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## Uninvited Guests in the Backyard: Dangers and Risks of Terrorist and Anti-American Activity in Latin America

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**UNINVITED GUESTS IN THE BACKYARD:  
DANGERS AND RISKS OF TERRORIST  
AND ANTI-AMERICAN ACTIVITY IN  
LATIN AMERICA**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Defense and Strategic Studies

By

Santiago Spadilero

May 2023

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# **UNINVITED GUESTS IN THE BACKYARD: DANGERS AND RISKS OF TERRORIST AND ANTI-AMERICAN ACTIVITY IN LATIN AMERICA**

Defense and Strategic Studies

Missouri State University, May 2023

Master of Science

Santiago Spadilero

## **ABSTRACT**

The international security environment has changed. In the last two decades, new challengers to the American liberal order arose, with China being the most defiant one, in political and military terms. Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative opened the doors to these extra-continental powers, as their loans provided an alternative source of funding for Latin America, walking these countries away from American-led lending institutions. In this new context, Latin America becomes a desirable piece of land in which these new challengers can safely create trade routes while decreasing American influence. Russia and Iran also want to project power in America's backyard. Furthermore, the presence of terrorist organizations, such as Hezbollah, and their relationship with criminal organizations, such as guerrilla groups and cartels, also pose a severe threat to these countries and the United States. Finally, the possible prospect of conflict with China, Russia, or Iran makes this continent vital for their interests in undermining America's safety through its southern border. For these reasons, this thesis tries to address these challenges, while assessing several courses of action the United States can take to block them and keep America safe.

**KEYWORDS:** United States, Latin America, threats, China, Iran, Russia, terrorism

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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## INTRODUCTION

“And because the condition of man is a condition of war of every one against every one, in which case every one is governed by his own reason, and there is nothing he can make use of that may not be a help unto him in preserving his life against his enemies.”

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, & Power*

The Rio Grande River, the Gulf of Mexico, and the southernmost part of Key West, Florida, are the natural borders that separate the history, culture, and most of the time, the interests of the United States and Latin American countries. Historically the United States has greatly sought to influence the political, economic, and social paths of some of these countries, which comprehend roughly more than 665 million people in today's numbers. However, in the last 20 years, several other states have tried to disrupt American influence over this continent, trying to loosen its ties to the U.S. and create new, more complex relationships with its countries. In some cases, these alien states have not-so-friendly ties to the US government.

This situation may become problematic in the near-to-mid future, as foes of the United States find more and more arguments to enter America's backyard: Latin America. During the Cold War, Cuba became a tumor for America's national security, due to its proximity to the continental United States while also working as a spreading center of anti-American ideas and doctrines. Havana worked as the central core for the training and teaching of the ways of guerrilla warfare, and the ideas of socialism-communism, that would then spread across this continent and Africa. Bolivia and Angola serve as examples of Cuban influence in guerrilla movements worldwide. Today, this influence can be seen everywhere on the continent. In the next 5 to 10 years, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and others may become a new hub, no longer for



socialist ideas or an anti-American sentiment but for the entrance of military assets on the continent from revisionist powers, such as Iran and China. And this process has already begun.

This thesis will try to study and analyze the level of threat that countries such as Venezuela, Nicaragua, and others, may pose to U.S. national security as a forward base for other non-continental states, such as China, Russia, and Iran. This threat may include the deployment of military assets and the operations of terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah, on the continent.

The first chapter will explore the history of the relations between the U.S. and Latin American countries in order to understand the tools that the United States has used to assist and, to a certain extent, to control the activity of the continent, showing how important has this region been in the cultural, political, and strategical development of this country. These tools may become vital to understand how the U.S. could re-establish its prominence on the continent. The second chapter explores the current activity of three of America's foes on the continent: China, Iran, and Russia. The third chapter of this thesis will explore the feasibility of the use of a terrorist organization, such as Hezbollah, that is currently active on the continent, to weaken America's influence in the region while posing a threat to U.S. national security. The fourth chapter will analyze two lesser challenges to the safety of the United States: the use of migrants to weaken America's borders, and the ultimate deployment of military forces, including short-range ballistic missiles, by these anti-American nations.

Lastly, the final chapter of this thesis will provide three courses of action that the United States government can attempt to implement together or separately to try to block the expansion of extra-continental influence. The three recommendations include creating more commitment for the Build Back Better World Initiative to counterbalance the Belt and Road Initiative, improving the partnership programs between the United States and the armed forces of Latin American countries, and strengthening the political and economic pressure over those countries

that enhance their ties with America's adversaries. A conclusion will summarize all these points while looking at the future.

## CHAPTER I: THE HISTORY OF THE US-LATIN AMERICA RELATIONSHIP

Before wandering into the problems of today, it would be important to take a look at what was Latin America to the United States at the beginning of this relationship, when the first colonies decided to follow the 13 Colonies' example and become independent from their European "masters". In this sense, the Monroe Doctrine, as articulated before the U.S. Congress in 1823, was conceived as a statement in opposition to European intrusions in the Americas.<sup>1</sup> In the next decades, several presidents used this policy to pursue foreign policy agendas on the continent. Several other foreign policies were developed through the last century, showing how important has this region always been to the United States. An in-depth chronological analysis of these policies follows.

### **1776-1849: The American Revolution and the Monroe Doctrine**

1776 was a very special year, not only for the colonists of the 13 Colonies but also, indirectly, for the people of the several viceroyalties and colonial settlements of the European powers in the rest of the continent. The birth of the United States of America also set the outcome of several revolutions that would take place in the following decades, creating several flourishing, but not exempt of problems, nations. The Monroe Doctrine was born as the response of the U.S. government to these births.

Although the United States of America was "born" in 1776, several other Latin American nations were born decades later. For example, Argentina's declaration of independence was signed in 1816, Brazil's independence from Portugal was achieved in 1822, and Colombia's freedom was achieved in 1819. During those same years, the American

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<sup>1</sup> Mark T. Gilderhus, "The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* vol. 36, no. 1 (March 2006), Page 5.

government would start to recognize these newly born countries, such as Colombia, in 1822. These countries needed a new set of foundations, as the old monarchies were no longer considered legitimate rulers. The United States, along with Great Britain and France, became the examples that Latin American countries would look up to in the following years, bringing a more or less stable era of Enlightenment on the continent.

For the U.S., however, the idea of creating relationships with Latin American societies was, at least, controversial.<sup>2</sup> As stated by Schoultz, “it took a direct order from President Monroe to make Secretary of State John Quincy Adams recognize the newly independent countries of Latin America.” The strong differences between both societies, the American and Latin American, were too difficult to mediate in a stable relationship, according to Adams and other officials of the federal government. Anglos and Hispanics were, according to this view, too different to be able to create long-standing and profitable relationships.

In this context, and during this first half of the century, American officials will develop a policy diagram of what Latin America was, and how to deal with it. Initially, it was shaped by a need for security. By 1810, the relationships between the U.S. and the British declined steadily. Meanwhile, the Spanish were losing territory in their Peninsular War against Napoleon. British assistance to the Spaniards created fear among American officials that the Spaniards may surrender Florida to the British, surrounding the former colonies in the north and south. In September of that year, the Congress passed its first formal statement of U.S. policy toward Latin America: the No-Transfer Resolution, which stated that “The United States, under the peculiar circumstances of the existing crisis, cannot, without serious inquietude, see any part of East Florida pass into the hands of any foreign power; and that a

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<sup>2</sup> Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America*, (Harvard University Press, 1998).

due regard to their own safety compels them to provide, under certain contingencies, for the temporary occupation of the said territory.”<sup>3</sup>

After the War of 1812, the interest of U.S. officials in Florida dropped but still remained. As then-Secretary of State Monroe described: “East Florida in itself is comparatively nothing, but as a post, in the hands of Great Britain, it is of the highest importance.”<sup>4</sup> In this sense, then, Florida was seen by Monroe exactly as many of his successors would see other parts of Latin America, as economically useless territories of great geopolitical value.

According to Gilderhus, the idea behind Monroe’s doctrine, in 1823, was to secure America from the dangers that might come from Europe due to the stabilization of the continent after the Napoleonic Wars, where the monarchies of Europe decided to settle their differences in an alliance, called the Quintuple Alliance, to reinforce monarchical rights and reconquer their lost territories by the newly independent nations. President Monroe knew that this could only mean problems by having newly powerful European nations very close to America’s borders, while Latin American Independence Wars caught the attention of American citizens, including, for instance, the attention of Congressman Henry Clay of Kentucky, who said that “(Latin American leaders) have adopted our principles, copied our institutions and ... (sic) employed the very language and sentiments of our revolutionary papers.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, new markets started to open as Latin American countries started to acquire their long-expected independence. The commerce between colonial Latin America and the United States had blossomed in the following years of the American Revolution.

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<sup>3</sup> Smith to William Pinkney, 13 June 1810, and a second warning, 22 January 1811, *Instructions to U.S. Ministers*, quoted in Schoultz, page 3.

<sup>4</sup> Monroe to JQ Adams, 10 December 1815, *Instructions to U.S. Ministers*, quoted in Schoultz, page 17.

<sup>5</sup> Gilderhus, “The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications,” page 6.

Nonetheless, in 1823, the expulsion of Spanish armies from North America opened up new commercial possibilities in Latin America. At the same time, European stability meant European expansionism in the New World. This was seen as a threat to America's safety, as several fronts would then be opened: rumors of a French fleet ready to sail toward the New World, and the intentions of Russian Tsar Alexander I to extend his territories southward from Alaska. On December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1823, President James Monroe, before Congress, expressed the three points of the Monroe Doctrine. The first point was to commit the United States to a policy of non-colonization by affirming that "the American continents, (...), are henceforth not to be considered as subjects to future colonization by any European powers."<sup>6</sup> The second point endorsed a policy of "hands off" while arguing that a monarchical system on this continent was deemed as failure and that any attempt by a European power to institute their political system on this continent would appear as "dangerous to our peace and safety." The third point, finally, addressed Washington's position by embracing a policy of abstention from European matters: "In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken part, nor does it comport with our policy to do so."<sup>7</sup>

In the following decades, during the late 1830s and 1840s, two opposite forces struggled for influence over the US government decisions. One of the forces was led by the Democratic party, which called for a deeper annexation of new territories, such as Texas and the West, while the second force was led by the Whig party, which called for the opposition to an aggressive expansion of US territories. The Democrats' position will have its own expression, popularly known as "Manifest Destiny", as this position grew stronger within the American population. This political platform would then serve to justify the annexation of native tribes and Mexican territories during the following 40 years.

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<sup>6</sup> Gilderhus, page 8.

<sup>7</sup> Gilderhus, page 8.

## 1850-1900: Manifest Destiny and the War Against Spain

During most of what remained of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Monroe Doctrine became a forgotten policy for most Americans, as interest in Latin American nations started to decline. Latin American nations, for Washington's decision-makers, presented neither dangers nor opportunities for the United States. Moreover, these nations built stronger ties with some European powers, such as Great Britain. According to Gilderhus, the only territories that landed within United States' interest were Mexico, Cuba, and Central America. The "Manifest Destiny" position entrenched this expansionism toward these territories. As first stated by John Quincy Adams, "The annexation of Cuba will be indispensable to the continuance and integrity of the Union itself."<sup>8</sup>

For the remaining territories, the Monroe Doctrine was not effectively asserted. When British expeditions were launched against other territories, such as Argentina and Santo Domingo, US government officials raised no objections. The Monroe Doctrine was used pragmatically by each administration, therefore, until the late years of the century.

After the Civil War, and by the last decades of the century, a radically more assertive approach was developed toward Latin American nations. According to Gilderhus, the Monroe Doctrine served as a tool driven by "a quest for markets and resources at a time of uncertainty and instability, the consequences of urbanization, immigration, and industrialization."<sup>9</sup>

Expansion overseas meant more markets to which American products could land. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, it could only mean one thing: domination. By this time, the "civilized" world, Europe, started to find in colonialism and imperialism a way to expand their boundaries in two, intertwined concepts: power and economy. Opening new markets

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<sup>8</sup> Adams to Hugh Nelson, 28 April 1823, *Writings of John Quincy Adams*, quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 65.

<sup>9</sup> Gilderhus, "The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications," page 9.

overseas not only meant new territories to put their products in but also a means to gain more power by the domination of these lands. This way, the British created complex administrative systems in India, Australia, and other territories, while the French did the same in Indochina, for example.

In America, the ideologist of America's sea power expansion, Alfred Thayer Mahan, was not unaware of Europe's new geopolitical passion, that was, overseas expansion, and he found in the navy the real source of power for a country. According to Schoultz, this led to the following set of ideas:

- Most American citizens and their leaders in Washington D.C. believed that prosperity came from opening trade routes to new territories.
- Using the British as an example, opening trade routes involved dominating these new territories.
- Finally, Mahan believed that only a strong navy could determine the future and survival of the country.<sup>10</sup>

Two opposite ideas became the center of argument within American society. First, those who defended the idea of self-determination and opposed the incorporation of alien cultures, and second, this new idea of overseas expansion and domination over new territories. By 1899, the idea of a new paternalism settled the argument and served as the perfect justification for most of the overseas expansion of U.S. territories during the final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>.

In the years that followed the Civil War, these two ideas, the Monroe Doctrine, and the paternalist approach were used in several political interventions on the continent, namely, the Pacific War (1879-1883) between Chile and Peru and the following Chilean Civil War (1891), and the Venezuelan border dispute with the British (1895-1899). Nonetheless, the most important American intervention during the last years of the century was the

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<sup>10</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 107.



involvement in the Spanish-Cuban conflict, in 1898. The war between the US and Spain was declared after more than three years of attempts to reach a peaceful resolution to a civil war unleashed on the island. Although the declaration was not completely related to the Monroe Doctrine, its language was. President William McKinley's request for a war declaration aimed at goals consistent with the doctrine: the expulsion of the Spanish presence from the Caribbean region, the stabilization of the region, and the establishment of a protectorate over the island. This last point references the idea that Cubans could not govern themselves, and therefore needed the assistance of the United States. The new geopolitical landscape of the Caribbean with the United States as its protector will determine the future of most of these nations in the upcoming decades.

### **1900-1945: The Panama Canal and the Great Wars**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the relationship between the United States and Latin America was marked by the conflict surrounding the new emplacement of a canal that would connect the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans through a narrow piece of land in Central America. Several attempts from European nations to obtain control over Panama were done in the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mostly from France, since Napoleon III wrote "Canal de Nicaragua" in 1846 in order to create popular interest among the Frenchmen for a French deal with the Nicaraguan government for the construction of a canal that would connect the Caribbean Sea with the Pacific Ocean.

In the following decades, several attempts were made by private and public French funds to create a canal to connect both oceans, but they all failed. By 1900, the two most powerful political parties in the American landscape had finally reached the same conclusion: a canal in Central America was vital to US interests. The question, now, was where it would be located, and who would fund it. Nicaragua was the desired location for the

canal for most officials in Washington DC and in the Southern states, as they knew how important a canal will be for these states' commercial activity. Two congressional commissions were set to establish the best route for the construction of the canal in Nicaragua, first, and in the rest of the isthmus, later.

By 1902, the Congress of the United States had authorized the purchase of the New Panama Canal Company's assets. The problem now was getting the concession from Colombia. In order to get it, Secretary of State John Hay sat with Colombia's minister to the United States, Tomás Herrán, and signed an agreement in January of 1903. This treaty was then ratified by the US Senate, but it was not ratified by the Colombian congress, as they considered the amount paid as low, and the territorial concession was too lengthy in time. This decision outraged President Theodore Roosevelt, who even considered a possible military intervention against Colombia. Congress, however, would never pass a declaration of war under these circumstances, or even approve a small military operation. Therefore, the eyes were set on Panama.

During the last 80 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Panama tried to acquire its independence from Colombia numerous times. The US even intervened on behalf of the Colombian government in order to secure the railroads to the ports, where the American products were arriving. Now it seemed that Panama could become Colombia's weak heel. A few months later, in October of 1903, President Roosevelt met with Panamanian officials and settled the plan for Panamanian independence, with Manuel Amador Guerrero, the physician in charge of Panama's railroad, appointed as the leader of this nascent revolution.

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, the USS *Nashville* arrived at the port of Colon as proof of US support for the Panamanian cause. The day after, the declaration of independence was signed. With that problem solved, the government could now focus on the canal. By mid-November, Secretary Hay and the Panamanian government had already completed and

signed a treaty that would give the concession of the canal, and the land, to the US government in perpetuity. By early 1904, the Senate had already ratified the treaty, and the canal was completed by 1915 at the expense, however, of the relationship between the US and Colombia, and most of Latin America as well. This attack on Colombian sovereignty would not be forgotten by these until several decades later. Lars Schoultz stated in this that “the United States had seized control over the single most valuable piece of Latin America’s territory (and) in doing so, the Roosevelt administration exceeded the limits of US public opinion, but no political force arose to challenge the jingoes, in large measure because nearly everyone wanted a canal, and nearly everyone agree (sic) that the United States needed to control it.”<sup>11</sup>

During the same time, debt became a problem for some Latin American countries, convincing President Roosevelt that a new policy toward Latin America was needed: the Roosevelt Corollary. In President Roosevelt’s words, “Brutal wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may finally require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the United States cannot ignore this duty.”<sup>12</sup> This posture states that the United States can and will intervene in other Latin American countries’ affairs if they repeatedly fell into misbehavior or wrongdoings, something that President Roosevelt would call “chronic”, no longer “brutal”, in his following speech. These wrongdoings would most of the time involve the delays in debt payments and expropriation of American assets abroad. This policy had nothing to do with expansion, as Roosevelt had lost all appetite for annexation after several years of nearly continuous involvement in Caribbean adventures.

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<sup>11</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 200.

<sup>12</sup> Roosevelt to Root, 20 May 1904, *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 210.

This new policy towards Latin America allowed the United States to intervene in several Latin American countries in the following decades, which included the Dominican Republic in 1904, Cuba in 1906, Nicaragua in 1909, and Haiti in 1915. It also created the foundations for its successor, the Dollar Diplomacy. This last policy was created by Roosevelt's successor, President William Taft, who argued that, in the words of his Secretary of State, Philander Chase Knox, "The most effective way to escape the logical consequences of the Monroe Doctrine is to help them to help themselves ... We diminish our responsibilities in proportion as we bring about improved conditions."<sup>13</sup>

Assistant Secretary Huntington Wilson then stated that the dollars were helping diplomacy: "using the capital of the country in the foreign field in a manner calculated to enhance fixed national policies. It means the substitution of dollars for bullets."<sup>14</sup> In practice, then, authorities in Washington D.C. did not see any contradiction because there was no conflict. Capital helped democracy, and diplomacy helped capital. The motivation, then, to pursue this type of foreign policy relied on the same motivation that had led the Roosevelt administration to push for the construction of a canal and the execution of the Roosevelt Corollary. The Taft administration saw commerce and foreign trade as a source to promote U.S. economic health, while coincidentally boosting corporate profits. There also was a belief that, following Roosevelt's Corollary, the United States was obliged to ensure that Latin Americans paid their debts.

The first case in which this policy was applied was in Nicaragua after the successful revolution of General Governor Juan Estrada. The revolution had expelled President Zelaya

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<sup>13</sup> Address before the New York State Bar Association, 19 January 1912, in *Speeches Incident to the Visit of Philander Chase Knox*, quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 234.

<sup>14</sup> Address of the Honorable Huntington Wilson, Assistant Secretary of State, at the Third National Peace Congress, Baltimore, May 4, 1911, *Huntington Wilson Papers*, quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 236.

and left a wrecked economy, with its activity disrupted and the nation's finances in disarray. In this scenario, U.S. officials determined that Nicaragua's economic problems could not be resolved without foreign assistance, thus meaning that the Taft administration should take over the nation's finances.

The subsequent presidential administration, of Woodrow Wilson, had a completely different perspective on the issue. The critique against his predecessor's policy was based on "moral principles" that were still not followed. In the end, and in terms of foreign policy, both administrations were no different. The Taft-Wilson transition has been described as "one of the few instances in which no break is shown, and no national administrations overturns (sic) the policies of its predecessor."<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, in his final year as President, Wilson's secretary of state commented that the best way for the United States to resolve a Central American border dispute was "to bang them over the head."<sup>16</sup> A strikingly similar statement to the ones made by the officials of the Taft administration. In the end, no real modifications were done between one administration's policy and its successor.

In terms of the impact that the Great War (1914-1918) may have caused on the relationship between Washington D.C. and Latin America, there were no important modifications regarding the doctrine and policies that had been established. Due to the ongoing war in Europe, the importance of Latin America declined. The most important event during Wilson's administration was the famous Zimmerman Telegram. On the eve of the United States' entrance into the war with its expeditionary force, Germany was in desperate search of allies. Germany's foreign secretary, Arthur Zimmerman, was instructed to approach the Mexican government of Carranza with the following well-known message:

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<sup>15</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 250.

<sup>16</sup> Frank Polk re. the Honduras-Guatemala border dispute, *Chandler Anderson Diary*, 1 March 1920, quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 250.

“We propose Mexico an alliance upon the following terms: Joint conduct of war. Joint conclusion of peace. Ample financial support and an agreement on our part that Mexico shall gain back by conquest the territory lost by her at a prior period in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.”<sup>17</sup>

Even though many could question the source from which Germany could get enough money to “buy” Mexico’s support at that point of the war, in the end, the telegram was intercepted by British intelligence services and delivered to American authorities. This worked as the last drop that would then unleash the U.S. declaration of war against the Triple Alliance and the shipping of the Expeditionary Force.

By the end of his administration, many policies and successes can be told about President Wilson’s term on international affairs, like being a participant at the end of the Great War or being the greatest lobbyist of the League of Nations. Nonetheless, his policies toward Latin America were rather minimal compared to the ones of his predecessors. He ignored most of Latin America, except for the Caribbean and Mexico, where he applied a foreign policy extremely similar to the Dollar Diplomacy from the Taft administration but added a more democratic ingredient to it. This policy would then prompt many of the following interventions in Latin American countries under a paternalistic attitude that would then, over time, create the National Endowment for Democracy and other similar agencies whose mandates include teaching Latin American leaders how to govern.

The following Administration from Warren G. Harding had one major success: it was the modification of the U.S. policy towards intervention, setting the tone for the next generation of decision-makers in the U.S. regarding this topic. President Harding renounced

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<sup>17</sup> Zimmermann to von Eckhardt, 16 January 1917, in *Official German Documents Relating to the World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1923), quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 281.

the corollary posed by the Monroe Doctrine as no European threat could be seen on the horizon:

“(the Monroe Doctrine) Gives no justification for... intervention on our part. I utterly disclaim, as unwarranted,... a claim on our part to superintend the affairs of our sister republics, to assert an overlordship, to consider the spread of our authority beyond our own domain as the aim of our policy, and to make our power the test of right in this hemisphere.”<sup>18</sup>

The period from 1926 through 1930 saw the creation of several pacifist and radical organizations throughout the United States that called for the ending of all imperialistic policies in Central America and the Caribbean and the removal of all protectorates and marines from foreign territories. This debate reached the very hallways of Congress and set the foundations of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s policy toward the continent: the Good Neighbor policy.

Before analyzing President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s policy toward Latin America, it is important to explore the economic impact that the U.S. had during the decade of 1920 in Latin America alone. Economic involvement on the continent sky-rocketed in that decade, reaching an outstanding 44% of all foreign investment from the U.S. This investment rose from \$101 million to \$676 million during this decade.<sup>19</sup> Most of this investment went to oil operations, raw material extraction enterprises, and banking conglomerates. At the same time, U.S. exports to the continent rose from \$540 million in 1916 to \$1.6 billion in 1920. Helped by the falling of European markets after the Great War, Europe was never able to retake more than a small fraction of them.

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<sup>18</sup> Hughes, *Observations on the Monroe Doctrine*, quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, pages 288-289.

<sup>19</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 307.

Coming back to the Good Neighbor policy, the first close approach to this type of American behavior was done during President Herbert Hoover's administration when he organized his goodwill trip around Latin America. He recognized that U.S. policies on the continent had created a hostile view of these countries toward the United States. Due to this reason, in his first stop in Honduras, the then-President talked about being a good neighbor which, at the time, "meant a halt to the deployment of U.S. armed forces in Latin America."<sup>20</sup>

However, national, and international circumstances, such as the stock market crash of October 1929 and the London Naval Treaty of the same year took much of the attention and energy needed for such a policy, as Secretary Stimson noted in 1932: "the President is so absorbed with the domestic situation that he told me frankly that he can't think very much now of foreign affairs."<sup>21</sup> President Hoover's intentions, nonetheless, were not fruitless, as during his time not only as President but also as Secretary of Commerce, he paved the way to a different approach towards Latin America. The new approach was distancing itself from the then-typical military occupations carried out until then and redirecting its energies toward sponsoring business and commercial relations with Latin American countries.

President Hoover's successor, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FRD), had developed a similar perspective as his predecessor, and so had his team as well, including FDR's main Latin Americanist, Sumner Welles. In early 1933, Welles sent the then-elected President a draft with the suggested prohibition to dispatch the armed forces of the United States to any foreign soil whatsoever. This compromise became the defining characteristic of FDR's Good Neighbor policy.

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<sup>20</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 324.

<sup>21</sup> Stimson Diary, 5 November 1930 and 17 May 1932, *Stimson Papers* (Yale University), quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 329.



The most important outcome of this policy, during the 1930s and 1940s, was the rebirth of American and Latin American economies that were trying to overcome the Depression. The trade between these countries tripled in dollar value between 1934 and 1941 when the Second World War once again deprived Latin American consumers of competing sources of supplies. The economic result of the Depression, and the ensuing European devastation, increased the dominant U.S. role in Latin American Markets.

When the war was at the gates of America, by 1940, President Roosevelt fell under the pressure from businessman Nelson Rockefeller, who urged him to launch a propaganda counteroffensive against the Nazis.<sup>22</sup> In August of that same year, Roosevelt issued an executive order creating the Office for the Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics. The mandate of this organization was to strengthen the bonds between the nations of the Western Hemisphere, assisting in the coordination of the hemispheric defense against fascism. Rockefeller entered government service as the Office's director. The reason, as briefly mentioned before, was to subdue Nazi influence and propaganda that was spreading across the continent. German businessmen, who at the time were very prosperous on the continent, had strong bonds with the Nazi party, making them perfect envoys for the Nazi regime in the region. The Office was intended to interfere in these operations via the production of all types of media, from magazines to shortwave broadcasts. Its most important contribution was the creation of the U.S. economic aid program. According to this approach, the safety of the continent depended on the health of its citizens, and most Latin American countries could not afford advanced public health programs. This was the start of a foreign policy tradition that remains to this day.

At the same time, a plan was devised by U.S. officials to improve the connections between the U.S. government and Latin American armed forces throughout the continent. By

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<sup>22</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 343.

1939, several U.S. military advisory groups had been formed in most Latin American countries, including those south of the Panama Canal. U.S. military schools were also established, and these would assist the U.S. anti-communist mission after the war.

The influence and propaganda machinery devised and employed by the Nazi regime in Latin America generated a severe perception of intolerance toward these governments by U.S. officials in Washington DC. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, an urgent meeting took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with Latin American foreign ministers. The main goal of this meeting was to convince all Latin American republics to break off relations with the Axis powers. This was considered a life-or-death mission by the American delegation, as failure to obtain a joint declaration would mean the domination or occupation of the continent by the Nazi Reich.

By 1942, U-boat attacks started to rampage the Caribbean, targeting the supply routes to and from the continent. To counter the threat, the U.S. government managed to acquire and build naval bases and airfields in most Caribbean countries from which to deploy patrols. Moreover, the two most important Latin American allies in the war were Mexico and Brazil: the former deployed a fighter squadron in the Philippines, while the latter deployed an infantry division plus navy support units in Italy.

The policy of the Good Neighbor, in this matter, did not work to modify the perception of U.S. decision-makers and citizens regarding Latin America. Rockefeller's 1941 survey about American views on Latin Americans did not provide positive feedback. Overall, the policy was strictly addressed to prevent more marines from landing on Latin American ports, while creating international institutions and meetings to create this idea of Pan-Americanism. U.S. interests remained the same, essentially: economic expansion, first, and national security, second. This new approach was, overall, more accepted by Latin

American nations, but that was about to change in the new diagram of the post-war Western Hemisphere configuration.

### **1946-2000: The War against Communism**

After the end of the Second World War, the United States government started to devise and employ a new political strategy regarding Latin America. The new policy was intended to encourage and expand democracy on the continent. “Good government”<sup>23</sup> was an old term used in Washington for the last century, but until that moment it meant stability, not democracy. In this matter, stronger opposition was somewhat tied to a number of Latin American states whose governments did not represent democracy, in theory, or practice.

Two cases, Argentina and Nicaragua, raised some questions within the American administration as to the value of the democratic effort pursued by it, as their leaders were democratically elected but contradicted the interests of the United States. At the time, and since the decade of 1930, U.S. officials had started to systematize their thinking by identifying the basic “national character” of a country. This analysis tried to reproduce the probability of producing an effective and enduring democracy in such a country. Democracy, then, would not always be suited to flourish on the continent.

The following years after the war saw the emergence of a new enemy to U.S. values and beliefs. The Soviet Union had become America’s most powerful foe, and Moscow restarted their plans for the expansion of communism throughout the world. The first target was Europe, to which the Marshall Plan, NATO, and numerous other projects and campaigns were devised and developed to counter Soviet influence. The Cold War had started, and, at the time, Latin America was at a safe distance from it. Containment, however, was not a war only to be fought on one continent, but worldwide across all of them.

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<sup>23</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 352.

By 1946, developed by the United States, the first school for the military and educational training of Latin American forces was opened in the U.S.-controlled Panama Canal Zone. Its first name was the Latin American Center Ground Division, and by 1963 it adopted its most well-known name, the School of the Americas.<sup>24</sup> This school was then used to train and equip Latin American forces with anti-guerrilla doctrines while educating the forces in ways to assist in countering communism in their own countries. “The School of the Americas is charged (...) with the mission of developing and conducting instruction for the armed forces of Latin America, using the most doctrinally sound, relevant, and cost-effective training programs possible.”<sup>25</sup> Since then, this institution became the most important anti-insurgency school in the Americas, trained with preventing Communism from spreading throughout the continent.

By 1950, “the basic situation of the hemisphere today is this. The 21 American states together face the challenge of Communist political aggression against the hemisphere,”<sup>26</sup> as the Assistant Secretary of State of the Truman administration, Edward Miller, recognized. The threat of facing a similar menace as the one faced by the Nazi regime, with agents and assets hidden within the continent, exploiting the weaknesses of these countries, and trying to find a way to harm the United States, was very real for the Truman administration. This vision, nonetheless, faced issues at home. Domestically, the race for the presidency raised many uncertainties. The accusations against the Democratic party of losing China and the complacency of the administration against the Soviets’ first nuclear test polarized the U.S. domestic landscape. The Republican platform, then, promised to fight communism on every

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<sup>24</sup> Richard, F. Grimmett and Mark P. Sullivan, “United States Army School of the Americas: Background and Congressional Concerns,” *Congressional Research Service*, 1994. Accessed on October 21, 2022 at <https://irp.fas.org/crs/soa.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> Grimmett and Sullivan, “United States Army School of the Americas: Background and Congressional Concerns.”

<sup>26</sup> Speech to the Pan American Society of New England, 26 April 1950, *Adolf Berle Papers*, quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 373.

battleground, including at home. The speech of Senator Joseph McCarthy at a Republican gathering in Wheeling, West Virginia, claimed to possess a list of 57 cases of “individuals who would appear to be either card carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party.”<sup>27</sup>

After the inauguration of Dwight D. Eisenhower as president, he ordered his brother to tour and report his findings on the situation of the Latin American continent. Milton Eisenhower’s report warned about the precarious situation of most of the continent and how vulnerable it was to Communist aggression and infiltration. Just like Europe, Latin America was in need of assistance. But perhaps more importantly, “One American nation has (already) succumbed to communist infiltration.”<sup>28</sup> That country was Guatemala.

Communism in Guatemala had become a growing concern during the Truman administration. Reports wired from the US embassy in Guatemala City reported this growing concern since, at least, 1947. “A suspiciously large portion of the reforms advanced by the present revolutionary government seem motivated in part by a calculated effort to further class warfare.”<sup>29</sup> These fears convinced the Eisenhower administration that the government of President Juan José Arevalo’s successor needed to be overthrown. Jacobo Arbenz, Arevalo’s successor, was, in the eyes of the administration, no better. The arming of the Guatemalan opposition in Honduras was the first step. A diplomatic offensive was also launched at the Caracas meeting of foreign ministers. In this gathering, the “Declaration of Solidarity for the Preservation of the Political Integrity of the American States Against the Intervention of International Communism” was signed by 17 American states, with only

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<sup>27</sup> Senator McCarthy did not use a written text in making his 9 February 1950 speech in Wheeling; these quotations are his rereading to the Senate of a tape-recorded transcript, *Congressional Record*, quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 371.

<sup>28</sup> Milton Eisenhower, *Report to the President*, Department of State Bulletin, 23 November 1953, quoted in Schoultz, page 374.

<sup>29</sup> Milton Wells, *Communism in Guatemala*, 6 May 1948, quoted in Schoultz, page 376.

Guatemala in opposition, and two abstentions: Mexico and Argentina. This diplomatic pressure, however, was fruitless as it “had been watered down to the point of saying virtually nothing (...). The speeches indicated that there was more fear of U.S. interventionism than of Guatemalan communism.”<sup>30</sup>

In June 1954, the US-backed forces in Honduras crossed the border, led by Colonel Castillo Armas, and overthrew President Jacobo Arbenz. Castillo Armas, then, was selected to lead the country as a de-facto president. The lesson to be learned for the US government, then, was that the United States would then need friends in the region to act against any communist threat. This idea was not new, as it was hidden in the minds of US policymakers since the War of 1812: the possibility of an adversary seizing territory on the continent and using it as a forward base from which to attack the Homeland. The Communist threat, however, was something new, as no thought had been given to the possibility of a Latin American state helping or assisting an extra-hemispheric foe. This concern will increasingly grow in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with the new multipolar configuration.

For the remainder of the decade, the most important foreign policy pursued was to secure friends, like Castillo Armas, in most Latin American countries to prevent the entrance of more Communist influence into it. This was difficult, however. It was easy to occasionally overthrow a small country, but it was radically different to control all 20 American states from welcoming the Communist doctrines. The problem, then, was treated in its roots: Latin American poverty, illiteracy, and daily struggles were the most important contributors to the spread of Communism. The United States could not, nonetheless, pay too much attention to this effort during the Eisenhower administration due to the expenses of the fight against Communism in Europe. In this scenario, private investment in these countries seemed to be

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<sup>30</sup> Louis J. Halle., Jr., *Memorandum: Our Guatemalan Policy*, 28 May 1954, quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United State*, page 378.

the only way to solve its problems. In the meantime, the Eisenhower administration decided to encourage one of the most important flaws that American officials saw in Latin American countries: the profound support or admiration for ruthless heroes -caudillos-. In other words, to support anticommunist dictators who could maintain order throughout the continent.

The new dictators to be placed in these countries did not follow the same directive as those placed in the 1930s and 1940s. Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, and Batista in Cuba, were consciously placed in those positions to respond to American interests. According to Schoultz, the support for these anticommunist dictators was never made in a formal policy directive, “it just flowed naturally out of the belief that Latin Americans were already undemocratic, on the one hand, and the desire for anticommunist stability, on the other.”<sup>31</sup>

The situation with the communist groups and organizations, whether they were real or not, on the Latin American continent had many different divergencies within the American government. Most policymakers in Washington had grown used to the typical dictators or popular democratically elected presidents who did not follow the designs of the American national interest. But this new threat, the communist one, was rather new, and most policymakers had no experience on how to deal with it on this continent. The support for dictators was faced with great unpopularity on the continent, and most decision-makers in Washington blamed that anti-Americanism on communist efforts. But by the end of the decade, a new intellectual approach, led by President Eisenhower’s brother, tried to reinstate the blame on America’s past and present policies toward the continent. According to Schoultz, these two different approaches that tried to explain the rising anti-Americanism in

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<sup>31</sup>Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 384.

Latin America were not mutually exclusive, and throughout the Cold War era, “a majority of U.S. officials probably believed both.”<sup>32</sup>

The first test for these approaches came with Fidel Castro’s military parade in Havana. Was it a revolution guided by Communist ideals and interests? Or was it only led by the need of the people, as a “revolution of rising expectations”? The new Cuban government was quickly transforming Cuban society, and these changes clearly affected U.S. interests and security. The relationship between the island and the Soviet Union was exponentially growing, creating fears of a domino effect throughout the continent. What came after is well known. The Bay of Pigs failure, in which CIA-backed Cuban exiles failed an attempt to land on Cuba’s shores when they were intercepted and destroyed by the Cuban Revolutionary Army. This helped Castro to realize that no revolution was likely to survive in Latin America without external assistance. The military and economic support from the Soviet Union was vital, and the deployment of Soviet missiles on the island led humanity to be at the brink of a nuclear war in 1962.

It is important, nonetheless, to understand the important effects that the Cuban revolution and the following American policies had on the continent. By the end of the Eisenhower administration, and the beginning of John F. Kennedy’s, a new approach was taken regarding economic assistance to the continent. For the first time in its history, America had committed itself to the economic development of Latin America, not due to economic benefit or interests, but due to security interests. The Cuban government was not left behind and soon started a toe-to-toe contest with the Kennedy administration to provide the so-needed economic assistance to the continent. The administration was convinced that the region’s political instability stemmed from a contest between those who demanded rapid and widespread economic change, and those who were satisfied with the status quo.

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<sup>32</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 393.



Unattended, a clash between these two groups could have led to a Communist revolution in most countries of the region.

This is how the Alliance for Progress was born. It was based upon a very simple idea: “prosperity means contentment, and contentment means repose.”<sup>33</sup> A similar belief is what helped develop the Dollar Diplomacy decades earlier, but in that case, the money was provided by the wealthy pockets of Wall Street. In this new approach, the money was directly provided by U.S. taxpayers. The 1961 Foreign Assistance Act created the bureaucracy needed to allow the funds to get to Latin America’s poorer classes, while the Agency for International Development was created to administer U.S. assistance programs. The minds and hearts of the Latin American populace could be won thanks not only to the financial assistance provided by the regular U.S. taxpayer but also to the mental and educational guidance provided by the U.S. military schools that expanded throughout the continent. This approach, however, did not last long as an assassin made sure to kill this foreign policy along with its guide in 1963 in Dallas.

Thereafter, the following administrations decided to leave the idea of development aside and bring back the old approach of stability. The new problem with this policy was that it was no longer easy to identify a quarrel between different political groups, and the machinations of international Communism. The issue was that it was very difficult to identify, in a troubled area, who deserved the assistance and who deserved to be shot. Or as Schoultz points out, in the case of El Salvador, the administrations pursued a twofold policy of food for the impoverished, and arms to the military, so two trucks were loaded with each and sent to a troubled region: “Eventually the trucks arrived at a designated village, the local residents were assembled in the plaza, and... and then what? Since it was impossible to bifurcate a *campesino* (a peasant), someone had to decide who gets the food and who gets

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<sup>33</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 397.

shot.”<sup>34</sup> It was never easy to separate the instability caused by rising expectations among the hungry poor and the instability caused by communist adventurism. This led the Salvadoran army, trained, and armed by the U.S. to consider that most peasants were sympathetic to the guerrillas, which left 80,000 dead by 1979. Nonetheless, whether the communist threat, if any, could have survived and thrived or not, to the point of overthrowing the Salvadoran government without the assistance of the United States, is unknown.

The financial and military support to dictatorial anti-communist regimes in Latin America reached a limit by the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s as new domestic and foreign scandals took the attention of the American constituency. The situation in Vietnam, the Watergate scandal, and the destruction of the Chilean democracy made the liberal and progressive members of Congress review America’s national policy regarding these regimes. This situation became the most important Democrat political platform for the 1976 election in which President Jimmy Carter was elected. During his administration, most funding to authoritarian and dictatorial regimes in Latin America was cut, and more pressure was put on these regimes. This, in the voice of some detractors of this foreign policy, such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, argued that this decision provided the communist with an excellent opportunity to overthrow certain governments, such as the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua in 1979.<sup>35</sup>

From 1960 to 1980, these two distant positions fought each other for preeminence in the foreign policy stage. Anticommunism versus human rights took the spotlights of foreign policy decisions during that period, and while that war was fought, another one was also fought in Central America with the multiple guerrilla organizations, such as the Sandinistas, that threatened democratic and dictatorial regimes on the continent. The administration of

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<sup>34</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 398.

<sup>35</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 403.

President Ronald Reagan faced this issue by following the anti-communist approach, that is, supporting illegal or anti-democratic organizations. It also added an old approach used by America during the first decades of the century: direct military intervention. The support to the Nicaraguan Contras, and the military intervention in Grenada, are examples of this direction.

By the end of the decade, most dictators and autocrats were overthrown or voted out by their constituents in most Latin American countries. At the same time, the Soviet Union disappeared, and all major wars in Central America had ended, reinstating a so-needed peace in those affected countries. Their social and human landscapes were, still, devastated, as 110,000 citizens were killed during the Reagan years in Nicaragua and El Salvador. The administrations of Bush and Clinton tried to assist these countries with aid packages, but the country also had to deal with the now-independent countries of the Soviet bloc. Similar to what happened after the Second World War, aid to Central America fell from a peak of \$1.2 billion in 1985 to \$167 million in 1996, while military aid declined to almost nothing.<sup>36</sup> Central America, and Latin America in general, were removed once more from the American general picture of foreign affairs.

Latin America, as shown in the lines of this research, has always been extremely important to the United States in three aspects: its security, a place to accommodate the demands of U.S. domestic politics, and the drive to promote U.S. economic development. In this matter, the Monroe Doctrine has been very important. The Cold War, in a few words, was just a pronged interpretation of this doctrine, as the security of the nation laid not on the strict control over the entire continent, but on leaving the continent safe from the hands of America's enemies. This was somewhat explained by the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, John Bushnell, who in 1980 answered a question aimed toward the

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<sup>36</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 406.

importance of the Latin American continent for the United States: “The thing that tends to worry most of your constituents and most of the American people is that they have learned enough geography to know that these places are pretty close to us.”<sup>37</sup>

The most important reason to prevent communism from expanding across the continent was, then, to keep it from turning into a forward station for America’s biggest foe, the Soviet Union. The deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962, for example, showed the fears that this could become not an isolated case, but a trend. According to Schoultz, nonetheless, there was another reason for the importance given to the continent. As ICMBs and nuclear submarines became the norm, and as their targeting systems improved, the concerns about having Soviet missiles in Latin America were reduced, as they could launch them anytime from Moscow. The role that Latin America took in U.S. foreign policy, then, became symbolic: “hegemony over the region became an indicator of U.S. credibility in international relations.”<sup>38</sup>

To summarize this section, the relationship between the United States and Latin America during the last hundred years was particularly turbulent as it was constantly modified every decade. The first 30 years saw an interventionist America that saw stability and order as an extremely important source of American financial profit. During the 30s and 40s, the Good Neighbor policy was the most influential foreign policy for Latin America. This policy was intended to improve relations with the Latin American nations by cooperating and trading with them in order to grant stability and order to the hemisphere.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and Related Agencies, *Foreign Assistance and Related Programs Appropriations for 1981*, quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 408.

<sup>38</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, page 409.

<sup>39</sup> “Good Neighbor Policy, 1933,” Office of the Historian. Accessed on October 17, 2022 at <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/good-neighbor#:~:text=President%20Franklin%20Delano%20Roosevelt%20took,maintain%20stability%20in%20the%20hemisphere.>

The post-war period brought a new adversary or foe that threatened peace and stability not only in Europe but also worldwide and especially in Latin America. Communist adventurism on the continent was dealt with through covert actions and increased support to dictatorial regimes that could keep the communist guerrillas at bay. The situation grew substantially more dangerous for American national security with the successful revolution in Cuba, as it also served as an extremely important point to spread the *Foquismo*, the way by which communist guerrillas could win a war against a Latin American government, taking advantage of the terrain and the needs of the common people. A new approach was briefly attempted by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to tackle the root causes of anti-Americanism and support for the communist movement, poverty, and education, by providing aid that came from federal money. This approach ended with the new governments in the 70s and their following scandals, which brought back the support for dictatorial regimes and covert actions. President Jimmy Carter briefly brought this policy down in support of democratic elections in some countries, but the previous policy was re-established and reinforced by President Reagan. Plus, he also added an interventionist approach not seen in America since the first decades of the century. The end of the century sentenced the victory of the United States, and so democracy and freedom came back to reign the continent. Most issues regarding the impoverished sectors, however, could not be solved, and this will cause some of the most important problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **21st century: Democracies and the Pink Tide**

Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many new threats arose that could threaten American safety and the security of its citizens. Massive immigration, international drug trafficking, and international terrorism took the stage as the most important threats against the United States. At the state level, no enemies could be found: the Soviet Union had fallen

years before, being replaced by a well-behaved Russia, while China continued with its rapid growth while not being considered a threat. The only level-state threats to be considered were the then-known as “rogue states”: North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

The unipolar new configuration of the international system with the United States as its leader, or sheriff, unleashed a new era of change that would address a broad new set of issues and problems. What Francis Fukuyama called “The End of History and the Last Man”<sup>40</sup> was also joined by the Washington Consensus which expanded a certain belief that the American model of behavior could not be challenged. Democracy expanded throughout the continent, while trade substantially increased in all countries. And this was also the case for Latin America, where “the trade liberalization reform produced a significant destruction of employment in industry, and the destruction of employment in industry produced an increase in income inequality.”<sup>41</sup>

The Latin American populations were enraged. The collapse of growth rates and living standards that came with the implementation of neoliberal policies provoked much of the widespread anger that was later seen in most countries. For these people, there was clearly one guilty party: the International Monetary Fund, which was trying to “force the Anglo-Saxon model of capitalism upon Latin American countries,”<sup>42</sup> and this was a poor fit for the region. In this context of anger against international institutions and the American or Anglo-Saxon conception of wealth, these new, modern political parties came to power.

But what about the Latin American continent? What position has it taken regarding the United States and the international community? The Washington Consensus and the

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<sup>40</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Free Press, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> Carlos Roa, “Changing Tides: On the Political Changes Occurring in Latin America,” *Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development*, September 2016, page 12. Accessed on November 2, 2022 at <https://www.cirsd.org/en/publications/occasionalpapers/on-the-political-changes-occurring-in-latin-america>.

<sup>42</sup> Roa, “Changing Tides: On the Political Changes Occurring in Latin America,” page 14.

neoliberal governments that swore in their respective countries during the 1990s left, in most cases, many social and economic sectors harmed by the neoliberal policies that were applied in unprepared societies. The privatization of most state-owned companies without certain control of the social outcomes of such decisions created the fertile soil that would then allow new political parties to take control over the administrations at the beginning of the new century. Massive, impoverished sectors went out to the streets to fight and win in the elections of the new century, and these movements unleashed the Pink Tide over these governments. Nestor Kirchner in Argentina, Ignacio Lula da Silva in Brazil, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and Evo Morales in Bolivia were the most important representatives of this group, which was also known as the Sao Paulo Forum.<sup>43</sup> This alliance consists of ideologically like-minded leftist individuals and groups that offer an extremist public policy platform and recommendations to left-leaning political parties, social movements, and insurgent groups throughout the Western Hemisphere.

These political parties and movements, whose nickname first appeared in a 2005 New York Times article written by journalist Larry Rohter, where he described the recent elections in Latin America as a sign of the new “leftist consensus in Latin America.”<sup>44</sup> It was no longer a “red tide”, as was known at the time, but pink because its more moderate socialist posture. The voice of the poorer sectors, of the peasantry, was no longer common communism, but now this new type of socialism became their banner.

What these political leaders had in common was the pursuit of social and economic equality for the impoverished sectors, while using populism as the mechanism that would grant their legitimacy. This was done, in most cases, through the application of powerful

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<sup>43</sup> Paz Gomez, “The Sao Paulo Forum’s Modus Operandi,” *Impunity Observer*, June 23, 2020. Accessed on November 3, 2022 at <https://impunityobserver.com/2020/06/23/the-sao-paulo-forums-modus-operandi/>.

<sup>44</sup> Rohter, L., *With New Chief, Uruguay Veers Left, in a Latin Pattern*, quoted in Roa, “Changing Tides: On the Political Changes Occurring in Latin America,” page 17.

subsidies for those in need while taxing the sale of products, of international companies, and of the richer sectors. Whether these policies were good or bad, the situation improved for most sectors of these countries, while creating a very strong alliance between these ideologically similar-minded leaders. This alliance also implied the search for a common enemy of the people, and to a more or lesser extent, the United States and the international institutions became the best scapegoat.

The relationship between these new socialist governments and the United States varied according to the government in particular, and the time. There's plenty of literature on these differences between the several governments of the Pink Tide. For instance, Kenneth Roberts of Cornell University identified four different expressions of these governments:

1. The first expression involved an established political party that predated the era of neoliberal adjustment that went through an extensive process of ideological renovation and moderation. The government of Uruguay was an example of this type.
2. The second expression involved a left-leaning government rooted in an established party from Latin America's populist tradition. The Peronist party of Argentina is an example.
3. The third expression referred to a new political party that consisted of a top-down process of political mobilization based on charismatic leadership. The Venezuela of Hugo Chavez is the best example of this type.
4. Finally, the fourth expression referred to a case where autonomous social mobilization from below had been critical. Evo Morales from Bolivia was the leader of this type of mobilization.<sup>45</sup>

According to Roberts, the first two types of populist expressions represented a deeper maturation of democracy and the moderation of the left in institutionalized party systems. On the other side, the last two represented the failure of democracy as the

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<sup>45</sup> Roberts, K., "Conceptual and Historical Perspectives: Part 1," *The 'New Left' and Democratic Governance in Latin America*, quoted in Roa, "Changing Tides: On the Political Changes Occurring in Latin America," page 19.



representative democratic institutions failed to respond effectively to social needs and demands.

These governments had many successes that were clearly visible in their first years of power. The decade of the 2000s saw them grow in power and legitimacy as their social programs expanded and lowered the poverty levels and illiteracy indexes. For example, the *Bolsa Familia* social program in Brazil managed to reduce extreme poverty from 9.7% to a substantial 4.3% in seven years.<sup>46</sup> These programs, however, were reliant on the commodities prices, such as oil and soy, that skyrocketed thanks to the expansion of Chinese consumption and its economic growth. When the Chinese expansion slowed down, and when these prices fell, so did the prices of those goods.

The very strong relationship created with Beijing, at times, heavily collided with the interests of the United States on the continent. It is also true, nonetheless, that the loss of interest from the United States in the continent after 9/11 also helps explain the turn toward China.<sup>47</sup> Several times, led by Hugo Chavez, many of these Latin American countries tried to achieve regional integration, similar to the one seen in Europe, when he created the ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America). The core of this organization, therefore, was in contrast with the interests of the United States and the Washington Consensus, that is, the liberalization of the economy and the reduction of the role of the state in the national economy.<sup>48</sup> The anti-American rhetoric has become popular as a means to gather support and voters, as the United States seems to be the only culprit of Latin America's misfortunes.

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<sup>46</sup> Roa, "Changing Tides: On the Political Changes Occurring in Latin America," page 22.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Hakim, "Is Washington Losing Latin America?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 2006. Accessed on November 8, 2022 at <https://www.cfr.org/node/157113>.

<sup>48</sup> Roa, "Changing Tides: On the Political Changes Occurring in Latin America," page 45.

The unsolved issues in these countries, with the fall of commodity prices worldwide, created the opportunity for most of the center and center-right-leaning parties to win in the elections of the mid-2010s. Their victories were short-lived, however, as the Pink Tide came back to power by the end of the decade to create a possible new Pink Tide 2.0.<sup>49</sup> The new tide, whose survivability is still to be observed, faces a new international context closely related, but still different, to the one they faced in the mid-2000s. Russia is no longer a friendly partner. China is not only eager for more products and raw materials extracted from the continent, but they also are attempting to shape the interests of Latin American countries with their Belt and Road Initiative. Finally, more actors have increased their activity on the continent, such as Iran with its useful relationship with Venezuela, as well as the activity of drug trafficking organizations and, perhaps, terrorist organizations as well. The latter will be addressed in the third chapter of this project.

The understanding of this era is and will become vital in the future safety and security of the United States and its citizens. The last twenty years have created the environment the country will face in 2023 and beyond. The following sections will analyze the threats that have come up from these recent developments with Latin American countries, how their relationships with America's foes may affect the way Washington conceives the continent, and what types of new and old threats may emerge from them as well. Perhaps more importantly, this entire chapter should have shown that this is not something new. The American continent has always been a distant prize for those that wanted to harm the United States and its people. In any case, the past should provide the tools for America's best to decide how to engage these new and old threats. What does the presence of China and Russia on the continent imply for America's overall strategy? What is the role that international

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<sup>49</sup> John Yannik, "Pink Tide 2.0? The Same Trap Awaits," *Global Americans*, September 22, 2022. Accessed on November 8, 2022 at <https://theglobalamericans.org/2022/09/pink-tide-2-0-the-same-trap-awaits/>.

terrorism and drug trafficking organizations will occupy in the name of America's foes?

These questions will intend to be addressed in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER II: UNINVITED GUESTS IN THE BACKYARD

Once we have explored the fruitful but still complicated relationship between the United States and the Latin American continent during the last 200 years, it is time to analyze the current threats that are present, today, on the continent. In order to do this, this chapter will be divided into three sections. Each will dissect the state-level threats that are present on the continent. These are, in order of importance, China, Iran, and Russia.

### China

The rapid economic growth that China enjoyed during the 90s and 2000s slowly decreased its acceleration in the last couple of years, but it left a much more powerful country that successfully combined the typically totalitarian communist regime with a market-free economy led by a powerful, but still dependent, private sector.<sup>50</sup> This combination has allowed the country to climb positions to become America's most important adversary. In recent years, Beijing's intentions to replace the United States as the sole superpower and leader of the world have become evident, especially when it comes to foreign policy. The Belt & Road Initiative is the best example of this enterprise. For these purposes, this policy will be analyzed in the following lines, keeping the attention on its effects on Latin America and U.S. national security.

The Belt & Road Initiative (for these purposes, B&RI) was conceived in 2013 in the heart of the Chinese Communist Party's politburo as the new masterpiece in China's foreign policy doctrine. The purpose of the initiative is to restore China as an influence superpower that could fight Western influence, especially in the Far East. To expand its influence, the Chinese designed vast funding and investment machinery capable of financing multiple

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<sup>50</sup> Adi Ignatius, "Americans Don't Know How Capitalist China Is: An Interview with Weijian Shan," *Harvard Business Review*, June 2021. Accessed on November 15 at <https://hbr.org/2021/05/americans-dont-know-how-capitalist-china-is>.

infrastructure projects in multiple countries. It comprises two major programs, one is land-based and planned to connect China with Europe, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean. This program is called the Silk Road Economic Belt. At the same time, a second, maritime program called the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road is based on maritime trade routes with other countries part of the B&RI.<sup>51</sup>

During the last seven years, the initiative has provided the completion of more than 900 projects in more than 70 countries around the world, especially in Southeast and Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The investment volume has been 850 billion dollars to date and is mostly financed by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).<sup>52</sup> The bank has invested in numerous bridges, roads, dams, and even nuclear plants around the world.

In official words, the purpose of the project is to “develop measures that can promote growth in developing countries, multilateral dialogue, and the creation of organisms whose leader is, precisely, China.”<sup>53</sup> Two main concepts have been used to describe this approach. Development is one, and the “Harmonious world” is the other, taken from old Confucian traditions. These two concepts create an idea of a win-win strategy, pacific development, respect for diversity, cooperation, and coordination, and pacific coexistence. Despite this seemingly benign purpose, several countries in the West, including the United States, have criticized the initiative as trying to develop a debtor-lender relationship between developing

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<sup>51</sup> Sarker, M., Hossin, M. and Yin, X., “One Belt One Road Initiative of China: Implication for Future of Global Development,” *Scientific Research Publishing*, April 18, 2018. Accessed on November 20 at <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=83814>.

<sup>52</sup> Sarker, Hossin and Yin, “One Belt One Road Initiative of China: Implication for Future of Global Development.”

<sup>53</sup> Ayelén Cecilia Leda, “Belt and Road Initiative y la Comunidad de Destino Común: avances en América Latina,” *II Congreso Latinoamericano de Estudios Chinos*, page 69. Accessed on November 20, 2022 at <http://sedici.unlp.edu.ar/handle/10915/116283>.

countries and China. Furthermore, some consider this Chinese approach as an “Enchantment Offensive,”<sup>54</sup> a way to fight America’s soft power.

According to Peter Cai, who is the director of the Australia-China project for Lowy Institute, the B&RI has geopolitical intentions.<sup>55</sup> On the one hand, to restore China’s imperial legacy among its neighbors. On the other hand, to extend its influence over farther regions, seeking special treatment or deals with countries outside Eastern Asia region. In other words, in the latter case, it is important to remember that most former-imperial states usually never forget their past, and they always try to somehow bring it back to the present. This feature can be seen nowadays in countries such as Iran, Turkey, Russia, and, precisely, China. Imperial China was the uncontested superpower in Asia for more than 1,000 years, until the raising of Imperial Japan. According to the scholar David Kang, it is not surprising to see that the only war fought between China, Japan, and Korea was in 1592’s Japanese invasion of Korea.<sup>56</sup> This means that the eastern world, comprised of these three states, was greatly more stable than the European world at the time, with China being the major superpower. This remembrance is what the members of the Chinese Communist Party are desperately trying to bring back.

The Chinese intention to expand their geopolitical and military influence can be seen in one simple example, displayed by director Cai: The Chinese-Pakistani Economic Corridor has been one of the most important deals made by the Chinese government to a country far west than its original neighbors. The project has the main objective of connecting China to the port of Gwadar, in Baluchistan. This connection will give China a port close enough to the Persian Gulf, therefore giving them the possibility to avoid passing through the Strait of

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<sup>54</sup> Leda, “Belt and Road Initiative y la Comunidad de Destino Común: avances en América Latina,” page 71.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Cai, “Understanding China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” *Lowy Institute*, March 22, 2017. Accessed on November 22, 2022 at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/understanding-belt-and-road-initiative>.

<sup>56</sup> David Kang, “The Puzzle: War and Peace in East Asian History”, in *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (Columbia University Press, 2010).

Malacca in Southeast Asia, an area controlled by the US and its allies. At the same time, this port is big enough to allow the accommodation of submarines and aircraft carriers, a concession given thanks to the political and economic leverage earned by the deals in the country.

But these are not the only objectives that the Chinese government pursues. According to Cai, China has also another three objectives:

**Regional development.** Led by the National Development and Reform Commission, its target is to “address the chronic problem of uneven development in China.”<sup>57</sup> The rationale behind this idea is simple: “instead of showering these provinces with more central government money, Chinese policymakers want to integrate them into regional economies.”<sup>58</sup> And there is where Chinese investment money in foreign activities comes into play.

**Upgrading Chinese industry while exporting Chinese standards.** As the comparative advantages of the Chinese manufacturing industry have decreased over time, the Central Government is seeking to capture the higher end of the global value chain. To achieve this goal, investment in foreign countries may help Chinese higher-end manufactured goods enter different markets around the world. For example, during the last 6 years, Chinese automotive and cellphone companies have seen an incredible increase in penetration in Latin American countries, most effectively in Argentina, where companies such as Geely, Chery, and Huawei can be found in much larger quantities than they were years ago.<sup>59</sup>

**Dealing with excess capacity.** After China’s 2008 largest stimulus packages in history, its production of goods sky-rocketed, squeezing corporate profits, increasing debt levels, and making the country’s financial system more vulnerable. To address the problem, the Chinese government developed a strategy involving the B&RI to export not the products themselves,

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<sup>57</sup> Cai, “Understanding China’s Belt and Road Initiative.”

<sup>58</sup> Cai, “Understanding China’s Belt and Road Initiative.”

<sup>59</sup> Marilina Bossarelli, “Las Empresas Chinas en Argentina,” *REDALC*, 2017. Accessed on November 25, 2022 at <https://cgtrainternacional.com.ar/pdf/empresaschinasenArgentina.pdf>.

but the excess production to other countries. This would help China reduce its supply glut at home while helping less developed countries to build up their industrial bases.

The initiative, then, opens the gates of a critical question: how does this strategy affect the U.S.? Despite one may think that in the short term the B&RI may help the United States by providing better commercial infrastructure around the world, different types of negative effects will threaten U.S. national security interests in the long term.

The first problem is economic and comes from the growing level of debt that participating countries of the initiative are facing. As several infrastructure projects are designed and built by Chinese workers, the transfer of know-how and training of local workers is limited. Also, the bidding process is extremely closed and only open to Chinese companies. This means that in these countries, the United States will struggle to keep pace with China as their firms will rapidly gain market share while their technical standards become the norm. This situation may cause a fall in worldwide production with a sustained fall in prices, causing a recession in several countries, including the United States.<sup>60</sup>

Secondly, a political problem for the United States surges. As the B&RI works as an integral element of a broader strategy to bolster China's geopolitical influence and international standing, many citizens of participating countries believe that China has a greater impact on their economy than the United States, even if reality thinks otherwise. This strategy, however, has a double edge, as considerable parts of the population of these countries may find their rights and benefits undermined by corruption and displacement created by these projects. Precisely, these projects incentivize corruption and a backslide of democracy in these countries.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Jennifer Hillman and David Sacks "China's Belt and Road: Implications for the United States," *Council on Foreign Relations*, Independent Task Force Report No. 79, March 2021. Accessed on November 25, 2022 at <https://www.cfr.org/report/chinas-belt-and-road-implications-for-the-united-states/findings>.

<sup>61</sup> Hillman and Sacks, "China's Belt and Road: Implications for the United States."



Finally, in terms of security, the Chinese government fears that, in case of a sudden “state of conflict” with the United States, the American strategy would consist of blocking the Strait of Malacca and isolating China from the rest of the world. The B&RI may help to overcome this obstacle by, as was already mentioned, establishing a new military and commercial port in Baluchistan.<sup>62</sup> This also means that the People’s Liberation Army’s Navy (PLAN) may also seek to finance and establish new naval bases overseas to expand the maritime versatility of its forces. Meanwhile, if the port being financed is a treaty-led U.S. ally, things get more complicated. The self-defense or wider regional contingencies of this ally may rely heavily on the United States’ ability to flow logistics in crisis or conflict. This could mean that the Chinese government, already established in that country’s port, may seek to prevent, or delay the host country’s reception of military logistics and supplies necessary for defense. This is the case of Piraeus port, in Greece, where Chinese companies own a great percentage of the port’s infrastructure. This means that if some NATO countries try to use the Piraeus port to provide financial or military equipment for Greece, the Chinese government can, for diverse reasons, try to stop or delay the arrival of such supplies. For these reasons, the Belt and Road Initiative might be America’s biggest soft-power enemy the country will face in this decade.

As mentioned, the Belt and Road Initiative has global implications for the security of American interests and citizens, its allies, and its partners. Nonetheless, an extremely important site of confrontation is currently located in Latin America, where the intrusion of the Chinese mega-projects and their influence can already be seen. On this continent, the wake of socialist, programmatic parties in Latin America during the first years of the century, plus extreme differences among classes in each country, created a fertile soil in which Chinese companies could flourish, and where the perception of the “American enemy” could be exploited by the Chinese politburo. Today, many multirole Chinese companies develop their projects in most

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<sup>62</sup> Cai, “Understanding China’s Belt and Road Initiative.”

countries of the continent, while Beijing signs very profitable commercial agreements with these countries. During the second ministry meeting from CELAC (Community of Latin American and the Caribbean States), for instance, Chinese officials expressed their interest in the continent, by claiming that “Latin American and Caribbean countries are natural parts of the Maritime Silk Road.”<sup>63</sup>

The entrance of China into the region was eased by the arrival to power of left-wing political parties in several Latin American countries. This turn to the left<sup>64</sup> was, as mentioned previously in this research, caused by the unpopularity of neo-liberal political measures taken during the 90s that led to an increase in poverty in several countries. In Argentina, for example, the arrival of the left branch of the Peronist party to power was led by president Néstor Kirchner who, along with his wife and future president, Cristina Kirchner, thought of China as an alternative model to follow instead of the Monetary International Fund (IMF), funded mainly by the United States.

This situation was also replicated in several other countries, such as Brazil with Lula da Silva, Bolivia with Evo Morales, and Venezuela with Hugo Chávez, among others. These last two countries even built an international treaty and organization capable of synthesizing their values and ideas. The organization was called ALBA (for *Alianza Bolivariana para Los Pueblos de Nuestra América*) and its objective was to integrate the economies of the countries of Latin America. It has ten full members, but the most important ones are Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, and Nicaragua. These countries have built strong economic and political ties with China and other countries, such as Russia and Iran, meaning that they are the centers that connect Beijing to the rest of the continent. These countries will be repeatedly mentioned in the cases of Iran and Russia, as well.

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<sup>63</sup> Leda, “Belt and Road Initiative y la Comunidad de Destino Común: avances en América Latina,” page 72.

<sup>64</sup> *Giro a la Izquierda*, as this event is known in Spanish.

For instance, Bolivia's government has recently chosen a Chinese consortium to be "its strategic partner on new \$2.3 billion lithium projects."<sup>65</sup> In the northern area of South America, Venezuela made similar agreements with diverse Chinese companies. According to the *Journal of International Affairs*, "Venezuela's current relationship with China was initiated by Hugo Chávez in an attempt to distance himself from American tutelage over the region."<sup>67</sup> It continues: "Chávez linked his foreign policy to extensive oil production (...) and China was the world's largest oil importer." This last quote would create implications for the United States posture toward Latin America, as the ties of Venezuela with several extra-continental governments have grown in recent years to include Iran and Russia, among other organizations.

Moreover, Chinese involvement is still growing in other countries as well, especially in regions like Argentina where, for example, its president, Alberto Fernández, had a meeting with the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, during the first half of 2021, where they discussed Argentina's official entrance to the B&RI, with the investment of 5G technology, provided by the company Huawei, and the development of new solar plants in the country.<sup>68</sup> On the other side of the continent, in Mexico, works on the Yucatan Solar Park had been halted for over a year as indigenous people have organized themselves to protest against the Chinese company, Jinko Solar, for not consulting with them about the construction of such a project.

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<sup>65</sup> Daniel Ramos, "Bolivia picks Chinese partner for \$2.3 billion lithium projects," *Reuters*, February 6, 2019. Accessed on November 23, 2022 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bolivia-lithium-china/bolivia-picks-chinese-partner-for-2-3-billion-lithium-projects-idUSKCN1PV2F7>.

<sup>66</sup> Lithium is an extremely important component for batteries and other electronic devices, considered to be one of the most important elements of the near-future.

<sup>67</sup> Patrick Igor and Lucas Wosgrau Padilha, "China's Stake in Venezuela are Too High to be Ignored," *Journal of International Affairs*, February 14, 2021. Accessed on November 25, 2022 at <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/online-articles/chinas-stakes-venezuela-are-too-high-be-ignored>.

<sup>68</sup> Mariano Camoletto, "Argentina busca acordar con China plan de inversión por 30 mil millones de dólares," *FUNDEPS*, March 31, 2021. Accessed on November 26, 2022 at <https://fundeps.org/argentina-china-plan-inversion/>.

A less perceptive reader could think that China is investing in these different areas without a clear direction, with randomness as the pattern. But this is not the case. Most investments are selectively prepared for certain areas that may benefit China in the long run. In the Latin American case, two main areas are being targeted. In the first case, those areas devoted to first-industry production that may guarantee China a safe income of food and energy. For example, last year, in Argentina, an important deal was signed between the country and China to allow the former to build and invest in hundreds of pork mega factories, whose main production target is China.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, as mentioned, solar plants are being built with Chinese funding in several countries of the continent. Secondly, those areas that are dedicated to logistics and the development of infrastructure, mainly bi-ocean corridors that might reduce the costs of moving goods to the Asian giant.

To name other relationships among Latin American countries with China, Ecuador has also been engaged in several financing and investment deals with Chinese companies for the last couple of years. According to the think tank Carnegie, Chinese mining companies “were drawn to Ecuador by a strong interest in diversifying their sources of copper in Latin America.”<sup>70</sup> It continues: “But Chinese mining operations in Ecuador (...) soon gained a negative reputation after these activities prompted a great deal of local pushback, especially from affected Indigenous communities.” In Brazil, things are not different. As reported by Monica Piccinini from *Byline Times*, China “is keen to challenge the United States’ dominance in Latin America and between 2002 and 2019 it has boosted trade with the region from \$17

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<sup>69</sup> Martin Dinatale, “Avanza un acuerdo con China para favorecer la producción y exportación de cerdos,” *El Cronista*, July 12, 2021. Accessed on November 26, 2022 at <https://www.cronista.com/economia-politica/argentina-y-china-cierran-acuerdo-instalar-granjas-cerdos-aumentar-exportacion-porcina/>.

<sup>70</sup> Cintia Quiliconi and Pablo Rodríguez Vasco, “Chinese Mining and Indigenous Resistance in Ecuador,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 20, 2021. Accessed on November 27, 2022 at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/09/20/chinese-mining-and-indigenous-resistance-in-ecuador-pub-85382>.

billion to \$315 billion.”<sup>71</sup> In this country, it seems like China is focusing mainly on the energy, transport, and agribusiness sector. These last two examples are very interesting. Ecuador, on the one hand, has been a long-time left-wing enclave within the Andes region, with former president Rafael Correa being an intimate friend of Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales. Thus, large amounts of funds being released toward Ecuadorian soil should not surprise us. However, the opposite situation happens in Brazil. The entrance of China into the country was granted by the then-president Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, both leaders of the Workers’ Party of Brazil. But the number of investments provided by Beijing to the country has increased since President Jair Bolsonaro became the president of the country. A right-wing leader with close ties to former President Donald Trump would have rejected all plans for Chinese investment in the country. Nonetheless, according to Monica Piccinini, “(...) nowhere has welcomed China more warmly than in Brazil under President Jair Bolsonaro. So much so that China has become the largest foreign investor in the country.”<sup>72</sup> In this matter, it should be important to analyze the current and future paths that these countries will take with the recent inauguration of President Lula da Silva. According to the Chinese media, President Lula’s return “is expected to energize China-Brazil relations and cooperation between China and Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) countries, and help promote common prosperity around the world.”<sup>73</sup>

During the last couple of years, China has become the 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest trade partner for countries in the region, and the leading importer of high-quality agricultural products. This information clearly shows how China had and has a strategy to develop in the continent. And

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<sup>71</sup> Monica Piccinini, “Brazil Welcomes Chinese Investment Regardless of the Consequences,” *Byline Times*, November 19, 2020. Accessed on November 26, 2022 at <https://bylinetimes.com/2020/11/19/brazil-welcomes-chinese-investment-regardless-of-the-consequences/>.

<sup>72</sup> Piccinini, “Brazil Welcomes Chinese Investment Regardless of the Consequences.”

<sup>73</sup> Xinhua, “Stronger ties, cooperation with China expected as Brazil’s Lula returns to presidency,” *China Daily*, January 8, 2023. Accessed on January 24, 2023 at <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202301/08/WS63b9fc0da31057c47eba846c.html>.

it is working. Especially in those countries whose governments feel that the enemy is in Washington D.C. The idea of blaming the United States for different misfortunes is not new. It has existed since the Cold War with the arguments promoted by guerrilla groups, for example. The neoliberal policies of the 90s and early 2000s that increased the breach between the poor and the rich have also reinforced this idea. Taking advantage of this situation, China started to develop its ties with these countries, first as commercial ties. The commodity boom that the Pink Tide enjoyed from 2002 on was heavily assisted by the growing demand for these products by Chinese consumers. In 2013, these commercial benefits were translated into a well-developed foreign policy that, first, targeted China's neighbors in Asia. Since 2017, however, the focus has been set on Latin America. The issue, nonetheless, has also grown more problematic. The entrance of China onto the continent also meant the loss of American influence among these societies. In most cases, China occupied a central role in the vacuum left. In some cases, like Venezuela and Cuba, the vacuum was also occupied by other countries, like Russia and Iran. The triangle of these three countries, whose relationships with each other are based on counterbalancing America's soft and hard power, could prove challenging to U.S. safety in the future.

## **Iran**

Iran's influence on the continent pre-exists the Chinese presence by around a decade. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, Iran's influence on the continent was portrayed by its militant-terrorist branch, Hezbollah, known for its constant activity against Israel and other enemies of Iran. It is important to note that Iranian influence on the continent has been radically different from the one employed by China or even Russia. As implied by The International Republican Institute (IRI), Tehran seeks to create political partnerships with the countries of the region, while China pursues a more expansionist maneuver to challenge the

U.S.-led liberal order, while Russian attempts are more opportunistic, dependent on the interaction between its military forces and the armed forces from some Latin American countries.<sup>74</sup> The use of Hezbollah as Iran's most important tool on the continent will be addressed in chapter 3.

In this field, the countries in the region that are more repeatedly targeted by Iranian officials including the dictatorships and authoritarian regimes of Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. Latin America has not only become extremely important to the Iranian regime because of its location in the vicinity of the United States but also because it might become a safe haven in which to avoid the sanctions that harm the Iranian economy. "For instance, Iran sought to develop banking ties with Cuba, in hopes of laundering funds as well as evading sanctions."<sup>75</sup>

The political connections that the regime creates with the multiple governments of the region are created gradually, first by creating cultural bonds with the populations of these countries. Shiite Islamic cultural centers are key in this stage of the plan. A similar approach was also seen in Russia's attempts to enter the region via the support of Spanish-speaking Russian news outlets. In the same way, Iran has also created its own Spanish-language news outlet, HispanTV, which usually broadcasts with an anti-American signature.

The next step comes with deeper cooperation with the local government. For instance, the Maduro regime has granted more than 1 million hectares (about 3,860 square miles) of farmland to the Iranian regime.<sup>76</sup> The agreement, signed by President Nicolas

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<sup>74</sup> McKayla Swan, "Foreign Authoritarian Influence in Latin America: Iran's Growing Reach," *International Republican Institute*, August 22, 2022. Accessed on November 27, 2022 at <https://www.iri.org/news/foreign-authoritarian-influence-in-latin-america-irans-growing-reach/>.

<sup>75</sup> Swan, "Foreign Authoritarian Influence in Latin America: Iran's Growing Reach."

<sup>76</sup> "El régimen de Maduro le cederá a Irán 1 millón de hectáreas de tierra de cultivo," *Infobae*, July 26, 2022. Accessed on December 1, 2022 at <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2022/07/26/el-regimen-de-maduro-le-cedera-a-iran-utilizar-1-millon-de-hectareas-de-tierra-de-cultivo/>.

Maduro and his counterpart of Iran, President Ebrahim Raisi, seeks to secure the Persian country against food-related issues, most likely related to the sanctions imposed on the country due to their recent advancements in their nuclear program. A 20-year-long cooperation treaty was also signed between the regimes, and it involved all areas, including defense, energy, food supply, and infrastructure investment. Following the usual narration, Iran's president highlighted that "the relationship between both countries is strategic against the Empire (the United States). The signature of this document shows the will of both governments to embrace the bonds in all these different sectors." And he continued: "Venezuela has shown a perfect resistance against the sanctions and threats from the Empire, the same types of sanctions and threats that the Iranian people have suffered for the last 40 years."<sup>77</sup>

The signing of agreements with the Theocratic Republic of Iran presents grave dangers to the security of America and its citizens. This threat is posed by, at least, two factors. The first one is the presence of Iranian military assets on the continent. Back in 2020, President Nicolás Maduro increased the economic and military ties with Tehran by trading its oil reserves in exchange for gasoline imported from Iran. At the same time, and after the acknowledgment of members of the Colombian government that officials of the Venezuelan government were looking into purchasing several Iran-made missiles.<sup>78</sup> Whether these were short, medium, or long-range is not known. Days later, President Maduro, seemingly trying to joke about this issue, stated that "It had not occurred to me, it had not occurred to us. (...) Padrino, what a good idea, to speak with Iran to see what short, medium, and long-range missiles they have, and if it is possible, given the great relations we have with Iran."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Infobae, "El régimen de Maduro le cederá a Irán 1 millón de hectáreas de tierra de cultivo."

<sup>78</sup> "Maduro says Venezuela buying Iranian missiles "a good idea"," *Reuters*, August 22, 2020. Accessed on December 1, 2022 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-iran/maduro-says-venezuela-buying-iranian-missiles-a-good-idea-idUSKBN25I0TU>.

<sup>79</sup> Reuters, "Maduro says Venezuela buying Iranian missiles "a good idea"."



Whether a joke or not, this statement brought back the possibility, or at least, as President Maduro said, the idea to carry this out.

The second factor of Iranian presence on the continent is the activity of the Iranian-backed terrorist organization known as Hezbollah. This group has been active on the continent since, at least, the early 1990s. At that time, they carried out the two deadliest terrorist attacks on Latin American territory in history against the Israeli embassy in Argentina, on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1992, and against a Jewish community center, also located in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1994. Since then, more attention has been placed on this group, and it is now known of their activity and presence in Venezuela and the tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay.<sup>80</sup> The use of these agents to increase the Iranian influence among Muslim populations on the continent, or against American or Western targets is a possibility. More on this organization will be briefed in chapter III of this research.

Of great concern is also the arrival and positioning of Iranian military ships in the waters of the continent. On January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Iranian Navy stated that it was sending two ships to the Panama Canal for training purposes. Rear Admiral Shahram Irani stated that the country has yet to operate in two straits of the world, one of them being the Panama Canal.<sup>81</sup> The other strait is still unknown. According to the same source, the fact that Iranian ships will be approaching the shores of the American continent is a sign of the authority that Iran possesses. According to Behnam Ben Taleblu, an Iran expert from the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, the Iranian Navy has been trying to expand its reach and its

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<sup>80</sup> Julieta Pelcastre, "Iran's Tentacles Threaten Latin America," *Diálogo Américas*, January 19, 2023. Accessed on January 25, 2023 at <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/irans-tentacles-threaten-latin-america/#.Y9CGwnbMJPY>.

<sup>81</sup> Heather Mongilio, "Iranian Navy Sending Ships to Panama Canal, Says Commander," *USNI News*, January 13, 2023. Accessed on January 25, 2023 at <https://news.usni.org/2023/01/13/iranian-navy-sending-ships-to-panama-canal-says-commander>.

international presence by visiting many ports worldwide. Whether they manage to reach the Panama Canal or not is not known. “If anything, the statement tells one more about Iranian intentions than capabilities, as the regime tries to project strength abroad when it’s increasingly looking weak at home.”<sup>82</sup> The flotilla of ships is being led by the frigate IRIS *Dena* and the forward base ship IRINS *Makran*. According to the most recent reports on these two vessels, they arrived on January 23rd of this year at the port of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.<sup>83</sup> Both ships were set to depart from the port on January 30<sup>th</sup>. The election of President Lula da Silva in Brazil, a long-time ally of the traditional Latin American Pink Tide, could also be of concern if he intends to seek an alignment with President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, with more ports on the continent being given to the Iranian fleet.

The move from the Iranian navy was received with large criticism in Panama. Alonso Illueca, professor of International Law at Santa María la Antigua University, in Panama, stated that “(it) should be considered a violation of Panama’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”<sup>84</sup> Another point of concern would be the support provided by Venezuelan and Nicaraguan ships to the flotilla in the area. Both countries, led by Daniel Ortega and Nicolas Maduro, respectively, have very close ties with Iran and could support Tehran’s attempts to establish itself in the surroundings of the Panama Canal. “Iran is seeking to provoke the United States and shows that it has the capability to move its military apparatus close to U.S. territory.”<sup>85</sup>

Iranian movement around the continent does seem to follow a pattern that could threaten the security of the United States’ southern border in the future if a conflict breaks

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<sup>82</sup> Mongilio, “Iranian Navy Sending Ships to Panama Canal, Says Commander.”

<sup>83</sup> Sam LaGrone, “Iranian Navy Flotilla Heading to Rio de Janeiro,” *USNI News*, January 23, 2023. Accessed on January 25, 2023 at <https://news.usni.org/2023/01/23/iranian-navy-flotilla-heading-to-rio-de-janeiro>.

<sup>84</sup> Pelcastre, “Iran’s Tentacles Threaten Latin America.”

<sup>85</sup> Pelcastre, “Iran’s Tentacles Threaten Latin America.”

out between the two nations. In 2022, Iran and Nicaragua signed important agreements in energy and agriculture that increased the cooperation between the two countries.<sup>86</sup>

According to Fabián Calle, political analyst, and professor of International Relations at Argentina's Austral University, argued that "Iran's idea is to enter the United States (through the south) with the help of Cuba and Venezuela."<sup>87</sup> He continued: "The strategy is to present itself diplomatically at the political and economic level, to upset the sphere of influence of the United States, for example, by meddling in Nicaragua's internal politics."

Iranian presence on the continent, nonetheless, does not mean that it intends to directly attack the United States or its interests in the area, but the presence in the region and the capability to react if a war finally breaks out between both countries is a clear menace to the United States national security. The presence of Iranian military vessels, and maybe even missiles, on the continent, plus the undercover and clandestine actions from Iran's terrorist arm, could become increasingly daring in the near future if these are not correctly addressed. Tehran's missiles, to this day, can only reach territories within or around the Middle East, but the presence of a single short-range ballistic missile in Latin America could modify the entire planning of American decision-makers. It could become Iran's best deterrence weapon against America and its allies' adventurism in the Middle East.

## **Russia**

Russian influence on the continent can be traced back to the very first decades of the XIX century when Russian settlers and royal explorers established the first Russian settlements in what is today known as Alaska and California, and most of the American west

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<sup>86</sup> Juan Delgado, "Iran Deepens Trade Agreements with Nicaragua," *Diálogo Américas*, September 8, 2022. Accessed on December 20, 2022 at <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/iran-deepens-trade-agreements-with-nicaragua/#.Y9HQc3bMJPY>.

<sup>87</sup> Delgado, "Iran Deepens Trade Agreements with Nicaragua."

coast. The economic situation in the empire, and the expansion of the United States toward the west, prompted an agreement to purchase Alaska and all territories controlled by Russian exclaves or colonies. For almost 100 years, this was the last sign of Russian presence on the continent.

The Cold War modified this situation, as the United States and the Soviet Union became fearsome rivals with the goal of expanding and dominating the international order. For this purpose, Latin America could become vital to Soviet interests. The most important piece of evidence reflecting this strategy was the placement of short and medium-range ballistic missiles in Cuba by the Soviet regime in 1962. Although the petition from Havana to receive economic, military, and ballistic assistance was due to the failed plot the year before at the Bay of Pigs, it became a great opportunity for Moscow to put their greatest foe in range of their missiles. But the U.S. blockade caused the Russians to go back on their plans and try a new strategy.

The political and ideological appeal that Latin American populations were starting to feel regarding communism and the Soviet regime became a second opportunity for Moscow to settle itself in America's backyard. "A partial answer (to Soviet Union's "enthusiasm" regarding Latin America after 1960) is that Bolshevik revolutionary theory and political ambitions were worldwide. Another is that Moscow believed, with some reason, that their cause had political and ideological appeal in Latin America. (...) No less important was Soviet political and strategic competition with the United States, its major political opponent."<sup>88</sup> The support provided to the communist and socialist guerrillas and political parties throughout the 20th century, however, did not create the fertile soil needed to establish a communist regime on the continent or, at least, a Soviet forward military base.

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<sup>88</sup> Cole Blasier, "Soviet Impacts on Latin America," *Russian History: The Soviet Global Impact: 1945-1991*, p. 481.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, however, the newly reborn Russian Federation tried to develop democratic institutions that could last in time, alongside the United States, which was no longer considered to be a foe, but an ally. This all faded rapidly during the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as Vladimir Putin took control of the country. “Russia is working to expand its presence in Latin America, largely at Washington’s expense,” wrote Julia Gurganus for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace institute in 2018. She continued: “Souring attitudes toward the United States throughout the region over trade and immigration issues, the rise of populist candidates, and the deepening internal economic and social challenges facing many Latin American countries create favorable circumstances for Russia to advance its interests.”<sup>89</sup>

Since the return of Putin to the presidency of Russia in 2012, the Kremlin has relied on a wide array of diplomatic, military, intelligence, cyber, trade, energy, and financial tools to influence political systems, public attitudes, and elite decision-makers in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Russian operations on the continent, and the expansion of their influence worldwide, respond to domestic and external factors. On the one hand, Putin has been trying to enhance his domestic legitimacy by showing Russia is back on its feet as a global power. On the other hand, undermining U.S. influence worldwide and harming its liberal order has always been objectives of the Kremlin. Finally, but not less important, the promotion of specific commercial ties with countries of the third world related to military, commercial, and energy interests.

In Latin America, Russia is mostly active primarily through arms sales, commercial agreements, and high-level political outreach. The connections that Russia has established on

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<sup>89</sup> Julia Gurganus, “Russia: Playing a Geopolitical Game in Latin America,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 3, 2018. Accessed on December 28, 2022 at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/03/russia-playing-geopolitical-game-in-latin-america-pub-76228>.

the continent are strongly supported by those countries, mostly undemocratic, whose leaders support the establishment of a new world order far from American interests. Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua are some of them. The Kremlin has also cultivated a strong commercial and political relationship with those countries that are members of the BRICS group, which include Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The recent election of leftist president Lula da Silva in Brazil will be interesting to examine in the near future.

In terms of military sales to the continent, Russia has been an important ally for several governments. Since the beginning of this century, most Latin American countries faced an increasingly beneficial economic surplus that they have used to modernize their armed forces. In this context, the increase in military purchases was tied to the boom in commodity prices in most of these economies, from 2004-2014.<sup>90</sup> In numbers, Latin America's military purchases were 10% of the global arms transfers in 2010-2014 and 5.7% in 2015-2019. Between both periods, arms imports by Latin America dropped by 40%.<sup>91</sup> The sale of these weapons can be seen as a clear challenge to the U.S. influence on the continent. From 2014 onwards, however, the U.S. recovered its position as the region's largest arms provider thanks to the drop in Russian exports on the continent, as these fell around 18% globally by 2015.

Venezuela is still Russia's biggest customer in the region. Since the beginning of this century, more than \$20 billion in military equipment have been purchased by the government of Hugo Chavez, then, and the government of Nicolas Maduro. Just to name some equipment, Venezuela has acquired 24 Sukhoi SU-30MK2s, an S-300 surface-to-air missile system, several combat helicopters such as the Mi-35M and Mi-26 models, and 92 T-72M1

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<sup>90</sup> Peter Cavanagh, "Russia became an important arms supplier for Latin America, but its sales have dropped," *Universidad de Navarra*, May 2020. Accessed on December 28, 2022 at [https://www.unav.edu/documents/16800098/17755721/SRA-2020\\_17-19\\_RUS-arms.pdf](https://www.unav.edu/documents/16800098/17755721/SRA-2020_17-19_RUS-arms.pdf).

<sup>91</sup> Cavanagh, "Russia became an important arms supplier for Latin America, but its sales have dropped."

main battle tanks. More than 30 arms deals have been carried out by Venezuela in the last 20 years, more than any other countries in the region combined. For example, Mexico is placed in the second position for the same time frame with 7 arms deals.<sup>92</sup>

Nicaragua has also been a great beneficiary of many arms deals with the Kremlin. Since 2007, when President Daniel Ortega came to power, 90% of all military imports made by the country were sent by Russia. T-72B1 main battle tanks were reported as part of an \$80 billion deal. In 2017, two Antonov An-26 military transport aircraft were also purchased by the Ortega government. The attention that Russia pays to Nicaragua is not only related to the easier access to its government, as the government of Daniel Ortega is highly critical of the United States' role on the continent but also because it might be part of a greater scheme to get access to the refueling facilities located in the country, closer to the Panama Canal and the United States.<sup>93</sup>

Russian activity on the continent is not only concerning because of the military-grade equipment that is shipped to these countries in the region but also because of the Russian armed forces' presence and activities in them. For instance, in 2018, satellite photos revealed Russian bombers in a Venezuelan airport: two Tu-160 -codename Blackjack- capable of carrying a nuclear payload.<sup>94</sup> Years later, in August 2022, Venezuela hosted the war games organized by Russia, where several anti-American countries participated in different "games", mostly sniping contests.<sup>95</sup> The participants of these war games are members of the

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<sup>92</sup> Cavanagh, "Russia became an important arms supplier for Latin America, but its sales have dropped."

<sup>93</sup> Cavanagh, "Russia became an important arms supplier for Latin America, but its sales have dropped."

<sup>94</sup> "Satellite photos reveal Russian bombers in Venezuela," *Defense News*, December 12, 2018. Accessed on January 2, 2023 at <https://www.defensenews.com/global/the-americas/2018/12/12/satellite-photos-reveal-russian-bombers-in-venezuela/>.

<sup>95</sup> Antonio Maria Delgado, "Russia holding war games in Venezuela, sending alarming signals throughout Latin America," *Stars and Stripes*, August 19, 2022. Accessed on January 2, 2023 at <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/americas/2022-08-19/russia-war-games-venezuela-alarming-signals-latin-america-7038039.html>.

armed forces of several states, including Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Uzbekistan, Burma, China, India, Pakistan, and Indonesia, among others. According to Vladimir Padrino Lopez, Venezuela's defense minister, "these are nations that daily condemn imperialist aggressions against the peoples."<sup>96</sup> The games were also considered to be a signal to the United States and Europe that Russia still has friends around the globe, given the strong sanctions that have fallen above the Kremlin after its invasion of Ukraine in February that same year. "In a sense, this seeks to normalize (and pave the way for) a larger military presence in Latin America," said Josef Humire, executive director of the Center for a Secure Free Society.<sup>97</sup> The invasion of Ukraine, however, may modify Russia's objectives in the short term. The large number of casualties that the Kremlin is suffering in its war against Kyiv, and the lack of advanced military equipment for its forces, may lead them to turn their focus toward Moscow and the frontline at the Donbas. The outcome of the war in this region, therefore, might alter the way Russia will increase or decrease its involvement in Latin America, and whether the current government led by Putin may stand or fall.

Based on the evidence provided in these last lines, the Russian activity on the continent can be defined by two factors: the commercial impact that trading has on the Russian economy, including the trade of military-grade equipment and other types of commodities, such as energy and food, and the explicit military support provided to the authoritarian regimes still present on the continent, such as Venezuela and Nicaragua. The continuation and evolution of the war games organized by Russia and that were held in Venezuela could possibly involve the participation of other countries with strong political antagonism against the United States, such as China, Iran, and North Korea. If that is the

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<sup>96</sup> Delgado, "Russia holding war games in Venezuela, sending alarming signals throughout Latin America."

<sup>97</sup> Delgado, "Russia holding war games in Venezuela, sending alarming signals throughout Latin America."



case, then a new militarization by external forces over the continent is expected. Critical assets could be at risk of being subdued or attacked by these forces, such as the Panama Canal. Two possible threats will be explored in more detail in the following chapter, namely, the threat posed by terrorist activity on the continent, and the threat posed by the direct or indirect militarization of the continent by anti-American governments. Some of these aspects have already been mentioned in this chapter, but more in-depth research will be addressed in the following chapter.

### **CHAPTER III: THE THREAT OF HEZBOLLAH**

This chapter will explore the history, relevance, and level of threat that the terrorist organization known as Hezbollah may pose to the United States' national security. This group is important as it is the only Islamic terrorist organization currently active on the continent and has maintained such a status for the last 30 years, actively participating not only in the trafficking of drugs and other materials but also in violent activity, mainly the attacks against the Israeli embassy and a community center in Argentina, in 1992 and 1994, respectively. The first section of this chapter will analyze the similarities and differences between the old socialist guerrilla groups that organized similar types of attacks during the height of the Cold War, and Hezbollah itself. This is important given that some of these guerrilla groups are still active on the continent, so it is important not to confuse the level of threat that these can pose. Secondly, the history and the activity of Hezbollah will be addressed, making special attention to the 1992 and 1994 Buenos Aires bombings. Finally, the last section will explore the implications that this organization may cause for the United States, and the most recently known activity of the group and its patron, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

#### **Between Guerrillas and Religious Zealots**

Terrorist activity on the continent is not something new or something that the Iranian regime has been investing in the last recent years. The presence of Iran's most important clandestine branch, the terrorist organization known as Hezbollah, on the continent has been addressed since, at least, the early 1990s. This section explores the activity of this group in the region, and how Iran makes use of it to spread its interests at the expense of American influence. To do so, first, it is important to understand why this type of terrorist activity,

popularly known as Islamic terrorism, is different from the terrorism used by socialist/communist guerrilla groups during the height of the Cold War. Even though their strategies were similar -the use of explosives as lethal weapons- and their patrons were both extra-continental powers -the Soviet Union, then, and Iran, now-, their goals were radically different, and marking this difference is important to understand the threat they pose to U.S. national security.

Terrorism can be defined as an inherently political phenomenon closely related to power and the search for it. Power, in this case, is used as a means to achieve political change. It involves violence in pursuit of a political aim, planning calculations, and a systematic act. In other words, it is a phenomenon of political violence perpetrated by individuals belonging to an organization or ideological movement dedicated to the revolutionary change that can only be achieved thanks to the entangled violence.<sup>98</sup> Even though these types of political movements have existed since the early ages of human evolution, its name, known to refer to the word “terror”, comes from the times of the French Revolution by the end of the XVIII century.

Today, however, this definition has been radically modified to encompass a large number of movements, of which the most important are the Islamic religious-ideological groups. These groups have expanded worldwide, influencing all continents through several means and with, sometimes, different goals. In this case, this research will analyze the origins and activity of terrorist organizations in Latin America and their ties to several other non-state organizations -cartels, criminal bands, etc.- as well as with other states, mainly Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

As mentioned, a terrorist organization is a group of individuals who utilize terror as a means to achieve a political goal. According to Bruce Hoffman, senior fellow for

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<sup>98</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, (Columbia University Press, 2017).

counterterrorism and homeland security at the Council on Foreign Relations,<sup>99</sup> terrorism's interpretation has radically changed in the last two centuries. In this argument, Hoffman explains that during the 1960s and 1970s, terrorism was seen within a revolutionary context. As he defined it: "Various left-wing political extremists -drawn mostly from radical student organizations and Marxist/Leninist/Maoist movements in Western Europe, Latin America and the United States- began to form terrorist groups opposing American intervention in Vietnam and what they claimed were the irredeemable social and economic inequities of the modern capitalist liberal-democratic state."<sup>100</sup>

Socialist-Leninist-Maoist guerrillas, sometimes backed by the Soviet Union, saw, then, their origin in the first, and to this day, the only, successful military-popular uprising that established a socialist government on the continent. When Fidel Castro entered La Havana, Cuba, on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1959, he triggered a military dogma that would be then appropriated by most, if not all, socialist movements on the continent. Castro's second in command, Argentine Ernesto "Che" Guevara, devised a military strategy that could be easily used by dispersed, popular groups against centralized governments. This type of asymmetric war was especially effective given Latin America's particular territorial landscape and was called *Foquismo*, also known as *Foco*, who argued that:

1. Popular forces can win a war against a regular army.
2. Not always wait for the perfect conditions for the revolution; the insurrectional *Foco* can create them.
3. In the under-developed Latin American continent, the ground for the fight must be fundamentally rural-based.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> "Bruce Hoffman," Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed on February 27, 2023 at <https://www.cfr.org/expert/bruce-hoffman>.

<sup>100</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, page 37.

<sup>101</sup> Marco Antonio Gutierrez Martinez, "El Che: Foquismo y la Guerrilla," *Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México*, May 2018. Accessed on January 5, 2023 at <https://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:29193/>.

In the years that followed Castro's victory over the overthrown Batista, and especially after the failed Bay of Pigs operation, Cuba became the center of the school of the good guerrilla fighter. As many as 2500 young Latin Americans studied there the diverse techniques that would then be used to threaten governments and people.<sup>102</sup> In 1967, Guevara died after trying to establish a wide revolutionary network (*Foco*) in Bolivia. However, the seeds were already planted, and several other guerrilla-terrorist organizations grew from them.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, a different type of terrorist activity evolved, with a different set of ideologies, means, and goals. Islamist terrorism is the most prevalent type of terrorism threatening Europe, Africa, and Asia. Hoffman points out how this type of religious motivation behind the attacks rose to prominence after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.<sup>103</sup> According to him, even though many terrorist organizations throughout history have used a strong religious component, political motivation was dominant. In the Islamist terrorist movements that came to be before and after 9/11, religion in the most important motivator for its agents and leaders.

In Latin America, Hezbollah is the only originally-Islamist terrorist organization present on the continent. Its presence on the continent is dated, at least, since the early 1990s when two terrorist attacks were carried out by this organization against the Israeli Embassy (1992) and an Israeli community center (1994). These two cases will be explored later in this paper. Since that decade, the government of Iran, Hezbollah's godfather, has tried to expand its influence and scope of action: "From drug smuggling to money laundering, from

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<sup>102</sup> Barry Lando, "Latin-American Guerrillas," *The Atlantic*, December 1967 issue. Accessed on January 5, 2023 at <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1967/12/latin-american-guerrillas/660067/>.

<sup>103</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, page 39.

fundraising to recruitment and proselytism, and even terrorist attacks.”<sup>104</sup> However, the Iranian government has not exclusively been acting on its own, but via its paramilitary-religious organization Hezbollah. Its religious goal on the continent, moreover, is to spread Shia influence throughout the Muslim communities. To this goal, the terrorist group is assisted by a “brother” organization, Al-Tajammu, which serves as an Iranian platform to leverage the “resistance axis against the US, Israel, and its allies.”<sup>105</sup>

In general terms, left-wing guerrillas and radical Islamist organizations have a strong similarity when it comes to violence. Bombings and concentrated attacks have been their most important tools of violence. Another strong similarity between these groups is their reliance on illegal businesses, such as drug trafficking and drug production. According to John Otis, at first, FARC’s leadership believed that dealing with this type of business would corrupt its forces but as being a rural-based organization with few ties to urban areas, money was needed but not found.<sup>106</sup> “The control over the coca fields helped the FARC consolidate control over the peasantry and widen its social base,” and he continued: “Millions of drug dollars provided the FARC with a kind of steroidal boost allowing the rebel army to expand from 6,000 members in 1982 to about 20,000 fighters at the peak of its military power in the early 2000s.”<sup>107</sup> In contrast, Hezbollah’s drug trafficking operations on the continent started

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<sup>104</sup> Jorge Paredes Esteban and Michael Barak, “Propaganda, Narratives and Influence in Latin America: Iran, Hezbollah and Al-Tajammu,” *Reichman University International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, July 2022. Accessed on January 6, 2023 at <https://ict.org.il/propaganda-narratives-influence-operations-latin-america/>.

<sup>105</sup> Michael Barak, “Al-Tajammu: A Pro-Iranian International Platform to Leverage the Resistance Axis,” *Reichman University International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, August 2021. Accessed on January 6, 2023 at <http://ict.org.il.web101.virtualbox.co.il/images/Al-Tajammu%20-%20Michael%20Barak.pdf>.

<sup>106</sup> John Otis, “The FARC and Colombia’s Illegal Drug Trade,” *Wilson Center*, November 2014. Accessed on January 6, 2023 at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-farc-and-colombias-illegal-drug-trade>.

<sup>107</sup> Otis, “The FARC and Colombia’s Illegal Drug Trade,” page 5.

in the early 1980s but grew significantly in the last decades.<sup>108</sup> Of particular concern is the area known as the “tri-border” area: the sector in which the borders of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay collide. In this area, weak cross-border enforcement and flawed authorities have created fertile soil for Lebanese traffickers to move goods northward and southward, from Colombia’s fields to Argentina and Brazil’s ports.

Nonetheless, left-wing guerrillas and Hezbollah have an extremely important difference. Although these organizations had strong ideological motivations for their violence, the types of ideologies are radically different. The ideology behind the socialist guerrilla activity was related to the political field, to the establishment of Leninist, Marxist, or Maoist governments in their national governments. Hezbollah’s motivation, in contrast, is to destroy the enemies of Shia Muslims throughout the world. And that includes Israel and most of the West. For this reason, most branches of this organization have been declared terrorist supporters by the United States and many other countries.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, Hezbollah’s motivations are purely religious, that is, to expand and protect Shia Muslims throughout the world in the name of their God, and as a sacred mission. As Hoffman pointed out, here the religious component is more prevalent than the political one.

### **The 1992 and 1994 Attacks**

Focusing now on Hezbollah, the organization was born during the Lebanese Civil War that broke out in 1975. After Israel occupied the country in 1978 and 1982 to destroy the Palestinian guerrilla camps that were threatening Israel’s borders, a group of Shiites, also

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<sup>108</sup> Matthew Levitt, “Hizbullah narco-terrorism: A growing cross-border threat,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, September 2012. Accessed on January 10, 2023 at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hizbullah-narco-terrorism-growing-cross-border-threat>.

<sup>109</sup> Kali Robinson, “What Is Hezbollah?,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 25, 2022. Accessed on January 10, 2023 at <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-hezbollah>.

influenced by the already established theocratic government of Iran, took up arms against the Israeli occupation. Under the sponsorship of Iran, which saw then an opportunity to expand its influence among Arab states, this militia would then become Hezbollah. During this time, the group was better known for the successful plot to attack the barracks of the coalition forces in Beirut, in 1983, where more than three hundred people perished. The organization enshrined its goals in a manifesto that was published in 1985. In it, the group called for the destruction of the Israeli state, to expel Western powers from Lebanon, and pledged allegiance to Iran's supreme leader.

The organization continued to exist even after Lebanon's civil war was over. At the time, Hezbollah was already closely tied to drug trafficking in Lebanon, as it had become one of their most important sources of money. Their justification was shrouded by their holy duty of destroying Israel and America: "We are making drugs for Satan – America and the Jews. If we cannot kill them with guns, so we will kill them with drugs."<sup>110</sup> Hezbollah's operations in Latin America, moreover, started at around the same time. By the late 1980s, they had already established operations in Colombia, the tri-border area between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, and, later on, in Venezuela and the rest of the continent.<sup>111</sup> Drug smuggling was not their only activity, as money laundering also became a part of their toolbox.

Hezbollah's presence on the continent was largely heard during the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on March 17, 1992. The bomb killed 22 people and shocked the Latin American population with a new type of terrorism.<sup>112</sup> The attacks showed that Hezbollah, and therefore the Islamic Jihad, was not only targeting Israel and the United States but also the entire world. According to an official witness, only known by the

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<sup>110</sup> Levitt, "Hizbullah narco-terrorism: A growing cross-border threat," page 35.

<sup>111</sup> Levitt, "Hizbullah narco-terrorism: A growing cross-border threat," page 37.

<sup>112</sup> Carlos Escudé and Beatriz Gurevich, "Limits to Governability, Corruption and Transnational Terrorism: The Case of the 1992 and 1994 Attacks in Buenos Aires," *EIAL*, vol. 14 – N°2 (2003), pp 127-148.



alias “Abolghasem Mesbahi, the operation was led by the cultural attaché of the Iranian Embassy at the time, Mohsen Rabbani, while it was supervised by Hamid Naghashan, a senior official in the Iranian intelligence agency. According to this witness and an investigation led by the New York Times, even the then-President of Argentina, Carlos Saul Menem, was bribed to obstruct the investigation.<sup>113</sup>

These allegations placed the responsibility for the attack not only on Hezbollah but also on Iran. The motivation behind the attack is shrouded around the historical Islam-Judaism war stated by most Islamic Jihads. However, according to Escudé and Gurevich, the motivations behind the attacks were more related to the agreements signed during the Madrid Peace Conference in October 1991. The conference was co-chaired by US President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and was attended by delegations from Israel, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon.<sup>114</sup> A joint Palestinian-Jordan delegation also participated in the conference. It was the first time that all the parties involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict had gathered to hold direct negotiations. Although the conference did not provide distinguishable results, it did encourage the different parties to continue negotiating via their bilateral channels. Eventually, the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed the Declaration of Principles in 1993 and the peace treaty in 1994.

Up until the Madrid Peace Conference, both Hezbollah and Iran preferred to target Israeli military objectives in Lebanon. After the conference, however, the terrorist group and Iran decided to shift their aim against Israel itself and other Jewish targets throughout the

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<sup>113</sup> Escudé and Gurevich, “Limits to Governability, Corruption and Transnational Terrorism: The Case of the 1992 and 1994 Attacks in Buenos Aires,” pages 128 and 129.

<sup>114</sup> Office of the Historian, “The Madrid Conference, 1991.” Accessed on February 4, 2023 at <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/madrid-conference>.

world. The attack against the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires is framed within this new strategy.

Nonetheless, according to Escude and Gurevich, the participation of Syria in the plot is also clear. The clue was known as the “Condor II and Syria Connection”. According to these authors, President Menem’s campaign was funded by both Syria and Libya. At the time, Iraq was being the most important investor in Argentina’s Condor II missile, capable to carry nuclear warheads up to 1,000 kilometers away. When the Gulf War broke out, Menem would have promised the Syrian government that they would inherit the Condor II program from Iraq, but US pressure against the Argentinean government called the program off. Under this circumstance, and given the broken promise, the Syrian government would have given green light to the attack and assisted in its preparation.

The second attack was consummated against the AMIA, a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, on July 18, 1994, where 85 people died and approximately 300 people were injured.<sup>115</sup> The attack again proved the immense weaknesses of the national security apparatus and even a possible cover-up and assistance from it to the terrorist plotters. Hezbollah’s attack also showed how weak were Argentina and its neighbors’ intelligence agencies. In late September 2002, the suicide bomber who carried out the attack was identified as Ibrahim Hussein Berro, from Lebanon, who entered the country through the Triple Border. This information was then confirmed by the CIA and Mossad.

These attacks serve as evidence of Islamic terrorist activity on the Latin American continent. Fortunately, these were the first and only attacks of this kind on the continent to this day, but Hezbollah’s activity in the different areas under their control, such as the Triple Border; their connections to other drug trafficking organizations, such as Colombia’s cartels,

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<sup>115</sup> Escudé and Gurevich, “Limits to Governability, Corruption and Transnational Terrorism: The Case of the 1992 and 1994 Attacks in Buenos Aires,” page 128.

and the many guerrilla groups still alive on the continent, like the Shining Path in Peru and the FARC in Colombia, shows how vulnerable these countries have become in the war against these organizations. The war against rural-based peasants and college students has shifted to a war against global narco-terrorists on the very same continent.

## **Implications**

What are the dangers that a terrorist organization, such as Hezbollah, could create not only for the Latin American nations but also for the United States? As the evidence depicted in this chapter shows, terrorist organizations may be effective terror spreaders via their violent plots. As mentioned before, since the attacks on Argentina, no new attack has been performed by this organization on the continent. After these attacks, and especially after 9/11, more resources have been allocated to different countries in the region and the US to counter this organization's efforts. "Since 9/11, under US pressure, local governments have monitored and discovered part of the wide Hezbollah network active on the continent. It led to an increased understanding of Hezbollah's fundraising operations but also led Hezbollah to shift them to other Latin American countries, making their location, nature, and extent largely unknown."<sup>116</sup>

This increased vigilance in the group has generated more pressure on its activities. For instance, on June 6, 2022, a 747 cargo aircraft belonging to EMTRASUR, a subsidiary of Venezuelan state-owned airline CONVIASA, landed in Buenos Aires. The aircraft was detained in Buenos Aires's airport when the country's Airport Security Police searched the aircraft and found not only a crew of Venezuelans but also of Iranians. The aircraft had been

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<sup>116</sup> Ely Karmon, "Iran and its Proxy Hezbollah: Strategic Penetration in Latin America," *Real Instituto Elcano*, April 8, 2009. Accessed on January 11, 2023 at <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/work-document/iran-and-its-proxy-hezbollah-strategic-penetration-in-latin-america-wp/>.

purchased by the Venezuelan government from Iran's state-owned Fars Qeshm Air. One of the Iranian members of the crew was identified as Gholamreza Ghasemi, an individual with links to the IRGC. In the investigation and apprehension of the aircraft, several intelligence agencies were involved, which included Argentina and its neighbors as well as the CIA.<sup>117</sup> The purpose of the trip is still unknown, but it is clear that heavy pressure is being put not only on Hezbollah as an organization but also on its employers, the IRGC, and, therefore, the Iranian government.

In the tri-border area, Hezbollah has established a significant presence using local businesses, drug trafficking, and contraband networks to launder funds for terrorist operations not only on the continent but worldwide.<sup>118</sup> In Colombia, Hezbollah has facilitated drug trafficking and smuggling operations for the FARC organization. The production is led by the guerrilla group, while the trafficking route is directed by the terrorist organization, shipped to Africa, and then dispatched to Europe, mostly.<sup>119</sup>

Hezbollah has also been active in Peru, where the Shining Path continues with its drug trafficking and production operations, but to a much lesser extent than the FARC's. The center of the connection between the Shining Path and Hezbollah is located in the small rural-based town of Abancay, where larger parts of the population are converted Muslims with their political party: the Peruvian Hezbollah Party. In hard evidence, in October 2014, a Lebanese man, Muamar Amdar, was arrested in connection to a plot against Israelis and Jews in Lima. According to the law enforcement apparatus, he had received assistance from the Shining Path to enter the country.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Richard Sanders, "In Argentina, a Mysterious Plane," *Wilson Center*, July 29, 2022. Accessed on January 10, 2023 at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/argentina-mysterious-plane>.

<sup>118</sup> Karmon, "Iran and its Proxy Hezbollah: Strategic Penetration in Latin America."

<sup>119</sup> Matthew Levitt, "Hizbullah narco-terrorism: A growing cross-border threat," page 40.

<sup>120</sup> Melissa Scholem Heller, "Peru, Abancay & Hezbollah: The Party of God in the City Where the Gods Speak," *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, November 2016.

This section of the chapter has tried to explore the current activity of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization on the continent and has reflected upon two ideas: the feasibility of a terrorist attack, like the attacks on Buenos Aires in 1992 and 1994, and the feasibility of an expansion of the ties between this organization and other illicit groups such as guerrilla groups and cartels. Another question that arises from this research is the possibility that Hezbollah could seek shelter within Mexico's cartel groups, creating a symbiotic relationship between them that would grant these terrorists safe haven into the United States across an already overwhelmed border. "The immediate US national security concern related to Hezbollah activity in Latin America is Mexico, where the terrorist group has ready access to the US border" argue Roger Noriega and Jose Cardenas from the American Enterprise Institute.<sup>121</sup> And they continued: "Hezbollah's capacity to move operatives across the US border was noted in a 2007 Homeland Security Committee staff report on threats along the border: "Members of Hezbollah, the Lebanon-based terrorist organization, have already entered the United States across our Southwest border."<sup>122</sup> Under these terms, it seems that Hezbollah can pose a threat bigger than most decision-makers actually conceive.

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Accessed on January 11, 2023 at <https://www.ict.org.il/UserFiles/ICT-peru-abancay-hezbollah-nov-16.pdf>.

<sup>121</sup> Roger F. Noriega and Jose R. Cardenas, "The Mounting Hezbollah Threat in Latin America," *American Enterprise Institute*, October 6, 2011. Accessed on January 11, 2023 at <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-mounting-hezbollah-threat-in-latin-america/>.

<sup>122</sup> Noriega and Cardenas, "The Mounting Hezbollah Threat in Latin America."

## **CHAPTER IV: MASS MIGRATION AND A NEW CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS**

This chapter seeks to briefly address two other challenges to American security: the use of migrant caravans to overwhelm U.S. security efforts in its southern border, the intrusion of cartels and the use of drugs to undermine America's inner safety, and the deployment -and their possible use- of short-range ballistic missiles in Venezuela or Nicaragua by Iran. It is important to note that this section seeks to understand if America's foes can use these methods to undermine the safety of Americans, not to address the precise effects of it. In other words, this chapter tries to examine the likelihood of the use of migrants and smuggling operations to enter the United States but does not address the following purpose or effects of these operations inside the country.

### **Mass Migration**

The United States is a country created and shaped by immigrants. Since the birth of this country, and maybe even before, immigrants from Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America have provided their grain of sand in the construction of the country. In the last 40 years, however, Latin America has provided the vast majority of annual arrivals to the country through its southern border. Whether good or bad, this situation was received differently by each administration. In this new security environment, where China, Russia, and Iran "play" with dictatorial governments and terrorist organizations, is it possible that they might use these migrants as disguises to enter America?

In a report written in 2018 by the expert in Transregional Threat Networks, Josef Humire, he provided maybe the best account of the threat posed by migrant caravans headed

toward America's southern border.<sup>123</sup> The group led by Humire analyzed the migrant caravan that in mid-October 2018 began their way through Guatemala and Mexico toward the border. Their research found that each caravan moves in a highly organized fashion similar to a military convoy, and here they found three different groups:

1. The first group serves as the scouting party for the other groups.
2. A second group is the main body of the caravan, where you can usually find the "regular" undocumented immigrants.
3. A third group uses vehicles to reach the transit points and checkpoints. In this group is where the extra-continental migrants and Special Interest Aliens (SIA) from Asia and Africa can be found.<sup>124</sup>

The problem to be addressed in this project comes from this final group and those Special Interest Aliens. According to Humire, these SIAs originate from countries that have shown a tendency to promote, produce, or protect terrorist organizations. This situation, fortunately, was not unheard of by U.S. security officials. Former Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson proposed the creation of a "multi-DHS Component SIA Action Group", whose role was to produce a consolidated action plan to address this new threat. The threat was considered to be the smuggling of migrants from Muslim-majority countries across the southern border. According to this action plan, "intelligence collection and analysis would drive efforts to counter the threats posed by the smuggling of SIAs, while border and port of entry operations capacities would help identify and interdict SIAs of national security concern who attempt to enter the United States and evaluate the U.S. border

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<sup>123</sup> Josef Humire, "Central American Caravans," *Center for a Free Secured Society*, December 2018. Accessed on January 12, 2023 at <https://www.securefreesociety.org/research/sitrep-central-american-caravans-3/>.

<sup>124</sup> Humire, "Central American Caravans," page 2.

and port of entry security posture to ensure U.S. resources are appropriately aligned to address trends in the migration of SIAs.”<sup>125</sup>

This situation is not new, clearly, but its numbers are growing: 1,105 SIAs were declared during FY2017, while 3,028 were declared during the following fiscal year. According to many of the regular undocumented migrants that traveled through this caravan, those SIAs seemed to receive preferential treatment from those organizations that led the caravan, raising the doubts about the origin -and purpose- of these SIAs. According to Humire, these organizations’ mission is less humanitarian and more political than what they claim. What the research found is that this organization not only assists in the healthy development of the journey but also by organizing these caravans with fake promises once it gets to the border.<sup>126</sup>

Perhaps more importantly, several political forums in Latin America work as ideological networks where support for these movements can grow. The Sao Paulo Forum, mentioned in the previous sections, serves as one of these political forums. These forums help shape a narrative of open borders, considering border security as inhumane. Most populist leaders from across the continent gather at these events to show their support and, maybe, organize new caravans.

To sum up, it is clear that there is a situation developing between South America and Central America with these massive caravans heading toward America’s southern border. These caravans seem to be way more organized than the media usually portrays, and they are led by multiple political and humanitarian organizations. The Department of Homeland Security seems to have acknowledged this threat and has prepared intelligence

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<sup>125</sup> Todd Bensman, “Terrorist Infiltration Threat at the Southwest Border: The National Security Gap in America’s Immigration Enforcement Debate,” *Center for Immigration Studies*, August 13, 2018. Accessed on January 11, 2023 at <https://cis.org/Report/Terrorist-Infiltration-Threat-Southwest-Border>.

<sup>126</sup> Humire, “Central American Caravans,” page 11.



countermeasures against the possible SIAs that try to illegally enter the country. The purpose of these SIAs, however, is not yet clear. “The caravans reflect a form of strategic engineered migration that is being weaponized by anti-American political actors in Latin America who aim to destabilize the region by provoking border conflicts.”<sup>127</sup>

### **A New Cuban Missile Crisis**

This subheading seems to be taken from a New York Times article, but the feasibility of seeing the deployment of short-range ballistic missiles by Iran -or any other country- on the continent deserves to be addressed. For this reason, this section will first mention the two most important military events organized by Russia and Iran on the continent. Then, a brief analysis of those systems capable of reaching the United States will be explored, while a possible American response will be examined.

It is important to note that these movements have already been mentioned in the previous chapters of this work, but it is still useful to recognize that America’s foes are already maneuvering in Latin America, and their intentions are, to this day, unknown. In the case of Russia, the Kremlin organized the latest Army Games in Venezuela that lasted for two weeks in August 2022. At least 30 countries, allies, and partners of Russia, participate in this event annually, in which tank biathlons, artillery calculation, chemical defense, and tactical intelligence gathering and analysis are evaluated by a panel of experts.<sup>128</sup> In Venezuela, the competition that took place was “Sniper Frontier”, in the Terepaima Military Fort in Lara, Venezuela.

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<sup>127</sup>Humire, “Central American Caravans,” page 16.

<sup>128</sup> Ava Solow, “Russia International Army Games to conclude in Venezuela,” *Foreign Brief*, August 27, 2022. Accessed on January 12, 2023 at <https://foreignbrief.com/daily-news/russia-international-army-games-to-conclude-in-venezuela/>.

This event is just a symbol of the growing strategic relationship between both countries, as their governments have signed more than 20 bilateral agreements, including the purchase of Russian military equipment by the Venezuelans. This is another aspect of Russia's involvement in Latin America. As was described in a previous chapter, Moscow has become a vital military partner for some Latin American countries, such as Colombia, Nicaragua, Peru, and Ecuador.<sup>129</sup>

In the case of Iran, it has been previously analyzed the influence the regime exerts on the Muslim population of the continent, and the network of illegal organizations it leads and collaborates with. Another aspect of this expansion is the appearance of Iran-made Venezuelan aircraft with their crews being members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, as the Boeing cargo aircraft that landed in Argentina by mid-2022. Finally, and perhaps the most important aspects of Iran's intervention on the continent, are the military agreements with Venezuela and the deployment of its fleet in the waters surrounding the continent. In the first case, for instance, Israeli intelligence has concluded that the new trading relationship between Iran and Venezuela could assist in the ultimate construction and transfer of a military port on Venezuelan soil to the Iranian regime.<sup>130</sup> This could not only increase Iran's capability to expand its influence just miles south of the American southern border but also to threaten the vital Panama Canal in case of conflict. In the second case, Iran has already been operating in Latin American waters during the first month of 2023. As explained in previous chapters, Iran sent a small, but still powerful flotilla, to navigate around Latin America, working as envoys in some countries, while acting threatening in the surroundings of the Panama Canal.

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<sup>129</sup> Diana Negrofonte, "Russo-Latin American Arms Sales," *Americas Quarterly*, 2015. Accessed on January 12, 2023 at <https://www.americasquarterly.org/russo-latin-american-arms-sales/>.

<sup>130</sup> Arie Egozi, "Iran asking Russia to sell military ships, help build new designs: Israeli sources," *Breaking Defense*, December 15, 2022. Accessed on January 12, 2023 at <https://breakingdefense.com/2022/12/iran-asking-russia-to-sell-military-ships-help-build-new-designs-israeli-sources/>.

This situation makes clear that Iran has plans for the continent, and the United States might be its ultimate target.

It would be useful to understand the reason behind this section's title. The possibility of one of these extra-continental powers deploying ballistic missiles in Latin America is very low, but it should be worth noting that CIA analysts did not believe it possible that the Soviet Union would deploy missiles in Cuba. And that indeed happened. Also, Iran's activity on the continent has increased in the last few years, increasing the stakes of more military cooperation with countries such as Venezuela and Nicaragua. At this point, the only country with real interest in pursuing this course of action would be Iran, as it is the only one of these extra-continental countries that lacks an effective long-range ballistic missile capable of reaching the continental United States. Geopolitics, however, most of the time moves in a single, risk-averse direction, meaning that it is unlikely that any Latin American country or Iran would risk entering into a direct confrontation with the United States.

It would be interesting, thus, to review the capabilities that Iran may have if they consider the option of deploying short-range ballistic missiles in Latin America to "deter" American interventions in the Middle East. According to data from 2022, Iran's fleet of ballistic missiles is diverse and includes several short and medium-range missiles.<sup>131</sup> The Shahab 1 and 2, Qiam, and Fateh missiles are included in the first case, while the Shahab 3, Ghadr, Emad, and Sejjil are included in the second group. As a threat posed to the United States, at this point, the Sejjil is the only system capable of reaching some parts of the continental United States. This system has a maximum range of 2,000 km (1,242 miles), meaning that if it is to be deployed in Venezuela, it could reach some parts of Florida. If deployed in Nicaragua, it could reach most of Florida, and some parts of the southernmost

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<sup>131</sup> Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, "Table of Iran's Missile Arsenal," *Iran Watch*, July 27, 2022. Accessed on January 14, 2023 at <https://www.iranwatch.org/our-publications/weapon-program-background-report/table-irans-missile-arsenal>.

states of the country. The list of possible targets also includes the Guantanamo Base and the Panama Canal.

This information tries to put some attention to this unlikely threat, but still possible. The war in Ukraine has also shown American decision- makers that the use of ballistic missiles and drones from these major powers is of extreme importance. Their reliance on these types of weapons should encourage the creation of defensive policies to prevent the threat from becoming a reality. One possible course of action would be dedicating more resources to intelligence gathering to observe the arrival of military equipment into those countries likely to host Iranian -and others- military gear. Those countries include Venezuela and Nicaragua, although Cuba should not be left off the list. Another possible course of action could involve an enhancement in the Integrated Aerial and Missile Defenses (IAMD) of American bases in the region, not necessarily to intercept incoming threats but to deter the Iranian regime from pursuing a risky and unsuccessful course of action.

Overall, these pages tried to summarize an unlikely but still possible threat to the U.S. and its bases in the region. The next chapter will try to provide a conclusion to this work by analyzing certain measures or courses of action that the U.S. government can implement or devise to re-establish its leading position on the continent.

## CHAPTER V: THE AMERICAN COURSES OF ACTION, AND A CONCLUSION

This final chapter will try to provide three courses of action that the American government can pursue to limit, influence, or alter the wave of anti-American sentiment in Latin America. By doing so, the power projection that extra-continental foes may exert over the entirety of the continent will be severely reduced. This should be a goal that American policymakers should have in mind before it is too late to retrieve the lost influence. For this reason, the recommended courses of action to be analyzed will be a) To exert more political and economic pressure, b) to enhance and deepen the Build Back Better World Initiative launched in 2021, and c) to enhance the partnership programs with the armed forces of Latin American countries. In this matter, the experience provided by the historical relationship between the United States and Latin America will be vital. The Monroe Doctrine, the Dollar Diplomacy, the Big Stick Diplomacy from Teddy Roosevelt, and the independence of Panama with the following creation of the Panama Canal, among others, were historical political and economic events that radically shaped the perception and role of Latin America. It would be important to see what we can learn from history. A **Conclusions** section will summarize what this thesis has learned, what is yet to be discovered, and what are the next steps regarding the international order.

### **To Enhance the Build Back Better World Initiative**

The Build Back Better World Initiative (B3W) was announced in June 2021 during the Carbis Bay Summit of the G7. The summit saw the participation of the 7 richest nations of the world, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, France, Germany, and Italy, plus the participation of the European Union and other guest countries

including Australia, South Korea, India, and South Africa.<sup>132</sup> The initiative created from the meetings held by these countries was born as a countermeasure against China's Belt and Road Initiative that has already spread all over the world. As explored in chapter 2, China's Belt and Road Initiative has created the conditions in Latin America for the entrance of other extra-continental powers into these countries, by providing easy-access funding for infrastructure projects strongly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.

For this reason, the goal here would be to fight money against money or funding against funding, under the premise that expanding American or Western assistance under projects that could be controlled by these countries could reduce the level of influence that Beijing exerts over the continent. This initiative will have a global scope and will try to meet the tremendous infrastructure needs of low and middle-income countries. Moreover, the focus of this initiative is placed on general "health and health security, climate, digital technology, and gender equity and equality."<sup>133</sup> The project aims to coordinate with private-sector capital to provide enough funding for these countries. On the contrary, China's Belt and Road Initiative uses debt financing through China's lending entities, such as the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank. On the other side, the B3W will use "the full potential of our development finance tools, including the Development Finance Corporation, USAID, EXIM, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency"<sup>134</sup> in projects supported by the U.S. government.

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<sup>132</sup> Noah W. Miller, "Who Will Win the Strategic Long Game? The G7's Build Back Better World or China's Belt and Road Initiative?" *Sochin Research Institute*, June 2021. Accessed on January 16, 2023 at <https://www.sochininstitute.org/research/2021/6/24/who-will-win-the-strategic-long-game-the-g7s-build-back-better-world-or-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative>.

<sup>133</sup> Miller, "Who Will Win the Strategic Long Game? The G7's Build Back Better World or China's Belt and Road Initiative?," page 3.

<sup>134</sup> The White House, *President Biden and G7 Leaders Launch Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership*, June 12, 2021. Accessed on January 17, 2023 at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/12/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-launch-build-back-better-world-b3w-partnership/>.

As also happened with its counterpart, the B3W Initiative also has a set of core values:

- Values-driven.
- Enhance the impact of multilateral public finance.
- Mobilize private capital through development finance.
- Strong strategic partnerships.
- Climate-friendly.
- Good governance and strong standards.

In a certain way, fighting money with money does not seem to be a bad plan. This, nonetheless, has not yet seen a clear political effort. For instance, the European Union's own development initiative, the 300-billion-euro answer to the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Gateway, failed to enter the global stage.<sup>135</sup> The joint US-G7 project aims to funnel some \$600 billion into the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment -part of the B3W Initiative-.

There is good news, however, as the Chinese project is also slowing down. In the last few years, mostly due to the pandemic-bred shortages and China's economic slowdown, most Belt and Road Initiative projects have stalled as the funding also slumped.<sup>136</sup> At this moment, for many countries that are reliant on this project, taking Chinese loans has become unsustainable, and one of the best examples of this is Sri Lanka. This insular country located just miles south of India defaulted on a mountain of debt in 2022 as it grappled with a spiraling economic crisis it found nearly impossible to repay the loans. The same has happened in Pakistan, where one-third of its foreign debt is owned by Beijing, and in Zambia,

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<sup>135</sup> Christina Lu, "China's Belt and Road to Nowhere," *Foreign Policy*, February 13, 2023. Accessed on February 16, 2023 at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/13/china-belt-and-road-initiative-infrastructure-development-geopolitics/>.

<sup>136</sup> Lu, "China's Belt and Road to Nowhere."

where the Zambian government has struggled to create a restructuring plan with China, its biggest bilateral creditor.<sup>137</sup>

In this context, it may be a good time to enhance, improve, and further develop the Build Back Better World Initiative. The war in Ukraine has raised global prices, meaning that countries in the third -and even the second world- are desperate to find funding for their own infrastructure projects. Their enthusiasm for the loans provided by the Chinese lending enterprises has dropped, leaving a void that could be quickly taken by any other serious lending competitor. To do this, a stronger commitment from those governments that are members of the G7 group will not be enough. A stronger commitment from private capital will also be of extreme importance if the loans are to be credible and risk-safe. For these reasons, this option should receive the most attention from Washington D.C. officials, as it could become a clear path toward influencing the decisions of many Latin American governments. Finally, there's another option.

### **Partnerships with Latin American Armed Forces**

“He overturns everything, disfigures everything; he loves deformity, monsters; he desires that nothing should be as nature made it, not even man himself. To please him, man must be broken in like a horse; man must be adapted to man's own fashion, like a tree in his garden.”<sup>138</sup> These words were written by the prominent philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau back in 1762, as he tried to explain, in his vision, the role that education should have in the creation of human society. He criticized how education is artificially created, and not naturally given, as men tend to disintegrate what they touch. In this way, however, he also

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<sup>137</sup> Lu, “China’s Belt and Road to Nowhere.”

<sup>138</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or on Education* (Boston, D.C. Heath & Company, 1889), page 11.



recognized that education is the foundation of society, and as such, it should never be left aside.

Just as Rousseau, the United States government has also heavily invested in a way to expand education beyond its borders, and a way it has done so, especially since the Cold War, was by educating the military forces of Latin American countries. Since the end of the Second World War, and the advent of Communism and the Soviet Union to Latin America, it was clear to officials in Washington D.C. that America's most competent allies on the continent were the military services of those countries. These armed forces, rightly trained and educated, could be the backbone of the continental defense against Communism. And to a certain extent, it worked.

The most important institution in charge of the training of these forces was the School of the Americas, founded in 1946 at the Panama Canal. As briefly described in chapter 1, this school had the purpose of military training Latin American forces while educating them with anti-communist ideals. The institution was also tasked with teaching democratic values, although its reputation did not follow the example. The strong support for anti-guerrilla and anti-communist elements sometimes took the form of violent aggression and tortures against combatants and non-combatants and the corruption of those democratic values. During the context of the Cold War, most Latin American military dictators went through this school, like general Jorge Videla from Argentina, leader and then de-facto president of Argentina during its last military dictatorship.

In 1993, a congressional committee was created to investigate the accusations that the School of the Americas was a "School of Dictators", which caused the school to be reframed and renamed as the Western Institute for Security Cooperation.<sup>139</sup> Since then, the school has

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<sup>139</sup> Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (Duke University Press, 2004).

appropriately served its purpose as a school where democratic values can be shared and expanded upon. This duty has also been supported by the expansion of the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and the execution of multilateral military exercises with the armed forces of the region. One of these multilateral military training exercises is the PANAMAX held annually and organized by SOUTHCOM. Its purpose is the “strengthening of the partnerships, enhancing readiness and improving interoperability between U.S. Armed Forces and partner nations.”<sup>140</sup>

The enhancement of the relationships between partner nations can serve a bigger purpose as it did during the Cold War: to create obstacles for the expansion of extra-continental and anti-American dogmas and influence. Perhaps more peacefully, this relationship needs to grow to encompass all services of all or most nations on the continent. This, nonetheless, has many bumps on the road. As with every force, the militaries from Latin America have their own interests, and these may or may not be aligned with those of Washington D.C.

It might also be the case that other extra-continental powers allied to the United States decides to oppose the development of cordial relationships with Latin American nations. Such is the example of the sale of F-16 jet fighters to Argentina. Since the Falklands War in 1982, the Argentinean government has not been able to secure a source of military gear and equipment as part of a British boycott of these items.<sup>141</sup> In this context, many of the different options that were provided to Argentina, including Indian, Israeli, and South Korean aircraft, failed due to the British-built Martin-Baker ejection seats. Since then, the government of the

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<sup>140</sup> Joshua Taeckens, “Army South hosts PANAMAX 2022 Planning in Crisis exercise,” *U.S. Army*, June 13, 2022. Accessed on January 20, 2023 at [https://www.army.mil/article/257490/army\\_south\\_hosts\\_panamax\\_2022\\_planning\\_in\\_crisis\\_exercise](https://www.army.mil/article/257490/army_south_hosts_panamax_2022_planning_in_crisis_exercise).

<sup>141</sup> SA Defensa, “F-16 jets for Argentina?,” *UK Defense Journal*, September 29, 2022. Accessed on January 25, 2023 at <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/f-16-jets-for-argentina/>.

South American country has tried to acquire aircraft from countries that do not depend on British manufacturers, being China an obvious option. Since 2021, the Argentinean government has tried to acquire the Chinese-Pakistani-built JF-17 Block III fighter jet, but the armed forces of the country have tried to push for an agreement with the U.S.-made F-16s. Around the same time, the U.S. appointed Gen Laura Richardson as the new head of SOUTHCOM and pushed for an agreement with the country. Gen Richardson stated in a testimony before the House of Representatives Armed Services Committee that “the United States should aggressively market the F-16 to Argentina in order to stop Chinese influence in “America’s backyard”, even stating that the US should appeal to the UK to lower the embargo to stop Chinese influence from spreading.”<sup>142</sup>

Enhancing the relationships with Latin American armed forces is vital to secure a safe port from which the U.S. government can safely try to block the spreading of anti-American and extra-continental influence. There is still a foundation in place, the Western Institute for Security Cooperation, but there are still many hurdles to get around. A unified, comprehensive front with other American allies should be created, as blocking the influence of other countries -particularly China- must become the number one priority. This could be done by the development and signing of new military cooperation agreements between the U.S. and those Latin American countries interested. These agreements could involve the participation of European and non-European allies as well, such as Japan and Australia, to increase the size and scope of the partnership.

### **To Exert Stronger Political and Economic Pressure**

The United States is known for its powerful tools for exerting pressure on other countries around the world, and it certainly has done so in Latin America as well. In the

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<sup>142</sup> SA Defensa, “F-16 jets for Argentina?”

political field, the Monroe Doctrine tried to exert certain control over the political and military intentions of Latin American countries. As described in the first chapter of this thesis, the Monroe Doctrine worked as, in a few words, the first collective military alliance of the continent. In this context, it is clear that the most powerful country, that is, the United States, would take the lead in this enterprise. The use of this doctrine, or the threat of it, was therefore exerted in a political way against any European country that would try to set foot on the continent. This might sound familiar as many extra-continental countries are trying to establish themselves on it, once more.

Perhaps more visible was the American cultural belief in Manifest Destiny, created by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. For the following decades, the areas of interest were located in the rest of the North American continent and the Caribbean. A military expansion, for sure, but also the creation of a system of political pressure that would then be emphasized under President Teddy Roosevelt's administration. The possibility of facing a military intervention -whether in the form of a complete annexation or the landing of marines- certainly served as an important way to force countries into cooperation. This policy was known as the Big Stick Diplomacy, by negotiating peacefully but being ready to hit if things went south. The case of Panama is likely to be the most important case of political pressure generated against a country, such as Panama, such as for the rights to be granted for the construction of what will then be known as the Panama Canal. The political pressure applied to the Panamanians, as described in chapter 1, serves perhaps as the best historical example of the application of this option.

The policies and actions mentioned here can provide us some insight into how the United States displayed its power against its neighbors, and how it could do it again. Certainly, it is troublesome to imagine the United States politically and militarily intervening in another Latin American country, with the last one being against Noriega in Panama in

1989 during the Cold War.<sup>143</sup> In this new context, in what ways can the U.S. exert political pressure over Latin American countries? Although weaker than other policies from the last two centuries, political pressure can be now applied in multilateral contexts. For example, if a Latin American country seeks support for a declaration or motion in the United Nations General Assembly, it will probably need the support of the United States to put it through. If the United States decides to reject such petition, it is difficult to think that motion will move through the assembly. In this scenario, the US government could use this leverage to exert this political pressure over this country. This could also be applied to every multilateral agreement that a Latin American country wants to sign, as it will likely need the support of other countries aligned with the United States. Even admission into an international organization, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) would require the previous approval of the United States.

Communication could be vital in accomplishing political change in a country, whether that change is in the form of a complete political change or a modification in the course of action of a certain policy. In this matter, the United States could devise and implement a media and communications campaign against a certain regime, bill, or policy that a Latin American government tries to pursue. By doing this, the political party could lose its bid in the election or cause the defeat of the policy or bill to be debated. In the case of Venezuela, for example, where President Nicolas Maduro works as a despot, and not as a truly, democratically elected president, stronger support for Juan Guaidó, who had been known to be the opposition's best candidate to beat President Maduro in a free election, would be an effective way to exert political pressure from inside the country.

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<sup>143</sup> Barbara Salazar Torreon and Sofia Plagakis, "Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-2022," *CRS Report*, 2022. Accessed on February 1, 2023 at <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R42738.pdf>.

Overall, it seems that political pressure can be an effective way of gathering support inside a certain country while trying to force political change. An application of the previously mentioned strategies could encourage these countries to modify their courses of action. This, however, is unlikely to change the tide by itself. A supplementary measure should be carried out: the use of economic pressure. This type of pressure, as happened with the political type of pressure, has been an instrumental tool for American foreign policy since the conception of this country. A similar type of approach was used by President Roosevelt's successor, President William Taft, who devised the Dollar Diplomacy as a way to influence Latin American behavior, not by the threat of getting intervened by a United States marine company, but by providing them funding to solve their issues. If those issues were not solved in a certain time frame, the money would then cease flowing. At the time, in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that funding was extremely necessary for local governments to continue working in relative peace. For this reason, the United States found a way to economically pressure those governments if they decided to misuse those funds.

In the world we live today, that policy has been replaced by a more direct way of engagement. Sanctions have become a vital tool in the American foreign policy toolbox. A brief definition of the word "Sanctions" provided by Jonathan Eaton and Maxim Engers tells us that "Sanctions are measures that one party (the sender) uses to influence another (the target)."<sup>144</sup> In the political world, sanctions are measures used by a certain country to influence another to pursue a certain course of action. This means that in the interconnected world we live today, the prohibition to trade with a certain country can greatly affect that country's government's capability to survive. Currently, the United States already exercises strong economic pressure in the shape of sanctions against some Latin American countries,

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<sup>144</sup> Jonathan Eaton and Maxim Engers, "Sanctions," *Journal of Political Economy* vol. 100, no. 5 (October 1992).

like Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba. In these cases, sanctions not only affected the capabilities of those countries to commerce with other regions but also the economic security of the leaders of the party and other high-ranking officials. For example, in December 2019, a bipartisan congressional effort passed the VERDAD Act that imposed sanctions that hampered the Maduro regime's ability to access financial instruments and specifically revoked visa privileges for people who acted on behalf of Russia to aid the Venezuelan security forces.<sup>145</sup>

Stronger political and economic pressure could be pursued to incline the balance in these countries toward supporting America's interests, but this course of action alone is unlikely to produce any positive results in the short or even long term. The experience of the use of this measure in Latin American countries, and even in non-Latin American nations, has not been favorable in all cases. For this reason, this course of action should be only considered for special cases.

## **A Conclusion**

The journey is coming to an end, but the world keeps spinning beneath us. This thesis had one purpose: to teach about the importance of Latin America in the overall grand American strategy, and the dangers that it would pose to lose it. A historical analysis of the relationship between the two regions gave a start to this research. Since the birth of the United States as a sovereign nation, Latin America played a particular and important role in the cultural, strategic, political, and economic development of the country. The Monroe Doctrine was conceived to keep European powers away from the continent, an enterprise that should be worth revisiting in today's context. The American expansionism and the "Manifest

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<sup>145</sup> Clare Ribando Seelke, "Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions," *Congressional Research Service*, 2022. Accessed on February 3, 2023 at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10715>.

Destiny” approach created the foundations for future American deployments and investments in Central America and the Caribbean. Creating good neighbors came after, whether by hitting them with a big stick or by indulging them. Wars in the south and the north threatened to alter the balance of the continent, and in this effort, the United States built the first foundations of the future counterintelligence and counter-insurgency agencies in Latin America. These were the frontline of an almost invisible war on the continent between the governments supported by Washington D.C. and the guerrilla fighters supported by the Soviet Union. The *Foquismo* and the School of the Americas were the nemeses in this war.

Once the Soviet Union was defeated, a new era of peace and American prominence spread throughout the continent, with the new neoliberal agendas taking place in most Latin American governments. This, however, did not last long as the early 2000s saw the emergence of a new Pink Tide with most Latin American governments leaning toward the left. This, and the support of an economically-strong lending machine like China, created the first gaps in the American influence over the continent, leaving small voids of power to be occupied by these extra-continental nations. Today, the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine have shaken the stability of these projects, but their influence is still visible across the continent.

In chapter 2, those three extra-hemispheric threats were analyzed according to the level of influence and danger they exposed on the continent. China, Iran, and Russia. As it has been thoroughly observed, China relies on its international commitment in the shape of the Belt and Road Initiative in which most, if not all, Latin American countries are participants. In the case of Iran, the regime has had a continuous influence for the last 30 years, with the clandestine actions of its terrorist branch, Hezbollah, and the silent spread of the Shia ramification of Islam within the Muslim communities of the region. This, at the same time, has been reinforced by bilateral agreements between Tehran and several of these



countries, such as Venezuela and Nicaragua. Finally, Russia has strong military ties with most countries of the region, being their main contributor of arms. This tendency, however, is slowing down, especially after the outbreak of the Ukrainian war. This, nonetheless, does not mean that their influence is less powerful than before. The organization of war games with some countries of the region in 2022 reflects this.

Chapter 3 brought a more in-depth analysis of the threat posed by terrorist activity on the continent, an activity that has been present since the early 1990s. The attacks in Buenos Aires in 1992 and 1994 serve as evidence of this enterprise. Since then, no new terrorist attacks have been carried out, but the activity of the terrorist organization has then turned toward illicit activities in the tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, and in Colombia with its close relationship to the FARC group.

Chapter 4 provided a glimpse into the use of migrant caravans by political organizations to enter elements -people and items- into the United States through its southern border. A report created by Josef Humire helped reflect the use and weaponization of these groups as ways to overwhelm U.S. security forces while infiltrating extra-continental elements into the country. At the same time, this chapter also tried to briefly explore the possibility of facing a new Cuban Missile Crisis, as the military and economic ties between some countries -Venezuela and Nicaragua, at the top of the list- and America's foes improve, creating a new environment in which the presence of military personnel from these foreign countries, including the deployment of short to mid-range ballistic missiles and drones, is slightly possible.

Finally, chapter 5 provided some courses of action that could be pursued together or separately to block and tackle the spread of the anti-American influence in the region. To do so, this research served on the invaluable experience provided by the past. Chapter 1 assisted in providing the tools that America could revisit to create a new strategic defense policy

against Latin America. The first recommendation involved the historical battle between money, personified in the battle between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Build Back Better World. This fight could be won if more commitment is gathered between the participant countries and the private capital needed to succeed, while the current slowdown of the Chinese economic machinery provides a unique opportunity. The second recommendation pushed for the enhancement of the partnership relationships between the U.S. and the armed forces of Latin America. As seen since the Cold War, most sectors of the Latin American militaries were trained and educated by American men and women, meaning that the armed forces of these countries could become strongholds against Chinese, Russian, or Iranian influence. There are obstacles in the middle, though. As exposed in the case of Argentina, a unified front between allies should be presented to avoid embargos that could leave the militaries of a country at the gates of extra-continental weaponry. If the Argentinean air force falls under the acquisition of the Chinese JF-17, their entire armed force will follow. Finally, stronger political and economic pressure was recommended to try to “persuade” these countries of adopting courses of action more favorable to American interests, just as the Monroe Doctrine, the Big Stick, and the Dollar Diplomacy policies did more than a century ago.

This thesis tried to answer a difficult question: Does Latin America pose a threat to the United States’ national security? I hope this work provides a short answer to this question. Yes, it does pose a threat, as long as the United States allows these adversaries to continue growing and creating networks in America’s backyard. The history of this relationship between the two regions can serve us today while showing the importance that this region has had for America throughout its history. America’s enemies are out there, waiting to take advantage of any weakness that the United States would present. But there are ways to tackle or block this threat, as has been shown. Further research should be carried out, however.

More Latin American countries could join this flow of dependence on China and others, expanding the case studies to be subtracted, while a deeper analysis of the strategical thought of China, Russia, and Iran could also help predict their future plans for the continent. In the end, maybe Thomas Hobbes was right, as men fight for their own survival, but as men are bound to war, they can also be bound to peace.

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