

Estados Unidos y Latinoamérica. Los dilemas del siglo XXI

Resumen:

La próxima Cumbre de las Américas que se va a celebrar en los Ángeles en el contexto de la crisis migratoria en Estados Unidos da pie a una reflexión sobre las relaciones de este país con el conjunto de Latinoamérica. Al ser Latinoamérica parte de un hemisferio y dotar a este de una naturaleza integral, se hace posible que Estados Unidos ejerza como su potencia rectora. No obstante, y por más sigue siendo un área de gran interés para este país, su liderazgo se ha debilitado en el contexto de la globalización y se limita a una acción de influencia. Esta es más fuerte cuanto mayor es la proximidad a su territorio. Tres son los principales problemas que se plantean a la relación; una pérdida de influencia económica en la región que sigue a la pérdida de influencia política; el crimen organizado y una emigración masiva. Los tres son problemas “intermésticos” simultáneamente internacionales y domésticos, y los tres son susceptibles de ser aprovechados por populismos oportunistas para alcanzar o mantenerse en el poder; por potencias rivales de las democracias occidentales y especialmente de los EEUU; o por una combinación de ambos, lo que redundaría en una fuerte desestabilización de la región

Palabras clave:

Latinoamérica, Iberoamérica, Estados Unidos, migraciones, narcotráfico, relaciones comerciales.

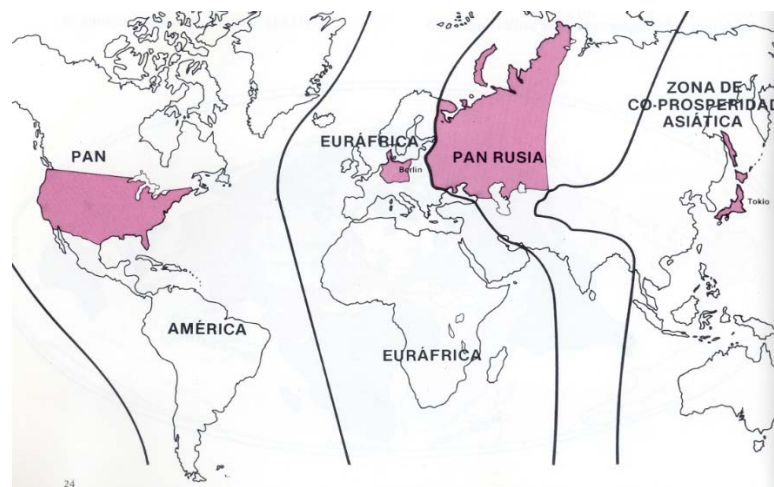
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https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA36_2022_FEDAZN_Dilemas_ENG.pdf and/or [bie³ link](#) (accessed day/month/year)

"A continent where institutions are invented every five years, dismembered every decade and do not function well most of the time can hardly be expected to achieve its goals. In this story, Ariadna's thread is the greatest pain of all; what is woven in the day is unwoven at night and what is rewoven has a different stitch".

Table Gisbert

Geopolitics studies power deployed on a map. Consequently, it incorporates different solutions depending on the framework chosen, on the references underpinning it. The German general Houshofer defined geopolitics as "the study of the great vital connection of today's man in today's space, and its aim is the insertion of the individual in his natural environment and the coordination of the phenomenon that link the state with space".



- VV.AA. Geopolitics conference. Concept and evolution. ESFAS, 2011-

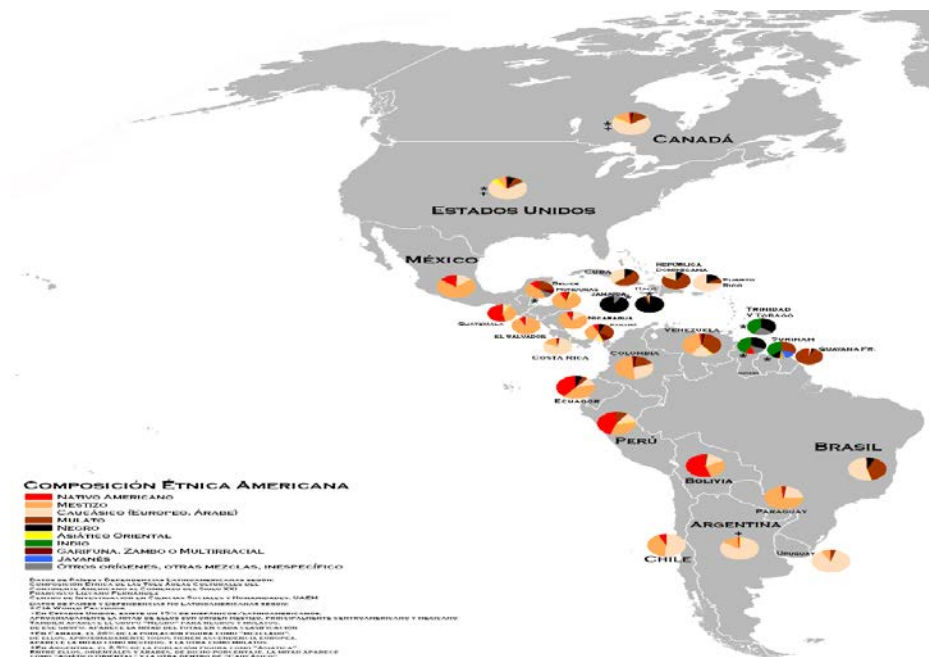
Houshofer saw the world as divided into four pan-regions, each with an industrial core and acting as a hegemonic power, and as zones supplying primary products: a pan-America ruled by the US; a Euro-Africa under the German hegira; a pan-Russia ruled by Russia; and an East Asia ruled by Japan.

In his famous civilisation classification, Huntington considers that Ibero America does not belong to the West because, among other reasons - which would also serve to exclude Spain, in the same way as he excluded Greece - it "incorporates indigenous cultures that did not exist in Europe and were effectively annihilated in North America"¹. And he adds, "Ibero America has followed a rather different development path from Europe and North America. Although it is an offshoot of European civilisation, it also incorporates, to varying degrees, elements of indigenous American civilisations absent from North America and

¹ HUNTINGTON, Samuel P., (1997), The clash of civilisations and the remaking of world order, Paidós, Barcelona, p. 51

Europe. It has had a corporatist and authoritarian culture that was much less in evident in Europe and was entirely absent in North America. Both Europe and North America felt the effects of the Reformation and have merged Catholic and Protestant cultures. Historically, Ibero America has been Catholic, although this may now be changing. Ibero American political evolution and economic development have taken a clearly different path from the predominant models of the North Atlantic countries.”²

We are faced with a problem of definition that begins with the observer and increases in intensity when we attempt to make a single reality out of what is actually a complex diversity full of nuances, even if it is united by a language and a basic culture.



- Ibero American ethnic composition³ -

THE IDEA OF AMERICA AND THE HEGEMONIC PRESUMPTION.

The independence and birth of the US meant the emergence of a new political system that made the country a beacon of light, leading it to embark on a kind of apostolic work, and to which would be added the Protestant ethic and the Calvinist conception of redemption through work that stems from the Founding Fathers' own discourse.⁴

The result of this combination of ideas would be an entire moral philosophical model based on freedom and the superior status of its political-economic system, which would endow its actions with a kind of "hegemonic presumption". It is "the idea of America". This

² Ibidem, p. 51-52.

³ https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:Composici3n_3tnica_de_Am3rica.png

⁴ PALOMARES LERMA, Gustavo. (1994). Theory and concept of International Relations I. UNED, p. 179.

legitimised not only a right of expansion - which was also a necessity to satisfy the raw material and market requirements arising from its development - but also a responsibility to the rest of the continent, which it claimed exclusively and which it would begin to exercise, in practice, from its industrial development onwards as a "full and complete right of its own".⁵

In 1783 - when the US only occupied an area of less than 30 per cent of its present size - the Count of Aranda already sensed the danger posed by this burgeoning nation to Spain's possessions. To this effect, in a letter addressed to Charles III, he stated: "This federal republic was born a pygmy, so to speak, and needed the support and strength of two powerful states like Spain and France to gain its independence. The day will come when it will grow and become a giant, and even a fearsome colossus in those regions. Then it will forget the benefits it has received from the two powers, and will think only of his own aggrandisement... The first step for this power will be to seize the Floridas to dominate the Gulf of Mexico. After thus disrupting us and so our relations with New Spain, it will aspire to the conquest of this vast empire, which we will not be able to defend against a formidable power established on the same continent and its neighbour"⁶.

In line with Aranda's predictions, in 1823, US President James Monroe promulgated a doctrine that denied European powers the right to intervene in the Americas. It was the primordial idea of the existence of a "Western Hemisphere"; that is, of a distinctive and differentiated space, marked by the concurrence of interests, values and perceptions from which common policies derive.

It also, paradoxically, opened the way for US neo-colonial intervention in the continent, an idea that would be supported through the development of permanent concepts in the same direction and which form the backbone of policy in the region. These in turn are an explanatory and justifying corpus for an approach that is often based on hidden economic and security interests.

To this effect, in the second half of the 1840s, the Polk Administration would come up with the idea of Manifest Destiny, which is the natural result of the feeling of superiority towards the southern countries, which are the object of a "special interest". In the late 19th century, with an industrialised America, this would lead to President Theodore Roosevelt's Big Stick policy and the conceptualisation of Admiral Mahan's thinking. This

⁵ Ibidem, p. 180.

⁶https://ejercito.defensa.gob.es/museo/HECHOS_HISTORICOS/HECHOS_HISTORICOS/05.08_mayo_BERNARDO_DE_GALVEZ_CONQUISTA_PENSACOLA.html

is actually the development of a whole power politics that uses the national interest as a guide and is known as the "Roosevelt corollary".

These ideas, combined with President Wilson's idealism, made the US the guardian of the continent's "political spirit" which, in practice, resulted in "the awareness of Ibero Americans and their governments of the need for a double consent, that expressed by the will of the people and that expressed by the US". It also, however, meant the growth of economic relations and development.⁷

Pan-Americanism can thus be presented as a strategic project used by the US to dominate all hemispheric relations under its own understanding of economics, politics, culture and security⁸.

However, a predatory spirit was also generated. As General Smedley Butler wrote about this period in 1935 in his famous work *War Is a Racket*: "I served for 30 years and four months in the most combative units of the US armed forces: the Marines. I have the feeling that all that time I was acting as a highly qualified bandit in the service of big business on Wall Street and its bankers. In a word, I have been a gangster in the service of capitalism. To this effect, in 1914, I affirmed the security of oil interests in Mexico, particularly in Tampa. I contributed to transforming Cuba into a country where the people of the National City Bank could quietly swipe the profits. I took part in the "cleansing" of Nicaragua from 1902 to 1912 on behalf of the international banking firm Brown Brothers Harriman. In 1916, I bought "civilisation" to the Dominican Republic on behalf of the big American sugar companies. In 1923, I "straightened out" affairs in Honduras in the interests of the American fruit companies... We have done pretty well with Louisiana, Florida, Texas, Hawaii and California, and Uncle Sam can swallow Mexico and Central America with Cuba and the West Indies islands for dessert without getting intoxicated.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbour policy was a departure from previous practices. Launched in the midst of the Great Depression, it basically promoted non-interference in the region's internal affairs while encouraging trade and bilateral treaties with neighbouring countries.

The Cold War would include Ibero America in the area of influence of the US, as advocated by the Kennan doctrine which, vis-à-vis the USSR's attempts to enter the

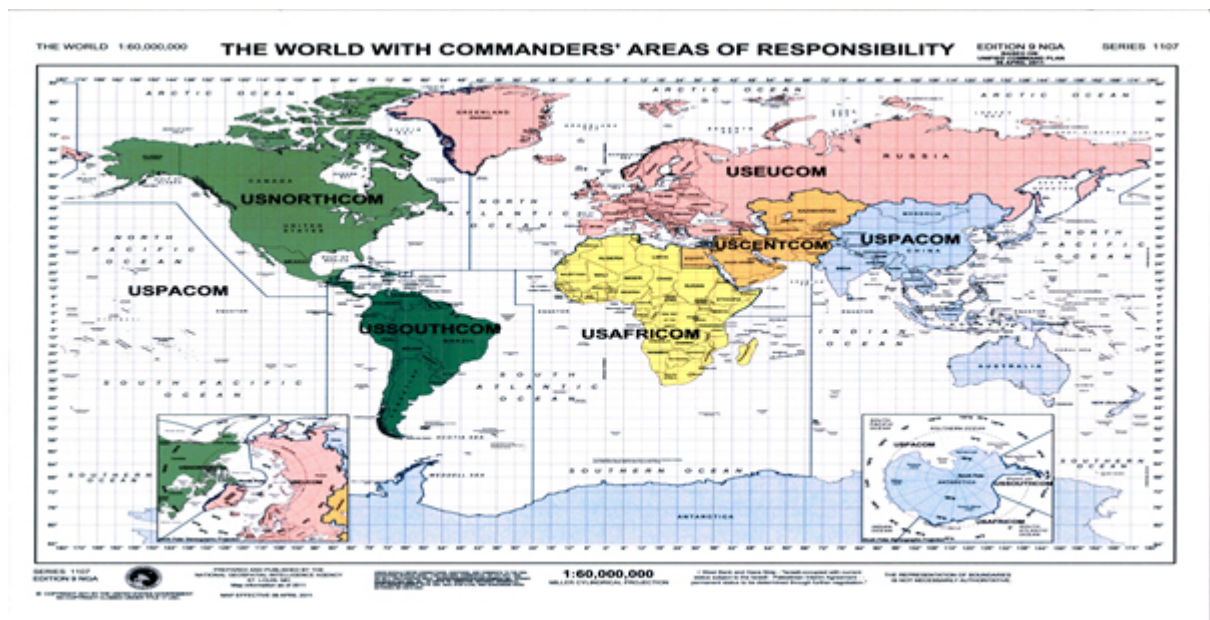
⁷ PALOMARES LERMA, Gustavo. (1994). Theory and Concept of International Relations I. UNED, p. 182-184.

⁸ CORREA, J. (2020). "Panamericanism versus Ibero Americanism: geopolitical and civilisational tension". *Analecta Politica*, 10 (19), 56-76

region to destabilise the continent, called for absolute control over Central America and the Caribbean on the basis of National Security. To this effect, the East-West dimension would be added to the North-South problem. In political terms, there was a commitment to the use of force and political cooperation. This took the form of a policy with a common basis for Ibero America as a whole.

The situation reinforced the need to cooperate with Ibero American governments, enhancing the role of the Southern Command, USSOUTHCOM, and especially the School of the Americas, which operated in Panama between 1946 and 1984. More than 60,000 military and police personnel from almost every country in the region passed through this institution, and its existence is firmly associated with human rights violations during the era of Ibero American military dictatorships.⁹

To illustrate the primacy of the military element, USSOUTHCOM, based in Miami and originally created to protect the Panama Canal, has a greater presence in the region than any other element of the US government and has more personnel dedicated to Ibero American issues than the Departments of Commerce, State and Treasury combined.¹⁰ The creation of the Fourth Fleet in 2018 during the Trump Administration has, in a sense, revitalised the command.



- Distribution of North American Commands¹¹ -

⁹ PARDO DE SANTAYANA, Jose María in "Introduction" to VV.AA. *Seguridad y defensa en Iberoamérica: posibilidades actuales para la cooperación*, CESEDEN, November 2007, p.6.

¹⁰ KERN, Soren. "What are the interests of the US in Ibero America? Real Instituto Elcano 19.12.2005. <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/cuales-son-los-intereses-de-estados-unidos-en-latinoamerica-ari/>

¹¹ <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrn/art/national-security-and-arctic-deterrence-russian-influences-arctic-ocean>

Along these lines, the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance was signed in 1947, making it the first post-Second World War treaty of its kind. Furthermore, in 1948, the Organisation of American States (OAS) was created and, at the time, was instrumental in the ideological conflict to guarantee cohesion and ensure uniformity of response. From 1960 onwards, the Pentagon sought to enhance cooperation with Ibero America and various instances of military consultation and training were promoted.¹² Within this atmosphere of realpolitik, President Kennedy, with his *Alliance for Progress*, sought to promote cooperation in the field of Ibero American economic and social development, which, incidentally, was also part of a counterinsurgency strategy, albeit with limited results, not least because it was launched a year before his assassination.



- U.S. Interventions in Latin America¹³ -

In the following administrations, Kissinger-sponsored policies were predicated by a legitimate order based on US authority, democratisation and regional development, the

¹² PARDO DE SANTAYANA, José María in "Introduction" to VV.AA. *Seguridad y defensa en Iberoamérica: posibilidades actuales para la cooperación*, CESEDEN, November 2007, p.26.

¹³ El Orden Mundial. <https://elordenmundial.com/mapas-y-graficos/intervencionismo-estadounidense-latinoamerica/?nowprocket=1>

purpose of which was to act pre-emptively to avoid any possible revolutionary contagion. Likewise, operations such as Operation Condor were launched to suppress insurgent movements in many countries in the southern hemisphere, which continued under various administrations.

Furthermore, the Reagan administration saw a return to parameters of national interest and the Kennan doctrine; and not only that, but they were intensified, which translated into increased conflict, particularly in Central America. To this effect, in a famous speech the US president remarked how "Central America is much closer to the US than many of the trouble spots in the world that interest us...El Salvador is closer to Texas than Texas is to Massachusetts, Nicaragua is as close to Miami, San Antonio, San Diego and Tucson as these cities are to Washington".¹⁴

In the 1980s, the Cold War spilled over into the region in the form of proxy conflicts, continuing into the 1990s with deadly results. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed, whether by leftist guerrillas in El Salvador and Guatemala or by the anti-Sandinista *contra* in Nicaragua, contributing to a culture of death.

Armed conflicts in Central America were mixed with drug trafficking, which re-organised its routes to the US: territory was left in the hands of the armed forces, institutions of control and justice were disabled, violence imposed an order underpinned by fear, and the ideological "cause" served to justify any excessive action¹⁵. The US also used the convenient justification offered by the "fight against drug trafficking" to increase its geopolitical weight in the region. This moment of singular anomie in which, for example, the Iran-Contra affair took place was also the moment seized by Colombian drug traffickers to relocate in the region. This is picked up in films such as *American Made*.

Civil strife brought with it an increase in crime. However, for organised crime violence is a last resort because its public repercussion runs counter to the discretion it seeks. Armed conflict therefore provided an ideal scenario: violence not associated with its own activities that operates in a state framework institutionally weakened by the violence itself and, furthermore, that serves to cover it up.

As a result, crime in Central America today is akin to a pandemic. The vulnerability of borders and the institutional/administrative limitations of some states explain the growth

¹⁴ PALOMARES LERMA, Gustavo. (1994). Theory and concept of International Relations I. UNED, p. 188.

¹⁵ VILLEGAS HERRERA, César. "Las fronteras borrosas de la economía ilícita: Impactos del tráfico ilícito de drogas en los flujos de la economía legal en Centroamérica" in VV.AA. "Repensando el tráfico ilícito de drogas en Centroamérica: un enfoque desde las ciencias sociales".

of organised crime in the region, which is the result of an explosive cocktail of drug trafficking, arms and gangs. The result is that in 2011 an estimated 90% of the cocaine arriving in the US –which accounts for around 86% of the world total– came through the Central American corridor, leaving an illegal profit of approximately €5.3 billion in the region. This was equivalent to 5% of regional GDP.

Moreover, the policies pursued in Ibero America as a whole were not in line with US actions at a global level, the two coming into contradiction. This was the case with the Falklands conflict, an area where no US interest was at stake and where it opted for its special relationship with the UK to the detriment of the OAS and the TIAR. As a result, the TIAR's status as a multilateral defence instrument of the American continent was seriously delegitimised.

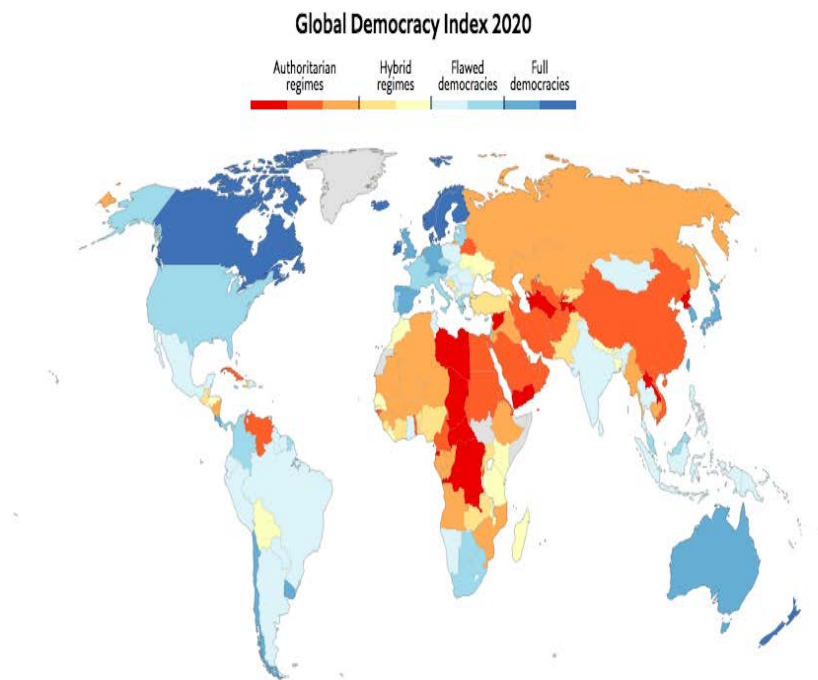
As we have seen, during the Cold War, Ibero America was a secondary stage of confrontation between the two blocs, which was the justification for the development of highly interventionist and even direct action policies.

The issue that serves to prove all the above is that the key decisions that are adopted and affect numerous Ibero American states have been taken outside these states and without the actors concerned taking part in them. This has been particularly evident in the case of the US, which has been exploited by its traditional geopolitical rival to fuel a distrust (historically justified at times) of the US that continues to this day and tends to spread to all Western democracies.¹⁶

HEMISPHERIC POLITICS AFTER THE END OF THE COLD WAR.

The end of the Cold War relegated questions of ideology to the back seat, which in turn reduced interference in the political life of these countries; this was the practical realisation of the ideological veto. As a result, there was progress in the democratic quality of the region's states, where there has been a very healthy alternation of power within the right-left game, which will hopefully serve to strengthen state institutionalism, the rule of law and democracy. This has been the case in countries such as Chile, Ecuador, Argentina, and Brazil, among others.

¹⁶ KERN, Soren. "What are the interests of the US in Ibero America? Real Instituto Elcano 19.12.2005. <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/cuales-son-los-intereses-de-estados-unidos-en-latinoamerica-ari/>



- Global Democracy Index¹⁷-

It has, on the other hand, also caused Ibero America to lose geopolitical importance. The fact is that it is not the region where the major issues on the international agenda are settled, nor is it the epicentre of the struggle between the major geopolitical actors. And consequently, its geopolitical relevance is affected. It is also at the mercy of the US in its geographical position as a regional leader, with the level of geopolitical asymmetry maintained: The US is more important to any country in the hemisphere than any of them are to the US.¹⁸

Notably, and in a return to the past, during the Trump administration the idea of the "axis of evil" was reformulated with reference to the Ibero American case, and made up of Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua.

For its part, although the US, as we have seen, has kept control over the region, it has also progressively reduced the level of its commitment to the continent, to levels that are perfectly delimited and measurable in terms of security. Indeed, so significant and abrupt was this loss of importance after the end of the Cold War that the US redirected much of the economic aid it provided to Ibero America to the reconstruction of Eastern Europe. However, on the other hand and as a canon, this evident loss of political and economic

¹⁷ The Economist. <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year>

¹⁸ KERN, Soren. "What are the interests of the US in Ibero America? Real Instituto Elcano 19.12.2005. <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/cuales-son-los-intereses-de-estados-unidos-en-latinoamerica-ari/>

weight of the US in the continent has the consequence that it can no longer count on Pan-American solidarity to strengthen and legitimise its external action and, given that there is no vacuum in international relations, the space left free by the US in the region is being occupied by other powers.

This also explains the failure of the TIAR, especially when compared to NATO. It should be borne in mind that both treaties were signed at around the same time and that while one has allowed Europe to benefit from the protective umbrella provided by the US and has been accompanied by economic support, this has not been the case with the second for Ibero America.¹⁹

Thus, in 2002, Mexico withdrew from the TIAR and in 2012 the ALBA countries did the same. In 2017, Venezuela withdrew from the OAS, from which Cuba was excluded, having been expelled in 1962, and although it rejoined in 2009 does not participate in meetings.

The case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine is paradigmatic and a good example that allows us to take the measure of this situation. A few weeks before the invasion, the Argentinian president and his Brazilian counterpart travelled to Moscow. Mexico has also maintained a good relationship with Russia. Nevertheless, all three condemned the invasion at the UN. However, Bolivia, Cuba, El Salvador and Nicaragua abstained, with Venezuela unable to participate due to arrears. Accordingly, the implementation of sanctions on Russia is also experiencing more difficulties in the hemispheric region than in others.

The underlying issue is the aforementioned and enormous distrust that Ibero American governments, regardless of their political colour, feel towards the US and its presence and intentions for the region. This has even led at times to rather unhinged responses that are not only inconsistent with the US policy to which they correspond, but are not even consistent with their own interests.

In addition to the above, the character of hegemon no longer corresponds to the real power of the US, or at least to its current economic power. In terms of economic parity, in 2018 China had 18% of global GDP, the US 15% and Europe 13%. Maintaining levels in all areas requires a great deal of effort and coordination with Europe, forcing it to make

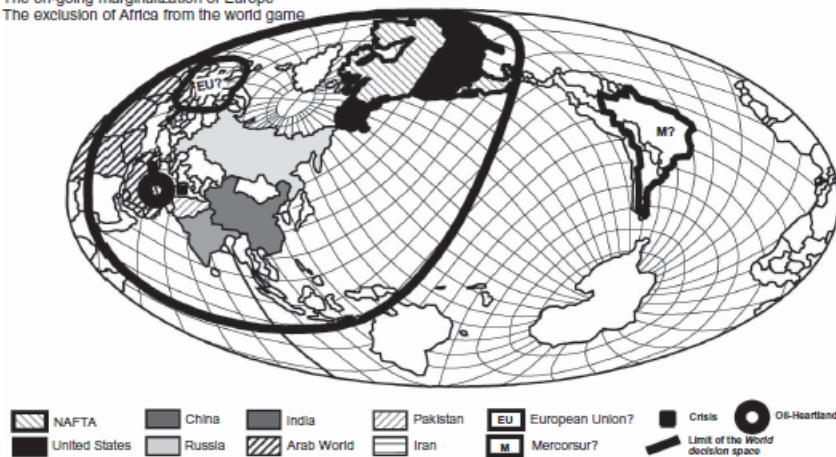
¹⁹ PARDO DE SANTAYANA, José María in "Introduction" to VV.AA. *Seguridad y defensa en Iberoamérica: posibilidades actuales para la cooperación*, CESEDEN, November 2007, p.26.

a measured use of power in all the scenarios it has to address, particularly with its pivot towards Asia-Pacific.

In view of the above, the loss of US presence in Ibero America can be presented either as a loss of interest or as an outcome of the decline of its global hegemony; or even as a combination of the two, derived from the efficient reallocation of available resources, giving Ibero America a lesser role. It is a matter of maintaining a certain degree of control linked to economic efficiency and spending.

Consequently, the US is unable to maintain strong hemispheric leadership and has therefore shifted in a possibilist manner towards soft power and accommodation. In this regard, by way of example, the US has not provided leadership or economic support to Ibero America during the COVID-19 pandemic, unlike China, which has done so through extensive vaccine and mask diplomacy.

The purpose of the map is to show:
 - The new world axis: United States-China-India-(Russia)
 - The on-going marginalization of Europe
 - The exclusion of Africa from the world game



- U.S. vision of the world²⁰ -

Moreover, the US does not act with a single voice in an area that is more diverse than it may at first appear. As the security imperatives that made other actors and interests (companies, universities, commodity markets, technologies, etc.) invisible have faded, these have re-emerged to counterbalance some more tenuous and lighter state policies, which they transcend.

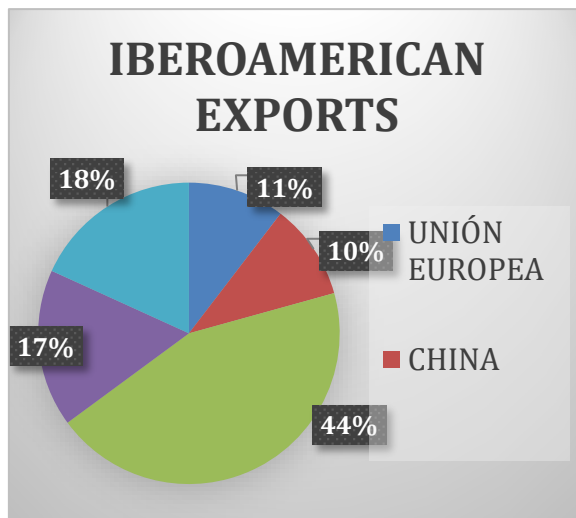
STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS IN THE REGION. THE LACK OF INSTITUTIONALITY.

However, far from being the result of the shadow cast over the region by North America, the continent's apparent geopolitical irrelevance, that is, its lack of decisiveness in the

²⁰ Got from VV.AA. Conference: Geopolítica. Escuela Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas, 2011.

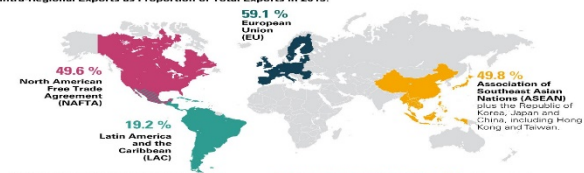
We can say that these geopolitical conglomerates have moved in different directions while the Andean space remains anchored in the same place in terms of conflict.

As for integration experiences, which are always desirable, notable is today's low volume of inter-regional trade. The political, economic or ideological mortgages of local national elites undermine commitment to these organisations, making it one of the few areas in the world where regionalism is on the wane.



Foreign Trade in Latin America and the Caribbean

Intra-Regional Exports as Proportion of Total Exports in 2013:



The liberalization of intra-regional trade has not stimulated the region's productive and export diversification enough, as it continues to show heavy reliance on commodities.

Knowledge of commodities exports with respect to total goods exports of Latin America and the Caribbean.

To other countries of the region:

20.4% commodities

To the rest of the world:

37.9% primary products

Intra-regional trade in Latin America and the Caribbean remains at low levels. Only a fifth (19.2%) of exports are destined for other countries in the region. Furthermore, commodities deliveries continue to account for a large portion of the export basket. ECLAC here proposes the creation of regional value chains to widen demand, foster intra-regional trade, and diversify production.

All association mechanisms in Latin American and Caribbean have identified regional productive integration as a primary objective.

In this process the production of goods and services is shared between two or more countries belonging to a delimited geographic space.

The integration can be generated through regional value chains, with several potential positive effects including:



ECLAC Source: Latin America and the Caribbean in the World Economy 2014. ECLAC <http://repositorio.cepal.org/handle/11362/1196>

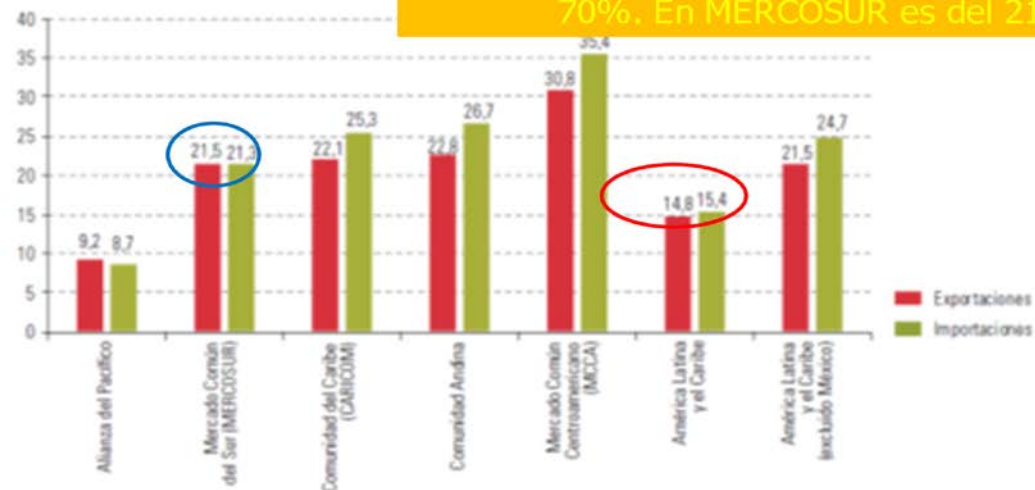
- Foreign trade in Latin America and the Caribbean²³ -

If we take the European Union, wherein the volume of its internal trade reaches 70%, we see the vast distance still to be covered by organisations such as MERCOSUR, the Pacific Alliance, and the Andean Community, which in most cases is below 25%. In this integration process the damaging regional confrontation between the Ibero American Free Trade Area (FTAA) and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) must not be forgotten. In addition, trade with other countries in the region averages only 17%, showing that there is still a long way to go to achieve such integration.

²³ ECLAC. <http://repositorio.cepal.org/handle/11362/37196>

HAY MUCHAS IBEROAMERICAS.

América Latina y el Caribe: participación del mercado regional como destino del comercio de bienes de los principales mecanismos de integración regional (En porcentajes)



Fuente: Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), sobre la base de UN Comtrade - Base de Datos Estadísticos sobre el Comercio Internacional [en línea] <https://comtrade.un.org/> e información oficial de los países.

Iberoamérica no tiene una estrategia respecto a China

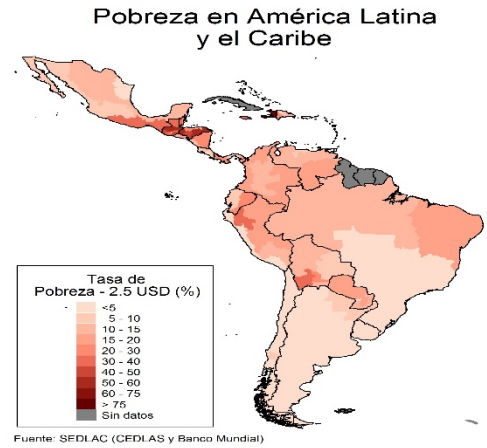
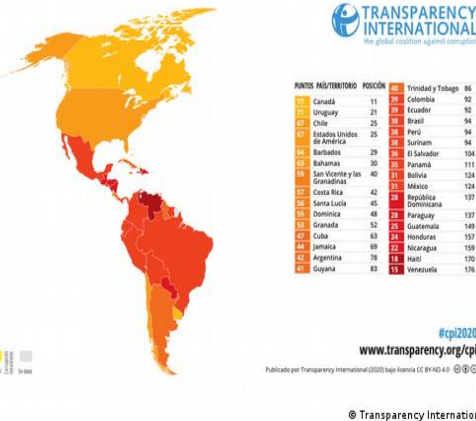
- Latin America regional organization participation in regional trade²⁴ -

Another endemic problem that holds weight in explaining the region's lack of global projection despite its undeniable wealth is undoubtedly the distribution of this wealth, with the region having the most unequal distribution in the world. This inevitably fractures and weakens societies, hinders institutional development and undermines legal certainty, all of which hampers growth. All this, in turn, generates indigenous dynamics that feed and aggravate the problem when they are transferred to the global level by favouring the establishment of organised crime in the territory. In a vicious circle that is difficult to break, this affects institutional development, which it must necessarily penetrate to achieve its aims, while by infiltrating institutions it hollows them out and weakens them, which in turn affects the cohesion of societies.

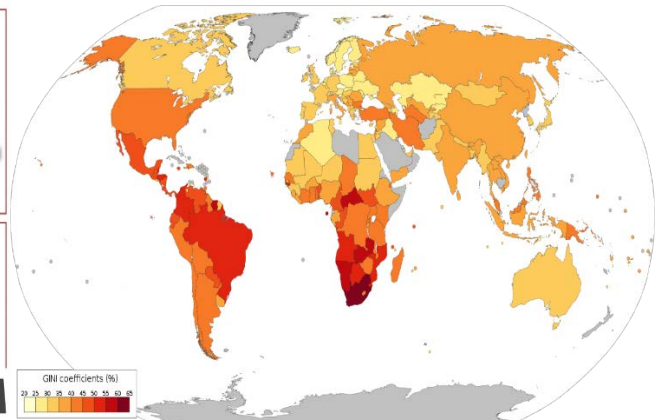
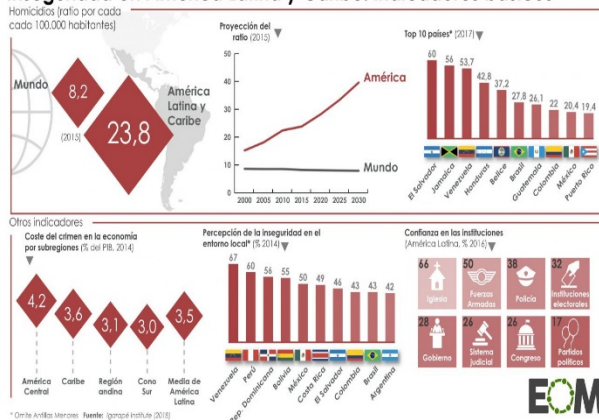
While Colombia, three times the size of Central America, has a strong state structure in the main cities (Bogotá, Medellín, Cali), this is diluted as it moves away from the

²⁴ CEPAL. <https://comtrade.un.org>

developed urban centres, explaining the prolongation of guerrilla processes in its territory”²⁵.



Inseguridad en América Latina y Caribe: indicadores básicos



1.- Corruption Perception Index 2020. 2.- Poverty in Latin America 3.- Insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean. 4.- World Inequality in the distribution of wealth²⁶.

This also carries over to other indicators. According to UNODC, the homicide rate in the Americas as a whole in 2020 was 17.2 per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to 0.7 in Spain.

²⁵ ARGUETA, Otto. “El narcotráfico es un asunto político en Centroamérica” in VVAA “Repensando el tráfico ilícito de drogas en Centroamérica: un enfoque desde las ciencias sociales” FLACSO

²⁶ 1.- Transparency International. www.transparency.org/cpi

2.- <https://blogdidactico.com/por-que-latinoamerica-es-pobre>.

3.- El Orden Mundial. <https://elordenmundial.com/mapas-y-graficos/la-inseguridad-en-america-latina/?nowprocket=1>

4.- https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:GINI_index_World_Bank_up_to_2018.svg

Ibero-America has only 8% of the world's population, but 33% of the world's homicides. And one in every 10 lives lost is from Central America and the Dominican Republic²⁷.

All this helps to explain why, despite its wealth and geopolitical potential, Ibero America has remained on the strategic periphery, even being dubbed the “quadrisphere of strategic marginality”, while remaining to some extent under the tutelage of the US which, moreover, is neither as strict as it used to be nor deploys a single policy towards the continent but rather different bilateral and sub-regional policies, although it does try to provide all of them with a common basis. In the 21st century, all this has meant a softening of political modes and some corrective work and has resulted in complex, multifaceted and sometimes contradictory politics.²⁸

What is certain is that the main US interest in the region is to promote stability there; let us not lose sight of the fact that its own territory borders the Barnett fault. It contributes to this in three distinct areas: security, economics and politics. To this effect, the dynamics of trade, security (China's presence in the region combines both terms), drug trafficking and irregular migration are of particular relevance.

They are all, in a sense, “intermestic” issues, i.e. concurrently international and domestic. They are characterised by having a dual reading, civilian but also securitarian, given “the absence of threats at the border and the absence of borders for the threat”. Moreover, this approach further complicates the conceptualisation of security.

In national terms, this generates a dilemma, because the policies that are best accepted by national public opinion are those that simultaneously place problems on the other side of the border and affirm national sovereignty as a way of ignoring or not dealing with the burden and responsibility that their implementation demands; to be effective, response policies, on the other hand, are comprehensive and do not admit border criteria.

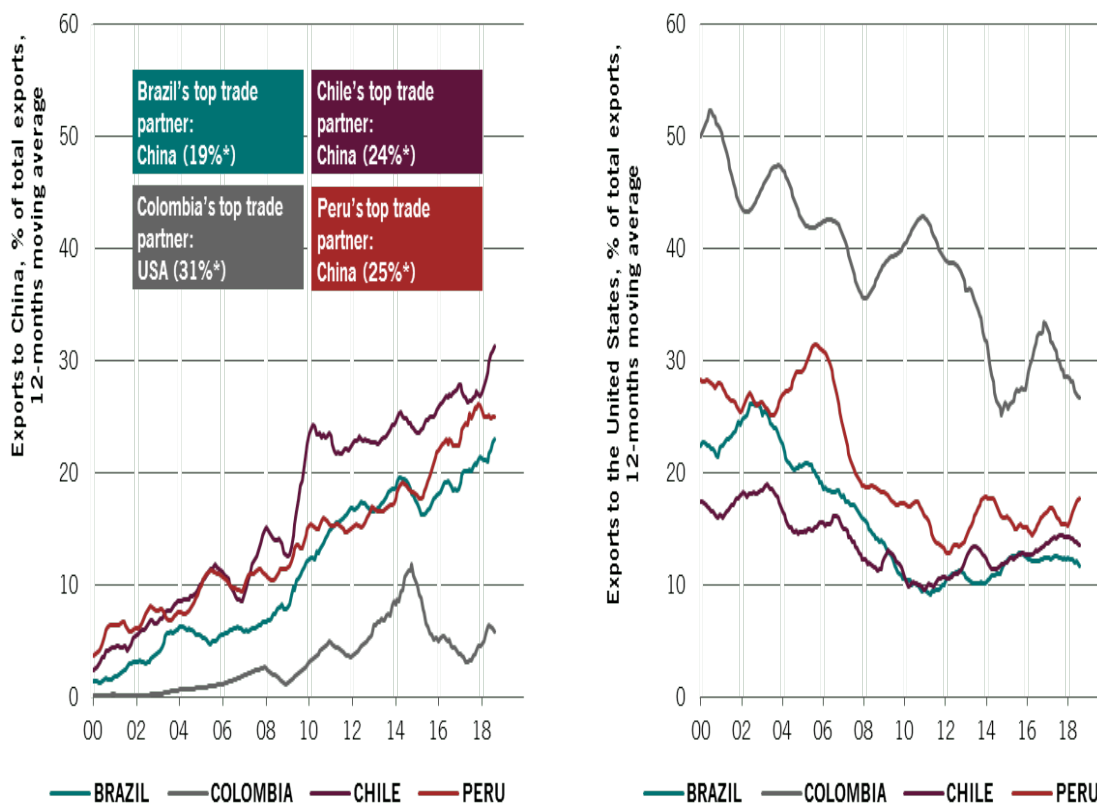
²⁷ UNDP; USAID. “Análisis sobre la situación de violencia y seguridad ciudadana 1er. semestre 2020 (1s-2020)”.

²⁸ [Abraham F. Lowenthal](#) The US and Ibero America in the early 21st century NUSO Nº 206 / NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2006 [The US and Ibero America in the early 21st century | Nueva Sociedad \(nuso.org\)](#)

<https://nuso.org/articulo/estados-unidos-y-america-latina-a-principios-del-siglo-xxi/>

TRADE RELATIONS. CHINA

As we have seen, while the region has traditionally been a space linked to US security, it has ended up becoming a stage of geo-economic and geopolitical confrontation with China, which has become Ibero America's second largest trading partner, thus defying the Monroe Doctrine itself by disputing the US's own backyard, with all the symbolism that this entails. With the main confrontation in China's maritime zone, the country's presence in Ibero America, in geo-economic terms, has an air of the Second Punic War.



- Exports to China and U.S. from Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Peru - ²⁹

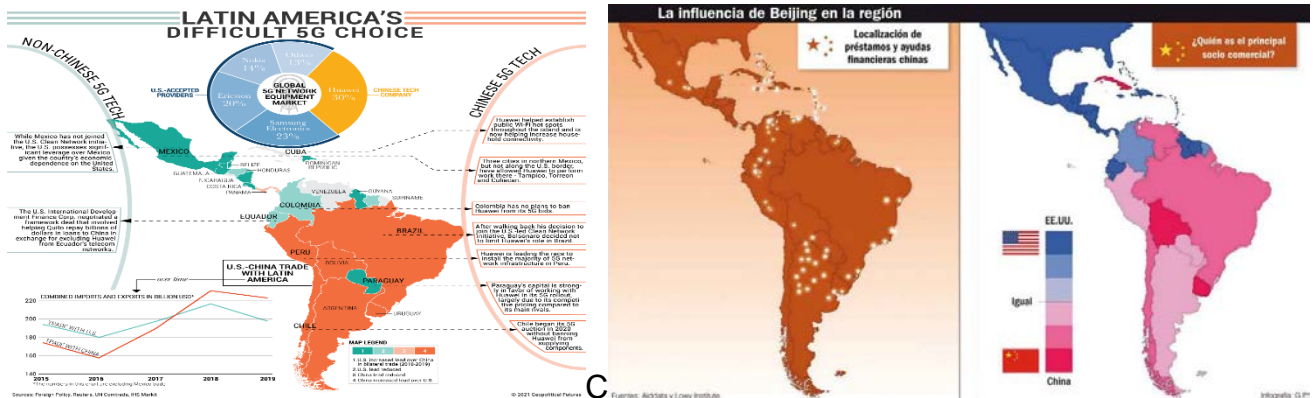
According to the World Economic Forum, China's trade with the hemisphere grew 26-fold between 2000 and 2020, and is expected to double by 2035 to more than \$700 billion. Whereas two decades ago the US was the main trading partner of nine out of twelve South American countries, today China has overtaken it everywhere except in Ecuador, Colombia and Paraguay.

²⁹ <https://gentosha-go.com/articles/-/19750>

Total trade between China and Ibero America increased from almost \$18 billion in 2002 to reach \$318 billion in 2020. Between 2005 and 2020, cumulative lending amounted to more than \$137 billion, with Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador and Argentina as the main recipients. As for China's investments in the region, these amounted to \$140 billion between 2005 and 2021, of which \$64 billion corresponds to Brazil (the second largest trading partner in the region after Mexico) and \$25 billion to Peru. Notable are infrastructure investments, with projects valued at \$66 billion between 2005 and 2021, 51% of which are dedicated to energy projects and 29% to transport projects.³⁰

In 2021, neither the pandemic nor the global crisis in the supply chain could stop the exponential growth of trade between China and Ibero America, which increased by 41.1% compared to the previous year, reaching \$451,591 million, with exports to China of \$222,582 million, an increase of 31.4%, and imports of \$229,009 million, an increase of 52%.³¹

In 2020, the region experienced its biggest economic slump in a century, with regional GDP falling by almost 8%, hand-in-hand with a 7% increase in poverty. This has left almost four out of 10 Ibero Americans in a vulnerable situation. Moreover, growth figures have not yet been able to bring the continent back to pre-pandemic levels.



- China influence in the region³²

China today is already the largest trading partner of Brazil, Chile, Peru, Uruguay and Argentina, and has free trade agreements with Chile, Costa Rica and Peru. In 2022, it

³⁰ ZAPATA, Sandra. 19.04.2022 Foreign Policy Review "Chinese rise and fall in Ibero America" <https://www.politicaexterior.com/auge-chino-y-caida-rusa-en-america-latina/>
³¹ HURTADO, Jorge. "Trade between Ibero America and China is growing at an unprecedented rate, experts call for "caution". france24 <https://www.france24.com/es/programas/economía/20220219-china-america-latina-comercio-economia>

³²1.-Geopolitical futures. <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/latin-americas-5g-dilemma/?nowprocket=1>
 2.- Perfil. <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/internacional/china-pisa-fuerte-en-america-latina-y-compite-con-eeuu.phtml>

initiated talks with Ecuador in this regard. As always, their trade relations are asymmetric in terms of the products that are traded. China imports natural resources - minerals (35%), soybeans (17%), mineral fuels (12%), meat (7%) and copper (6%) - while imports are concentrated in industrial products.

As was already the case in Africa, several of these New Silk Road projects have generated large trade deficits, enabling China to take control of the strategic works it had previously financed. And this also has political repercussions and corollaries. For example, only eight Ibero American and Caribbean countries recognise Taiwan. Panama, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador switched recognition to the People's Republic of China between 2017 and 2018, and Nicaragua did so in 2021.³³

In terms of soft power, this circle is closed through the Confucius Institutes, which are cultural entities but have the capacity to influence public opinion, of which in 2021 there were 44 in 21 countries.

For its part, the volume of US business with the region in 2019 was \$885.1 billion and direct investment (FDI) was \$256.1 billion. US goods exports to Ibero America amounted to \$418.2 billion in 2019, accounting for 16.7% of total US exports that year, but were concentrated in Central America and the Caribbean, losing strength in South America and further south, with Brazil, as can be seen in the accompanying map, its second largest trading partner after Mexico. Special mention should be made of the Agreement between Mexico, the US and Canada (T-MEC), which entered into force in July 2020 to replace the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).³⁴

³³ HURTADO, Jorge. "Trade between Ibero America and China is growing at an unprecedented rate, experts call for "caution". france24 <https://www.france24.com/es/programas/economía/20220219-china-america-latina-comercio-economia>

³⁴ DE LA FUENTE, Erich; ROMERO, Alejandro; LABRY, Khy, "The relationship between the US and Ibero America: what to expect from the Biden administration" *Llorente y Cuenca*, 25.03.2021



- U.S. main trade partners³⁵ -

DRUG TRAFFICKING

The drug problem is of particular relevance to the US. It is estimated that as many as 101,263 people died from overdoses in the US in the 12 months leading up to June 2021; almost 21% more than the previous year. This increase concurs with the business side: Mexican narcotics traffickers increased their drug trafficking in this period, overcoming the border closures and travel restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

In terms of understanding the evolution of drug trafficking, the attitude of the US is of the utmost importance. Its shift towards prohibitionism with regard to both opiates and marijuana in the first decades of the 20th century is of paramount significance; by focusing on supply rather than consumption and preventive policies, it shifted its problem to Mexico and Central America, even though it has eventually generated indigenous markets.

It is a long story. World War II saw an increase in the production of Mexican opiates to meet US demand for morphine. The war's end led to an excess on the black market, which was joined from the end of the 1950s by marijuana, which became increasingly in demand from 1967 onwards. In 1969, President Nixon launched the war on drugs, with successive US administrations growing increasingly intolerant of the drug trade. This

³⁵ Statista. <https://www.statista.com/chart/10942/top-us-trading-partners-for-goods/>

would place the burden of the fight on Mexico, as is the case with illegal immigration from Central America.

The lack of a comprehensive global policy combined with the closure of supply markets such as Turkey and the dismantling of laboratories in France where heroin was produced (the plot of the famous film *French connection*) hugely boosted the Mexican opiate market, to which marijuana, a product in growing demand, was added. Through existing networks, demand evolved to cocaine, which was added to the existing distribution channels when the US began to put pressure on Colombia. The *narcos* then diverted the direct Caribbean routes to others that went via Mexico. Paradoxically, the penetration of institutions increased hugely and the groups grew in size as the state had no resources with which to oppose them.³⁶

Partial state capture took place, with agents inhibiting and even leading groups or gangs. This explains why the Mexican “cartels”, unlike the American mafia organisations, were not small groups but were large and powerful enough to be able to take over the spaces the state was unable to control by exercising its functions in them.

The involvement of the army in this fight in a context of peace contributes to legitimising its existence at the cost, on the one hand, of redefining its role and, on the other, of prioritising a security rather than a public health vision. Moreover, the idea of “war”, predominant in public discourse and also underlined in 2008 with the Merida Initiative – an international security treaty established by the US in agreement with Mexico and the countries of Central America to combat drug trafficking and organised crime– is consubstantial with the armed forces, defining the dispute in symmetrically violent and unrestrained terms, when the *raison d'être* of the armed forces is to protect the entire population. This explains the spirals of violence experienced in some regions in line with the principle of reciprocal action and the rise of Clausewitzian extremes.

For its part, the US has focused its fight against drug trafficking on initiatives such as Plan Colombia, which provoked the suspicion of neighbouring countries and was seen by some as a kind of “Trojan horse” to increase Washington's interference in the region. Focusing the fight against drugs on external supply, and not on internal demand, is a debatable approach given that it seems to prioritise a security-based approach over a public health approach; it means ignoring the “intermestic” nature of the problem and

³⁶ VALDÉS CASTELLANOS, Guillermo. *Historia del narcotráfico en México*. Editorial Aguilar.

transferring the burden of a fight for the benefit of the US to Central American, for no benefit of their own. The undoubted social and developmental aspect that it also raises and which lies at its root perhaps must also be addressed. Approaching the issue of the fight against drug trafficking from an exclusively securitarian perspective can simultaneously undermine both the phenomenon and the fight against it, as well as the state itself and its political and economic independence³⁷

Believing that demand can be eliminated solely by prohibition and repression of supply ignores basic criteria of economics, ignores the US experience of prohibition in the 1920s and incorporates relevant political tolls in terms of limitations on the freedom and rights of individuals. The logic of war additionally incorporates the risk of favouring social control by establishing the precise mechanisms for it³⁸

States are called upon to use violence restrictively, as it incorporates a toll in terms of legitimacy and undermines their very essence. The state does not and cannot make war on its society or any part of it. In fact, the “war on drugs” may *de facto* entail a criminalisation of the poorest and most vulnerable social sectors of Ibero American countries.

To this effect, in Mexico homicides increased from 2,819 in 2008 to 17,000 in 2011, although 85% of these were due to fighting between the cartels themselves. The year 2019, the first of López Obrador's presidency, in which he wanted to put an end to the “war on drugs” policy and replace it with other ways of addressing its underlying reasons, ended with 34,608 homicides and 1,012 murders of women. Some sources estimate the number of homicides between 2006 and 2019 at more than 275,000, with impunity for these crimes at 98%. In 2021, homicides fell to 33,308, down 3.6 per cent from the previous year but far from the figures at the turn of the century.

Money laundering, together with corruption, tax evasion and tax fraud, is part of the so-called shadow economy, which is very difficult to quantify. It has, nonetheless, reached global dimensions, already ranking among the world's top 20 economies in 2012 with a volume of \$870 billion per year, equivalent to 1.5 % of the world's GDP. Meanwhile, according to UN data from 2020, it is estimated that 10% of global GDP is cross-border financial assets, of which money laundering from illicit sources amounts to \$1,370 billion

³⁷ CORTÉS, Ernesto. “Cómo comprender y abordar el crimen organizado en los estudios sobre el mercado ilícito de drogas”, en VV. AA. Repensando el tráfico ilícito de drogas en Centroamérica: un enfoque desde las ciencias sociales. FLACSO, October 2020.

³⁸ Ibidem

–equivalent to the GDP of Spain– and 2.7% of global wealth; with volume of bribes estimated at \$35 billion per year. Following illicit money inexorably leads to power, financial centres and politics. And all this in a globalised environment with flows in all directions.³⁹

MIGRATION

America's founding origins are rooted in emigration and its contribution to a melting pot culture in a land of opportunity. Immigration forms a substantial part of its national mythology.

Yet the number of first-generation immigrants quadrupled from 9.6 million in 1970, to approximately 38 million in 2007.^f There were then some 11.1 illegal immigrants in the US (31% of the total), 11.8 million legal residents (33%), 11.5 million naturalised citizens (32%) and 1.3 million Temporary Legal Residents (4%).⁴⁰ With more than 14 million migrants, legal and illegal, the 1990s has so far been numerically the peak decade for immigration in US history.

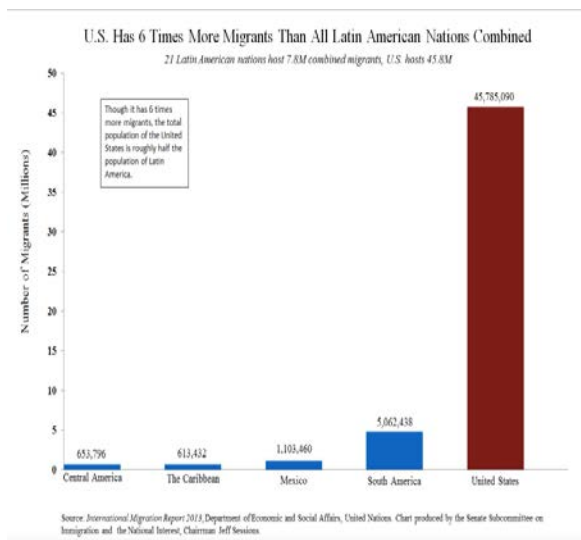
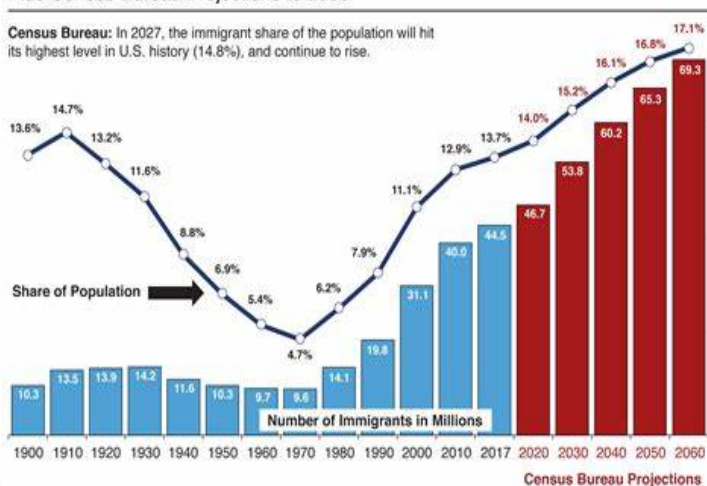


Figure 1. Immigrants in the U.S., Number and Percent, 1900-2017 Plus Census Bureau Projections to 2060



- Migration in U.S.⁴¹ -

³⁹ HERNANDEZ, Anabel “Informe de EE.UU.: crece el poder de narcos durante el gobierno de AMLO” <https://www.dw.com/es/informe-de-eeuu-crece-el-poder-de-narcos-durante-el-gobierno-de-amlo/a-56950410>

⁴⁰ MEISSNER, Doris; W. MEYERS Deborah; G. PAPADEMETRIOU, Demetrios; FIX, Michael. (2006) Immigration and the Future of the US: A NEW CHAPTER. Migration policy Institute.

⁴¹ 1.- <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/sessions-us-has-6-times-as-many-immigrants-as-latin-america-48m-vs-7m> 2.- <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/more.php?id=2223>

From 2000 to 2018, some 20 million immigrants arrived in the US, mostly from Central America and Ibero America, totalling 44.7 million in 2018. Some sources put the total number of legal and illegal immigrants that the US receives each year in the last period at 1.8 million, of which more than 600,000 are illegal.

But the problem has now escalated into a crisis. In the year leading to September 2021, 608,000 Mexicans, 309,000 Hondurans, 279,000 Guatemalans and 96,000 Salvadorans were detained by the US border authorities. A further 367,000 Central American migrants were also detained.⁴²

Migration certainly has many benefits for the US, improving productivity and competitiveness and boosting the economy. But it also brings with it significant difficulties. Resolving them involves tackling illegal emigration at its origin, the social integration of these groups, the effects on the native population, security issues, criminality, xenophobia, and more. Managing emigration on the existing scale is an economic, social and security challenge.

Illegal migration incorporates an additional problem. The small-scale trafficking and offences practised by these marginalised groups in an environment of poverty and inequality contribute to the trivialisation of these crime and disregard for the law. It is a similar scenario to the Sahel: the concurrence of licit and illicit activities is a place where the barriers between the two can be broken down. Moreover, there is a powerful link between drug trafficking, human trafficking and other crimes such as extortion, as they use the same means and channels of communication within the framework of a "normalised" black market and in an atmosphere of impunity (real or not). A regional example would be La Bestia, the name of a network of freight railways which, among the "goods" it transports to the US border itself, are illegal migrants and drugs under the "protection" of gangs.

The tightening of US immigration policies during the Trump era has been widely contested. Formulas such as Title 42, a health restriction stemming from the COVID 19 pandemic in force to date, have prevented the entry of 1.7 migrants at its border with Mexico. Meanwhile, organisations such as Amnesty International and Médecins Sans

⁴² BEAUREGARD, Luis Pablo. "Migration breaks all records in the US in the first months of the Biden administration". *El País newspaper*. 21.10.2021
<https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-10-20/la-migracion-rompe-todos-los-records-en-estados-unidos-en-los-primeros-meses-de-la-administracion-biden.html>

Frontières denounce the break-up of 8,000 families as a result of abusive practices and cruel treatment of these people.

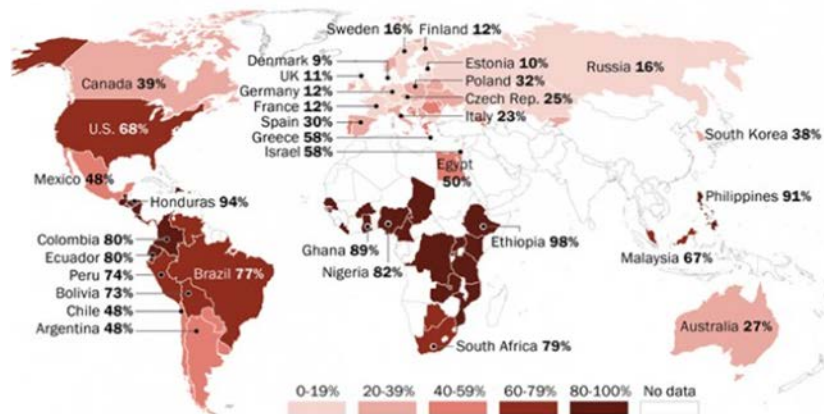
Another approach is needed. Solving this problem requires solving other problems that lie beyond its borders and act as push factors. This brings us back to the problems of development, inequality, organised crime, and violence that shake the whole of Central America. Ultimately, it would be a matter of facilitating the comprehensive development of the continent and, in particular, of Central America. The current US administration's proposals to promote employment and development in the region through economic investment are steps in the right direction; the point is that they require a sustained effort because they involve not only economic but also cultural change.

It is an "intermestic" problem characterised by "the absence of threats at the border and the absence of borders for the threat", an approach that further complicates the conceptualisation of security. The reinforcement of the border with Guatemala undertaken by Mexican President López Obrador in response is part of this logic.

However, and as a counterflow, Ibero America receives important remittances that are fundamental for its economic development. And even cultural influences such as evangelical movements.

Among Christians, religion most important in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the United States

% of Christians who say religion is very important in their lives



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2008 to 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Religious Affiliations of Latin Americans

	Catholic	Protestant	Unaffiliated	Other
Predominantly Catholic				
Paraguay	89%	7%	1%	2%
Mexico	81	9	7	4
Colombia	79	13	6	2
Ecuador	79	13	5	3
Bolivia	77	16	4	3
Peru	76	17	4	3
Venezuela	73	17	7	4
Argentina	71	15	11	3
Panama	70	19	7	4
Majority Catholic				
Chile	64	17	16	3
Costa Rica	62	25	9	4
Brazil	61	26	8	5
Dominican Rep.	57	23	18	2
Puerto Rico	56	33	8	2
U.S. Hispanics	55	22	18	5
Half Catholic				
El Salvador	50	36	12	3
Guatemala	50	41	6	3
Nicaragua	50	40	7	4
Less than half Catholic				
Honduras	46	41	10	2
Uruguay	42	15	37	6
Regional total*	69	19	8	4
<small>(adjusting for each country's population size)</small>				
QCURREL				
<small>*Regional total does not include U.S. Hispanics.</small>				
<small>Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.</small>				
PEW RESEARCH CENTER				

- Religion importance by countries⁴³ -

CONCLUSIONS

Ibero America embodies a space that is united by language but is, if one looks closely, rich and diverse. Its presentation as part of a hemisphere and its endowment with an integral nature enables the US to act as a leading power in the hemisphere. However, its leadership has been weakened in the context of globalisation and is now limited to an action of influence, to a practical guiding and composing action, which is stronger the closer to its territory. Nevertheless, for geopolitical reasons, it remains an area of great interest to the US, not to mention for its significant reserves of natural and energy resources.

Moreover, in the last two decades there have been some significant shifts, mainly due to the progress made both in the democratisation of the region and in regional and sub-regional integration processes, although not as much as should have been made. These countries need to become more credible, at least among their leaders.

US interventionism in the region will linger in the collective memory, which will translate into mistrust both socially and on the part of Ibero American governments, whatever their political colour. This will make it difficult to develop a hemispheric, i.e. continent-wide, policy.

⁴³ Pew Research Center. www.pewresearch.org

Nonetheless, and due to its own internal problems, Ibero America is situated in the strategic semi-periphery while its voice, drowned out, remains absent from the major issues of international relations, despite it being a region rich in resources.

In its relationship with the region, the US seeks to ensure the stability of its strategic environment and its vital interests regardless of the region's geopolitical weight in the global system. The constants and permanencies of the region point to a basic area for this country.⁴⁴

The US faces three main problems: a loss of economic influence in the region following a loss of political influence, organised crime and mass emigration. All three are 'intermestic' problems and will require greater US engagement with the region. The proposals to promote the economic development of the region emerging from the current US Administration are steps in the right direction but will need a continued and prolonged commitment that is able, by example and by favourable results in the region's economic and political development, to prevail over the anti-Western narratives so convenient for both opportunistic populisms and illiberal powers that deepen the cracks in the legitimacy of democracy and the rule of law.

China's rise in Ibero America is also worthy of mention. China has not only become the main trading partner of a dozen countries, but has also significantly increased its investment in various strategic sectors such as natural resources, infrastructure and telecommunications. China's increased presence comes against a backdrop of increased strategic confrontation with the US and in its backyard, a rivalry that only seems to deepen as it moves into an area of particular symbolism and sensitivity for the US.

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⁴⁴ KERN, Soren. "What are the interests of the US in Ibero America? Real Instituto Elcano 19.12.2005. <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/cuales-son-los-intereses-de-estados-unidos-en-latinoamerica-ari/>