

# CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO SECURITY IN LATIN AMERICA

*Paul Eduardo Vera Delzo, Coordinator*

**CEEPEP** CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS  
ESTRATÉGICOS DEL  
EJÉRCITO DEL PERÚ



U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE  
**SSI**  
STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE

# CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO SECURITY IN LATIN AMERICA

With the collaboration of:



# CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO SECURITY IN LATIN AMERICA

## Authors:

R. Evan Ellis	Paul Eduardo Vera Delzo	Daniel Jiménez Salcedo
Carlos Malamud Rikles	Martin Verrier	Carlos Ojeda Bennett
Rogelio Núñez Castellano	Douglas Farah	Fabián Cabello Alfaro
Andrés Gonzales Martin	Marianne Richardson	Fabiana Sofia Perera
Román D. Ortiz	Boris Saavedra	Raúl Oswaldo Jarrín Román
Mariano López de Miguel	David E. Spencer	Jacintho Maia Neto
Celina B. Realuyo	Vicente Torrijos	María Johana Alarcón Moreno
Keith Ditcham		

## Edited by:

### Peruvian Army - Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies

Av. Chorrillos, Primera Cuadra, Chorrillos, Lima, Peru.

E-mail: [cecep@cecep.mil.pe](mailto:cecep@cecep.mil.pe)

Telephone: +51969005832

### William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies

Abraham Lincoln Hall - 260 5th Ave. Bldg. 64 - Washington, DC 20319-5066, United States.

<https://wjpcenter.org/>

Telephone: +12026854670

### Institute for Strategic Studies - United States Army War College

47 Ashburn Drive - Carlisle Barracks - Pensilvania, United States.

<https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/contact/>

Telephone: +17172453131

## Coordinator:

Paul Eduardo Vera Delzo

## With the collaboration of the following academic entities:

- Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies
- Colombian War College
- Elcano Royal Institute
- Center for International Security - Francisco de Vitoria University
- National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies (ANEPE - Chile)
- Brazilian War College

First digital edition, November 2022

Made the Legal Deposit in the National Library of Peru No. 2022-11055

ISBN: 978-612-47954-4-2

Ebook available at [www.cecep.mil.pe](http://www.cecep.mil.pe)

## Design and layout:

César Miranda

## Technical support:

Jefree Vásquez Gallegos and Hugo Bernabé Moreno

# CONTENT

Forewords	6
Introduction	12

## CHAPTER I: EXTERNAL ACTORS IN THE REGION

New Developments in China–Latin America Engagement	21
<i>R. Evan Ellis</i>	
Russia in Latin America: Variable Geometry of a Secondary Actor with Protagonist Aspirations	41
<i>Carlos Malamud Rikles and Rogelio Núñez Castellano</i>	
Connectivity Conflicts and their Effects on Ibero–American Security	59
<i>Andres Gonzalez Martin</i>	
Arms Transfers and Major Power Competition in Latin America	92
<i>Roman D. Ortiz</i>	
Transnational Terrorism in Latin America	119
<i>Mariano López de Miguel</i>	

## CHAPTER II: TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Fighting Illicit Financial Flows in the Americas	130
<i>Celina B. Realuyo</i>	
From Regional to Global. The Consolidation of Criminal Convergence in South America	146
<i>Keith Ditcham and Martin Verrier</i>	
Evolution and Impact of Gangs in Central America and Brazil	165
<i>Douglas Farah and Marianne Richardson</i>	

## **CHAPTER III: NEW CHALLENGES AND REGIONAL STABILITY**

<b>Cybersecurity in Latin America: Challenges, Concerns and Opportunities</b>	<b>180</b>
<i>Boris Saavedra</i>	
<b>Venezuelan Migration in Peru: Perceptions and Realities</b>	<b>204</b>
<i>Paul Eduardo Vera Delzo</i>	
<b>The Challenge of Unrestricted War on Modern Conflict in Latin America</b>	<b>227</b>
<i>David E. Spencer</i>	
<b>Violent Social Demonstration and Democratic Instability</b>	<b>243</b>
<i>Vicente Torrijos and Daniel Jiménez</i>	
<b>The Typologies of Modern Conflict and its Impact on State Security: Something New Under the Sun?</b>	<b>258</b>
<i>Carlos Ojeda Bennett and Fabián Cabello Alfaro</i>	

## **CHAPTER IV: ARMED FORCES IN THE NEW STRATEGIC SCENARIO**

<b>Women, Peace and Security Agenda as a Response to Security Challenges and Threats in Latin America</b>	<b>273</b>
<i>Fabiana Sofia Perera</i>	
<b>New Competences of the Ministries of Defense</b>	<b>286</b>
<i>Raúl Oswaldo Farrín Román</i>	
<b>Efficiency of Strategic Management in Latin America</b>	<b>304</b>
<i>Jacinto Maia Neto</i>	
<b>Challenges of Defense Strategic Management: The Colombian Case</b>	<b>319</b>
<i>Maria Johanna Alarcon Moreno</i>	

# FOREWORDS

*Challenges and Threats to Security in Latin America* is a book that not only seeks to promote reflection and debate on aspects related to Security and Defense, offering innovative proposals and ideas to the complex problems currently faced by Latin America as a region, but also shows the benefits of coordinated work between the various scholarly institutions involved in its publication.

The different modalities of Transnational Organized Crime (among them, illicit drug trafficking, illegal mining, illegal trade in flora and fauna, illicit trafficking in firearms, human trafficking, smuggling of migrants and cybercrime) have been -for decades- negatively impacting the economic and social development of Latin America, representing a serious threat to the security of the countries that comprise it. Similarly, it should not be forgotten that the region has faced the devastating effects of a pandemic that has revealed, to a large extent, the weaknesses of its States in dealing with crisis situations, a scenario aggravated by the dynamic economic and diplomatic repercussions of the war between Russia and Ukraine, as well as by the interests and actions of extra-regional actors.

Peru is not an isolated actor in Latin America. The various forms of transnational organized crime, particularly in the Peruvian Amazon, pose a serious threat to the country's security and development, and jeopardize the State's ability to reduce poverty and effectively maintain sovereignty and territorial integrity. On the other hand, the serious political and economic crisis in Venezuela has generated the largest migratory flow in the history of Latin America, and it is estimated that by the end of 2022, Peru -the second largest host country for Venezuelan migrants after Colombia- will have a population of Venezuelan migrants and refugees of close to 1.45 million, constituting a serious humanitarian challenge. Although these Venezuelan citizens are gradually integrating into Peruvian society and economy, they are a clear example that what happens in one country has repercussions in other countries of the region, exposing the need to coordinate and work

together to create or strengthen the conditions that ensure and provide stability for the desired development of nations.

During the last decade, several Armies in the region, including the Peruvian Army, have initiated transformation processes to face the new challenges and threats to national security, and effectively fulfill the roles assigned by the State. For the Peruvian Army, military transformation involves profound changes in the institution, reviewing and redesigning its core processes (through reengineering), closing existing gaps in its current capabilities (through modernization), and introducing necessary changes in the set of beliefs, habits, attitudes and traditions existing in the institution (through a change in organizational culture). To this end, the Peruvian Army has, since 2019, employed an Institutional Transformation Plan that emphasizes *Capabilities Based Planning*. In that sense, a key element of the Army's Fundamental Concept -to adapt to the new set of missions- is the concept of *Amazon Protection Jungle Brigades*, which reflects the priority of focusing on the Peruvian Amazon region to act, in accordance with the Political Constitution of Peru, in comprehensive whole-of-government operations against drug trafficking, illegal mining and illegal logging, among other challenges. In this way, this concept integrates with other mechanisms, such as the *Amazon Surveillance System* and the *Amazon Protection System*, sharing information with neighboring countries to strengthen control of the border region.

In Latin America, there has been much discussion about the usefulness of having Armed Forces in the 21st century. Some analysts have characterized the development of capabilities in the Armed Forces as an expense that constitutes a burden for the State; however, reality shows that the development of these capabilities is an investment, particularly in emergency and crisis situations. In Peru, for example, the actions taken during the COVID-19 pandemic and during disasters caused by natural events in recent years are the best evidence of it. If the necessary acquisitions are not made, the Armed Forces would have great difficulties in fulfilling their tasks, negatively impacting the State's response capacity.

As a product of the quality of the authors and the diversity of the topics addressed, *Challenges and Threats to Security in Latin America* is a book of great interest not only for key decision-makers and specialists in Security and Defense issues, but also for society, insofar as it is directly affected by the challenges and threats analyzed in this publication.

**General Walter Horacio Córdova Alemán**  
**General Commander of the Peruvian Army**

When I think of my hometown, I think about the community of neighbors who respected, supported, and took care of each other through the good times and the bad. That's how I view our shared neighborhood: Latin America and the Caribbean. We are close neighbors -even family- forever linked by geography, history, trade, culture, and, most importantly, values. Our nations were born out of similar circumstances: a desire for self-government, a strong sense of sovereignty, and a yearning for democracy. That flame for freedom inspired Founding Fathers like Jose de San Martin, Simon Bolivar, and George Washington, to name a few. That flame has forged unbreakable bonds between the United States and our Latin American and Caribbean partners lasting decades - some for as long as two centuries.

This is a region of true promise. It accounts for hundreds of billions in annual trade with the United States; contains 60 % of the world's lithium and 31 % of the world's fresh water; has the world's largest oil reserves; and is home to the environmentally crucial Amazon rainforest. But today, our democracies face a whole host of cross-cutting challenges that threaten to extinguish that flame of freedom. These transboundary threats erode peace and security, weaken fragile democratic institutions, hinder economic prosperity, and create "wedges" for malign actors to expand their influence in our own hemisphere.

Unfortunately, it is the everyday people across the region who are bearing the economic and social burdens of these threats. Families across the region still mourn the loss of loved ones from the COVID-19 pandemic. Mothers and fathers are struggling to put food on the table and gas in their cars because of the current global rise of inflation. Currently, over 200 million people in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean are living under the poverty line. Partner nation military and security forces were at the forefront of the COVID-19 response in their countries, but their budgets faced extreme pressure as governments use their limited resources to address the pandemic.

In the midst of these issues, the People's Republic of China (PRC) is artfully "playing chess," seeking to target, recruit, and bribe to expand its economic, political, and military influence throughout the region. To date, twenty-one regional countries participate in the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which provides PRC-backed loans for key infrastructure such as ports, telecommunications, roads and bridges, agriculture cultivation, and mining projects to satisfy the PRC's own growing domestic demand and pursuit of a continued monopoly of critical minerals. But all too often, several of these infrastructure projects lack due diligence, involve corruption, ignore indigenous rights, and completely disregard environmental protections.

For example, several PRC state-owned-enterprises (SOE) are purchasing illegal timber from mafia groups within Peru, perpetuating corruption, environmental degradation, and marginalization of indigenous populations. PRC companies are also the largest offenders of illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing (IUUF) in this region. Every year, between 350 to 600 PRC fishing vessels severely deplete and imperil regional fish stocks, pollute ocean waters, and prevent local fishermen and merchants from earning nearly three billion dollars in revenue. What concerns me most are the PRC's investments in deep-water ports, 5G technology, and space infrastructure - projects that can be used for military dual use or access to sensitive information about Latin American, Caribbean and U.S. citizens. In other words, the PRC doesn't come to the region to invest; it comes to the region to extract.

Unfortunately, the PRC is not the only regional threat we collectively confront. Russia is “playing checkers” in the region, trying to manipulate populations through disinformation campaigns and malign cyber activity. Putin’s current war in Ukraine is contributing to higher food and fuel prices that are hurting families from favelas to farms and everywhere in between. Russia also continues to support repressive authoritarian regimes in Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua, and the consequences are dire. Today, the crushing authoritarian regimes under Nicolas Maduro, Miguel Diaz Canel, and Daniel Ortega have forced millions of Venezuelans, Cubans and Nicaraguans to leave their homes. Venezuela has become one of the worst humanitarian crises this hemisphere has ever seen. Countries across the region have welcomed the over 6 million Venezuelan refugees.

In addition, Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) like the First Capital Command in Brazil and cartels as far away as Sinaloa and Jalisco Nueva Generación are poisoning our people with drugs. TCOs are engaging in illegal mining, illegal logging, arms sales, human trafficking, and deforestation, contributing to their \$300 billion annual war chest at the expense of the environment, the health of our citizens, and the economic future of our hemisphere. They stretch their tentacles of violence and corruption across the region, which contributes to irregular migration.

Moreover, climate change imperils our way of life and long-term prosperity. Hurricanes, rising sea levels, flooding, and droughts collectively worsen economic and food insecurity. They also contribute to irregular migration by destroying personal property and job opportunities. These cross-cutting threats are too complex for one nation to handle on its own. We must work together -like a soccer team- all of us with the same uniforms on. U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin often uses the term Integrated Deterrence. It means bringing all partners together and using all tools available to counter threats, including different government agencies, allies and partners, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and especially academic institutions. A holistic approach to our collective defense is the only way to be successful in this dynamic threat environment.

This book, *Challenges and Threats to the Security in Latin America*, is the academic representation of Integrated Deterrence. It is the culmination of a truly concerted effort by the Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies, the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute, and the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies. This work also includes twenty two scholars from collaborating institutions in Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Peru, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. Throughout these four chapters: *External Actors in the Region*, *Transnational Organized Crime*, *New Challenges and Regional Stability*, and *Armed Forces Facing the New Strategic Scenario*, the authors not only expertly analyze the cross-cutting threats, but they also offer innovative solutions for all our nations to tackle these challenges together.

I hope that military professionals across the region not only read this great academic work but use the knowledge they gain and put it into action. We must all embed the knowledge and lessons in this book into our traditional security cooperation, training and exercises, professional military education, and programs focusing on human rights and Women, Peace, and Security. Doing so will demonstrate the power of partnerships.

A work like this is what true partnership among fellow democracies looks like. This is our shared neighborhood. Neighbors encourage each other, help each other succeed, lift each other up. As we do so, there are no strings attached. There is no fine print. We do it because that's what good neighbors do. We do it because we are always stronger when we work together. This is how we all strengthen our democracies and ensure the flame of freedom continues to burn bright in this hemisphere, our shared home - today, tomorrow, and always.

**General Laura J. Richardson**  
**Commander, U.S. Southern Command**

# INTRODUCTION

Latin America faces a complex economic, social, and political context with strong implications for the radicalization of society, the erosion of institutions, and the reduction of economic prospects, undermining its commitment to democracy and the rule of law. Although this phenomenon is not exclusive to Latin America, it seems that this region is experiencing the beginning of a chain of events that could negatively impact the countries that integrate it. In 2019, several protests in the region highlighted the deep and widespread frustration of citizens with the performance of their governments.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic not only claimed the lives of thousands of Latin Americans but also displaced a significant segment of the middle class into poverty and informality. In addition, COVID-19 exposed the strong corruption and mistakes made in emergency spending related to the pandemic, while forcing the reorientation of budgets initially allocated for social investment and infrastructure development, leaving governments with difficult decisions on how to raise more money and meet debt payment commitments. In several countries in the region, the effects were reflected in protests over the proposed tax reform, as well as discussions on how to meet IMF lending commitments. Additionally, the pandemic justified restrictions on public activity, helping authoritarian governments in the region consolidate control over their population.

The inflationary effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have been aggravating these tensions, hitting the most vulnerable populations with significant increases in the prices of food and fuel for transport, heating, and cooking, generating numerous protests in the region. This situation is aggravated by the behavior of important extra-regional actors through not only loans and investments, but also support for existing authoritarian regimes in Latin America. In addition, the deep economic, political, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela has generated the largest migratory flow

in the history of the region, demonstrating –once again– that the internal problems of one country can also permeate and affect other Latin American countries. Additionally, Latin America faces the effects of different forms of transnational organized crime, which –worryingly– have been challenging and affecting the security, prosperity, and good governance of the countries that make it up. These criminal organizations have strengthened and changed their patterns, forcing governments in the region to adapt to combat them.

As can be seen, Latin America faces a series of challenges and threats that put at risk the desired regional stability, forcing numerous armed forces to initiate processes of change that allow them to effectively fulfill their roles in the new strategic scenario. It is therefore vital that all these problems be widely discussed and analyzed, in society and academia, to raise awareness, but mainly to generate ideas that contribute to decision-making at different levels of the States of the region.

In this sense, the book *Challenges and Threats to Security in Latin America* is the result of the collaborative work between the Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies, the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, and the Institute of Strategic Studies of the U.S. Army War College, to which are added the contributions of other important academic institutions, integrating 17 academic articles, prepared by 22 authors of different nationalities, and grouped into 4 chapters.

In the first chapter of this book, referring to *External Actors in the Region*, Dr. R. Evan Ellis, in the article entitled “*New Developments in China-Latin America Relations*,” examines the evolution of the activities of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in Latin America, evidencing that the effects of COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, combined with domestic factors in China, they have hindered their progress in recent years. However, according to the author, these constraints are dissipating, while the PRC’s sources of leverage and associated opportunities are increasing, including China’s importance as an importer of raw materials and a

source of loans and investments, coupled with the need and willingness of governments in the region to work with the PRC. On the other hand, Dr. Carlos Malamud Rikles and Dr. Rogelio Núñez Castellano, in the article entitled “Russia in Latin America: *Variable Geometry of a Secondary Actor with Protagonist Aspirations*,” point out that Russia’s role in Latin America is framed in the changes of the global geopolitical context. In this sense, according to the authors, Latin America perceives Russia as an option to diversify its international and economic-commercial relations, and break the historical dependence on the United States, as well as that in force with the PRC. Moscow, however, has contributed to fragmentation, polarization, reprimanding, and subordination of the region. Additionally, Lieutenant Colonel Andrés González Martín, in the article entitled “*Connectivity Conflicts and their Effects on Ibero-American Security*,” indicates that the current situation may force the Ibero-American States to take a position on the fragmented geoeconomic and geo-technological map that is about to emerge. The fragmentation of the continent and the failure of integration processes today make it impossible to constitute an alternative geostrategic reference that, at least, had the possibility of giving itself its own voice on the global stage. However, the author adds, there are valuable meeting points that would favor the beginning of the necessary convergence to progressively reach a global weight.

Subsequently, Dr. Román D. Ortiz, in the article entitled “*Arms Transfers and Competition of Great Powers in Latin America*,” analyzes the penetration of Russia and the PRC in the Latin American arms market, paying special attention to the causes that allowed both countries to increase their sales in the period 2007-2016, as well as the factors that limited the number of recipient countries and the type of equipment delivered. According to the author, while Moscow could see its presence in the Latin American market disappear irreversibly, Beijing is likely to take advantage of several factors in its favor to increase its sales to the region in the coming years. Concluding this first chapter, Magister Mariano López de Miguel, in the article entitled “*Transnational Terrorism in Latin America*,” points out that

after the terrible attacks of September 11, 2001, suffered by the United States, the international community woke up to what many political scientists and historians described as “multipolar chaos.” Two decades later, strategic and security challenges have not been limited and have risen dangerously to global alert levels. With geopolitics once again a battleground, the horizon of terrorism has expanded or increased in traditionally safe areas, such as Latin America.

In the second chapter, referring to *Transnational Organized Crime*, Professor Celina B. Realuyo, in the article entitled “*Combating Illicit Financial Flows in the Americas*,” states that over the past 20 years governments have increasingly used money tracking to better understand, detect, disrupt, and counter illicit networks. Authorities should keep abreast of evolving methods of financing threats to combat criminal and terrorist networks, including their illicit financial flows, as well as to promote security, prosperity, and good governance in the Americas. Likewise, Dr. Keith Ditcham and Dr. Martin Verrier, in the article entitled “*From Regional to Global: The Consolidation of Criminal Convergence in South America*,” notes that for decades some South American countries (such as Brazil or Colombia) have suffered high levels of criminal violence, eroding the democratic governance of cities and regions across the continent. Often, this violence has been associated with drug trafficking, especially cocaine. However, according to the authors, the consolidation of this trafficking has led to a situation where criminal organizations have consolidated contact networks and alliances with other organizations, causing trafficking and smuggling routes to overlap, as well as enabling the emergence of ungoverned enclaves that act as facilitators and enhancers of organized crime. Finally, Professor Douglas Farah and Magister Marianne Richardson, in the article entitled “*Evolution and Impact of Gangs in Central America and Brazil*,” indicate that two prison gangs -the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) in Central America, and the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC) in Brazil- have accumulated military, economic and political power, as well as broad territorial control. These criminal groups pose a genuine

threat to the States in which they operate. Today, these gangs are a key component of immense transnational criminal structures that maintain deep ties to drug trafficking and other illicit activities worldwide.

In the third chapter, referring to *New Challenges and Regional Stability*, Dr. Boris Saavedra, in the article entitled “*Cybersecurity in Latin America: Challenges, Concerns, and Opportunities*,” states that the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the evolution of global geopolitics, with emerging digital technology becoming its center of gravity. In that sense, the lack of cybersecurity policies and strategies to address the vulnerabilities of freedom of expression in cyberspace, the use of Artificial Intelligence, 5G wireless communications, critical infrastructures, cyber diplomacy, cryptocurrencies, as well as cloud technology to store and use data are important sources of threats and challenges for cybersecurity in Latin America. Subsequently, Colonel Paul Eduardo Vera Delzo, in the article entitled “*Venezuelan Migration in Peru: Perceptions and Realities*,” points out that the deep crisis in Venezuela has generated the largest migratory flow in Latin America, estimating that, by the end of 2022, Peru will have a population of Venezuelan migrants and refugees close to 1.45 million. In this regard, the author adds, no population is prepared either to forcibly leave their country of origin or to welcome many external people in such a short time, generating a context of extreme vulnerability for the migrant population, as well as discomfort and even rejection in the receiving population. Achieving the full integration of the Venezuelan population into Peruvian society and economy requires the decisive involvement of the State and civil society.

Dr. David E. Spencer, in the article entitled “*The Challenge of Unrestrained War in the Modern Conflict in Latin America*,” analyzes the concept of unrestricted war and its doctrinal origins, as well as shows its application in Latin America since the social protests in Bolivia between 1995 and 2005, which brought the MAS party to power. It also briefly addresses the similarities and differences between the recent mass social protests that occurred in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru between 2019 and

2021. On the other hand, Professor Vicente Torrijos, and political scientist Daniel Jiménez Salcedo, in the article “*Violent Social Demonstration and Democratic Instability*,” affirm that social protest in Latin America is part of a regional regulatory framework that recognizes it as a peaceful and democratic citizen action. However, the social mobilizations that took place in 2019 hinted at the fissures suffered by democracies in the hemisphere. According to the authors, social protest, which must maintain a peaceful character for the vindication of rights, has been marred by acts of violence that have affected the institutional order of countries. Concluding this second chapter, retired Colonel Carlos Ojeda Bennett and Fabián Cabello Alfaro, in the article entitled “*The Typologies of Modern Conflict and its Impact on State Security: Something New Under the Sun?*” They state that the expressions of contemporary conflict have encouraged the dissemination of various typologies for their understanding in the academic community. However, far from being a new phenomenon, it warns of the presence of complex threats in which the relationship between combatants and criminals is blurred, and the security of States and individuals can be harmed.

In the fourth and final chapter, referring to the *Armed Forces in the New Strategic Scenario*, Dr. Fabiana Sofía Perera, in the article entitled “*Women, Peace and Security Agenda as a Response to Security Challenges and Threats in Latin America*,” points out that Latin America faces significant challenges in terms of security and defense. Therefore, women’s participation in the Defense Sector in Latin America should be seen more to face these new challenges than as a challenge in itself. However, while the region has shown some progress in promoting such participation, there are still many areas of opportunity. Subsequently, retired General Raúl Oswaldo Jarrín Román, in the article entitled “*New Competencies of the Ministries of Defense*,” states that the lessons learned from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine accentuate the Westphalian basis of the States and the importance of geostrategic assessment for the determination of strategic objectives that support national interests and the basis of collective security. According

to the author, in the regional geo-economic sphere, the importance of socio-economic factors in the democratic development of countries is highlighted, and the armed forces must participate in the prevention of political conflicts and crises.

Likewise, Dr. Jacintho Maia Neto, in the article entitled “*Strategic Defense Management in Latin America*,” states that the twenty-first century has caused organizations to face the need to adapt to a world characterized by the speed and intensity of change. New demands have arisen either in support of societal needs or in support of military organizations. In defense, a large amount of information and the speed with which strategies are modified to meet new demands that affect the organization’s goals are part of the scope. Knowing why, when, and how strategies should be changed is also part of defense management. Finally, Magister María Johanna Alarcón Moreno, in the article entitled “*Challenges of Strategic Defense Management: The Colombian Case*,” indicates that defense in Colombia contributes to the custody of territorial and decisional sovereignty, as well as the well-being of its citizens and institutions, allowing it to achieve the national objectives that as a society have been set. That is, both defense and national security are important factors for the development of national interests and the prevention of the evolution of complex situations affecting the nation. Therefore, the author adds, strategic planning and its management are the tools that will allow Colombia to face its risks, threats, and opportunities.

As can be seen, the book *Challenges and Threats to Security in Latin America* is a broad, detailed, and innovative academic contribution to the dynamics of integral security in the region, in the context of a changing global environment. Likewise, it promotes the analysis, discussion, and generation of ideas on aspects related to security in Latin America, as a fundamental element for the development of the countries that integrate it. In that sense, the Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies, the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, and the Institute of Strategic Studies of the U.S. Army War College hope that this book will

be of interest and pleasure to readers and contribute to decision-making at different levels of regional States, achieving, with it, effective and sustainable solutions.

**Colonel**

**Paul E. Vera Delzo**

Peruvian Army  
Center for Strategic  
Studies

**Doctor**

**Paul J. Angelo**

William J. Perry Center  
for Hemispheric Defense  
Studies

**Doctor**

**Carol V. Evans**

U.S. Army War  
College Institute for  
Strategic Studies

*CHAPTER I:*

# **EXTERNAL ACTORS IN THE REGION**

CHALLENGES  
AND THREATS TO  
**SECURITY** IN  
LATIN AMERICA

# NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN CHINA-LATIN AMERICA ENGAGEMENT

*R. Evan Ellis*

## **Abstract**

*This article examines the evolution of PRC activities in Latin America. It finds that the effects of COVID-19 and Russia's Ukraine invasion, in combination with factors internal to the PRC, impeded the PRC advance in recent years, but that those restraining factors are dissipating, while sources of PRC leverage and associated opportunities are increasing, including the PRC's increased importance as a commodity purchaser, source of loans and investments, as well as the need and willingness of the region's increasingly left-oriented governments to work with the PRC. This work also examines how the PRC has increased its focus on strategic minerals, green energy, and both physical and digital infrastructure in the region, as well as space and military engagement. It also highlights the importance of the ongoing PRC campaign, focused on Central America and the Caribbean, to convince the region's governments to derecognize Taiwan, advancing PRC influence and economic penetration of the states that change.*

**Key Words:** *PRC, Taiwan, Latin America, Caribbean, Lithium, Digital, Infrastructure.*

## **Introduction**

Shaped by COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, and the internal political and economic dynamics of the People's Republic of China (PRC), that nation's engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean continues to expand and evolve in ways that impact the region.

## **Overview**

PRC engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean has expanded notably in the past two decades. PRC-based companies have invested over

\$160 billion in non-financial foreign direct investment into the region,<sup>1</sup> with the quantity of FDI beginning to take off in 2010, as the region began to recover from the 2007–2008 financial crisis. While such investment is lower than that by U.S. and European Union-based companies in the region, the perceived linkage between PRC-based companies and the Chinese state causes local interest in receiving Chinese investment and access to the Chinese market to shape speech and behavior by local politicians and businesspersons toward the PRC, including refraining from criticizing the PRC on core foreign policy issues.

The two major PRC-based policy banks, China Exim Bank and China Development Bank, have loaned at least \$138 billion to the region,<sup>2</sup> although the level of new policy bank loans has fallen off in recent years as a function of the changing circumstances of the two primary recipients of that lending: Venezuela and Brazil. Furthermore, PRC-Latin America bilateral trade was \$449 billion in 2021,<sup>3</sup> with the PRC being the number one trade partner with every country in the region south of Costa Rica, or the number two partner behind Brazil in some South American countries.

## **The Trump Administration Pushback Against the PRC, COVID-19 and Ukraine**

Even prior to the arrival of Donald Trump in the U.S. Presidency, the U.S. had been publicly expressing concern regarding the expansion of the PRC in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>4</sup> The arrival of the Trump Administration significantly strengthened and changed the tone of that pushback against PRC activities there. The 2017 Trump Administration National Security

---

1 Enrique Dussel-Peters, “Monitor of Chinese OFDI in Latin America and the Caribbean 2021”, *Red China-ALC* (March 31, 2021), <https://dusselpeters.com/344.pdf>

2 Data Base, “China-Latin America Finance Database”, *The Dialogue* (2022), [https://www.thedialogue.org/map\\_list/](https://www.thedialogue.org/map_list/). (Accessed June 9, 2022).

3 Mark P. Sullivan, “China’s Engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean”, *Congressional Research Service*, (May 4, 2022), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10982/17>

4 Charley Keys, “Clinton warns of Iranian, Chinese gains in Latin America”, *CNN* (May 1, 2009), <https://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/05/01/clinton.latin.america/index.html>

Strategy explicitly acknowledged the PRC as a competitor.<sup>5</sup> Trump Administration Secretaries of State Rex Tillerson,<sup>6</sup> and Mike Pompeo,<sup>7</sup> and other U.S. senior leaders,<sup>8</sup> elevated the focus on warnings about the risks of China in engagements with regional partners. Following diplomatic changes from Taiwan to the PRC by Panama, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador, the U.S. withdrew its ambassadors from those countries to signal its concern.<sup>9</sup> U.S. pressure against authoritarian regimes in the region doing business with the PRC, particularly U.S. sanctions against Venezuela which significantly deepened beginning in 2019, also impeded the PRC advance, both by impairing the capabilities of such partners, and by increasing PRC caution due to its global commercial exposure to the effect of violating such sanctions.

The COVID-19 pandemic which hit Latin America hard in 2020 and 2021, and the economic effects of Russia's Ukraine invasion impacted the PRC advance in complex ways. On one hand, COVID-19-related economic closings paused a number of projects by PRC-based companies.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the reduced demand for Latin American products from traditional markets strengthened the relative importance of the PRC as a purchaser of the region's

---

5 NSS, "National Security Strategy 2017", *The White House* (December 2017), <https://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-2017/>

6 Frances Martel, "Rex Tillerson Warns Latin America: Don't Trust 'Predatory' China", *Breitbart* (February 2, 2018), <https://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2018/02/02/tillerson-warns-latin-america-dont-trust-predatory-china/>

7 Tal Axelrod, "Pompeo: Russia, China 'spread disorder' in Latin America", *The Hill* (April 12, 2019), <https://thehill.com/policy/international/americas/438698-pompeo-russia-china-spread-disorder-in-latin-america/>

8 Phelim Kine, "Adm. Faller: China exploiting corruption in Latin America", *Politico* (August 12, 2021), <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-china-watcher/2021/08/12/adm-faller-china-exploiting-corruption-in-latin-america-493948>

9 Reuters, "U.S. recalls diplomats in El Salvador, Panama, Dominican Republic over Taiwan", *Reuters News* (September 7, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-taiwan-idUSKCN1LOooN>

10 Yen Nee Lee, "Credit stress hurts new money going into China's massive infrastructure project, says Moody's", *CNBC* (November 24, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/24/covid-halts-investments-in-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-moodys.html>

commodities such as Brazilian soybeans,<sup>11</sup> Argentine pork,<sup>12</sup> and Chilean copper,<sup>13</sup> particularly as initial PRC success in managing the pandemic meant that the Chinese economy was able to reopen and expand its demand for global goods faster than the U.S. and the European Union.

COVID-19 has also given the PRC opportunities to demonstrate its power as an agricultural purchaser through pandemic-related cutoffs of items such as Brazilian beef<sup>14</sup> and Ecuadoran shrimp.<sup>15</sup> Such suspensions, whether or not based on valid sanitary concerns, sent powerful reminders to the Latin American source countries that their valuable export streams depended on the always changeable permission of the PRC government. Additionally, Russia's invasion of Ukraine created opportunities for the PRC to buy more agricultural goods from countries such as Brazil<sup>16</sup> as Ukrainian agricultural products disappeared from world markets.

Beyond its role as a purchaser and investor, the pandemic has given the PRC opportunities to build goodwill in the region by sending COVID-19 related goods to the region, initially items such as personal protective supplies, ventilators, thermometers, and thermal imaging cameras. Later, it was able to provide vaccines to the region, including those by Sinovac, Sinopharm, and CanSino, at a time in which the region was having difficulties obtaining vaccine from Western producers, and through the United Nations-based

---

11 Tarso Veloso Ribeiro, Tatiana Freitas and Alfred Cang, "China Buying More Brazil Soy in Sign of Shifting Trade Flows", *Bloomberg* (November 16, 2021), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-16/china-is-buying-more-brazil-soy-in-signs-of-shifting-trade-flows#xj4y7vzkg>

12 Merco Press, "Argentina/China accord to produce nine million tons of pork delayed by environmentalists", *MercoPress South Atlantic News Agency* (September 2, 2020), <https://en.mercopress.com/2020/09/02/argentina-china-accord-to-produce-nine-million-tons-of-pork-delayed-by-environmentalists>

13 Alberto Peña, "China's appetite for copper provides Chile with opportunity", *Yahoo* (February 24, 2021), <https://news.yahoo.com/chinas-appetite-copper-provides-chile-022704209.html>

14 Constance Mallaret, "China temporarily suspends JBS and Marfrig beef imports", *The Brazil Report* (May 24, 2022), <https://brazilian.report/liveblog/2022/05/24/china-suspends-beef-imports/>

15 Reuters, "China suspends imports from Ecuador shrimp producers on coronavirus risk", *Reuters News* (July 10, 2020), <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-china-shrimp-idUSB9N2E003W>

16 GT, "China, Brazil sign agreement to boost trade of corn, other agricultural products", *Global Times* (May 25, 2022), <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1266512.shtml>

COVAX facilities. Such initiatives opened doors not only for future biomedical collaboration, but also in non-related areas such as inclusion of Chinese companies such as Huawei in 5G telecommunications architectures.

As a compliment to its leverage as a purchaser of the region's goods, the strained fiscal balances of Latin American governments due to their expansion of spending to fight the pandemic, combined with the increased needs of vulnerable populations, augmented by the inflationary effects of Russia's Ukraine invasion, also increased PRC leverage as a source of needed loans and investment. However, as of mid-2022, the advance of PRC-based companies in the region was impeded by multiple factors internal to China as well. These include the substantial debt of its companies due to overextension in prior infrastructure projects of questionable economic viability,<sup>17</sup> coupled with high-profile collapse of one, Evergrande.<sup>18</sup> Such difficulties contributed to increased caution by those companies in pursuing new projects abroad. The financial position of such companies for pursuing projects or seeking to purchase products from Latin America (and elsewhere) has been further weakened by the extended economic shutdowns across the PRC of the Chinese government's "zero COVID" policy.<sup>19</sup>

In digital and other technology sectors, the advance of specific PRC-based companies has been impeded to varying degrees by administrative and legal actions by the Xi administration to increase control over them or their leadership. Notable examples include the November 2020 blocking of the

---

17 Evelyn Cheng, "China's real estate problems are spreading even to once-healthy developers", *CNBC* (January 7, 2022), <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/07/chinas-property-problems-spread-to-once-healthy-developers-like-shimao.html>

18 Jeff Pao, "Evergrande's bankruptcy still just a matter of time," *Asia Times* (November 23, 2021), <https://asiatimes.com/2021/11/evergrandes-bankruptcy-still-just-a-matter-of-time/>

19 Shi Jiangtao, "How the economic slowdown and zero-Covid threaten China's global ambitions", *South China Morning Post* (June 6, 2022), <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3180352/how-economic-slowdown-and-zero-covid-threaten-chinas-global>

Initial Public Offering of Jack Ma's Ant Group,<sup>20</sup> and the investigation into the ride-share company Didi Chuxing, with a significant profile in Latin America, and the August 2021 implementation of an associated data security law that strengthens access by the Chinese state to the information on users collected by companies such as Didi.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, the PRC government's assertion of increased control over the private sector, and anti-corruption campaign of the Xi Jinping administration has also cast a chilling effect on PRC ventures overseas, often associated with bribes, kickbacks, and other questionable transactions. In this changing and uncertain environment, the finalization of the selection of Xi Jinping for an unprecedented third term in power at the 2022 Chinese Communist Party Congress arguably became, for some PRC-based firms, a milestone for moving forward with projects in Latin America and elsewhere. Despite such dynamics, by mid-2022, there were signs that multiple major projects paralyzed by COVID-19 and other dynamics were beginning to move forward. Examples include the PRC-gifted national stadium in El Salvador,<sup>22</sup> the Demerara River Bridge between Guyana and Suriname,<sup>23</sup> the Amaila Falls hydroelectric project in Guyana, and the bridge over the Panama Canal,<sup>24</sup> among others.

---

20 Shalini Nagarajan, "China's Xi Jinping personally halted Ant's record-breaking \$37 billion IPO after boss Jack Ma snubbed government leaders, report says", *Business Insider* (November 14, 2020), <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/ant-group-ipo-personally-halted-china-xi-jinping-jack-wsj-2020-11-1029800224#:~:text=Chinese%20President%20Xi%20Jinping%20halted%20Ant%20Group%27s%20historic.criticized%20government%20leaders%2C%20The%20Wall%20Street%20Journal%20reported>

21 Xinmei Shen, "China issues tighter data security rules for ride-hailing firms amid Didi probe, but more clarity still needed", *South China Morning Post* (August 23, 2021), <https://www.scmp.com/tech/policy/article/3146051/china-issues-tighter-data-security-rules-ride-hailing-firms-amid-didi>

22 Luis Lozano, "Inicia la demolición de la Escuela Militar Gerardo Barrios para la construcción del nuevo Estadio Nacional", *La Prensa Gráfica* (June 8, 2022), <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Inicia-la-demolicion-de-la-Escuela-Militar-Gerardo-Barrios-para-la-construccion-del-nuevo-Estadio-Nacional-20220608-0062.html>

23 Santana Salmon, "Guyana signs largest infrastructure project with Chinese companies", *CNN Network* (May 26, 2022), <https://www.caribbeanationalweekly.com/uncategorized/guyana-signs-largest-infrastructure-project-with-chinese-companies/>

24 Ministerio de Obras Públicas, "Cuarto Puente sobre el Canal de Panamá", *Government of Panama* (2022), <http://www.mop.gob.pa/index.php/proyecto-1?view=page&id=42> (Accessed June 10, 2022).

## New Patterns in PRC Commercial Engagement

The pattern of PRC commercial engagement in Latin America and elsewhere has generally been oriented toward securing access to the commodities and foodstuffs needed by the Chinese people and economy, as well as access to markets for a range of goods and services. PRC-companies have particularly focused on infrastructure projects in the region as a part of, or enabler of these goals, including not only roads and bridges, rail links, and port complexes, but also electricity generation (particularly renewable sources such as hydroelectric, wind, solar, and nuclear), transmission and distribution, telecommunications and other digital infrastructure, eCommerce and financial infrastructure.<sup>25</sup> PRC companies and governments often work together in strategically prioritized sectors to dominate key technologies, including locking in advantages by dominating the standards associated with those technologies,<sup>26</sup> plus seeking to achieve vertical integration across supply chains, and horizontal integration across sectors, to secure as much of the value added as possible.

***PRC Extraction of Latin American Commodities.*** PRC-based firms have continued to play a key role in the demand for and extraction of Latin American commodities. In the Petroleum sector, this has included a significant role in the development of Brazil's Libra oilfield, a significant role by CNODC as a minority partner to Exxon-Mobil in developing Guyana's oil resources, and significant continuing, albeit low key, profile in Venezuela's oil sector. In traditional mining, the PRC continues to be the key purchaser of Chilean and Peruvian copper, as well as a significant operator of mines in Peru, Ecuador, Argentina and Brazil, among others.

---

25 R. Evan Ellis, *China Engages Latin America: Distorting Development and Democracy?* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2022), 85-130.

26 Arjun Kharpal, "China has a 15-year plan to shape the future of tech. But some call it hype", *CNBC* (June 22, 2020), <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/22/china-standards-2035-tech-plan-could-face-challenges-to-live-up-to-hype.html#:~:text=China%20Standards%202035%20is%20an%20ambitious%2015-year%20blueprint,give%20them%20a%20competitive%20advantage%20in%20future%20technologies>

Similarly, in strategic minerals, PRC-based companies are active in each of the countries in the region where lithium is being developed. This includes a 25 % stake by China's Tianqi in the SQM lithium operation in the north of Chile, presence by Ganfeng and other Chinese companies in multiple lithium projects in Argentina, and the conduct of lithium pilot projects in Bolivia. In Mexico, Ganfeng also acquired full control of the Bacanora lithium project in the Sonora desert.<sup>27</sup> PRC-based firms are also building some facilities in the region for transforming the extracted lithium into intermediate products. China's Gotion, for example, has announced plans to build a lithium-ion battery plant in Argentina.<sup>28</sup> In the domain of rare earth minerals, Chinese PRC-based have a 15 % interest in the CBMM consortium, extracting niobium and other rare earths in Brazil.<sup>29</sup>

In Agriculture, as noted previously, Chinese demand and the loss of Ukraine as a major agricultural producer have made China Oilseeds and Foodstuffs Corporation (COFCO) and PRC-based agrolistics firms such as Nidera and Noble increasingly important actors in the region. Argentina is currently working with the PRC to take forward an agreement that would establish 25 China-funded pork processing facilities in Argentina to expand exports to the PRC.<sup>30</sup> In May 2022, the PRC-based company Long Ping committed to establish a new "agricultural industrial park" in Parcaratu, Brazil.<sup>31</sup>

---

27 Tom Daly, "China's Ganfeng agrees takeover of Bacanora Lithium in \$264.5 mln deal", *Nasdaq* (May 6, 2021), <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/chinas-ganfeng-agrees-takeover-of-bacanora-lithium-in-%24264.5-mln-deal-2021-05-06>

28 Zhang Yushuo, "Gotion Jumps as Chinese Battery Maker Joins Argentina's JEMSE on Lithium Carbonate Refinery", *Yicai Global* (May 10, 2022), <https://www.yicai.com/news/china-gotion-gains-as-it-teams-with-argentina-jemse-to-build-lithium-carbonate-refinery>

29 Merco Press, "Chinese consortium acquires 15% of world's largest niobium producer in Brazil", *MercoPress South Atlantic News Agency* (September 6, 2011), <https://en.mercopress.com/2011/09/06/chinese-consortium-acquires-15-of-world-s-largest-niobium-producer-in-brazil>

30 Martin Dinatale, "Avanza un acuerdo con China para favorecer la producción y exportación de cerdos", *Cronista* (July 12, 2021), <https://www.cronista.com/economia-politica/argentina-y-china-cierran-acuerdo-instalar-granjas-cerdos-aumentar-exportacion-porcina/>

31 Xinhua, "Agreement to build China-Brazil agricultural industrial park signed", *China Internet Information Center* (May 16, 2022), [http://www.china.org.cn/china/Off\\_the\\_Wire/2022-05/16/content\\_78220940.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/Off_the_Wire/2022-05/16/content_78220940.htm)

***Access to Strategic Latin American Markets.*** PRC-based companies have successfully penetrated Latin American markets with a broad range of generally higher value-added goods and services.<sup>32</sup> Two key vehicles to further this penetration have been the pursuit of free trade agreements (FTAs), as well as memorandums of understanding with countries changing relations from Taiwan to the PRC. With respect to FTAs, the PRC has reached agreements with Chile, Peru, and Costa Rica, and unsuccessfully tried to negotiate FTAs with Colombia and Panama. In May 2022, the Panamanian government of Nito Cortizo indicated that it was re-launching efforts, abandoned at the end of the preceding administration, in reaching a FTA with the PRC.<sup>33</sup> The center-right Uruguayan government of Luis Lacalle Pou has also taken steps toward FTA negotiations with the PRC, despite impediments to doing so arising from its membership in the MERCOSUR trade bloc.<sup>34</sup>

With respect to MOUs, virtually every diplomatic change in the region from Taiwan to the PRC in recent years (Costa Rica, Panama, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Nicaragua), has been followed by the signing of non-transparent MOUs that have opened up local markets to work by Chinese companies on electricity and other infrastructure projects, as well as in other domains.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, with the COVID-19 pandemic, biotechnology has become a new focus for investment by PRC-based companies in the region. Such collaboration was noted by the PRC as an objective in the China-CELAC 2022-2024 plan.<sup>36</sup> Chinese companies such as Sinovac, Sinopharm and CanSino, leveraging the Latin American locations

---

32 Mark P. Sullivan, "China's Engagement with Latin America ...".

33 Patrick Gillespie and Stephanie Flanders, "Panama President Aims to Restart China Trade Talks Immediately", *Bloomberg* (May 19, 2022), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-19/panama-president-aims-to-restart-china-trade-talks-immediately>

34 Reuters, "Uruguay advances free trade talks with China, aims to be Mercosur 'gateway'", *Reuters News* (Uruguay: September 8, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/uruguay-advances-free-trade-talks-with-china-aims-be-mercosur-gateway-2021-09-08/>

35 For a detailed discusión, see R. Evan Ellis, *China Engages Latin America: ...*, 153-178.

36 Chinese Ambassador to Guyana, "CHINA - CELAC JOINT ACTION PLAN FOR COOPERATION IN KEY AREAS (2022-2024)", *Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana* (December 13, 2021), [http://gy.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/202112/t20211213\\_10469237.htm](http://gy.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/202112/t20211213_10469237.htm)

where they conducted phase three trials and produced vaccines during the pandemic period, are now setting up permanent research and production facilities in the region. Examples agreements to co-produce vaccines in Colombia,<sup>37</sup> as well as Chile, where a \$100 million Sinovac factory opened in May 2022.<sup>38</sup> Cuba has also signed an agreement with the PRC for production there of the co-developed “Pan-Corona” vaccine.<sup>39</sup>

With respect to infrastructure, although a number of high-profile projects by PRC-based companies such as the Nicaragua Canal and the Twin Oceans Railroad have not gone forward, many smaller ones have. PRC-based companies are making increasing use of public private partnership projects to win investments on terms in which they can effectively compete through putting some of their own funds into the deal. The North-South highway in Jamaica, work on Highway 5 in Chile, the Maya Train project in Mexico, improvement of the highway from Medellin, Colombia to the Gulf of Urabá, and the Bogota Metro are all examples of recent PRC successes in using PPP vehicles to advance their interest. PRC-based companies have often acquired stakes in companies with expertise that they require to advance their positions. For example, the acquisition by CCCC of a 30 % stake in the Portugal-based company Mota-Engil<sup>40</sup> arguably facilitated PRC knowledge of how to leverage PPPs and operate in Latin America.

Green energy, electric vehicles and associated technologies has been another key thrust of PRC companies in Latin American markets. In electricity generation, PRC-based companies have built an important number of

---

37 TET, “Producción de vacunas en Colombia, la apuesta del Gobierno y Sinovac”, *El Tiempo* (August 13, 2021), <https://www.eltiempo.com/salud/sinovac-produciria-vacunas-en-colombia-gracias-a-acuerdo-con-minsalud-610370>

38 Merco Press, “China’s Sinovac Biotech building vaccine plant in Chile investing US\$ 100 million”, *MercoPress South Atlantic News Agency* (May 16, 2022), <https://en.mercopress.com/2022/05/16/china-s-sinovac-biotech-building-vaccine-plant-in-chile-investing-us-100-million>

39 CD, “Cuba y China presentan primera patente de su vacuna Pan-Corona”, *Cuba Debate* (June 1, 2022), <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2022/06/01/cuba-y-china-presentan-primera-patente-de-su-vacuna-pan-corona/>

40 Patricia Vicente Rua, “UPDATE 2–Mota–Engil near deal to sell 30% stake to China’s CCCC”, *Reuters* (August 27, 2020), <https://www.reuters.com/article/mota-engil-cccc-stake-idUSL8N2FT2LP>

hydroelectric, wind, and solar facilities across the region, including six hydroelectric facilities in Ecuador, three in Bolivia, and two under construction in Argentina.<sup>41</sup> The largest photovoltaic energy generation facility in the region, Cauchari, in the north of Argentina, was built by PRC-based companies, as is the Açu complex, which when completed, will replace it as the largest.<sup>42</sup> Chinese companies have also largely cornered the market for photovoltaic panels in the region, including having set up a facility in Brazil to produce them locally.<sup>43</sup> A Chinese consortium is currently working on an \$8 billion project to build a new pressurized water nuclear reactor in the Atucha complex in Argentina.<sup>44</sup> In the electric vehicle market, PRC-based companies are the principal suppliers of electric busses in Chile, which currently has the largest fleet of such vehicles outside of the PRC.<sup>45</sup> Chinese electric carmakers have set up manufacturing facilities in the region, including a new EV production facility by BYD in Brazil.<sup>46</sup> In Mexico, BYD is the key supplier for a new fleet of EV taxis being introduced into the city.<sup>47</sup> In the province of Jujuy, Argentina, the Chinese company CRRC Tongshan is introducing an electric train powered by solar panels and lithium-ion batteries.<sup>48</sup>

---

41 Juan Manuel Haran, “Chinese Hydropower Project in Argentina Is Stuck in Limbo”, *The Diplomat* (December 23, 2021), <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/chinese-hydropower-project-in-argentina-is-stuck-in-limbo/>

42 Saur Energy, “Chinese Consortium to Spend and Financing 1.1 GW Solar Farm in Brazil”, *List Solar* (April 29, 2021), <https://list.solar/news/chinese-consortium/>

43 Livia Neves, “New PV system assembly factory in Brazil”, *PV Magazine* (July 14, 2021), <https://www.pv-magazine.com/2021/07/14/new-pv-system-assembly-factory-in-brazil/>

44 Reuters, “China inks \$8 bln nuclear power plant deal in Argentina”, *Reuters News* (February 2, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/china-inks-nuclear-power-plant-deal-with-argentina-2022-02-02/>

45 Fermín Koop, Manuela Andreoni, Andrés Bermúdez Liévano and Alejandra Cuéllar, “Chinese electric buses roll out across Latin America”, *China Dialogue* (August 10, 2020), <https://chinadialogue.net/en/transport/chinese-electric-buses-latin-america-roll-out/>

46 Luo Guoping and Manyun Zou, “China’s Top EV-Maker BYD Revs Up Brazil Expansion”, *Caixin Global* (May 30, 2022), <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2022-05-30/chinas-top-ev-maker-byd-revs-up-brazil-expansion-101892272.html>

47 Dong Yi Chen, “Mexico Orders 1,000 Electric Cars From BYD For Use As Electric Taxi Fleet”, *Car News China* (April 28, 2022), <https://carnewschina.com/2022/04/28/mexico-orders-1000-electric-cars-from-byd-for-use-as-electric-taxi-fleet/>

48 Xinhua, “Chinese train maker to produce new-energy light rail trains for Argentina’s Jujuy”, *China Internet Information Center* (May 7, 2022), [http://www.china.org.cn/business/2022-05/07/content\\_78205719.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/business/2022-05/07/content_78205719.htm)

Consistent with declarations of the China-CELAC 2022-2024 plan,<sup>49</sup> Chinese companies are also targeting and making significant advances in an array of digital technology markets in Latin America, including telecommunications, cloud computing, surveillance, ecommerce, and fintech. Huawei, which has been in the Latin American market since 1999 and whose equipment may comprise up to 60 % of the region's telecommunications infrastructure, is poised to play a major role in 5G and the internet of things as a provider to governments and commercial companies across the region.<sup>50</sup>

In cloud computing, Huawei is expanding significantly across the region, offering data centers in key markets including Mexico, Chile and Brazil,<sup>51</sup> and offering incentives for technology and other start-up companies in the region to put their intellectual property and core processes in Huawei clouds.<sup>52</sup> The Chinese eCommerce company Tencent also operates data centers in the region, with the large-scale computing provided by such centers critical for the enormous data requirements of its business to business (B2B) services.<sup>53</sup>

In security services, PRC-based companies such as Huawei and Hikvision have leveraged offerings developed in the PRC combining surveillance cameras, biometrics, data processing, and the integration of other types of data to offer “safe cities” and “smart cities” solutions throughout the

---

49 Chinese Ambassador to Guyana, “CHINA - CELAC JOINT ACTION PLAN ...”

50 R. Evan Ellis, “El Avance Digital de China en América Latina”, *Revista Seguridad y Poder Terrestre (Centro de Estudios Estratégicos del Ejército del Perú)*. July – september 2022), 15-39, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56221/spt.viii.5>, <https://revistas.cecep.mil.pe/index.php/seguridad-y-poder-terrestre/article/view/5/14>

51 Dan Swinhoe, “Huawei planning second Mexico data center, more across Latin America”, *Data Center Dynamics* (August 26, 2021), <https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/huawei-planning-second-mexico-data-center-more-across-latin-america/>

52 HC, “HUAWEI CLOUD Steps Up Investment in the Latin America with New Releases and Partner Programs”, *Huawei Cloud* (August 26, 2021), <https://www.huaweicloud.com/intl/en-us/news/20210826105400429.html>

53 RT Staff Reporters, “Chinese Tencent Cloud opens its first data center in Brazil for Latin America”, *The Rio Times* (November 26, 2021), <https://www.riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/brazil/chinese-tencent-cloud-opens-its-first-data-center-in-brazil-for-latin-america/?msclid=8c76bb72ac3711eca543f5fboaddb462>

region.<sup>54</sup> Such products are attractive in a region fighting against insecurity that has only been deepened by the economic effects of COVID-19 and the war in the Ukraine. PRC “safe cities” include ECU-911 in Ecuador, and BOL-110 in Bolivia. In Mexico, Hikvision recently acquired an interest in Syscom, the nation’s largest surveillance systems company.<sup>55</sup>

In eCommerce, in addition to the PRC-based B2B platform Alibaba, the Chinese ride-share company Didi Chuxing has captured an estimated 50 % of the market in the region, with particularly significant advances in Mexico and Brazil, giving it access to enormous volumes of data on millions of users, to include the potential ability to know not only their locations, but the sensitive personal, business and government meetings they may be having.<sup>56</sup> In the Fintech sector, in December 2021 NuBank, in which the Chinese firm Tencent holds an interest, became Brazil’s largest bank, giving the Chinese potentially significant access to user data.<sup>57</sup> Within eGaming, Tencent is expanding in Brazil,<sup>58</sup> giving it access to data about that nation’s youth.

## Pushback to Chinese Engagement with Latin America

While Latin American business and politicians generally welcome investments and loans from, and commodity purchases by PRC-based entities, their activity has sparked a number of conflicts with local communities, labor forces, and governments. At the project level, China Minmetals’ *Las Bambas* mine has repeatedly been forced to halt operations

---

54 R. Evan Ellis, “Chinese Surveillance Complex Advancing in Latin America”, *Newsmax* (April 12, 2019), <https://www.newsmax.com/evanellis/china-surveillance-latin-america-cameras/2019/04/12/id/911484/>

55 Robert Wren Gordon, “Hikvision Takes Control of Syscom’s Board, Mexico’s Largest Distributor”, *IPVM* (January 4, 2022), <https://ipvm.com/reports/hikvision-syscom-board>

56 R. Evan Ellis, “El Avance Digital de China en América Latina” ...

57 CLB, “Brazilian fintech backed by China’s Tencent Holdings on way to region’s largest listing”, *China-Lusophone Brief* (December 13, 2021), <https://www.clbrief.com/brazilian-fintech-backed-by-chinas-tencent-holdings-on-way-to-regions-largest-listing/>

58 CLB, “Tencent bets on Brazil e-gaming to compensate for restrictions in China”, *China-Lusophone Brief* (June 8, 2022), <https://www.clbrief.com/tencent-bets-on-brazil-e-gaming-to-circumvent-restrictions-in-china/>

over community activists protesting that the Chinese are not adequately compensating them for the impact of the mine on their land and the surrounding area.<sup>59</sup> In Burtica, Colombia, a mine bought in 2019 by the Chinese firm Zijin for \$1 billion from Continental Gold has run into similar problems.<sup>60</sup> In Peru, the \$3.1 billion project by a Chinese consortium to develop a new port at Chancay has also stimulated resistance from the local community, some of which claim that vibrations and other effects of the construction are damaging local housing.<sup>61</sup> In Argentina, protesters claim that two hydroelectric dams being developed by Chinese interests on the San Juan River, are disrupting biodiversity in a surrounding pristine glacial region.<sup>62</sup>

PRC-based firms and entities also regularly run into difficulties with Latin American governments. Those of Ecuador and Argentina have protested the activities of the (largely PRC-based) deepwater fishing fleet, entering the country's exclusive economic zones and/or maritime protected areas to conduct illegal fishing activities. In Mexico, the Chinese mining firm Ganfeng spent \$265 million to acquire control of the Bacanora lithium deposit in Mexico's Sonora desert,<sup>63</sup> before the leftist populist regime of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and his Morena party passed legislation to nationalize lithium mining in the country.<sup>64</sup>

---

59 Reuters, "Peru fails yet again to broker truce allowing Las Bambas mine restart", *Mining.com* (May 19, 2022), <https://www.mining.com/web/peru-fails-yet-again-to-broker-truce-allowing-las-bambas-mine-restart/>

60 Maria Paula Lizarazo, "Zijin's difficult days in Burticá", *Dialogo Chino* (May 23, 2022), <https://dialogochino.net/en/extractive-industries/54228-zijins-difficult-days-in-buritica/>

61 Leslie Moreno Custodio, "Chancay: El megapuerto peruano que sacude a un pueblo", *Dialogo Chino* (May 20, 2022), <https://dialogochino.net/es/infraestructura-es/43228-chancay-el-megapuerto-peruano-que-hace-temblar-a-un-pueblo/>

62 Maxwell Radwin, "China-funded dam could disrupt key Argentine glaciers and biodiversity", *Mongabay* (May 12, 2022), <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/05/china-funded-dam-could-disrupt-key-argentine-glaciers-and-biodiversity/>

63 Tom Daly, "China's Ganfeng agrees takeover of Bacanora Lithium in \$264.5 mln deal", *Nasdaq* (May 6, 2021), <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/chinas-ganfeng-agrees-takeover-of-bacanora-lithium-in-%24264.5-mln-deal-2021-05-06>

64 Cecilia Jamasnie, "Mexico nationalizes lithium mining", *Mining.com* (April 21, 2022), <https://www.mining.com/mexico-passes-mining-reform-nationalizing-lithium/>

## Other Chinese Strategic Activities in the Region

Beyond its commercial engagement, the PRC has been active in both the space sector, and security engagement in the region

***Chinese Space Engagement.*** In the China–CELAC 2022–2024 plan, the PRC has explicitly embraced working with and in Latin America in Space related sectors.<sup>65</sup> It has codeveloped and launched 5 satellites for Brazil under the China–Brazil Earth Research Satellite (CBERS) program, three satellites for Venezuela, one for Bolivia, a microsatellite for Ecuador, and launched a commercial satellite for Argentina. It has electronically outfitted and integrated substantial portions of the space tracking facilities in Venezuela and Bolivia and trained their space-oriented personnel. It shares a space observation facility in Chile and operates a deep-space radar in Neuquén, Argentina, to which the Argentine government has only limited access.<sup>66</sup> It has expressed interest engaging with the new Latin American space agency (ALCE) to be established and has offered to host Latin American personnel on a future PRC–built lunar base.<sup>67</sup> In the most recent meeting of the China–Brazil high-level coordinating committee (COSBAN), the deepening of PRC–Brazil Space cooperation was explicitly embraced.

With respect to security engagement, the PRC has both gifted and sold security equipment to Latin American militaries and police forces. It has also regularly brought Latin American and Caribbean personnel regularly to institutions in the PRC for training and professional military education, conducted numerous institutional visits with Latin American military counterparts, deployed peacekeepers there, conducted military exercises in the region, and sent its warships and hospital ship to the region.<sup>68</sup> To

---

65 Chinese Ambassador to Guyana, “CHINA – CELAC JOINT ACTION PLAN ...”

66 Cassandra Garrison, “China’s military-run space station in Argentina is a ‘black box’”, *Reuters* (January 31, 2019), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-space-argentina-china-insight-idUSKCN1PP012>

67 Chinese Ambassador to Guyana, “CHINA – CELAC JOINT ACTION PLAN ...”

68 R. Evan Ellis, “The Evolution of Chinese Security Engagement in Latin America”, in *China’s Interactions with Latin America and the Caribbean: Conquering the US’s Strategic Backyard?* (Germany: Techtum-Verlag, January 2021), 9–32.

date, Latin America's leftist populist regimes have been the most significant purchasers of PRC military equipment. Major end item purchases include K-8 fighter aircraft, air defense radars, and anti-riot vehicles acquired by Venezuela, air defense radars plus 709 military trucks acquired by Ecuador under leftist populist Rafael Correa, and military helicopters and armored vehicles acquired by Evo Morales' government in Bolivia.<sup>69</sup>

In addition, Peru has acquired Chinese military trucks, evaluated the purchase of Chinese main battle tanks, and purchased a PRC-made multiple rocket launch system. Trinidad and Tobago purchased the first offshore patrol vessel in the region. The PRC has also regularly provided gifts of equipment to military and police forces in the region. Examples include gifts of military construction equipment to the Colombian military, Uruguay, and the Guyana Defense Force, among others, as well as gifts of squad cars and motorcycles to police forces in the Dominican Republic, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>70</sup>

In 2022, PRC-based defense companies have made several significant advances in their arms sales to the region. These include budgeting for and serious evaluation by the Argentine government of the purchase of Chinese JF-17/FC-1 fighter aircraft,<sup>71</sup> which would be the most advanced Chinese weapon system sold to the region to date. In addition, the Uruguayan government has contracted for the purchase of two PRC-made offshore patrol vessels (OPVs) for \$200M.<sup>72</sup> While the PRC has not yet show an intention to establish formal military bases or alliance agreements in the region, its

---

69 R. Evan Ellis, *China Engages Latin America: ...*, 227-244.

70 R. Evan Ellis, "Chinese Security Engagement in Latin America", *Centro de Estudios Estratégicos del Ejército del Perú* (November 19, 2020), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinese-security-engagement-latin-america>

71 Juan José Roldan, "Una comitiva de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina visita China para evaluar al JF-17 Thunder", *Zona Militar* (May 9, 2022), <https://www.zona-militar.com/2022/05/09/una-comitiva-de-la-fuerza-aerea-argentina-visita-china-para-evaluar-al-jf-17-thunder/>

72 Javier Bonilla, "Tensa situación en Uruguay por la compra de OPV para la Armada, accedemos en exclusiva al dictamen que apuesta por la opción China", *Defensa* (May 6, 2022), <https://www.defensa.com/uruguay/tensa-situacion-uruguay-compra-opv-para-armada-accedemos-apuesta>

pursuit of such agreements in Djibouti, the Solomon Islands,<sup>73</sup> Kiribati, and in other parts of both the Pacific and Africa shows that the geographic sphere radiating out from the PRC in which it feels that it has sufficient capabilities and confidence to establish a military facility is expanding, and will only be a matter of years before it reaches Latin America.

In addition, the PRC is actively engaging Latin American states in dialogues about security cooperation, albeit in a superficially non-threatening way. In an attempt to redirect criticism over PRC support for Russia's invasion of the Ukraine,<sup>74</sup> at the Boao forum in April 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a new "global security initiative," with PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi subsequently engaging his Latin American colleagues, from Uruguay to Nicaragua, about signing on to the concept.<sup>75</sup> In support of their economic and other objectives, the PRC does not only interact bilaterally with individual Latin American countries, their local governments and communities, but also engages with Latin American and Caribbean multilateral institutions. Such engagements include active participation with the Interamerican Development Bank (IADB) since joining its board of directors in February 2009, such as PRC-based policy banks working with the IADB to offer "co-financing funds" for the benefit of Chinese companies interested in projects in the region. The PRC has also engaged with the region through the BRICS forum, its New Development Bank, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in which six Latin American states are members, as well as the Organization of American States (OAS), where the PRC has been an active observer since 2004.

---

73 IPD, "Pacific nations express 'great concern' over PRC-Solomon Islands deal", *Indo-Pacific Defense Forum* (April 7, 2022), <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2022/04/pacific-nations-express-great-concern-over-prc-solomon-islands-deal/>

74 President of Russia, "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development", *Kremlin Russia* (February 4, 2022), <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>

75 Jack Lau, "China drums up support for global security push in Latin America as US looks to Asia", *South China Morning Post* (May 22, 2022), <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3178717/china-drums-support-global-security-push-latin-america-us>

China's instrument of choice for multilateral engagement, however, has been the China-CELAC forum, a relatively thinly institutionalized organization which the PRC uses to convene the region, including a head-of-state level meeting every three years, plus more regular meetings of thematically oriented sub-forums. The PRC use of CELAC resembles its engagement with the counterpart forum, FOCAC, in Africa, and the 16+1 forum in Europe. Each allows the PRC to present its agenda to the region, without the region having corresponding opportunity to coordinate its position beforehand regarding its position toward the PRC.

***Taiwan Diplomacy.*** Since the breakdown of the diplomatic truce between the PRC and Republic of China (ROC, or “Taiwan,”) with the election of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government of Tsai Ing-wen in January 2008, the PRC has focused significant effort on convincing states in the region diplomatically recognizing the ROC to change their position. As a result, Panama switched relations to the PRC in 2017, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador switched to the PRC in 2018, and Nicaragua switched in 2021. In each case, as noted previously, the flip was accompanied by the signing of multiple nontransparent MOUs and engagement with politically connected local elites, in each case which facilitated a significant jump of PRC economic and other influence in those countries. Even Nicaragua, whose change was not followed by a package of rewards from the PRC as significant as that received by others, has begun to receive commitments from the PRC regarding more support.<sup>76</sup>

Currently, eight of the 14 countries in the world that continue to recognize Taiwan are found in the region, concentrated principally in Central America and the Caribbean (with Paraguay being the sole holdout in South America). The President of Honduras, Xiomara Castro, prior to her election, pledged to recognize the PRC, although she has subsequently said that doing so is

---

76 Xinhua, “Chinese, Nicaraguan FMs hold phone conversation, vowing to boost cooperation”, *China Internet Information Center* (Beijing: May 21, 2022), [http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off\\_the\\_Wire/2022-05/21/content\\_78220880.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2022-05/21/content_78220880.htm)

“no longer a priority.”<sup>77</sup> In Haiti, the key figures interested in replacing acting President Ariel Henry, if and when presidential elections finally occur, are interested in doing business with the PRC. In the Caribbean, the incumbent government of St. Lucia previously recognized the PRC and could do so again if others in the region begin to shift. Even Paraguay, whose current President Mario Abdo Benitez has shown a solid commitment to Taiwan despite ongoing PRC lobbying,<sup>78</sup> could switch to the PRC following that country’s Presidential elections in 2023.

## Conclusions

Although PRC engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean is primarily economic in character, it is nonetheless strategic in its impact on the region. Though the effects of COVID-19 and Russia’s Ukraine invasion combined with factors internal to the PRC to limit some PRC engagement with the region, those restraining factors are dissipating, while the sources of leverage for the PRC in the region and opportunities to advance have multiplied. As shown in this article, PRC engagement with the region is evolving in important ways, with increasing Chinese attention to strategic minerals, green energy, and both physical and digital infrastructure. The PRC is also giving increasing attention to space engagement, is proceeding forward with its sales, equipment donations, institutional visits, and other forms of engagement with both the Armed Forces and police of the region. It is also continuing to place emphasis on its struggle with Taiwan in the region, with opportunities for changes in recognition emerging in Honduras, Haiti, and elsewhere in Central America and the Caribbean. As left-oriented governments of both authoritarian and democratic orientation proliferate across the region, creating both the need for Chinese resources, and the disposition to work with it, PRC opportunities to expand its influence in Latin America will only increase.

---

<sup>77</sup> AP, “Official: Honduras will maintain its relations with Taiwan”, *Associated Press News* (Tegucigalpa, Honduras: January 31, 2022), <https://apnews.com/article/china-honduras-caribbean-taiwan-central-america-9e036d20cbad2do27293e5cd34d9913c>

<sup>78</sup> Nick Aspinwall, “Paraguay Says Chinese Brokers Offered Vaccines for Diplomatic Recognition”, *The Diplomat* (March 27, 2021), <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/paraguay-says-chinese-brokers-offered-vaccines-for-diplomatic-recognition/>

**About the author:**

**Robert Evan Ellis** – *Strategic Studies Institute* – *U.S. Army War College*

*Dr. Evan Ellis is a Research Professor of Latin American Studies at the United States Army War College Institute for Strategic Studies, with a focus on the region's relations with China and other non-Western actors, as well as transnational organized crime and populism in the region. Dr. Ellis has published more than 300 works, including the following books: China in Latin America: The What and Wherefores (2009), The Strategic Dimension of Chinese Engagement with Latin America (2013), China on the Ground in Latin America (2014), and Transnational Organized Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean (2018). He recently published his fifth book, China Engages Latin America: Distorting Development and Democracy?*

# **RUSSIA IN LATIN AMERICA: VARIABLE GEOMETRY OF A SECONDARY ACTOR WITH PROTAGONIST ASPIRATIONS**

*Carlos Malamud Rikles and Rogelio Núñez Castellano*

## **Summary**

*Russia's role in Latin America is framed in the changing global geopolitical context. Its renewed role in the region since 2008, reinforced following the invasion of Ukraine, is linked to that conquered by other emerging powers. Latin America perceives Russia as an option to diversify its international and economic-commercial relations, and break its historical dependence on the United States, as well as the current one with China. Moscow, however, has contributed to the fragmentation, polarization, reprimand, and subordinate position of the region. In the medium term, Russia could see its regional room for action reduced due to the growing Chinese potential and the authoritarian drift of Vladimir Putin's regime nullifying Moscow as a possible ally for most Latin American countries.*

**Keywords:** *Russia, Latin America, Putin.*

## **Introduction**

The invasion of Ukraine has deepened and accelerated an underlying trend for more than a decade: under Putin, the Russian Federation has returned

to Latin America.<sup>1</sup> A renewed presence and parallel to other processes that favors the return of the Kremlin to the “backyard” of the United States. This coincides, as Mira Milosevic points out, with the withdrawal of Washington and the European Union and the rise of China and other emerging powers in the region.<sup>2</sup>

Russia, without a comprehensive policy or a global view of Latin America, unlike China, has increased its presence in the last ten or fifteen years. For many Latin American nations, it is an international actor, functional to their interests, which allows them to diversify their international relations and export markets. Historically, these have focused on mono export. During the colonial period, the relationship with Spain prevailed, later, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the United Kingdom, after the Second World War with the United States, and now emerges, with exceptions such as Mexico, an increasingly intense relationship with China.<sup>3</sup> In this context, Russia rose, until the invasion of Ukraine, as a possible partner capable of expanding international ties.

The international presence of Latin America has been trailing behind the great powers. This was accentuated during the Cold War. The confrontation between the superpowers had in Latin America (Guatemala in 1954, Cuba since 1959, South America in the 1960s, and Central America in the 1980s) a

---

1 Carlos Malamud and Rogelio Núñez, “América Latina y la invasión de Ucrania: su incidencia en la economía, la geopolítica y la política interna”, *Elcano Royal Institute* (March 30, 2022), <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/americ-latina-y-la-invasion-de-ucrania-su-incidencia-en-la-economia-la-geopolitica-y-la-politica-interna/>. Centro de Estudios Estratégicos del Ejército del Perú (Lima: February 1, 2022), [https://cecep.mil.pe/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/El-reciente-regreso-de-Rusia-a-Am%C3%A9rica-Latina\\_para-PDF\\_010750feb.pdf](https://cecep.mil.pe/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/El-reciente-regreso-de-Rusia-a-Am%C3%A9rica-Latina_para-PDF_010750feb.pdf). José Antonio Sanahuja, Pablo Stefanoni, and Francisco J. Verdes-Montenegro, “América Latina frente al 24-F ucraniano: Entre la tradición diplomática y las tensiones políticas”, in *Working Document 62/2022 (2nd epoch)*, (Spain: Fundación Carolina, 2022), [https://www.fundacioncarolina.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/DT\\_FC\\_62.pdf](https://www.fundacioncarolina.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/DT_FC_62.pdf).

2 Mira Milosevic-Juaristi, “Rusia en América Latina: repercusiones para España”, in *Working Document 02/2019*, (Spain: Elcano Royal Institute, March 28, 2019), <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documento-de-trabajo/rusia-en-america-latina-repercusiones-para-espana/>.

3 On the economic development of the region see: José Antonio Ocampo, “La historia y los retos del desarrollo latinoamericano”, *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean*, (Santiago de Chile: 2012), <https://repositorio.cepal.org/handle/11362/3090>.

prominent role in the clash between capitalism and communism.<sup>4</sup> However, since the 1990s, especially after the crisis of 2008 and repeated displays of US disinterest, various extra-regional powers have landed, in some cases to challenge US hegemony. This process was facilitated by the anti-imperialist and post-colonial policies of ALBA and its allies. The consolidation of this multipolar world, especially after the crisis of 2008, had multiple consequences in Latin America. Economically, China consolidated itself as a relevant trading partner. Geopolitically, certain emerging actors gained influence, economic power, and prestige at the expense of traditional powers: the United States and the European Union (including Spain), allowing the emergence of new powers (China) or the reappearance of others (Russia).<sup>5</sup>

Since the first decade of the twenty-first century, and more particularly in recent years, China, India, Russia, Iran, and, to a lesser degree, Turkey strengthened their presence. Almost all question US hegemony and bet on a multipolar world, although only China has had a Latin American strategy since the time of Hu Jintao when the first *White Paper* on regional policy was prepared. Xi Jinping has quantitatively and qualitatively boosted Latin America's projection: China has become the region's second-largest trading partner and the first in most countries.<sup>6</sup>

---

4 Regarding the impact of the Cold War in the region, see: (1) L. Bethell and I. Roxborough, "The Impact of the Cold War in Latin America" in M. P. Leffler and D. S. Painter, *Origins of the Cold War. An International History* (Nueva York & Londres: 2005), 299–316. (2) G. Joseph, "Border Crossings and the Remaking of Latin American Cold War Studies", *The Historical Journal* (Cambridge University Press: 2009). (3) Vanni Pettinà, *La Guerra Fría en América Latina* (México: El Colegio de México, 2018).

5 Esteban Actis and Bernabé Malacalza, "Las políticas exteriores de América Latina en tiempos de autonomía líquida", *NUSO*. N.º. 291 (January – February 2021), <https://nuso.org/articulo/las-politicas-exteriores-de-america-latina-en-tiempos-de-autonomia-liquida/>. Carlos Fortín, Jorge Heine and Carlos Ominami, "Latinoamérica: no alineamiento y la segunda Guerra Fría". *Foreign Affairs Latin America*, Vol. 20. N.º. 3 (July – September 2020), 107–115, [https://www.bu.edu/pardeeschool/files/2020/07/EAL20-3\\_23\\_Heine.pdf](https://www.bu.edu/pardeeschool/files/2020/07/EAL20-3_23_Heine.pdf).

6 On the presence of extra-regional actors in Latin America see: (1) Carlos Malamud, "Los actores extrarregionales en América Latina (I): China", *Elcano Royal Institute, Working Document N.º. 50* (November 13, 2007), <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documento-de-trabajo/los-actores-extrarregionales-en-america-latina-i-china-dt/>, (2) Carlos Malamud, "Los actores extrarregionales en América Latina (II): Irán", *Elcano Royal Institute, Working Document N.º. 124* (November 26, 2007), <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/los-actores-extrarregionales-en-america-latina-ii-iran-ari/>.

The following pages analyze the characteristics of the Russian presence in Latin America, distinguishing the links established according to the Kremlin's strategy and the positioning of each Latin American country. This has led to regional deficits such as fragmentation, polarization, reprimanding, and subordinate positions in international geopolitics.

This presence is more geopolitical and political than economic-commercial. The share of total world trade (imports and exports) is small: the Russian weight in Latin American trade does not reach 1 %. However, from a geopolitical point of view, the link is functional for both. For Putin, Latin America is a window of opportunity to appear as a global power and weaken Washington. For Latin Americans, the relationship with Moscow gives them greater autonomy vis-à-vis the United States and diversifies their export markets.

### **Consequences of the Russian Presence in Latin America**

The influence and presence of Russia in Latin America, after the eclipse after 1989, has been experiencing a resurgence for two decades, supported by economic-commercial exchange (sale of arms and military equipment, trade, and agreements to fight drug trafficking) and propaganda to promote Russia's role as a power, legitimize its international strategy, and gain support in the region.<sup>7</sup>

Russia's link with Latin America is not uniform and varies from country to country. It is of variable geometry, structured through strategic relationships with several nations, basically Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba. They are usually geopolitical ties, in some cases commercial, but relevant. Russia is, in fact, a secondary regional actor, although in some countries it assumes a leading role and in others, it does not go beyond a supporting actor.

---

7 Armando Chaguaceda and Adriana Boersner Herrera, "Rusia en Latinoamérica: la confluencia iliberal", *London School of Economics* (18 August 2022), <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2022/08/18/rusia-en-latinoamerica-la-confluencia-iliberal/>. R. Evan Ellis, *The New Russian Engagement with Latin America: Strategic position, Commerce and Dreams of the Past*, (US Army War College: September 23, 2015). R. Evan Ellis, "El reciente regreso de Rusia a América Latina".

Russian geopolitical interest focuses on three main areas. First, the Kremlin seeks to diversify its foreign relations to show that it is not isolated internationally following economic sanctions by the European Union and the United States over the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine. It also seeks to establish and protect markets for its products, ensuring access to global technology and information flows and maintaining a presence in key institutions for its economic transactions. Secondly, it aims to create a multipolar “post-Western” order by counterbalancing American power.<sup>89</sup> Moscow uses Latin America to counter American influence in other areas. It’s one more piece of Putin’s global strategy. As a revisionist power, Russia questions the existence of a US-led unipolar world with European support. Together with NATO, they are the main obstacles to rebuilding Russian influence in its *hinterland* (Georgia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan). Thirdly, it enables it to establish itself as a great power, with global interests and presence. Since coming to power (1999), and especially since the last decade, Putin seeks to return Russia to its past role, recovering its hegemony in the former Soviet republics and making itself present in other strategic areas such as Latin America. This strategy, without the ideological constraints of yesteryear, is more pragmatic for diversifying foreign relations. It is anchored in the “Primakov Doctrine” (Prime Minister and Foreign Minister between 1996 and 1999). The ideas of Primakov, very critical of Boris Yeltsin’s purpose of “abandoning” the regions that Russia had influenced during the Cold War, including Latin America, underlie Putin’s “assertive strategy” in Syria, in the rapprochement with China, and support for Maduro and Ortega.<sup>10</sup>

---

8 Silvia Marina Rivas de Hernández, “Os intereses da Federación Rusa en América Latina como espazo estratéxico dentro dun mundo multipolar”, *Gladius et Scientia. CESEG Safety Review* No. 2/2020, (December 31, 2020), <https://revistas.usc.gal/index.php/gladius/article/view/7276/11534>

9 María Luisa Pastor Gómez, “¿Rusia realmente ha retornado a América Latina?”, In analysis document No. 09/2019 (Madrid: Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, March 13, 2019), [https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2019/DIEEEA09\\_LUIPAS-RusiaAmerica.pdf](https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2019/DIEEEA09_LUIPAS-RusiaAmerica.pdf)

10 Mira Milosevic-Juaristi, “Mapa de la presencia e influencia de Rusia en el mundo desde el año 2000”, in *Working Document 35/2020*, (Spain: Real Instituto Elcano, November 20, 2020), <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documento-de-trabajo/mapa-de-la-presencia-e-influencia-de-rusia-en-el-mundo-desde-el-ano-2000/>. Julia Gurganus, “Russia: playing a geopolitical game in Latin America”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (2018), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/03/russia-playing-geopolitical-game-in-latin-América-pub-76228>

The Russian presence in Latin America deepens three major deficits that weigh down the geopolitical role of the region: reprimarization of its economies, fragmentation of the region, and irrelevance as an international player.

***The Deepening of Reprimarization.*** Russia's first impact as Latin America's trade and economic partner is to deepen the reprimarization of Latin American economies. This process began with the economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s and continued during the commodity super cycle (2003–2013). The economic link that Russia, like the United States and China, has established with Latin American countries helps consolidate the trend that places the region as a mere exporter of raw materials.

Trade relations with Russia are concentrated in the largest economies: its average weight as a trading partner of Latin America is 5 %, although with Brazil and Mexico it exceeds 10 %. Most imports are raw materials; almost 100 % food (meat, fruit, vegetables, and milk). Exports are also poorly diversified (arms and military equipment, fertilizers, steel or oil, and wheat with Mexico). As Latin America's trading partner, Russia has a clear minority share, although it has grown by almost 50 % since the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

These trade and investment figures are far from those of the United States and the European Union, and even China.<sup>11</sup> The region, on average, exports less than 0.5 % of its sales to Russia, although Ecuador sells 21 % of its bananas. Regarding imports, Latin America only receives 0.7 % of

---

11 According to UNCTAD, this country increased its trade from almost 18,000 million dollars in 2002 to 318,000 million dollars in 2020, with a volume of loans that rose between 2005 and 2020 to more than 137,000 million and investments that reached 140,000 million between 2005 and 2021. Extracted from: UNCTAD, "Informe sobre las inversiones en el mundo 2021. Invertir en la recuperación sostenible", *United Nations Conference on Trade and Development* (Ginebra: 2021); [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/wir2021\\_overview\\_es.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/wir2021_overview_es.pdf):: Additionally, see: Néstor Santana Suárez, "¿Reprimarización en América Latina?: Efectos de la demanda china sobre el patrón exportador latinoamericano y las estructuras económicas internas (1995–2016)", *Papeles de Europa* (Ediciones Complutense: 2019), <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/PADE/article/view/63636/4564456549444>

the world's total from Russia,<sup>12</sup> although 88 % of mineral fertilizers are of Russian origin.

***The Accentuation of Fragmentation.*** Russia not only contributes to Latin American reprimarization but is also another element in the growing regional fragmentation and polarization, placing the subcontinent in a subordinate position on the international chessboard. The region has been affected by the war in Ukraine, albeit with a secondary role in the global context, due, first of all, to the crisis of integration. This has limited its presence on the extra-regional stage and prevented it from speaking with one voice in multilateral forums. Most countries, with exceptions (Brazil, Chile, and Mexico), lack a solid and coherent foreign policy. In general, this focuses on the regional relationship and, especially, on the link with its neighbors.

The relationship with Russia, an authoritarian and expansionist international actor, has accentuated regional fragmentation. That division has been evident in the region's vote in international forums following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Latin American countries have once again not spoken with one voice and have even positioned themselves in not only different but antagonistic fields.

Fragmentation was evident in several scenarios, such as the UN General Assembly on March 2, 2022. There, a resolution condemning the invasion of Russia was voted by a majority and its immediate withdrawal was requested. Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and El Salvador abstained. Venezuela, critical of the resolution, could not vote because it was not up to date with its contributions. The result was repeated on March 24, when the humanitarian consequences of Russian aggression were discussed. The Latin American vote was more divided on April 7, when Russia was suspended from the UN Human Rights Council for serious human rights violations in Ukraine. The majority, eleven, voted in favor,

---

<sup>12</sup> Alicia Bárcena, "Efectos económicos y financieros en América Latina y el Caribe del conflicto entre la Federación de Rusia y Ucrania", *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Santiago de Chile: 2022)*, <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/47831-efectos-economicos-financieros-america-latina-caribe-conflicto-la-federacion>

three against (Bolivia, Cuba, and Nicaragua) and Brazil, El Salvador and Mexico abstained.<sup>13</sup>

The fragmentation around Russia experienced another chapter in the OAS when a resolution was adopted calling on the Russian Federation to immediately withdraw all its military forces; 28 of the 34 members voted in favor, none against, and 5 abstained (Brazil, Bolivia, El Salvador, Honduras, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines). Nicaragua was absent.

***International Irrelevance.*** Being a fragmented region leads to global geopolitical irrelevance or occupying a subordinate and peripheral position. Fragmentation eliminates the region as a possible strategic ally, beyond its role as a supplier of natural resources. The traditional secondary role of Latin America in major international issues has been seen again in the Ukrainian crisis.

During the Summit of the Americas, held in Los Angeles amid the crisis (at the beginning of June), the United States did not present a project of economic modernization of hemispheric scale to incorporate Latin America into the technological revolution (its interest was reduced to the high migratory pressure), nor did it try to build a continental alliance in the face of Russian aggression. Behind this attitude is Washington's distrust of a region in which volatility and lack of international coordination predominate,<sup>14</sup> although the concern of the Biden Administration to reformulate its policy of alliances and its growing interest in Latin America were evident.

## **Russian Targets in Latin America**

As this crisis has shown, the pulse of the United States against Russia in vital areas for its security, such as Ukraine, is answered in Latin America

---

13 Detlef Nolte, "La guerra en Ucrania impacta las relaciones entre América Latina y la UE", *Latín America21* (April 14, 2022), <https://latinoamerica21.com/es/la-guerra-en-ucrania-impacta-las-relaciones-entre-america-latina-y-la-ue/>.

14 Carlos Malamud and Rogelio Núñez, "La Cumbre de las Américas y América Latina en el nuevo escenario geopolítico", *Elcano Royal Institute* (June 3, 2022), <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/la-cumbre-de-las-americas-y-america-latina-en-el-nuevo-escenario-geopolitico/>.

with force or even threats, despite its secondary role. Moscow is trying to take advantage of a region that, in turn, seeks access to markets, financing –especially in countries with difficulties in accessing traditional financial mechanisms (Argentina, Venezuela)- and technology, increasing cooperation in civilian uses of nuclear energy (Brazil and Argentina) and biotechnology (Cuba). However, Latin America is heterogeneous, does not speak with one voice, and maintains differentiated ties with Russia, whose strategy moves at different levels.

Strategic Alliances. Some Latin American nations see the relationship with Russia as a geopolitical and economic lifeline, while Moscow sees them only as a way to disrupt the U.S. rearguard. As Evan Ellis notes, the Russian moves are “limited in scope and appear designed to intimidate the United States and compensate for its international political and economic isolation following the invasion of Ukraine.”<sup>15</sup> For certain governments, the link with Russia allows them to leave the US area of influence, break isolation, circumvent international sanctions, and acquire weapons.

The consequence is mutual solidarity that emerges during crises, such as in 2022 when Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua did not join the massive rejection of the invasion, and also publicly supported Putin and international organizations, who have been supporting Castroism, Chavismo, and Ortega for more than a decade, allowing them to overcome international isolation and consolidate their authoritarian systems.

In Venezuela, Russia maintained a privileged relationship with Chávez and today is a pillar of Maduro’s future. At its weakest stage (2013–2020), Russia deployed military equipment and troops, and provided technical assistance for S–300 air defense systems. There are at least 100 instructors, military

---

15 R. Evan Ellis, “El reciente regreso de Rusia a América Latina”

technicians, and mercenaries of the Wagner Group in Venezuela.<sup>16</sup> In those years, sales of Russian military equipment amounted to \$11.4 billion. In the past decade, Russia was the main supplier of weapons to the region, especially to Venezuela, contributing 73 % of the total. In addition, Russian interest is focused on energy and raw materials. Taking advantage of Venezuela's isolation, Russia advanced in the control of its hydrocarbons. Rosneft resold about 225,000 barrels a day, nearly 13 percent of exports. The bilateral relationship with Venezuela was similar to that of the USSR with Cuba during the Cold War: to be the main stage to challenge “the hegemony of the United States” in its neighborhood. The biggest signs of support for Russia after the invasion came from Caracas. According to Maduro: “From Venezuela we denounce it, the West wants to dismember Russia, destroy it and end the hope of a multipolar world where we can all live.”

Nicaragua, although ranked 30th in Russia's international trade, has a privileged relationship. Ortega's dictatorial drift cannot be explained without Putin's support and the progressive rapprochement with China. In 2021, Ortega broke a historical tradition (maintained by conservatives, liberals, and Sandinistas) by recognizing Beijing and breaking with Taiwan. In 2022, it authorized Russian troops, planes, and ships to operate in its country. As in Venezuela, Russia also deployed nuclear-capable Tu-160 Backfire bombers and other military aircraft, violating Colombian airspace several times.

---

16 On the Russian presence in the region see: (1) Fernando Romero Wimer, “La alianza Rusia-Venezuela durante el siglo XXI: consideraciones en torno a la cuestión militar”, in *Notebooks of Mars Year 12/Nº. 21/2021* (Buenos Aires: University of Buenos Aires, July – December 2021), <https://publicaciones.sociales.uba.ar/index.php/cuadernosdemarte/article/view/7116/5963> (2) Carmen Scocozza, “El retorno del ‘Oso’ a América Latina. La política rusa en Venezuela”, in *Latin American Culture, Vol. 30.Nº. 2/2019* (Colombia: Universidad Católica, 2019), 58–73, <https://editorial.ucatolica.edu.co/index.php/RevClat/article/view/3444> (3) Ana Palacio, “What Venezuela tells Europe about Russia”, *Project Syndicate* (February 12, 2019), <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/venezuela-crisis-russia-maduro-support-flagging-by-ana-palacio-2019-02> (4) Rafat Ghotme, “La presencia de Rusia en el Caribe: hacia un nuevo equilibrio del poder regional”, in *Political Reflection, vol. 17, Nº 33/2015*, (Colombia: Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga, January – June 2015), 78–92, <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12749/10871> (5) Angel Saldomando, “Las nuevas relaciones de América Latina con China y Rusia: del Big Brother al Hada Madrina”, *IEEPP* (Managua: February 2015), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/34563160>

Russia has been a solid supporter of Ortega in the last four years. In 2018, following the repression against students in Managua, the Kremlin urged the United States at the UN to “abandon attempts inspired by the colonialist tradition to influence the situation in Nicaragua.” In 2021 and 2022, Russia backed Ortega at the Human Rights Council and the UN Security Council. In 2021, Russia was one of the few countries that validated the re-election of Ortega, who, in 2008, after the Second War with Georgia, was among the first to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In the Ukraine crisis, Venezuela and Nicaragua have repeatedly shown support for Russia.

Russia also regained a smooth relationship with Cuba, inherited from the Cold War. During the Ukrainian crisis, Putin and Díaz-Canel pledged to deepen “strategic cooperation” and strengthen bilateral relations. They agreed to intensify their contacts to expand “cooperation in trade, economy, and investment.” The Russian strategy reinforces its policy, embodied in 2014 with the cancellation of 90 % of Cuba’s debt since Soviet times (31,500 million dollars)<sup>17</sup> and the possible reopening of the Lourdes station. Moscow has financed much of Cuba’s military modernization, its railway system, and the energy sector. In 2017, Rosneft began shipping oil to compensate for Venezuela’s lower availability. However, trade ties are modest: Cuba ranks 26th in Russian trade. However, beyond this support, electricity supply problems continue due to the obsolescence of the generating plants.

These alliances demonstrate that cooperation in security and defense (arms sales, military diplomacy, and non-traditional security) is key to the return to Latin America. The three main allies (Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba) remain so at the current juncture and unconditionally support Putin, as when he invaded South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008 and annexed Crimea in 2014. Russia again showed its intentions when, after the invasion of Ukraine, Moscow hinted that among its plans could be to deploy military forces in Latin America. In Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. It was a way to set limits for Washington, a message about the need for mutual respect and

---

<sup>17</sup> BBC, “Rusia condona 90% de la deuda de Cuba con la Unión Soviética,” *British Broadcasting Corporation News* (July 5, 2014), [https://www.bbc.com/mundo/ultimas\\_noticias/2014/07/140704\\_ultnot\\_cuba\\_rusia\\_perdona\\_deuda\\_jgc](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/ultimas_noticias/2014/07/140704_ultnot_cuba_rusia_perdona_deuda_jgc)

non-interference in their areas of influence. If the United States insists on advancing in the former Soviet republics, Russia will increase its presence in the “American backyard.” The Russian government, in full tension with the United States and the European Union, announced in January 2022 that it would strengthen strategic cooperation with these countries in “all areas.”

The rivalry between the United States and Russia, in their respective areas of influence, assumes a common dynamic: both deploy the strategy of “resilience support.” Since the end of the Cold War, Washington articulated its relationship with the countries of the post-Soviet space supporting their sovereignty and independence from Russia. For its part, Moscow has tried to preserve and increase its influence among the historical allies of the USSR (Cuba and Nicaragua), becoming a fundamental pillar for Maduro and Ortega.

***Conjunctural Alliances.*** In the last five years, Putin has privileged bilateral relations to maintain a strategic link with governments opposed to the United States (Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Kirchnerist Argentina) and those capable of countering the hegemony of Washington (Brazil and Mexico). It also has other links, trying to be a geopolitical ally, as in the G-20 with Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, and in the BRICS with Brazil (Argentina has applied to join). He agrees with them in their multilateralist vision.

Russia and most Latin American countries have a limited conception of national sovereignty, more similar to each other than to the more interventionist positions of traditional powers. Moscow, unlike Washington and in agreement with Beijing, does not aspire to promote internal changes in the countries of the region or to demand guarantees of respect for human rights.<sup>18</sup>

---

18 Regarding the new world geopolitical map and the role of Russia, see: (1) Mira Milosevic-Juaristi, “Oso y dragón: el vínculo estratégico entre Rusia y China en el orden internacional post unipolar,” *Elcano Royal Institute* (January 4, 2019), <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/oso-y-dragon-el-vinculo-estrategico-entre-rusia-y-china-en-el-orden-internacional-post-unipolar/> (2) Paul Stronski and Richard Sokolsky, “The return of global Russia: an analytical framework”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (December 14, 2017), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/12/14/return-of-global-russia-analytical-framework-pub-75003> (3) Julia Gurganus, “Russia: Playing to Geopolitics Game in Latin America”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (May 3, 2018), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/03/russia-playing-geopolitical-game-in-latin-america-pub-76228>.

The position of the three Latin American members of the G-20 is especially noteworthy after the attempt of the United States to isolate Russia internationally. President Bolsonaro has reiterated Brazil's "neutrality" between Russia and Ukraine: "We will not take sides. We want peace, but we don't want consequences for us." Bolsonaro highlighted his dependence on Russian fertilizers. The case of Mexico is similar. López Obrador was cautious, calling for a peaceful solution and supporting humanitarian aid efforts. Argentina also maintained a "mixed" stance, between declarations of neutrality and condemnation of the invasion. Despite this, a group of four Republican senators asked Biden not to support loans for Argentina, because of its proximity to the Russian or Iranian dictatorships.

Russia is also present in other countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia. In a full escalation of tension with the United States and NATO, Argentine President Alberto Fernández visited Moscow in January 2022, and in mid-February, Bolsonaro did so. The link with Argentina, resumed in 2010, ranges from geopolitics to economics, given the interest of Gazprom and other companies in Vaca Muerta gas. Fernández's visit followed the debt workout agreement with the IMF, in which the United States played an important role. However, Fernández offered Russia to become his "gateway" in Latin America and saw Putin as a counterweight to the United States: "I am determined that Argentina has to stop having that great dependence it has on the Fund and the United States. It has to make its way elsewhere and there Russia has a very important place."

Brazil is Russia's main economic and geopolitical partner in the Americas. In the commercial sphere, it was during the governments of the PT (2003-2016) and with Bolsonaro. Putin's pragmatism is on ideological criteria. Since 2010, it is the main economic partner in Latin America, with 33 % of the regional total. During Lula's presidency, Brazil and Russia formed with India, China, and South Africa the BRICS, which have already held 12 summits, the last two in Brazil (2019) and Russia (2020). With Bolsonaro, the relationship has not declined. In addition to international interests, they share the same political vision: both promote illiberal and authoritarian governments. During the Ukrainian crisis, Bolsonaro announced his visit to

Russia, which according to *Folha de São Paulo* lacked Washington's approval. For Bolsonaro, the trip to Moscow was a way to show his autonomy in foreign policy and his distance from Biden: "Brazil is Brazil, Russia is Russia. I have a good relationship with everybody. If Biden invited me, I would also gladly go to the United States."

Relations with the rest of the region are scarce and more limited. It highlights the Kremlin's desire to foster closeness with Evo Morales, whom it supported when he was overthrown in 2019. After the return to power of the MAS in 2020, ties have become even closer, with exploitation projects in strategic areas, such as gas and lithium. The geopolitical link is joined by economic interests in gas (Gazprom), lithium, and nuclear issues (Rosatom).

The Russian presence has had another derivative, given the tense relations between Venezuela (its main arms client in Latin America) and Colombia (Washington's ally and NATO partner since 2017). In full escalation between Russia and Ukraine, Defense Minister Diego Molano denounced the prolonged "foreign interference" – Russian – on the border. Underlying is not only the Colombian fear of the Russian presence and cooperation with the Bolivarian military but also the fate of weapons that could end up in the criminal gangs (bacrim) and guerrillas operating from their Venezuelan bases, with Maduro's acquiescence. The weakness and corruption of the Venezuelan state and the financial capacity of the gangs led Bogotá to denounce these facts, while Colombia accused the Venezuelan government of protecting armed groups. The tension led to a meeting between Colombian Foreign Minister Marta Lucia Ramirez and the Kremlin's representative in Bogotá, Nikolay Tavidumadze. Russia pledged to avoid the diversion of its military cooperation. Moscow also guaranteed that its assistance was technical and not military.

From its pragmatic position and away from ideologies, Russia tries to expand in Latin America. At first, taking advantage of Bolivarian regional integration initiatives, such as ALBA, with alliances that neutralized the United States. However, he suffered the same disappointment as Bush in 2005, when he found with the FTAA that regional division, lack of

leadership, and inconsistency in integration prevented reaching global agreements with the region. Similarly, ALBA's paralysis, without Chávez's leadership or Venezuelan petrodollars, exposed its limitations. But Russia maintains strong ties with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), agreeing on the goal of building a multipolar world. This closeness has been reflected in the signing of a Permanent Mechanism for Political Dialogue and Cooperation (2015). For Russia, the relationship with CELAC is a way to insert itself and gain weight and global visibility through an international organization outside its theoretical area of influence. For CELAC (which excludes the United States and was born to be an alternative to the OAS) the link with Russia makes it gain autonomy from Washington.

Despite not being a relevant economic and commercial actor in Latin America, Russia has increased its projection and prestige through other strategies, such as "vaccine diplomacy" or information/disinformation campaigns. In the case of vaccines, Russia improved its image after developing Sputnik V, effective against COVID-19, and making it available to Latin American countries, when the United States and the European Union monopolized the acquisition of vaccines. Despite logistical problems that delayed its arrival and not being recognized by the WHO, Sputnik was applied in Argentina, Bolivia, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Venezuela.<sup>19</sup>

Within the framework of soft power, Russia also seeks to gain a presence in Latin America, as in other parts of the world, through propaganda. *Russia Today* (RT) in Spanish and the expansion on the Internet (Sputnik) are the most ambitious mechanism to gain image and influence. RT en Español has Latin Americanized its contents, to try to capture the interest of the regional audience. His bet has been successful, winning numerous followers, which has meant that he has a platform to attack the United States and the European Union, which he shows as corrupt countries that

---

19 Vanni Pettina, "China y Rusia aprovechan el hueco que occidente ha dejado en América Latina", *El País* (August 17, 2022), <https://elpais.com/opinion/2022-08-18/china-y-rusia-aprovechan-el-hueco-que-occidente-ha-dejado-en-america-latina.html>.

do not respect human rights and protect against war crimes. RT presents a friendly face of Russia while showing it as an alternative, efficient and successful political model compared to the “decadent” Western democracies.

This communicational/propaganda structure linked to the interests of the Kremlin runs parallel to the growing performance of the Russian secret services (especially in Mexico, the prelude to the United States) and powerful campaigns in favor or detriment of certain political options (according to Moscow’s interests), as well as the increase in cyberattacks, which grew by 600 % in 2021.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusions

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has denoted Russia’s present and future role in Latin America in the new geopolitical context. The role of Latin America in this crisis has once again highlighted a recurring problem: its position as a stone guest in lawsuits that it considers alien, and over which it does not exercise any control or influence. Cuba experienced this in the missile crisis in 1962 and Nicaragua in the 1980s and is repeated periodically. The ultimate cause is the weakness and division of their States and the absence of a regional governance system capable of transferring a single regional position to multilateral bodies. The disinterest of Latin American countries in global problems is deeply rooted in their idiosyncrasies. Governments and public opinion are concerned only with those issues that affect them directly and live with their backs turned to others, especially if they have nothing to do with them, such as Islamic terrorism. For most countries, foreign policy is basically a policy of regional relations, especially with border nations.

The Ukraine crisis has shown that Latin America’s heterogeneity parallels its geopolitical disunity. Countries allied to Russia (Cuba, Venezuela, and

---

20 María I. Puerta Riera, “Lo que nos cuenta Putin: medios rusos en América Latina”, *Latinoamérica21* (August 16, 2022), <https://latinoamerica21.com/es/lo-que-nos-cuenta-putin-medios-rusos-en-america-latina/>

Nicaragua) coexist with others with a less clear position, but with a certain proximity to the Kremlin (Peru, Argentina, and even Brazil), and a third group that moves silently (Mexico) or allied to the United States (Chile, Uruguay, and Colombia). As long as this situation or others like it persist, the weight of the region in the geopolitical scenario will not only be meager and secondary, with its reduced negotiating capacity but will continue to play the game of others. Thus, as long as each country continues to wage “war on its own,” there will be no possibility of influencing international conflicts, even those that directly affect them.

Concerning Russia’s prominence in Latin America, everything indicates that in the short and medium term it will decrease, except for its strategic allies whose international loneliness leads them to cling to Moscow as their lifeline. Russia, as a geopolitical and commercial partner of Latin American countries, has contributed to increasing the fragmentation of Latin America, the reprimarization of its exports, and its subordinate position vis-à-vis the great powers. In the medium term, it has an even narrower margin for action: the dynamics of Russia’s decline respond to various structural and long-term causes, related to the progressive Chinese commercial and financial hegemony, which has displaced the United States and the European Union and also leaves other emerging nations with regional interests in a peripheral position.

One conjunctural circumstance (the invasion of Ukraine) has a future impact: the sanctions on Russia and the supply crisis increase Latin America’s importance as a strategic partner of the West as well as a competitor to Russia when it comes to raw materials and energy resources. This has already been seen not only in the approach of the European Union to Latin America, looking for possible energy alternatives in the medium term (oil, gas, and green hydrogen) but in the turn of the White House regarding Venezuela, which has gone from being marginalized to being a possible supplier of oil. Finally, Putin’s authoritarian and aggressive drift nullifies Moscow as a viable alliance option for most Latin American countries.

## About the authors:

### **Carlos Malamud Rikles** – *Elcano Royal Institute*

*He holds a Ph.D. in American History from the Complutense University of Madrid, is a principal investigator at the Elcano Royal Institute, emeritus professor of American History at the National University of Distance Education and is a member of the National Academy of History of Argentina. In 2015, he was selected as one of the “50 most influential Ibero-American intellectuals” (Esglobal). He has been a Senior Associate Member at Saint Antony’s College of the University of Oxford (1992–1993), deputy director of the Ortega y Gasset University Institute and director of the Latin America program (1996–2002), a visiting researcher at the Universidad de Los Andes (Corona Chair, 2003), as well as a professor at the Complutense University of Madrid and San Pablo CEU. He began his academic career researching colonial economic history and then specialized in the political history of Latin America of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Currently, he combines his work as a historian with that of an analyst of International Relations in Latin America. His latest book entitled, *El Sueño de Bolívar y la Manipulación Bolivariana: Falsification of History and Regional Integration in Latin America*, was published in 2021.*

### **Rogelio Núñez Castellano** – *Elcano Royal Institute*

*He is a senior associate researcher at the Elcano Royal Institute and holds a Ph.D. in Contemporary History of Latin America from the Ortega y Gasset University Research Institute of the Complutense University of Madrid. He is also a professor of the master’s degree in Political Action, Institutional Strengthening and Citizen Participation in the Rule of Law at the Francisco de Vitoria University of Madrid, and the master’s degree in Communication and Political Marketing at the Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of Alcalá. He has been a professor at the Universities Camilo José Cela (Spain), Universidad de Los Andes de Chile, and Universidad Francisco Marroquín and Rafael Landívar (Guatemala). He has also been a professor of History of Law and Economics at the Center for University Studies attached to the Rey Juan Carlos University (2015–2016), visiting professor at the Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of Alcalá (2017–2019) and deputy director of Infolatam, a publication specialized in Latin America (2005–2017).*

# CONNECTIVITY CONFLICTS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON IBERO-AMERICAN SECURITY

*Andres Gonzalez Martin*

## Summary

*American hegemony has ushered in a multipolar world in which great powers compete by applying a defiant punitive unilateralism, significantly more dangerous. Simultaneously, the rivalry between the great powers in the economic and technological fields has caused a decoupling movement in globalization. This has resulted in a global restructuring based on the struggle between the People's Republic of China and the United States. On the one hand, connectivity has become a double-edged sword. The new form of warfare is the use of any network or flow as a weapon. On the other hand, globalization has provided a new arsenal of instruments of war such as sanctions, boycotts, export controls, tariffs, import prohibitions, or illicit appropriation of intellectual property that make it possible to attack all kinds of interrelationships. In this sense, the current state of the world has broken down the existing barriers between security and business.*

*The new situation may force Ibero-American states to take a position on the fragmented geo-economic and geo-technological map that is about to emerge. The obligation to choose for Ibero-America would mean a waiver that does not favor their interests. The fragmentation of the continent and the failure of integration processes today, make it impossible to constitute an alternative geostrategic reference that, at least, had the possibility of giving itself its own voice on the global stage. Nonetheless, greater diplomatic collaboration, commitment to harmonizing its foreign trade, construction of a shared strategic vision, development of internal infrastructures, collaborative efforts in the defense of its natural resources, collective action to combat environmental crimes on the continent with the greatest biodiversity, and the global fight against international criminal organizations are valuable meeting points that will aid the convergence toward global reach.*

**Keywords:** *Ibero-America, Integration, Globalization, Competition Between Great Powers, Weaponization, Conflicts of Interdependence, Punitive Unilateralism, The War in Ukraine, Global Decoupling, Biodiversity, Organized Crime.*

## **Introduction: The Inadequacy of the Global Governance System and its Effects**

The European Union (EU) has understood, thanks to the dramatic experience of the continent's history, that effective multilateralism is part of its DNA and is therefore reflected as an objective in its constitution. Consequently, multilateralism in the exercise of power is a European proposal, a consequence of its failures and weaknesses, with added value for the world. It is a model that invites others to pick up what they have learned from Europe's horror and suffering during the twentieth century, but also from its ability to overcome them.

The eclecticism of the EU is refractory to hegemonic unilateralism, regardless of who exercises it. However, the history of Europe teaches that the balance of power, while limiting unilateralism, does not in itself prevent the unilateral strategies of the different centers of power. Multipolarity is not enough to consolidate global multilateralism. So, in that regard, the facts show that the hegemony of the United States gives way to a situation of multipolarity where the parties adopt a far more unstable and dangerous unilateralist approach.

The shift from the American unipolar moment to punitive unilateralism began to be evident during Obama's administration. The financial crisis of 2008, the wars in Syria and Libya in the Mediterranean, the war in Georgia and, later, in Ukraine, the militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea, the turn to the Pacific, and the economic and technological rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC), are sufficient indicators to identify the change of pace and momentum. Today, it is common to hear from most analysts the same and repetitive diagnosis of the world, based on a pathology that is presented with a well-known euphemism: competition between great powers.

In a scenario regulated by others, some great powers can survive temporarily as revisionist powers. If the aspirant maintains a sufficient margin of action to question the system of governance imposed by the dominant power, then

it has a good chance of wearing it down. The great powers know how to patiently wait for the right moment. Strategic patience becomes a sign of proven virtue that adorns an old narrative, but that is renewed by knowledge and willingness to build the moment of turn without intolerable tensions.

As a result, the US has transformed from a “benevolent unilateralism” to a “competitive and punitive unilateralism.” The EU proposal has been unable to break through. As a result, Venus has been left alone in the face of a Mars that has been replicated across nations with the capacity to sustain a State with enough revisionist potential to make its story and dream credible. The EU’s level of ambition is not the result of its strategic reluctance. There is no means to develop the necessary mechanisms of power to influence the global agenda and governance due to its inherent nature and impossibility.

In the Ibero-American case, it can be said that the fragmentation of the continent and the failure of integration processes make it impossible to constitute an alternative geostrategic reference that, at least, had the possibility of giving itself its own voice on the global stage. The vision of security and defense continues to define the attempts of Ibero-American States to create their own strategic identities, renouncing a shared perception sustained by regional or institutional commitments and agreements. In this context, the EU has failed to win the right to be heard among the major competitors; Ibero-America does not even have its own discourse to contribute. As a result, there is a marginalization of an area and a culture with a Hispanic identity which is constrained by its own limitations and internal divisions. Regardless of the origin of the diagnosis, it’s hard not to consider how true it is: “Either we unite, or we sink.”

The financial crisis of 2008 and its subsequent development were an indicator that global interrelationships had advanced much faster than world governance. The continued U.S. trade deficit and President Trump’s tariff war were only a reaction to the mismatches in global flows. COVID-19

has confirmed that global governance standards are insufficient and that interdependence without policy guarantees carries serious dangers for humanity. The World Health Organization still does not know the origin of the Wuhan virus.

Considering the ability of international architecture to transform itself to adapt to new risks and threats may only be a way to avoid the need for a complete institutional redesign, which is beyond Europe's capabilities, and does not seem to be in the interests of the strongest international actors. The result of betting on an unsustainable world order without an institutional system accepted by the most powerful can translate for Europe into irrelevance and absorption by one of the competing power blocs. Ibero-America may not even be aware that its future will be the same.

Great powers can force Europeans and Ibero-Americans to take up positions in the new geo-economic map. The outcome, of the identified competition between great powers, is hegemony or preeminence for each of them. The quest for hegemony on the economic and technological fronts drives the disengagement from globalization. Temptation will soon knock on your doors to invite you to take sides. This means that sooner than expected, some circumstances -foreseen or not- may place them in an uncomfortable position. Competitive unilateralism in search of hegemony may try to impose on them a decision that involves a painful renunciation.

The rivalry between China and the United States structures the world, although attention is now focused primarily on Ukraine. Secretary of State Blinker clearly expresses the idea: "Even if President Putin's war continues, we will remain focused on the most serious long-term challenge to the international order, posed by the PRC."<sup>1</sup> The difficulty is that mainland China is also part of the world economy and is a decisive actor in addressing global security problems that affect everyone, such as those related to climate change or pandemics, for example. The United

---

<sup>1</sup> Marin Saillofest, "La Doctrina China de la Administración Biden," *The Grand Continent* (May 28, 2022), <https://legrandcontinent.eu/es/2022/05/28/la-doctrina-china-de-la-administracion-biden/>.

States cannot –even if it wanted to– completely disengage from the PRC. Even so, it continues to strive to lead the relationship, protecting its national interests and, at the same time, collaborating in fields of mutual interest.

Even the most powerful states, based on their own experience, have concluded that it is preferable to avoid the direct military option to the greatest extent possible, even when the enemy may be much weaker. The U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has taken a heavy toll on the power, influence, and economy of the hegemonic power. The political, financial, image, ethical, diplomatic, and narrative costs for the United States have been devastating. The degradation of US penetrating soft power, using more subtle dominance mechanisms, has been weakened using military force. Even non-democratic countries have internalized the high price that, for their intelligent and penetrating power, conventional or asymmetric war imposes. The war in Ukraine also clearly demonstrates that military aggression, with a supposed and clear conventional superiority, does not guarantee success. The social, political, and economic costs imposed on Russia can be too great for too little geopolitical gain.

Where power becomes manifest, resistance always emerges. The resistance is always stronger the more evident and dramatic the exercise of power. Consequently, nothing wears down power more in our globalized world than the direct use of overwhelming military force in the eyes of cameras and mobile phones. To avoid the drain of power, caused by force, interconnected international spheres are used, which end up as the new battlefields of war, where disputes are resolved without the need for bloodshed.

Non-military tools are chosen because of the risk of waging wars where military forces are primarily responsible for achieving victory. It is this very questioning of the sense of military victory that drives the commitment to other mechanisms of less strident domination and influence. In this political war, the discourse of the powerful can be blunt for their partners: They are with me, *or they are against me*. As regards Ibero-Americans, the

obligation to choose a position would imply their resignation, which would not be in their best interests. The PRC is, for much of South America, its main customer, and the second one is the United States or, in some cases, the EU. For Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, the United States remains its main trading partner, but the PRC may offer interesting options over time.

Therefore, the polarization of the powers in dispute for hegemony is not good news. A defense of Ibero-American interests without an idea of regression of diplomatic channels avoids – as much as possible – adopting a position committed to only one of the parties while defending a system of international norms for all, which can be reformed in response to Ibero-American voices. However, the conflict in Ukraine has shown Europeans that, faced with a situation entrenched for years, the Russian invasion offered no alternative. Economic ties with the Russian Federation, especially oil and gas supplies, have soared in the last few hours. This shows that the European energy system has to be rebuilt by giving up the supply of hydrocarbons and minerals from Russia.

Much of Europe, when renouncing nuclear energy as a source of electricity generation, had to bet on gas, combined cycle power plants, and cogeneration through turbines. Gas is an indispensable source for the EU's energy model, accounting for 40 % of Russia's consumption. Therefore, the impact is so great that the once perverse option of nuclear power plants is now being viewed as acceptable. While Germany closed, at the end of 2022, three of its six nuclear power plants in operation, having planned before the end of 2022 the closure of those that remain active, the European Commission put into circulation its proposal to modify the classification of green energies. For many, it was a surprise and, for others, a scandal that the Commission recognized nuclear energy as green energy.<sup>2</sup>

---

2 Bernardo de Miguel and Guillermo Abril, "La Comisión Europea reconoce la energía nuclear como verde al menos hasta 2045", El País (Brussels: January 1, 2022), <https://elpais.com/economia/2022-01-01/la-comision-europea-reconoce-la-energia-nuclear-como-verde-al-menos-hasta-2045.html>.

On 18 May 2022, the European Commission presented a plan to end the EU's dependence on Russian fossil fuels (REPowerEU).<sup>3</sup> Dispensing with Russian imports of hydrocarbons will require the EU to invest an estimated 297,000 million euros. This is not counting the losses generated by the closure of the facilities built to transport Russian oil. To this is added the increase in prices of hydrocarbon transport by sea and the new rise in gas and oil prices. The measures of the Commission's plan involve increased use of coal and nuclear energy, energy source- until now- stigmatized, but essential to address the transition of the current European energy model.

The REPowerEU has the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) to provide additional EU funding to Member States in their energy transformation. The available loans enabled by the RRF currently reach 225,000 million euros. This amount would be increased with the new subsidies for the auctioning of emission allowances worth 20,000 million euros more, and other activated mechanisms such as (1) The voluntary transfer of cohesion policy funds of up to 12.5 % of the national allocation of Member States, an amount that could mean an additional 26,900 million euros to the 100,000 million euros already allocated under the policy cohesion to support decarbonization and ecological transition projects; (2) The voluntary transfer of 12.5 % allocated to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, which could amount to an additional EUR 7.5 billion; and (3) The new calls for proposals for the Connecting Europe Facility, designed for infrastructure projects of common interest, which are increased by €800 million.

The effects of the war in Ukraine for an EU forced to disengage from Russia will have a high economic cost for the whole of Europe. As a result of sanctions on Russia and the decoupling of the gas and oil pipelines that supply fuel to Europe from that country, the EU and its members will be

---

3 ICC News, "REPowerEU: A plan to rapidly reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels and fast forward the green transition", Intelligent Cities Challenge (May 30, 2022), <https://www.intelligentcitieschallenge.eu/news/repowereu-plan-published-help-cities-accelerate-their-green-transition#:~:text=REPowerEU%20plan%20published%20to%20help%20cities%20accelerate%20their%20Green%20transition,-Home&text=On%20May%2018%2C%20the%20European,considering%20the%20current%20geopolitical%20context.>

faced with an unpredictable boomerang effect that will alter the difficult budget balances. The situation is complicated by runaway and unforeseen inflation. The danger of stagflation is real; overcoming it with levels of debt unprecedented in history will not be easy. Europe's macroeconomic picture, which was beginning to overcome the effects of COVID-19, has become complicated because of competition between two major powers, Russia, and the United States. The war in Ukraine could have been avoided in a less challenging context. The truth is that most analysts understand that this war, with intensity, will be long. Putting things back together will take several decades.

In a world that is experiencing a moment of geopolitical, geo-economic, and geo-technological competition between the United States and China, where the Russian Federation has demonstrated its willingness to continue maintaining its status as a global power, where the EU aspires to reconfigure itself as a strategic actor, although the war in Ukraine has blown up its long-term multilateral aspiration, where local conflicts are affected by the intervention of emerging regional actors that can pivot the balance of the area, and where the great powers aspire to assert their interests through their local allies, in the so-called "*proxy wars*", the deteriorated institutions of global governance cannot be expected to act effectively and favor a fairer redistribution of losses or earnings. It was to be hoped that everyone would lose, but the redistribution of efforts and incentives needed for economic and financial reconstruction would not be balanced.

The international system born after the Second World War, with all its defects, has avoided an armed conflict between nuclear powers. It has allowed the development of a global economy that has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty. However, it is questioned by the rise of revisionist powers, the aspirations of emerging countries, and the needs of less developed or poor countries. In the periphery and semi-periphery of the international system, discordant voices have emerged that demand attention.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in a May 2022 lecture at George Washington University, referred to the need to reform and modernize the rules-based international order. The new order proposed by Secretary Blinken aims to ensure “the representation of the interests, values, and hopes of all nations, large and small, in all regions, and also to meet the challenges we face today and will face in the future.”<sup>4</sup> The proposal, which is certainly encouraging, is not assured of success. Any international order will always have detractors. Having the resistance is essential to articulate the necessary mechanisms of surveillance, maintenance, and updating that any regulatory model requires. To be sure, there are times when friction can be so severe as to block any attempt at modernization or change. Only the effect of a serious global upheaval could suddenly create a propitious scenario for reconfiguring the questioned model of global governance and certainly implementing Mr. Blinken’s proposal.

At a time marked by geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geo-technological tension, reformulating the rules of an international system affected by the disruptive flows of globalization and, at the same time, by the centrifugal impulse of competition from the centers of power, implies idealism, arrogance, or excessive cynicism, without excluding the possibility of a combination of all of them. In any case, recognizing the need for change in the international system that was born after the Second World War implies an assessment of its current limitations.

In that sense, the international order that existed has been diluted by the predatory practices of some actors, so recomposing it will be a titanic task. The security and defense of the new system of power in the era of the pandemic and the post-pandemic depend on the ability to rethink and rebuild a more effective and inclusive global institutional order. Unfortunately, the war in Ukraine does not allow us to expect anything

---

4 Speech by Secretary of State Antony Blinken delivered on May 26, 2022 at George Washington University. Available in: Marin Sallolofest, “La Doctrina China de la Administración Biden”, *El Grand Continent* (May 28, 2022), <https://legrandcontinent.eu/es/2022/05/28/la-doctrina-china-de-la-administracion-biden/>.

other than an accelerated and progressive retreat from globalization, and disconnection of interdependencies. Avoiding, as much as possible, being dragged down by this dynamic is fundamental for the security and defense of Ibero-American interests.

### **The Decoupling Movement of the Great Powers**

Western countries have long held the conviction that the integration of the PRC into the global system of international markets and its economic development were inescapably linked to a process of political evolution of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to adapt to a social and economic space more open to freedom of choice. The dogma of indivisible freedom prefixed a democratic political evolution, unquestionably linked to the transformation promoted by the freedom of the markets.

The shared perceptions of strategic success on the part of the CCP and the United States, of the revisionist power and the established power vying for supremacy, are striking. For 40 years, success indicators have been complementary and convergent. The CCP aspired to a peaceful rise, and the United States viewed such a rise as a favorable strategic foundation. The prolonged complicity in the perception of success has ended up mutating into a new form of competition between great powers.

The trade war between the United States and the PRC, and to a lesser extent Brexit, exposed the risks of the excessive extension of the interrelationships of national economies before the arrival of COVID-19. Geopolitical tensions were being reshaped into geo-economic tensions that implied an exponential increase in the danger to the productive model of global interdependence. Highly stretched value and production chains could easily break down at some link, breaking down the entire business process. Risk-aware internationalized companies slowly began to reduce the exposure of their value and supply chains before the arrival of COVID-19. The pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of globalization for the productive fabric of Western economies. In a world that depends on complex networks, any

transnational tension threatens the relationship of heavily delocalized companies with their suppliers, customers, factories, and supplies. It also complicates logistics management, causing a general paralysis that spreads throughout the system.

In 2020, the Bank of *America Global Research* announced that the phenomenon of corporate relocation was unstoppable and would end up causing tectonic changes in the world economy. The bank's surveys surprised analysts because of the strength of expected movements in global supply and value chains. More than 80 % of U.S. companies surveyed had relocation plans.<sup>5</sup> Many wanted to start coming home and China is where most want to come from. The change will be slow, it has just begun, but within a decade most of the leading productive sectors will have completed it.<sup>6</sup>

COVID-19 has led to an acceleration of trends that were already present. Disengagement from globalization, automation, and digitalization are already present phenomena, but their impact will skyrocket exponentially. As the future unfolds, new possible roadblocks will arise due to different reasons, which will particularly harm the People's Republic of China. China has become the main -or even the only- source of production of basic and strategic resources, including health supplies and medical equipment.

Supplies that, in the past couple of years, were both vulnerable to a pandemic and, at the same time, were so simple and easy to produce, such as masks, personal protective equipment, respirators, and, in general, medical, and pharmaceutical equipment, weren't available in time and couldn't be manufactured in the quantities demanded. Too many essential items are produced almost exclusively by China and, of course, determine the priorities of their supply.

---

5 Ben Poole, "Tectonic shifts identified in global supply chains", *Cash & Treasury Management File* (February 11, 2020), <https://ctmfile.com/story/tectonic-shifts-identified-in-global-supply-chains>.

6 The most important moves are being made in the consumer durables, retail, technology hardware, and semiconductor sectors. The first two are changing mainly by relying on better profitability with automation and robotization. The last two sectors are moving due to the tension between the United States and China, which causes uncertainty due to possible sanctions or political restrictions.

The PRC has become the largest importer among all central economic regions. Most importantly, however, for most of these imports, China is the dominant producer. The factory of the world is the PRC. Everything that could affect it is transferred immediately and multiplied to the most advanced economies, with which it competes for technological dominance. Over-reliance on China is an added risk to potential new mobility restrictions, as well as a serious strategic risk.

Dependence on the PRC is a danger to the United States and the EU, which have launched initiatives and plans to encourage the return of their companies. In July 2020, the president of the National Security Council, Robert O'Brien, launched the initiative known as "Back to the *Americas*," which offers financial incentives to U.S. companies returning to the United States or setting up in Latin America, leaving Asia, especially if they come from China.

First estimates of the effects of these stimulus measures to move investments from China to Ibero-America estimate that investments would range between 30,000 million and 50,000 million dollars, especially in infrastructure, energy, and transport. The terms "*nearshoring*" and "*reshoring*" reflect the meaning of this new offshoring. The concept refers to re-designing the outsourcing of a company's activity through contracting with others in nearby countries (nearshoring) or within the country itself (reshoring). Mexico is undoubtedly the Ibero-American country that meets the best conditions for the relocation of US companies, surely followed by Colombia and Panama, but they are not the only ones that could benefit from this current. The penetration and strength of PRC companies or interests in some Ibero-American countries will be another factor to be considered by US investment companies.

In February 2021, President Biden signed several executive orders to make supply chains in the United States "more resilient and secure for critical and essential goods." Protection affects different products, including pharmaceuticals, those related to health services, food –especially fish–

, or computer chips. In June of the same year, President Biden expanded the scope of an executive order signed by former President Trump that vetoed the investments in the country of some thirty Chinese companies for, supposedly, supporting the efforts of Beijing's intelligence, military, and security apparatuses. This time the new list incorporated 59 more firms from the Asian country, including the giant Huawei and the three largest telecommunications companies in the nation.<sup>7</sup> In 2022, Washington's pressure on Beijing has continued to grow. For example, in February, another 33 Chinese companies were banned, in a move by U.S. tech companies to progressively disengage from markets and investments in China, to protect their intellectual property from misappropriation.

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission<sup>8</sup> has decided to exclude Chinese companies from U.S. markets if they do not meet the requirements of their audits. For several years, U.S. hedge fund managers have been dumping securities of Chinese companies, but the regulator's decision has multiplied exit movements. Washington demands full access to the accounting documentation of Chinese companies listed on its markets, but Beijing prohibits foreign inspection of its companies' documents.

Financial asset markets have been affected by regulatory changes and possible restrictions on listing or investing in Chinese companies. Stock prices of Chinese companies have fallen instantly and subsequently recovered based on the risk of sanctions. Knowing the impact that U.S. investment can have on Chinese securities helps to understand the scale of the problem. Goldman Sachs estimates that U.S. institutional investors hold

---

7 Redacción BBC, "Estados Unidos vs China: la nueva orden de Biden contra empresas chinas que refuerza la dura posición de Washington con Pekín", *BBC News Mundo* (June 4, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-57364306>

8 The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is an independent federal government regulatory agency responsible for protecting investors, maintaining the orderly and fair functioning of securities markets, and facilitating capital formation. Available in: SEC & Regulatory Bodies, "Comisión de Bolsa y Valores (SEC)", Traders Studio (February 26, 2022), <https://traders.studio/comision-de-bolsa-y-valores-sec/?nowprocket=1>

about \$200 billion in ADR (*American Depositary Receipts*)<sup>9</sup> certificates from highly exposed Chinese companies.<sup>10</sup>

For its part, the European Commission called on Member States to adopt more robust mechanisms to protect European companies that, at this time of crisis, could be acquired by Chinese companies at bargain prices. He requested that they be alerted to prevent foreign purchases of strategically important assets that could be vulnerable and to prevent the purchase of European companies by state companies or with subsidies from other countries. These defense measures are a shield against Chinese companies' interests in controlling key sectors in the EU.

COVID-19 made States and regional blocs aware of the need to guarantee their supply chain and reduce their dependence on the outside world in strategic sectors. Its excessive dependency on the PRC did not ensure reliable supplies of the necessary means to tackle the pandemic, nor did it guarantee timely delivery of those means. In addition, China -as the great winner of globalization- increasingly manifested its revisionist assertiveness and its willingness to reconfigure the political, technological, and productive norms and standards of the nascent fourth industrial revolution. Therefore, interdependence had gone too far. The need for sufficient industrial support to ensure the timely supply of components, sometimes complex and sometimes extremely simple, required consideration of the sufficiency of national and regional strategy. China could no longer be the factory of everything and the factory of all.

In addition, the PCC has maintained, since the beginning of its peaceful ascent, a willingness to use international connections to violate, in its favor, the rules of regulation of exchanges. The CCP managed to join globalization to gradually parasitize the system from within, enhancing its power inside

---

9 An ADR is a tradable certificate issued by a U.S. bank that represents shares of non-U.S. companies listed on one of the U.S. stock exchanges. In this way, the mechanism of ADR certificates allows Chinese companies to issue shares directly on the US Stock Exchange.

10 SEC & Regulatory Bodies, "Comisión de Bolsa y Valores (SEC)", Traders Studio (February 26, 2022), <https://traders.studio/comision-de-bolsa-y-valores-sec/?nowprocket=1>

and outside China. The PRC has consistently failed to comply with the principles of global markets to increase its competitiveness, advantage, and development.

The PRC's attitude was evident from the start. Its revisionist character too. The clear ambition of the PRC and its default formulas did not prevent Western companies from finding it attractive to invest in the country because of the large profits they could make. Much of the funding for China's economic and technological base comes from Western businesses and consumers, who saw it profitable to do business and trade with a state dominated by a Communist Party, with a particular Chinese way of understanding socialism.

Since 2017, the situation of competitive imbalance between the great powers, a consequence of the PRC's insightful mechanisms of non-compliance and oppressive penetration, began to be considered an unacceptable geopolitical and geoeconomic threat. Then, the only possible solution to the "*Weaponization of Everything*" or political war of the CCP began to be proposed: the progressive decoupling of economies and exchanges. Evidently, the war in Ukraine has unexpectedly accelerated the announced tilt of global disengagement.<sup>11</sup>

Understanding the movement of disconnection does not necessarily mean that Ibero-America should follow it beyond its own interests. Undoubtedly, it is an opportunity to review the risks, especially those related to the control of telecommunications, critical infrastructures, the energy sector, or any other sector identified as strategic. However, the rhythm, timing, and need of others should not necessarily be mimetically adopted.

### **Connectivity Conflicts**

Connectivity, like it or not, is a double-edged sword. Mark Leonard in his book, *The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict*, states that the

---

<sup>11</sup> *Weaponisation of Everything* can be translated as the use of all things as a weapon of political war.

unforeseen has arrived.<sup>12</sup> The flows of globalization, which for a long time were interpreted as effective mechanisms to strengthen peaceful relations, the expansion of the free market and democratic development in illiberal or totalitarian countries, have become a danger to stability, the rules-based order, and the expansion of spaces of peace and freedom.

Interdependence has not promoted democratization in China or the reduction of Russia's ambition for domination of its near abroad has not modulated its revisionism or reduced the possibilities of conflicts in its environment. Contrary to what is generally expected, the increase in interrelations with the PRC and Russia has ushered in an era of non-peace, where the line between war and peace is increasingly blurred. "Rather than removing tensions, connectivity offers new means to compete and conflict."<sup>13</sup>

The increase in links and flows between states and regions shows that any form of relationship can be used as a weapon of attack, one that at first appears harmless and even enticing to promote a more peaceful and collaborative environment. There is no difference between the mechanisms that promote mutual benefit and those used to achieve a position of dominance. National security becomes more complicated when it is more difficult to identify threats. Activities such as economics, commerce, finance, culture, science, and technology can be powerful weapons of war that can deter and respond to international actors who violate international norms.

Connectivity conflicts are more frequent, effective, and lethal than conventional wars. However, some may be unable to identify the damage they are causing. They may even feel convinced that they are enjoying a privileged space of peaceful relations, without discovering what lies behind the business, investment, and assistance of the great powers. In this regard, Mark Leonard invites us to recognize the new arsenal of weapons that the

---

<sup>12</sup> Mark Leonard, *The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict* (London: Bantam Press, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Mark Leonard, "La Guerra de la conectividad", *Project Syndicate* (December 1, 2021), <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/connectivity-conflicts-weaponization-of-migration-by-mark-leonard-2021-12/spanish>.

interconnectivity of globalization provides for competitive unilateralism. When states discover that others long ago began to use the bonds of peaceful relationships as weapons of penetration, influence, and dominance, it may be too late to order defense. Thus, the new battlefields will be the most solidly interconnected areas of the world where there is no accepted governing power. This idea is also supported by Mark Galeotti in his new book *The Weaponization of Everything: A Field Guide to the New Way of War*.<sup>14</sup>

The world's interdependence with the PRC has allowed the CCP to expand the battlefield so far as to avoid the need for decisive battles by large armies and navies. Future supremacy will not be elucidated in a naval air battle in the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait. The PRC aspires, with its political war, to turn scientific and technological development along with control of production and supply chains into the center of gravity of the dispute between great powers, exploiting the vulnerabilities of the system. The Chinese model could be identified in English as *the weaponization of interdependence*.<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning of 2022, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)<sup>16</sup> has begun to become a reality, becoming the largest free trade agreement in the world, formed by Asia-Pacific countries, including Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Japan, Laos, New Zealand, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, South Korea, Myanmar, and the Philippines.<sup>17</sup> The new Association represents a market of about 2.3 billion people, 30 % of the population, and about 25 % of world trade in the region with the highest

---

14 Mark Galeotti, *The Weaponization of Everything: A Field Guide to the New Way of War* (London: Yale University Press, 2022)

15 Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, *Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion* (International Security 2019, no. 44), 42–79, <https://direct.mit.edu/isec/article/44/1/42/12237/Weaponized-Interdependence-How-Global-Economic>. *Weaponization of interdependence* is not easy to translate into Spanish, it could be something akin to the militarization of interdependence or, perhaps better, the use of interdependence as a weapon.

16 RCEP aims to eliminate tariffs and quotas on 65 % of products, which will be expanded to 90 % in 20 years, and other barriers to free trade. The treaty harmonizes intellectual property rules and addresses the digital economy and e-commerce but contains no regulation on labor rights and environmental impact.

17 Myanmar and the Philippines have not yet ratified it.

economic growth. RCEP will increase the PRC's export trade opportunities in Asia-Pacific to the detriment of the United States. It is difficult to question that the impact of the RCEP treaty in the region will be far greater than the strategic alliance between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, known as the "Quad", or the AUKUS, which links the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. RCEP will allow the PRC, the big winner with the agreement, to practice strategic patience because time plays in its favor in the region.

The PRC's relentless efforts to boost the growth and maturation of the national industrial and technological base have important implications for the modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The objectives of military modernization have been in line with, and part of the broader aspirations for national development. The CCP leadership has directly linked the pace and scale of the modernization of the PLA to the overall development of the country. In the coming decades, the centrality of scientific and technological development in the development objectives of the PRC will give greater weight to the requirements of new state-of-the-art weapons systems, linked to Artificial Intelligence, the Internet of Things, robotics, automation, nanotechnology, and quantum computing.

Some of the PRC's anticipated developments may be revealed by COVID-19 and its economic and logistical consequences, which may alter its time estimation in pursuit of geoeconomic and geotechnical dominance. In any case, the PRC has developed strategies and forces that allow it to coerce, subdue or attack countries allied or partners of the United States in the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans. At the same time, the PRC is becoming more confident every day in its ability to assume or manage the risks and potential costs that may arise from its actions.

The dangers of hyper-connectivity are polarizing societies into bubbles filled with barriers to compete, especially in nations aspiring to hegemony. Globalization has provided a new arsenal of weapons for competition among

great powers. Countries now wage conflict by manipulating the very things that bind them together, using sanctions, boycotts, export controls, tariffs, or import bans for political purposes.

However, the militarization of interdependence goes far beyond trade. Vaccines during COVID-19 have also been a weapon of interference in disadvantaged countries. It seems that the fronts of strategic infrastructure, communications, information, technological development, environmental preservation, migration, and even the fight against greenhouse gas emissions are also new battlefields on which bloodshed is not necessary to exert political pressure and accomplish the objectives set by doubling the opponents' will. The gray zone expands into spaces that were not previously clearly identified as areas of geopolitical competence.

Paradoxically, the best way to unite the world is to leave enough space for a necessary distance to guarantee safe ties ordered by mutually accepted norms. The disengagement from globalization, as it was understood, is a chapter that must be structured to preserve the security of interconnections, without feeding a dangerous dynamic of mistrust and fear.

The war in Ukraine is a clear expression of how to influence the gray zone with mechanisms that, without turning Western countries into belligerents, allow them to strengthen and sustain the Ukrainian resistance, seeking to weaken Russia. While Europe supplies arms and ammunition to Ukraine, Russia continues to supply gas and oil to the very countries that support its enemy. Certainly, Russia seeks to maintain export earnings to finance itself, but at the same time, this also serves as a means of pressure on European countries that need Russian imports.

### **Priorities for Ibero-American Security and Defense in a Scenario of Competitive Unilateralism**

Prioritizing forces to choose, inevitably, implies giving up. However, before a decline can begin, it is necessary to identify the prevailing trends in the global, regional, and national context, to assess the different options.

What we may discover may not be pleasant, but it is a start. Competitive unilateralism is a way of expressing the situation that shapes the world chessboard of the coming decades. Consequently, the rivalry between China and the United States structures the world and will continue to do so in the time horizon of 2050. Current geopolitical dynamics have revealed the interrelationships of globalization as a double-edged sword, through which the great powers deploy their mechanisms of influence and dominance.

The decoupling of the great powers may lead to polarization in the future which will pressure states to take a stand. This scenario is not favorable to Ibero-American interests. To maintain a balanced position regardless of excessive commitment and strategic dependence on the great powers, diplomacy must be utilized as an instrument for restructuring the disputed global governance system. For the Ibero-American republics, having international mechanisms that represent them when designing the framework of mutual relations with the great powers would increase their bargaining power.

Currently, the great powers aspire to conquer the necessary technological superiority to set the standards and bases for the development of artificial intelligence, quantum computing, robotization, the internet of things, communication and interconnection systems, and the control of data and information. Arriving first and defining departure requirements will give the market power to the first mover. Ibero-America has no possibility of being heard when defining the supports and pillars of development of the new key technologies in the fourth industrial revolution that is to come. However, if there were any possibility of referring the resolution of preliminary technical issues to international institutions that can channel them, there would be a greater guarantee of security. In any case, the security of critical infrastructure, energy security, and the security of communication systems must necessarily be carefully analyzed before making commitments with companies controlled by US or Chinese capital.

On the regional chessboard, Ibero-America is an insufficiently integrated region with no voice of its own. The emancipation of Spanish America meant an unforeseen destruction of the links established between territories and populations during the Spanish monarchy. The great homeland longed for by American heroes never came to fruition. The Panama Congress was a dramatic failure. The different overlapping processes of partial integration of the Ibero-American republics have not been consolidated and in many cases have ended up being a failure. The volume of internal trade within the countries of the region barely exceeds 15 %, while in the EU it accounts for 70 %. Without common interests among States, it is very difficult to build integration mechanisms that will allow the construction of a true political community in the future.

Shared interests are not only economic. No Ibero-American State, not even Brazil, can build its own geopolitical design, much less equip itself with the necessary capacities to have its own geostrategy. The insufficiency of the parties does not nullify the possibility of thinking about the advantage of converging. If it could feel like a need, then this insufficiency is what creates that possibility. In a globalized world, the dispersion of the weak does not make it easier for their voice to be heard.

It would be possible to get started through increased diplomatic cooperation and among the strategic think tanks of the region; along with facilitating the exchange of students between the higher-level or command and staff schools. In the same way that the EU launched the Erasmus program, which allows students from all EU universities to study part of their career in university centers in other partner countries, in Ibero-America the exchange of university students between centers throughout its geography can be implemented. The fruit of this last initiative can only be expected to be reaped in the long term, but personal vital ties are undoubtedly the most vigorous support to promote the unity of the people. In this case, sharing the same language, but maintaining a different accent, favors integration and the depth of the effects of the exchange.

Ibero-America is the region with the greatest biodiversity in the world, but it is also the one that is losing it the fastest. Brazil is the country with the greatest biodiversity of flora and fauna on the planet. Colombia ranks second with 10 % of the world's fauna and flora. Ecuador, being a small country, has more plant species per square kilometer than any other country in Latin America. Mexico, Venezuela, and Peru are also on the list of megadiverse countries due to their privileged geographical position, the variety of climates, and their complex topography.<sup>18</sup>

Alicia Bárcenas, ECLAC's Executive Secretary, has highlighted that one of the biggest imbalances in international markets is their inability to give economic visibility to natural capital and ecosystems. The value of biodiversity is not reflected in prices because it is not quoted in any market. "Natural capital is an asset and an economic good that reduces risks and increases resilience to external shocks such as climate change."<sup>19</sup> The lack of visibility of the real value of the natural environment does not favor the global production system to identify the costs generated by the external costs of its activity. "The result is that, indirectly, the natural heritage of Ibero-America is subsidizing the most developed countries, without charging for the costs or impacts on nature, exporting the riches cheaply and keeping the damages."<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, the wealth of Ibero-American natural resources needs to be protected from illegal exploitation and trafficking. The most serious crimes against the environment perpetrated by transnational criminal organizations are (1) Illegal logging and deforestation, (2) Illegal fishing, (3) Illegal mining

---

18 The United Nations Environment Program's (UNEP) Global Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) has identified a total of 17 megadiverse countries: Australia, Brazil, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, United States, and Venezuela.

19 CEPAL Noticias, "CEPAL reafirma importancia de contabilizar el capital natural en América Latina y el Caribe e insta a promover espacios de cooperación regional e interinstitucional en la materia", *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean* (December 9, 2021), <https://www.cepal.org/es/noticias/cepal-reafirma-importancia-contabilizar-capital-natural-america-latina-caribe-insta>

20 CEPAL Evento, "Conservación y uso sostenible de la biodiversidad para una recuperación sostenible: desafíos y oportunidades de América Latina y el Caribe," *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean* (March 8, 2022), <https://www.cepal.org/es/eventos/conservacion-uso-sostenible-la-biodiversidad-recuperacion-sostenible-desafios-opportunidades>

and illegal trade in minerals, (4) Pollution with toxic and dangerous waste, and (5) Poaching and illegal trade in wild fauna and flora. In this sense, Ibero-American States need to equip themselves with laws that allow adequate protection of the environment and the prosecution of crimes related to its abusive and out-of-control exploitation. There are many instances where the penalties do not address the seriousness of the threat to the natural heritage of the continent, which is also a world heritage site. Organized crime's involvement in these crimes, which allows their financing, often goes unconsidered. Nor is the impact on the environmental, economic, and social development of countries and local communities sufficiently valued.

Strategies for the illegal exploitation of natural resources are becoming increasingly sophisticated and are associated with more developed methods of money laundering. International organized crime that commits these crimes against the environment can also participate in drug trafficking, use violence to impose its practices, promote corruption, exercise control of territory and population, destroy peaceful coexistence in regions where institutional presence is insufficient, and end up becoming the most serious threat to State security.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimates that illicit funds generated by criminal and criminal activities in the world represent 4 % of global GDP.<sup>21</sup> Interpol and the United Nations Environment Program consider environmental crime to be the third most serious criminal activity in the world, after drug trafficking and counterfeiting. In 2018, these environmental crimes represented benefits of up to \$281 billion. The figure would be sufficient to adopt measures, but the danger is also accentuated by the high rate of growth of these illegal activities, between 5 and 7 % per year; that is, between two and three times the pace of global economic growth.<sup>22</sup>

---

21 Actualidad, "El dinero del crimen organizado: hágase la luz", *Assistance Program against Transnational Organized Crime* (November 5, 2021), <https://www.clpaccto.eu/el-dinero-del-crimen-organizado-hagase-la-luz/>

22 News Interpol, "Interpol marks a decade of tackling serious organized environmental crime", *International Criminal Police Organization* (November 23, 2020), [https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2020/INTERPOL\\_marks\\_a\\_decade\\_of\\_tackling\\_serious\\_organized\\_environmental\\_crime](https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2020/INTERPOL_marks_a_decade_of_tackling_serious_organized_environmental_crime).

The amount of money available to international criminal organizations could exceed the GDP of several Ibero-American states. The financial resources available to the mafias can serve to permeate State institutions through corruption, perpetuating their businesses and facilitating their laundering. Associated with these immense businesses, it appears violence, and the number of murders skyrockets. “The absence of authority, the deficit of institutional control, the multiplication of organized crime groups and illicit economic activities, also threaten the strategic natural resources of the Nation and its future development.”<sup>23</sup>

The importance and gravity of the threat of transnational crime require concerted global action because of the many interrelationships that exist and the increasing complexity of criminal networks. Regional collaboration between different States is essential to prevent transit and control traffic at borders. The difficulty of border control in the countries of the region may require a significant amount of continued investment and, possibly, the collaboration between the armed forces and civil authorities. Colombia is the country most affected by these problems, so it seems appropriate that its security and defense policy address this dark aggression against national sovereignty.

Defense and Security Policy (PDS) for the legality, entrepreneurship, and equity, released by the Ministry of Defense of Colombia in 2019, represents a progressive initiative that will work to build a system of effective collaboration between different resources, organizations, and government institutions, as well as civil society and citizens to coordinate the effort in building a national defense project that is comprehensive and coherent with the complexity of the threats.<sup>24</sup> The PDS introduces water, biodiversity, and the environment as the main and predominant national interests. Undoubtedly, Colombia, the second country in the world in terms of biodiversity, cannot accept that in the past decade more

---

23 Government of Colombia, “La Política de Defensa y Seguridad PDS. For legality, entrepreneurship and equity”, *Ministry of Defence from Colombia* (January 2019), [https://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/go/km/docs/Mindefensa/Documentos/descargas/Prensa/Documentos/politica\\_defensa\\_seguridad2019.pdf](https://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/go/km/docs/Mindefensa/Documentos/descargas/Prensa/Documentos/politica_defensa_seguridad2019.pdf).

24 Ibid

than one million hectares were deforested, a large part for the planting of illicit crops. It is obvious that empty or precarious institutional spaces pose the greatest threat to security, including environmental security.

The estimated value by the United States Agency for International Development of illegally traded timber in the world would amount to between 50,000 and 150,000 million dollars in the year 2021. For Interpol, profits can be significant enough that they can be used to finance conflicts in some parts of the world. Illegal logging is such an important crime that *InSight Crime*,<sup>25</sup> in collaboration with American University's Center for Latin American and Latino Studies, has spent two years investigating Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, and Peru. The details and data offered by the published reports are very worrying and reading them can help to understand the dimension of the problem.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Peru, which is not the only one, illegally harvested timber is destined for the PRC. Pucallpa, the capital of Ucayali, is Peru's main timber trafficking hub.<sup>27</sup> InSight Crime's report uncovers the complex web behind this criminal business.

On the other hand, among the 15 countries in the world with the largest marine area under its jurisdiction, there are three Ibero-American countries. Argentina should be fourth, but the United Kingdom occupied the Malvinas, South Georgia, and the South Sandwich Islands, which were recognized as dependent and non-self-governing territories. Brazil, Chile, and Mexico

---

25 Delitos, "Delitos Forestales", *International Criminal Police Organization* (2021), <https://www.interpol.int/es/Delitos/Delitos-contra-el-medio-ambiente/Delitos-forestales>.

26 Deborah Bonello, "Cómo los carteles de la droga se colaron en la tala ilegal en México", *InSight Crime* (September 18, 2020), <https://es.insightcrime.org/investigaciones/carteles-droga-tala-ilegal-mexico/>; Héctor Silva Ávalos, "Los barones de la madera en Catacamas, Honduras", *InSight Crime* (September 18, 2020), <https://es.insightcrime.org/investigaciones/barones-madera-catacamas-honduras/>; César Molineros and Natalia Moreno, "Cómo los reguladores colombianos se convirtieron en proveedores de madera ilegal", *InSight Crime* (September 18, 2020), <https://es.insightcrime.org/investigaciones/reguladores-colombianos-madera-ilegal/>; Juan Diego Cárdenas, "Panamá lucha por combatir el tráfico de madera en sus bosques y puertos", *InSight Crime* (April 4, 2022), <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/panama-combate-trafico-de-madera-bosques-puertos/>

27 The timber were given the order to look for and cut "shihuahuaco" and "storaque," as the Dipteryx Micrantha and Myroxylon Balsamum species, tropical woods desired for the construction of floors and terraces, especially for importers, especially by importers of the largest wood business partner of Peru: China. Available at: James Bargent, "Los Patrones y sus patrones en Ucayali, Perú", *InSight Crime* (September 18, 2020), <https://es.insightcrime.org/investigaciones/patrones-ucayali-peru/>.

have more than three million square kilometers of a marine area within their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The Chilean case is especially relevant because the extension of its area of influence in the sea is five times greater than its territory. In addition, the maritime area of national responsibility of Chile in maritime search and rescue (SAR area) exceeds 26 million square kilometers, an area equivalent to the entire African continent. Chile is the fifth country in the world with the largest SAR area.<sup>28</sup>

Ecuador also deserves to be highlighted because it has a marine area under its jurisdiction that approaches 5 times its land area. In addition, Ecuador aspires to expand its waters 150 miles beyond its current EEZ, relying on the rights granted by the recognition of a wider continental shelf. To do this, it needs to prove, through technical and scientific studies, that the continental shelf is as wide as it claims. If it succeeds, all waters between the mainland and the Galapagos Islands would come under Ecuadorian jurisdiction. In this regard, Ecuador and Costa Rica have submitted to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf the previous studies related to the Carnegie and Cocos submarine mountain ranges, which would support their rights to expand jurisdictional waters.<sup>29</sup> It would be an important step forward for Ecuador and Costa Rica to conserve the rich biodiversity of a unique area in the world threatened by overfishing, especially from China.<sup>30</sup>

---

28 Francisco Pablo García-Huidobro Correa, et al *Horizonte en el Pacífico: Visión Océánica de la Armada de Chile*, (April 2019), [https://www.armada.cl/custom/radio\\_naval/libros/libro\\_horizonte.pdf](https://www.armada.cl/custom/radio_naval/libros/libro_horizonte.pdf).

29 The underwater mountain ranges and that of coconuts are dorsal of the Pacific Ocean between the coasts of Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands and are subject to the commission of limits of the UN continental platform.

30 In 1984, the Galapagos archipelago was declared by UNESCO a Biosphere Reserve for hosting hundreds of species of flora and fauna found nowhere else in the world. The Humboldt Current, also called the Peru Current, which travels from south to north, from the upper third of Chile to the borders between Peru and Ecuador, is responsible for the great marine wealth of the waters of the Ibero-American Eastern Pacific. In the Galapagos Islands, in addition to the Humboldt Current, there are the Cromwell Current, which comes from the western coast of the archipelago, and the Panama Warm Current, which comes from the northeast. This convergence of waters fosters unparalleled biodiversity, which allows an exclusive mixture of ecosystems. In the Galapagos Islands, we can see cold water species coexist with tropical species. Available in: News, "Reserva marina de Galápagos", *Ecuador Galapagos Info* (2022), <https://ecuadorgalapagosinfo.com/reserva-marina-galapagos/>.

The first fishing campaign in distant waters of the PRC registered in Ibero-America was in 2001, mobilizing a total of 22 vessels. In 2015, the number of Chinese fishing boats exceeded 250 and, by the end of the decade, exceeded 500.<sup>31</sup> Its largest part is located outside the EEZ of both countries at mile 201. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing is a serious problem affecting not only conservation but also development and security. In 2017, *Global Financial Integrity*<sup>32</sup> published a report entitled *Transnational Crime and the Developing World*. In this report, it is estimated that illegal fishing generated an estimated income of between 15,000 and 36,000 million dollars.<sup>33</sup> The Chinese fishing fleet is responsible for this type of illegal exploitation, although it is not easy to prove it. There are many indicators that, taken together, point in the same incriminating direction.

*The 2019 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime* establishes a global index of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing measured on an analytical basis of 40 different factors. The PRC is the state with the most unfavorable data, standing out as the great champion of criminal fishing activity.<sup>34</sup> Illegal and unreported fishing accounts on average for approximately 15-35 % of the total volume of fish production, equivalent to between 12 and 28 million tons of fish.<sup>35</sup> The predatory practices of the PRC deep-sea fishing fleet are a serious threat to the preservation of the

---

31 Frameworks Kisner Well, "La flota pesquera china y su impacto sobre las pesquerías", *Alert Economic* (May 21, 2021), <https://alertaeconomica.com/la-flota-pesquera-china-y-su-impacto-sobre-las-pesquerias/>.

32 *Global Financial Integrity* (GFI) is one *Think tank* based in Washington, DC. which produces analyses of illicit financial flows, advises developing country governments on effective policy solutions, and promotes transparency measures as a means for global development to combat illicit activities and promote security.

33 Channing Mavrellis, "Transnational Crime and the Developing World", *Global Financial Integrity* (March 27, 2017), <https://gfintegrity.org/report/transnational-crime-and-the-developing-world/>.

34 GI History, "Catalyzing the Building Blocks of a Global Strategy", *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime* (2022), <https://globalinitiative.net/about-us/our-story/>; Look Gutierrez and Guy Jobbins, "China's distant-water fishing fleet: scale, impact, and governance", *Overseas Development Institute* (June 2, 2020), <https://www.odi.org/publications/16958-china-s-distant-water-fishing-fleet-scale-impact-and-governance>.

35 Miren Gutierrez and Guy Jobbins, "China's distant-water fishing phleet: Scale, Impact and Government", *Overseas Development Institute* (June 2, 2020), <https://odi.org/en/publications/chinas-distant-water-fishing-fleet-scale-impact-and-governance/>.

natural environment.<sup>36</sup> The current situation could change if the UN were to advance the process of approving the international agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Sea areas beyond national jurisdiction account for almost two-thirds of the surface of the oceans and half of the planet. The efforts made by the United Nations system to regulate the protection of this important part of the planet began 15 years ago. However, they have not yet come to fruition. However, since 2019, a draft project has been developed to regulate international law's protection of global interests on the high seas and its seabed.<sup>37</sup> Resuming the approval process of the agreement is of vital importance to preserve biodiversity in the waters surrounding Ibero-America. The new treaty would identify the basic requirements necessary for the inspection and management of damage caused by the exploitation of resources in international waters. It would facilitate the expansion of marine protected areas by coastal countries and sustain the necessary capacities for developing countries to protect the sustainable use of the high seas.

Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Peru, Chile, and Argentina, with an adequate instrument of international law, would be in a position to request international support to prevent overfishing or illegal fishing beyond mile 201. However, legality is not sufficient without the necessary mechanisms and capacities to monitor and enforce international standards. Ibero-American navies and coast guard services need to have sufficient patrol

---

36 At the beginning of July 2020, the Ecuadorian Navy published a bulletin warning of the presence of a formidable Chinese fishing squadron, of about 260 boats, fishing on the limit of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) near the Ecuadorian archipelago of the Galapagos. At the end of the month, the number of boats exceeded 340, mostly trawlers. Available in: News, "Armada de Ecuador", *Government of Ecuador* (2022), <https://www.armada.mil.ec/?p=48604>.

37 Draft text of an agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Available in: Victor Luis Gutierrez Castillo and Carlos Soria Rodriguez, "Hacia un nuevo acuerdo internacional que proteja la biodiversidad en alta mar", *The Conversation*, (August 15, 2021), <https://theconversation.com/hacia-un-nuevo-acuerdo-internacional-que-proteja-la-biodiversidad-en-alta-mar-165850>.

vessels on the coasts and in the deep waters of the ocean. An adequate number of hydrographic and research vessels is also essential to be able to observe and monitor fishing grounds. This will allow for sustainable exploitation of the region's immense fishery resources.

Undoubtedly, public opinion is becoming more and more sensitive to crimes against the environment. The protection of the natural heritage of the Ibero-American republics is a demand of societies increasingly aware of the importance of resources and the value of the immense biodiversity of the region. At the same time, the protection of this natural wealth is associated with the persecution of international criminal organizations that, diversifying their illicit businesses, have landed from drug trafficking to the illegal exploitation of forestry, mining, fishing resources, and the irregular trade of wild fauna and flora. The difficulty of controlling compliance with the law in large spaces, far from population centers, often inhospitable and difficult to access, together with the militarization of transnational crime groups, requires the mobilization of military institutions to achieve an effective and coordinated prosecution of crime.

In May 2022, the Joint Command for Reaction to Adverse Emergencies of the armed forces was presented in Bolivia. The 2022 National Plan for Fire Prevention and Fighting, called "In Defense of Life and the Environment."<sup>38</sup> was also released simultaneously. The joint command directs six regional commands that will have air force aircraft, navy river ships, Search and Rescue Service teams, and army assets. The mission of this new command will be to respond, limit, and prevent risks from disasters of natural origin or caused by human action.

The new Bolivian military organization has its antecedent in the Spanish Military Emergency Unit (UME). The EMU was created in October 2005.

---

38 Press NOTE, "FFAA. inician tareas de prevención y atención a emergencias en el país ante posibles desastres naturales por incendios y otros eventos", Ministry of Defense of Bolivia (May 12, 2022), <https://www.mindef.gob.bo/Mindef/node/4569>

At the time, it was very controversial, so it meant supporting the budget of the Ministry of Defense a joint unit with missions that were not strictly military. Over time, the EMU has become the first intervention unit of the armed forces to respond to emergencies and catastrophes. The annual campaign to fight forest fires is a fundamental contribution to preserving Spain's environmental heritage, one of the richest in Europe. The prestige of the UME has exceeded all expectations, contributing significantly to the twinning of society with its army. The UME has fulfilled its mission of assistance outstandingly and at the same time has strengthened the identification of Spanish society with its armed forces.

When the population discovers that in difficult times, the army is willing and prepared to reach where others have been overwhelmed, it becomes a particularly relevant reinforcement of social trust in the armed forces. The defense of the rich terrestrial and maritime natural heritage together with support in situations of natural disasters is an effective form of military contribution to the protection of population and resources and at the same time a mechanism for controlling territory and prosecuting crimes associated with international crime.

## **Conclusions**

The shadows of globalization are long and dark. The immense increase in global wealth generated by the opening of world markets, international value chains, the interconnectedness of real and financial economies, migratory movements, and the increase in the size of markets has not been accompanied by a stronger system of international governance. Many times, it has been read and heard that now, there is a situation of competition between the great powers. However, it may not have been considered what it entails. The competition between great powers is a soft and ambiguous way of describing the tensions between the most powerful nations. This is the result of a multipolar world where the big powers engage in competitive unilateralism to impose their norms and standards. The current state of the world has dissolved the barriers between security and business.

The dominant trend of decoupling from interdependencies is new, but it could have been anticipated as inevitable. Political warfare, which some now identify as a hybrid strategy, is a geostrategic mode of dispute for geoeconomic and geo-technological dominance, where each of the Ibero-American States can be a key piece in favor of one of the competitors for hegemony. It is possible that, if the threat is underestimated, it will be too late for some Ibero-American republics to undo a situation of excessive dependence for their sovereignty and independence. Defiant interdependence can impose a dangerous discourse on nations that do not have a state strong enough to sustain the weight of their sovereignty in an interconnected world.

The rivalry between China and the United States structures the world, although attention is currently focused on Ukraine. A great power's desire to gain an advantage may threaten international actors with insufficient capacity to counter its progressive penetration. The influence of the PRC or the United States need not be related to the coercive exercise of force. *The Weaponization of Everything*, that is, the use of any kind of interrelation to exert pressure on Ibero-American countries and condition their sovereign decisions has become a serious threat. The next few decades are likely to see the battle for dominance intensifying, so much so that it becomes difficult to compel people to take sides in the conflict.

Taking sides would mean for the Ibero-American States a choice associated with a loss of opportunities. China and the United States are both important partners. The obligation to swing in one direction or another, imposed by an unbalanced balance in relations, would mean the closing of windows of opportunity for Ibero-American countries. In this inescapable struggle to maintain sovereignty, the fragmentation of the region plays a detrimental role. Without an integrated Ibero-American vision, the region will not have the geopolitical criteria or the geoeconomic strength to assert itself. There is more to life than facts, but possibility as such is a key component. Paradoxically, one of the most distinctive characteristics of the historical reality of the Ibero-American republics is not that they possess a territory.

Long before the existence of any republic, Ibero-America was considered a single reality. A reality linked to the legacy of Spain on the other side of the Atlantic. This is how Francisco de Miranda, Simón Bolívar, San Martín, and Artigas understood it. This was also understood by the royalist soldiers and generals who fought against them.

Ibero-America is the continent with the greatest biodiversity in the world. For all Ibero-American countries, the protection of their natural heritage is especially important. The magnitude of the threat requires the involvement of international organizations and the close collaboration of the countries of the region.

The significance of the losses caused by environmental crime is still not sufficiently visualized. The magnitude of the loss of resources, money laundering, the effects on crime, or threats to State security affects everyone. These illicit activities against the environment are clearly connected to the financing of international criminal organizations, terrorism, and subversive groups, such as the residual FARC or the ELN in Colombia. The borders between Ibero-American countries cannot be an obstacle that prevents the combined and joint fight against this threat.

Water, biodiversity, and the environment are vital national interests for Ibero-America. The common interest in defending this heritage imposes an obligation on nations to equip themselves with capacities to act against crime and natural disasters. However, the effectiveness of the means will not be sufficient without collaborative agreements between States to prevent criminals from having secure sanctuaries, beyond the national borders of the States where they perpetrate their crimes.

Finally, it is intended to highlight the importance for society of defending its cultural and natural heritage. Defending biodiversity, protecting the environment, and responding to natural disasters to minimize their effects, while simultaneously combatting transnational criminal organizations is a mission that, without a doubt, will promote a more successful and immediate bond between the people and their armed forces.

**About the author:**

**Andrés González Martín** – *Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies*

*Lieutenant Colonel of Artillery of the Spanish Army, Diploma of General Staff, Superior Diploma of Military Statistics, and specialist in pedagogical attitude, curricular design, evaluation of military education, and Roland and Mistral anti-aircraft missiles. He has been a professor of the missile center at the Artillery Academy, the Department of Strategy and Organization of the Army War College, and the Department of Strategy and International Relations of the Higher School of the Armed Forces. He is also a co-author of several books and the author of more than 50 articles published in military and civilian journals. Currently, he is assigned as an Analyst at the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.*

# ARMS TRANSFERS AND MAJOR POWER COMPETITION IN LATIN AMERICA

*Roman D. Ortiz*

## **Summary**

*This article analyzes the penetration of Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the Latin American arms market, paying special attention to the causes that allowed both countries to increase their sales in the period 2007–2016, as well as the factors that limited the number of recipient countries and the type of equipment delivered. It also analyzes the collapse of military exports from Moscow and Beijing to Latin America during the last five years. Based on this trajectory and the effects of the war in Ukraine, it is concluded that the prospects for the Russian and Chinese defense industries are markedly different. While Moscow could see its presence in the Latin American market disappear irreversibly, Beijing is likely to take advantage of several factors in its favor to increase its sales to the region in the coming years. This increase in arms transfers from the PRC to Latin America could have a substantial impact on the hemispheric geopolitical balances. To this end, the analysis of the evolution of the Latin American defense market, as well as Russian and Chinese military exports, has been based on information on arms transfers from the database of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).*

**Keywords:** *Arms transfers, arms sales, defense industry, Latin America, United States, Europe, China, Russia.*

## **Introduction: Business and Policy on Military Equipment Transfers**

The sale of military equipment has always been more than just a business. Behind every arms transfer, there are economic interests, but also strategic bets. The purchase of a weapon system by a country's armed forces creates deep and long-lasting ties with the manufacturer of the weapon system. The receiver is obligated to absorb to some extent the

doctrine of use of the equipment developed by the supplier and is chained to it by the maintenance needs of the system. In addition, the delivery of war materiel creates a bridge over which it is simple, almost inevitable, to expand cooperation from strictly technical areas such as training or logistics to more political areas such as the development of multinational exercises or diplomatic collaboration. In fact, the links created by arms purchases are so deep that relations between supplier and recipient tend to be perpetuated over time to the extent that it is much easier to renew military equipment from the same source than to undertake a change that is always costly and with uncertain results. In other words, arms sales are privileged ways to forge relationships on which to build alliances and delimit areas of influence.

This combination of political and strategic factors has determined the evolution of arms transfers to Latin America. Historically, major powers have used the supply of arms to Latin American governments as an instrument to gain influence in the region. With this background, the reconfiguration of the international scenario, the result of the rivalry between the United States, Russia, and the People's Republic of China (PRC), has fueled changes in the sales patterns of military equipment in Latin America. More specifically, Moscow and Beijing have sought to become major suppliers of military equipment to the continent's armed forces as part of their attempts to erode Washington's hegemony. In the context of the spiraling tension created by the crises in Ukraine and Taiwan, it is key to assess the extent to which Russia and China have been successful in these efforts, what prospects their attempts to conquer the Latin American arms market have, and what consequences they may have for hemispheric security.

During the Cold War, Washington's hegemony in the Hemisphere maintained the region as a market reserved for Western arms suppliers, while transfers of Soviet military equipment were limited to its few Latin American allies -Cuba from the 60s and Nicaragua during the 80s- with some exceptions such as the large acquisitions of land and air equipment

by the Peruvian military government of General Juan Velasco Alvarado in the 1970s. In this context, the United States and Europe assumed different roles. While the United States remained mainly a supplier of equipment for internal security tasks – helicopters, transport planes, armored vehicles, etc. – most Latin American capitals turned to European suppliers to acquire external defense means, a way to guarantee a certain degree of strategic autonomy from the hegemonic power of the continent. Consequently, the Latin American navies turned to Germany and Italy to equip themselves with submarines, corvettes, and frigates. For their part, the armies were equipped with tanks and artillery from France, Germany, and Italy. Finally, the region's air forces found in the French aircraft industry a key supplier of fighter bombers.

This distribution of the Latin American market between Washington and European capitals was not perfect. On occasion, Washington made significant transfers of military equipment intended for the external defense of its Latin American partners, but these were exceptions justified by specific strategic or political circumstances. This was the case with the sale of F-16 fighter bombers to Venezuela in the early 80s, and to Chile in the late 90s. In the first case, it was an attempt to offer Caracas the means to defend its oil fields against the threat of MiG-23s delivered to Cuba by the Soviet Union, while, in the second, it sought to cement an alliance with the newly restored Chilean democracy. However, these cases did not break the general pattern of a market where most large weapons systems were of European origin.

**Evolution of the Sale of Military Equipment to Latin America (\*)**

Exporter	1990-1991	1992-1996	1997-2001	2002-2006	2007-2011	2012-2016	2017-2021
<b>Russia</b>	525	191	603	445	2302	1854	7
<b>China</b>	6	27	0	27	251	451	1
<b>Israel</b>	49	238	142	389	512	207	112
<b>Europe</b>	1181	1772	2322	2489	2865	1795	1192
<b>USA</b>	358	972	2188	1151	1110	1424	663
<b>Other</b>	220	822	1218	754	1478	1116	1167
<b>TOTAL</b>	2339	4022	6473	5255	8518	6847	3142

(\*) The figures are millions of units of “Trend-Indicator Value” (TIV).<sup>1</sup>

Source: *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* and own elaboration

In any case, a series of political and economic factors led to a significant reduction of the Latin American military market in the late 80s. The change was driven by the end of the military dictatorships that had ruled since the 60s, and the progressive restoration of democracy in the region. The new civil administrations came to power with a new political agenda that included reducing the influence of the military to prevent possible coup adventures, reducing public spending to shore up economic stability, and expanding social programs to meet the demands of new voters. All these elements combined to impose a drastic reduction in defense spending and, consequently, a fall in arms purchases. Gone are periods like 1980 when

<sup>1</sup> The arms transfer figures used in this article come from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “Importer/Exporter TIV Tables”, *SIPRI* (Sweden), <https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php>. SIPRI uses a unit of measure of the volume of transfers of military equipment referred to as the “Trend Indicator Value” (*Trend-Indicator Value/TIV*). The calculation is based on the cost of production per unit of several major weapons systems. The unit does not measure the financial value of arms transactions but measures the military capacity transferred with a shipment. This makes it possible to assess the military potential delivered in a sale and compare this with successive transfers over time or with deliveries made by other countries to other destinations. The main merit of the TIVs They are homogeneous units that allow comparing the sales made by different suppliers to different receivers over time. More details on the definition of TIVs in Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “Sources and Methods”, *SIPRI* (Sweden) <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/sources-and-methods>

the Latin American military market reached a value of 2,915 million TIVs. By 1990, equipment purchases by the Latin American armed forces had fallen by nearly two-thirds to 1.11 billion TIVs. The figure is particularly small if one remembers that, in the same year, Saudi Arabia had acquired arms worth 2.043 billion and Turkey 1.251 million.

**Percentage of Market Share of Major Arms Exporters to Latin America**

Exporter	1990-1991	1992-1996	1997-2001	2002-2006	2007-2011	2012-2016	2017-2021
<b>Russia</b>	22.45%	4.75%	9.32%	8.47%	27.03%	27.08%	0.22%
<b>China</b>	0.26%	0.67%	0.00%	0.51%	2.95%	6.59%	0.03%
<b>Israel</b>	2.09%	5.92%	2.19%	7.40%	6.01%	3.02%	3.56%
<b>Europe</b>	50.49%	44.06%	35.87%	47.36%	33.63%	26.22%	37.94%
<b>USA</b>	15.31%	24.17%	33.80%	21.90%	13.03%	20.80%	21.10%
<b>Other</b>	9.41%	20.44%	18.82%	14.35%	17.35%	16.30%	37.14%

Source: *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* and own elaboration

In the context of this reduction in the Latin American arms market, Western suppliers, and in particular European suppliers, had a dominant position. In fact, by 1990, the main suppliers of military equipment from the old continent provided control of 51.44 % of the supply of weapons to the region, a figure that shot up to 62.16 % if the equipment supplied by the United States (9.46 %) and Israel (1.08 %) were added.<sup>2</sup> Faced with this enormous commercial weight, the then Soviet Union had a theoretically important presence (32.97 % of the total market), but with serious fragilities. 74 % of its military transfers (272 million TIVs out of a total of 366) were acquired by its only two client states in the region (Cuba and Nicaragua) that received it as part of the Kremlin's strategic support and, consequently, were not obligated to make monetary payments for any

<sup>2</sup> A "main European supplier" is defined in this article as the sum of sales made by Germany, Spain, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. The decision to choose this group of countries as the main European supplier group lies in the size of their respective market shares in the global arms trade.

amount close to the commercial value of that weaponry. In other words, it was a niche market occupied by political will, with no possibility of being financially sustainable.

### **The Penetration of the Russian Defense Industry: Myth and Reality**

This lack of financial rationality in Moscow's arms transfers became apparent after the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991 and the end of the East-West confrontation. Without the incentive of competition with the West and with a dire economic situation, Russia – as a successor state to the USSR – canceled the donations of military equipment it had made to its Western Hemisphere partners during the Cold War. On their part, former pro-Soviet allies in the region lacked the resources and interest to pay for the weapons they previously received free of charge from the Kremlin. Thus, by 1992, Cuba and Nicaragua had closed as destinations for Russian weapons and the only active customer in the region was Peru, which maintained a commercial relationship with its Moscow suppliers since the agreement of General Velasco Alvarado more than two decades ago. The result was that sales of Russian military equipment to the region plummeted from the aforementioned 366 million TIVs to just 27 million, just 4.46 % of the regional market.

While Moscow's market share was reduced to a minimum, the combined sales of the large European suppliers, the United States and Israel climbed to 67.93 %. This massive Western dominance reflected several factors associated with the end of the Cold War. On the one hand, Western defense industries operated in an environment absent of competitors because of Russia's political, economic, and social morass and the absence of any other rivals who might take their place. Suffice it to recall that, in 1992, the PRC's sales to Latin America were reduced to the delivery of equipment to Peru and Bolivia worth 18 million TIVs, 2.98 % of total arms imports to the region. On the other hand, the US and European military equipment enjoyed an excellent image of effectiveness that had increased after the triumph of the international coalition over Iraq in the first Gulf War. Finally, Western

companies and governments showed renewed commercial aggressiveness to seek new export markets in response to cuts in domestic military demand in the wake of reductions in defense budgets at the end of the Cold War.

The dominance of Western defense industries continued in the following years. The share of the regional market in the hands of the European producers and their US and Israeli equivalents remained at 74.14 % in the period 1992–1996, experienced a slight decrease in the five-year period 1997–2001 (71.87 %), and shot up to 76.67 % in the 2002–2006 period. In other words, more than three-quarters of the weaponry acquired by Latin American governments came from Western military industries. In this sense, all the major weapons programs developed by the armed forces of the region came from this group of countries. Such was the case with the transfer of U.S. helicopters to Colombia to support its counterinsurgency and counternarcotics campaign that totaled 15 Bell-212/UH-1N, 42 UH-1H Huey-2, and 30 UH-60 *Blackhawks* between 2000 and 2003 alone. The same can be said of several aircraft acquisitions, including 12 Airbus C-295 transport aircraft, 12 Mirage 2000 fighter-bombers, and 8 AS-532U2 Cougar transport helicopters, made by Brazil in the period between 2002 and 2009. Also, within this same category, we must mention the investment made by the Chilean government for the acquisition of 10 American F-16C Block 50/52 fighter-bombers, as well as the renovation of its entire armored fleet with 172 main Leopard-2A4 battle tanks and 266 Marder-1A3 infantry fighting vehicles of German origin, all between 2006 and 2011.

Against the backdrop of this Western dominance, Russian defense exports began a slow recovery. During the deep crisis unleashed by the collapse of the Soviet system, Russian arms exports to Latin America sank to 191 million TIVs between 1992 and 1996 (barely 4.75 % of regional purchases). However, this collapse seemed to slow down during the five-year period 1997–2001 when sales in the Russian Federation experienced a recovery to 603 million (9.32 % of the total). This commercial effort reaped some successes in attempts to move the Kremlin's defense industry beyond the traditional customer states to which it had supplied weapons during the Cold War and

which, at present, lacked purchasing power. Thus, the Moscow aeronautical industry sold a package of 8 SU-29AR aerobatic aircraft to the Argentine air force in 1997, whose operational life would only extend until 2005.<sup>3</sup> Russia also transferred Iгла man-portable air defense missiles (MANPADS) to Brazil in 1994, and to Ecuador in 1998. However, it was the sales of Mi-8/ Mi-17 helicopters to Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, and Mexico – more than 80 new and second-hand aircraft – that, above all, kept Russia as a player with some relevance in the Latin American military market. In any case, these commercial successes were not enough to bring Russian arms transfers back to the volumes they had had during the Cold War. The Kremlin seemed doomed to play a very secondary role as a supplier of military equipment to the Hemisphere.

Behind Russian attempts to regain space in the Latin American military market were some factors that have to do with the role of the defense industry in the economy of post-Soviet Russia.<sup>4</sup> The collapse of the USSR implied the collapse of much of its industrial structure because of poor management, lack of competitiveness, widespread corruption, and the absence of commercial and financial sustainability. In the context of this debacle, the defense industry remained an exception for its better management and superior quality of its products, far above its civilian counterpart. It also became a key support for sustaining Russia's research and development capacity, directly inherited from the former Soviet Union. On the other hand, from a social perspective, military production became one of the few niches of Russian industry capable of generating well-paid jobs and, consequently, making possible the survival of the middle classes that would give stability to the new Russian republic. Consequently, maintaining a robust defense sector became not only a strategic but also an economic and political priority.

---

3 Juan José Roldán, "La Fuerza Aérea Argentina subasta sus aviones acrobáticos Sukhoi Su-29", *Military Zone* (May 5, 2021), <https://www.zona-militar.com/2021/05/05/la-fuerza-aerea-argentina-subasta-sus-aviones-acrobaticos-sukhoi-su-29/>

4 Richard Connolly and Cecilie Sendstad, "Russia's Role as an Arms Exporter", *Chatham House* (March 20, 2017), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2017/03/russias-role-arms-exporter?4TXRR%2CO7Z7AR%2CI8JoP%2C=>

However, the maintenance of the military production sector required a renewed boost to arms exports. The end of the USSR and the ensuing economic crisis had forced a radical reduction of the Russian armed forces and the defense budgets that sustained them. Consequently, the Russian defense industry could not rely on the domestic market to survive; On the contrary, it needed to multiply its exports for commercial purposes. This partially explains the efforts to increase sales to Latin America. However, the need to increase export earnings is not the only explanation behind the boost in sales to Latin America. At the end of the 90s, the commercial eyes of the Russian defense industry were set on other latitudes. While transferring arms to Latin America equivalent to 69 million TIVs in 2000, Moscow's sales reached 642 million TIVs to India, 341 million to Iran, and 241 million to Algeria in the same year.

From this perspective, the Latin American market was extraordinarily small but strategically attractive for other reasons. The reactivation of the transfer of Russian arms to Latin America since the late 90s was part of a bid to recover Moscow's international weight that emerged under the name of "Primakov doctrine" after the name of the Russian Foreign Minister of the time, Yevgeny Primakov. According to this view, Russia's security depended on the emergence of a multipolar world in which its *great-power status* was recognized, and America's power limited. The implications of these proposals were expressed by Primakov himself during a trip to Latin America in 1997 when he expressed his opposition to granting Washington the right to enjoy special influence over the region. "After the Cold War," said the Kremlin's foreign policy chief, "the concept of 'sphere of interest' has become outdated. Russia has no intention of abandoning its position in the global arena and Latin American countries are our key partners." In this way, Russia saw its arms transfers to the region as a tool not only to obtain economic benefits but, mainly, strategic returns.<sup>5</sup>

---

5 IPS, "Russia-Latin America: Primakov Trip Shows Strong Interest in Region", *Inter Press Service News* (Moscow: May 28, 1996), <https://www.ipsnews.net/1996/05/russia-latin-america-primakov-trip-shows-strong-interest-in-region/>

Russia's bid to increase its military sales to Latin America seemed to have been bearing fruit since the mid-2000s. Compared to the low sales made between 2002 and 2006, just 445 million TIVs, Russian exports multiplied by five in the following five years to reach 2,302 million, remaining at 1,854 million during the following five years. This increase was due to the growth in military demand in the region. In fact, arms imports from Latin American states went from representing 5,255 million TIVs in the period 2002-2006 to 8,518 million in the five-year period 2007-2011, and subsequently remaining at 6,847 during the 2012-2016 stage. In other words, the growth of Russian exports to the region was aided by an expansion of the market. But, in addition, Moscow's market share also grew within the region's total arms purchases. Thus, the Kremlin went from representing 8.47 % during the years 2002-2006 to 27.03 % between 2007-2011, and then 27.08 % between 2012-2016. Consequently, it was not only a question of growing Russian sales dragged down by the expansion of the Latin American market but also that the Russian defense industry increased its share of the total equipment acquired by the region.

In theory, it was an unmitigated commercial victory: Latin Americans preferred Russian weapons to European or North American ones, whose manufacturers had lost space during the period analyzed. However, a closer look introduces important nuances to this apparent success. Undoubtedly, this sales growth included agreements with non-regular Moscow customers, such as the sale of 12 Mi-35 attack helicopters to Brazil in 2009.<sup>6</sup> But the bulk of the expansion of Russian military sales to Latin America during that period was the reflection of purchases from a single customer: Venezuela. Of the 4.156 million TIVs sold by Moscow in the period 2007-2016, Caracas was the destination of 3.498 million. In other words, 84.16 % of Russian arms transfers during that stage were purchased by Venezuela.

---

6 Augustus Caesar Dall'AgnolBoris Perius Zabolotsky and Fabiano Mielniczuk, "The Return of the Bear? Russian Military Engagement in Latin America. The Case of Brazil", *Army University Press* (March-April 2019), <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/Mar-Apr-2019/128-Russia-LATAM/>

This opportunity for the growth of Russian arms exports was the result exclusively of a series of considerably exceptional political and economic conditions. On the one hand, the coming to power in Venezuela of a leader like Hugo Chávez, who professed a sharp anti-American sentiment and raised the project of turning his country into a military power. On the other hand, Washington's decision to respond to Caracas' hostility with an arms embargo that was subsequently followed by most major European exporters and deprived the Venezuelan armed forces of the flow of spare parts they needed to sustain an arsenal almost entirely of Western origin. Finally, an oil bonanza provided the Venezuelan government with a substantial flow of resources to finance the complete re-equipment of its military apparatus. The result was the arrival of Russian equipment that had never been transferred to Latin American countries, such as 24 Su-30MK fighter-bombers, 12 BM-9A52 Smerch multiple rocket launchers, and 3 S-300VM/SA-23 anti-aircraft missile systems.

The strong dependence on Russian arms sales of the Venezuelan market during the period 2007-2016 should be seen as a demonstration that the penetration of Russian weapons in the region was not due so much to its technical attractiveness or its price but, rather, to the existence of a political understanding with Moscow that made systems of this origin more attractive than their Western equivalents. This trend is even clearer if we consider the case of another of Russia's main customers: Nicaragua. During the period indicated, Managua acquired weapons from the Kremlin for an equivalent of 128 million TIVs (3.07 % of total Russian sales), a very important figure for a small country. The fact that Moscow was the recipient of purchases of that volume can only be explained because it had the political confidence of President Daniel Ortega, a former ally of the USSR in the 80s, when he headed the Sandinista regime that ruled Nicaragua. As a result, much of Russia's expansion of arms sales to Latin America was not the result of its team's increased competitiveness but, above all, of the Kremlin's ability to make new friends or draw on those with whom it had collaborated during the Cold War.

The other key component of expanding Russian arms sales was a series of deals for the transfer of Mi-17 helicopters, a system Moscow had previously sold to several Latin American countries and enjoyed a reputation for its combination of robustness, reliability, and low cost.<sup>7</sup> In fact, in the period 2007-2016, Moscow delivered different variants of this aircraft to Argentina (2), Colombia (9), Ecuador (2), Mexico (4), and Peru (30), in addition to an additional package to Venezuela (18). Thus, if sales to Venezuela and transfers of Mi-17 helicopters are left aside, the supply of Russian military material to Latin America in the period 2007-2016 is marginal. Consequently, the supposed commercial success of Russian armaments in Latin America was reduced to one country (Venezuela) and one system (the Mi-17 helicopter), a base too narrow to become a starting point for solid and lasting market penetration.

### **The Rise of the People's Republic of China as an Arms Supplier**

The PRC's military sales to Latin America present a completely different trajectory. Beijing was largely absent from the Latin American market until the early 2000s. Between 1990 and 2002, its sales were practically testimonial. During those years, the defense industry supplied its Latin American customers with the equivalent of 33 million TIVs, 0.25 % of all weapons acquired by governments in the region. The only notable transfers were the sale of HN-5A man-portable air defense missiles to Ecuador in 1994, and to Bolivia in 1995. The United States had always been reluctant to transfer these systems because of the risk they could pose to civil aviation if they fell into the hands of terrorists willing to use them to shoot down a passenger plane.<sup>8</sup> However, Beijing had no problem handing them over to Quito and La Paz, revealing one of its key trade tactics: selling without

---

7 HH, "Russian helicopter fleet posts solid growth in Latin America", *Helihub* (March 27, 2014) <https://helihub.com/2014/03/27/russian-helicopter-fleet-posts-solid-growth-in-latin-america/>

8 In the case of the missiles delivered to Bolivia, the United States government reached a commitment with the Bolivian military high command to send these systems abroad for deactivation as a precautionary measure to avoid the risk that they could fall into the hands of terrorists. This agreement generated a political scandal in Bolivia in WT, "Removal of missiles roils U.S.-Bolivia Ties", *The Washington Times* (December 22, 2005), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/dec/22/20051222-121716-8988r/>

political restrictions on the potential use of the weaponry, and without worrying about possible subsequent consequences. A way of operating that imitated the behavior of the Russian military industry in its effort to conquer international markets after the Soviet collapse. In fact, Moscow would follow China's lead when it comes to man-portable air defense missiles when it would transfer a package of 2,000 systems of the same Igla-S category to Venezuela in 2012. The conditions and restrictions for the delivery of this armament were the same as those of its Chinese equivalent: none.

Starting from such a low level, expansion into Latin American defense markets initially served Beijing little. During the period 2002–2006, the PRC only added another 27 million TIVs of sales. The almost total lack of Chinese presence in the Latin American market is easier to understand if one considers that the Chinese defense industry had limited export capacity in that period. While it is true that Beijing transferred only the equivalent of 20 million ICTs to Latin America in 2006, it should also be taken into consideration that its total arms exports that year were 663 million TIVs. In other words, Latin America represented a small market (3 % of Chinese military sales) for an equally small exporter. That said, Beijing's defense industry reaped some significant success, not so much because of the amount of equipment exported but because of its characteristics. Thus, in the period 2005–2006, the PRC agreed to the delivery of 10 JYL-1 aerial surveillance radars to Venezuela, a significant step in Beijing's efforts to penetrate the region's military electronics market.

Without reaching the figures of its Russian equivalents, the Chinese defense industry undertook a significant expansion of its exports to Latin America in the period 2007–2016. In that sense, in the first five years, sales of the Chinese defense industry jumped to 251 million TIVs and continued to climb to 451 million in the following five years. These figures remained modest (2.95 % of the total market in 2007–2011 and 6.59 % in the period 2012–2016) but represented a spectacular expansion if the starting point is taken into account. The 451 million 2011–2016 TIVs sold in 2016 represented a 16-fold increase from the meager 2002–2007 sales.

In addition to the quantities, the customer base and the sophistication of the transferred products also experienced a certain expansion.<sup>9</sup> Of course, Beijing continued to benefit from the Chavista regime's hunger for military equipment. Therefore, China became the main supplier of armored equipment to the Venezuelan Marine Corps with the delivery of ZBL-09/VN-1 and ZBD-05/VN-18 infantry fighting vehicles, as well as ZTD-05/VN-16 light tanks. It also equipped the Venezuelan National Guard with 121 VN-4 armored vehicles that would become infamous during the popular protests of the Chavista regime in 2017. In terms of aerial material, however, the PRC's sales to Venezuela made the greatest qualitative leap. Beijing transferred 27 K-8 Karakorum training and light attack aircraft to Caracas, as well as PL-5E short-range air-to-air missiles to equip them. In addition, the Venezuelan Air Force incorporated 8 Shaanxi Y-8 transport aircraft.

In parallel, the PRC extended the list of its Latin American clients beyond the Bolivarian regime. The most prominent case was Bolivia which acquired 6 K-8WB Karakorum training and light attack aircraft, as well as 6 H-425 (Z-9) helicopters, which gave Beijing a decisive weight in the equipment and training of its Air Force.<sup>10</sup> Another particularly noteworthy equipment transfer was the delivery to Trinidad and Tobago of a Type-718 deep-sea ocean-size patrol boat.<sup>11</sup> In this way, although with smaller figures, Beijing penetrated two segments of the Latin American defense market normally reserved for Western countries, air, and naval equipment.

As in the case of Russia, an important part of the commercial successes of the Chinese defense industry was associated with an effort to occupy niche markets created by governments that had decided to displace their Western suppliers for ideological reasons. This was the case of the purchase of Chinese radars by the Venezuelan Armed Forces, which was little motivated

---

9 Allan Nixon, "China's Growing Arms Sales to Latin America", *The Diplomat* (August 24, 2016) <https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/chinas-growing-arms-sales-to-latin-america/>

10 TW, "The first Chinese helicopter H425 for Bolivia", *Top War* (February 3, 2014), <https://en.topwar.ru/39264-pervyy-kitavskiy-vertolet-h425-dlya-bolivii.html>

11 Trinidad Express, "Chinese vessel coming to Trinidad", *Jamaica Observer* (February 25, 2014), <https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Chinese-vessel-coming-to-Trinidad/>

by their quality, and mostly by the desire of the Caracas regime to show off its anti-American position, opening the door to the PRC in an area as sensitive as the control of airspace. This same logic is behind the purchases of planes and helicopters by the government of Evo Morales in Bolivia, which included the incorporation of the PRC as a supplier of military equipment as part of an effort to cut the historical ties of the Bolivian Armed Forces with the United States. Thus, it was political affinities that opened opportunities in the field of military equipment sales.

In contrast to this inclination to support the sale of military equipment based on political coincidences, China chose to keep its economic expansion in Latin America and the activities of its defense industry separate. In other words, Beijing appeared to give up using the leverage provided by its trade ties to the region to push for the purchase of its war products. Beijing's big trading partners chose to ignore their defense industry as a potential supplier to their armed forces. This was the case of Chile, which had already made China its main foreign market in 2016 (26.98 % of its exports), without committing to any military purchases. The same can be said of Brazil, which had also elevated the PRC to the category of first trading partner that same year (20.01 % of its exports) but avoided the acquisition of weapons from this source. Thus, in the period 2007-2016, the PRC maintained its growing economic influence and the aspirations of its defense industry in Latin America as two separate efforts.

In any case, the penetration of the Chinese defense industry in the region has faced significant problems. Legal issues have sometimes arisen as a result of low-quality equipment delivered by the PRC. This was the case of the contract signed between the government of Ecuador and the Chinese company CETC for the purchase of a package of airspace control radars YLC-2 and YLC-18. The systems never worked, and the contract was terminated by the Ecuadorian government, leading to a legal battle with the

supplier company.<sup>12</sup> Mention can also be made of the purchase of 27 Norinco Type 90B multiple rocket launchers by the Peruvian Army, which was placed under investigation by the Ministry of Defense of that country when significant failures were discovered in the systems received.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, several contracts have been questioned for corruption problems. This was the case, for example, of the contract to supply helicopters to Bolivia which resulted in the prosecution of the air force commander responsible for this purchase.<sup>14</sup>

These quality deficiencies and accusations of corruption are not unique to Chinese military sales but extend to the activities of the Russian defense industry as well. Without a doubt, the most notorious case is the failed construction of a factory in Venezuela to produce Kalashnikov AK-103 assault rifles. In 2006, the Russian military export agency Rosoboronexport, the Venezuelan Ministry of Defense, and the Venezuelan Anonymous Company of Military Industries (the Venezuelan state defense company) signed an agreement for the establishment of two factories, one for the manufacture of rifles and the other for the corresponding ammunition. However, the project was mired in a tangle of corruption that resulted in heavy economic losses for the Chavista regime and made it impossible to complete the project.<sup>15</sup> The story of the so-called Multipurpose Helicopter Maintenance and Repair Center, a facility intended to maintain the rotary-wing fleet sold by Moscow to Venezuela, bears some similarities to the case of the

---

12 EU Redacción, “Empresa china CETC que vendió radares pide \$ 280 millones a Ecuador”, *The Universe* (November 7, 2016), <https://www.ehuniverso.com/noticias/2016/11/07/nota/5892721/empresa-que-vendio-radares-pide-280-millones-estado/>.

13 Peter Watson, “Perú investiga la adquisición de los lanzadores múltiples Norinco a China”, *Infodefensa* (January 5, 2017), <https://www.infodefensa.com/texto-diario/mostrar/3079068/peru-investiga-adquisicion-lanzadores-multiples-norinco-china>.

14 Carlos E. Hernández, “Imputan a un general boliviano por la compra de helicópteros chinos para el Ejército”, *Infodefensa* (January 13, 2020), <https://www.infodefensa.com/texto-diario/mostrar/3127880/imputan-general-boliviano-compra-helicopteros-chinos-ejercito>.

15 Sergey Denisentsev, “Russian-Venezuelan Defense Cooperation”, *Center for Naval Analyses* (May 6, 2019) <https://www.cna.org/reports/2019/06/russia-venezuela-defense-cooperation> and also: Daniel Gómez, “¿Qué pasa con las fábricas de fusiles Kalashnikov que Rusia construye en Venezuela?”, *To the Navio* (November 1, 2021), <https://alnavio.es/que-pasa-con-las-fabricas-de-fusiles-kalashnikov-que-rusia-construye-en-venezuela/>.

rifle factory. Following the signing of an agreement for its establishment in 2006, the project suffered a long list of delays and postponements. In March 2019, Rosoboronexport announced the inauguration of a center for the use of simulators in the training of Venezuelan pilots.<sup>16</sup> However, at that time, maintenance facilities remained incomplete judging by the statements of the deputy general manager of the Russian Helicopters group, Igor Chechikov, who promised that they would be ready during the year.<sup>17</sup> It is unclear whether Russian Helicopters have been able to complete the project, but certainly, a substantial part of the Venezuelan helicopter fleet showed clear symptoms of a complete lack of maintenance in June of that same year.<sup>18</sup>

This combination of incompetence and corruption has been a powerful barrier for both Russia and China to consolidate their control over a substantial part of the Latin American defense market. However, another factor has curbed the penetration of Russian and Chinese defense industries: the deep roots of Western military models in the Latin American armed forces and the enormous difficulties in breaking these ties and replacing them with concepts imported from Moscow or Beijing. As already mentioned, the acquisition of military equipment always brings with it changes in training and doctrine. In other words, arms purchases should not be seen as mere changes in material means, but necessarily bring about modifications of the military system. As a result, a radical change in suppliers of military equipment often involves a transformation of the profile of the armed forces, including their training, force structure, and doctrine. Such change is always a process of uncertain outcomes, even

---

16 AFP, "Rusia anunció apertura de centro de pilotaje de helicópteros en Venezuela," *The National* (March 29, 2019), [https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/politica/rusia-anuncio-apertura-centro-pilotaje-helicopteros-venezuela\\_276980/](https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/politica/rusia-anuncio-apertura-centro-pilotaje-helicopteros-venezuela_276980/).

17 Carlos E. Hernandez, "Russian Helicopters abrirá su centro de mantenimiento en Venezuela este año," *Infodefense* (April 5, 2019), <https://www.infodefensa.com/texto-diario/mostrar/3129740/russian-helicopters-abrira-centro-mantenimiento-venezuela-ano>.

18 Sebastiana Barraez, "Rusia están abandonados como chatarra," *Infobae* (June 2, 2019), <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/06/02/los-principales-helicopteros-que-venezuela-le-compro-a-rusia-estan-abandonados-como-chatarra/>.

when significant resources and strong political support are available. In this sense, the case of Venezuela under the Chavista regime provides important lessons. Despite the Caracas government's bid to break its ties with the United States and the investment of an overwhelming amount of resources, the Venezuelan Armed Forces were not able to complete the transition from a military model with Western equipment and doctrine to a "Bolivarian" one that would amalgamate Cuban military experience and the massive injection of Russian and Chinese equipment. The current military capabilities of Bolivarian Venezuela are a shadow of those of the democratic regime that preceded it.

Undoubtedly, corruption, misrule, and the economic debacle of the Chavista regime explain much of the failure of Venezuela's military transformation. However, it is key to take into consideration that the effort to move a military apparatus like Venezuela's, beyond its Western traditions, towards a "revolutionary model" was an adventure with little chance of success. The new air and armored systems from Russia and China forced the Venezuelan Armed Forces not only to learn the management of systems based on a philosophy and technique different from the Western one but also to conceive a structure of forces and a doctrine according to the new equipment. There are few historical examples of successful change of this nature and -beyond the problems of mismanagement and corruption- the lack of a solid plan to comprehensively address the technological, organic, and doctrinal dimensions of the process of change made it almost impossible for the military transformation undertaken by the Chavista regime to culminate with any degree of success.

The barriers represented by the Western military traditions of the Latin American armed forces to absorb equipment of Russian or Chinese origin are cemented both by a history of close ties with the United States and Europe and by a network of defense cooperation woven by Washington during the Cold War and that has continued active after its end. The effort promoted by the U.S. Southern Command to maintain training programs and joint exercises has become a way to keep alive a common military knowledge

that connects Latin American defense apparatuses with their American and European counterparts. Maintaining common views on missions, force structures and doctrines makes it much easier for the region's armed forces to bet on integrating teams of Western origin instead of their Russian or Chinese equivalents. Without purchasable cooperation channels, the defense industries of Moscow and Beijing face barriers to entry into the region that not only slowed their growth possibilities during the first decades of this century but will continue to do so until their respective governments are unable to develop their own military collaboration mechanisms with which to promote and sustain their arms sales.

### **The Great Adjustment: Moscow, Beijing, and the Latin American Military Market after the Ukraine War**

The growth of Russian and Chinese military sales to Latin America suffered an abrupt slowdown in the period 2017–2021, going from 2,305 million TIVs in the previous five-year period to only 8 million. Several contextual factors help explain this collapse. On the one hand, at the end of 2014, the cycle of high raw materials that had allowed high levels of public spending to Latin American countries and, consequently, had facilitated the expansion of the region's defense budgets came to an end. On the other hand, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 increased pressure on public finances while paralyzing trade, two other factors that further reduced the dynamism of the defense market. In addition, purchases made in previous periods seemed to saturate – to some extent – the demand of the Latin American armed forces. Together, these factors explain why the Latin American military market shrank substantially, falling from 6,847 million TIVs in the 2012–2016 period to only 3,142 million in the 2017–2021 stage, a cut of 54.11 %.

In any case, this general market decline does not in itself explain the collapse of Russian and Chinese sales. Amid these cuts, Western countries were able to maintain significant market shares. For example, the United States transferred equipment equivalent to 663 million TIVs (21.10 % of the total

market) while its European partners transferred an estimated equipment volume of 1,192 million (37.94 % of total sales to the region). On the contrary, the market shares of Russia and China fell to a negligible 0.22 % and 0.03 % respectively. Such a collapse has a lot to do with the very limitations of Moscow's and Beijing's defense industries.

For starters, Russian exports suffered substantially from the loss of their two key recipients in the region, Venezuela and Nicaragua. Sales of the former were reduced to zero and those of the latter were limited to 7 million TIVs. This simultaneous closure of both markets is easier to explain if one considers that the economies of these two countries were closely connected to the extent that the Nicaraguan regime was a major recipient of Venezuelan economic assistance. Consequently, when the economy of the Chavista regime collapsed, the finances of the Ortega government soon suffered. The result is that both countries quickly lost interest in continuing their rearmament programs. The case of the PRC bears similarities to that of Russia. The bulk of Beijing's sales were dependent on the health of the Venezuelan and Bolivian markets. If the first was exhausted with the economic turmoil of the Chavista regime, the second was not immune to the political upheaval sown by the fall of President Evo Morales in 2019 and his replacement by President Jeanine Añez, whose mandate until 2020 was characterized by her desire to approach the United States and the lack of interest in strengthening military relations with China.

In this context, the possibilities of Moscow and Beijing to find new Latin American customers to compensate for the closure of the markets of Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Bolivia were practically nil. These difficulties in winning new customers were the inevitable consequence of the weight of politics in Moscow and Beijing's business in the Hemisphere. The commercial successes of both countries' defense industries were driven much more by the affinities of some Latin American governments with Russian and Chinese diplomacy than by the quality of their products. Based on these sympathies, it became easier for Moscow and Beijing to transfer systems that were less capable than their Western counterparts and were

more difficult to integrate into the region's defensive apparatuses. The appeal of these weapons was not their technical performance but their value as an instrument to break the ties of the armed forces with the United States. The problem is that, once the region's anti-American regimes lost their appetite for more weapons (due to a lack of resources or lack of strategic interest), Russia and China found it almost impossible to find new buyers among governments whose interest was not to distance themselves from Washington but simply to have the most appropriate equipment to meet their security needs.

Of course, other factors contributed to the debacle of Russian and Chinese sales in Latin America in the period 2017-2021. U.S. and European Union sanctions on the Kremlin over the annexation of Crimea made it an outlawed and unreliable supplier. However, it was above all the dependence of sales on the existence of political affinities with client countries that became an obstacle to expanding transfers of military equipment beyond the diplomatic partners of Russia and China. The main attraction of Moscow and Beijing's weaponry was not technical but political. Consequently, selling it to governments that saw no merit in approaching these capitals and distancing themselves from Washington became extremely difficult.

Based on this scenario, the outbreak of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and tensions between Washington and Beijing over Taiwan have shocked the region's military market. In principle, Russian and Chinese arms producers cannot expect anything good from this new situation. Western countries' massive sanctions against Russia make it extremely difficult for Latin American countries to bear the political costs and financial and technological risks of getting involved in the purchase of military equipment of this precedence. Without being in the same situation, the deterioration of relations between Washington and Beijing promises to increase the political costs in relations with the United States for those countries that choose to acquire Chinese military equipment. In addition, the success of Western military equipment in Ukraine reduces the attractiveness of buying war materiel from another source. In that sense, the absolute dominance of the

US and European defense industries in the Latin American market could be guaranteed for the near future. However, several factors could substantially alter these prospects.

For starters, most of the region has taken a political turn with the emergence of leftist governments that promote a foreign policy that is divergent and sometimes directly opposed to U.S. interests. Given the significant importance of political factors in Latin American governments choosing to buy Russian and Chinese weapons, it seems reasonable to think that some of these governments would prefer to turn to non-Western suppliers as a way of asserting their independence from Washington. It is possible, for example, that the new Colombian administration of President Gustavo Petro may sympathetically view the acquisition of military equipment from sources other than the United States to distance itself from the traditional alignment of the Colombian Armed Forces with their U.S. counterparts.

So far, there are already some examples of how changes in the political orientation of governments led to revisions in military procurement policy. This was the case in Argentina, where the replacement of the center-right government of President Mauricio Macri by the Peronist administration of Alberto Fernández led to the paralysis of the agreement to buy 27 US Stryker M1126 armored vehicles and the opening of talks for the acquisition of 88 Chinese ZBL09s. The talks have also extended to the possible purchase of JF-17 fighter bombers to renew Argentina's obsolete military fleet.<sup>19</sup> This opportunity for the Chinese aircraft industry has been greatly facilitated by the fact that the UK has systematically blocked Buenos Aires' previous attempts to obtain aircraft from Western suppliers. In any case, if this sale were closed, it would represent a qualitative leap in the type of military equipment supplied by Beijing to its Latin American customers and would

---

19 Eduardo Menegazzi, "China ofreció a la Argentina tanques y aviones que ya no usan sus Fuerzas Armadas", *Infobae* (January 23, 2021), <https://www.infobae.com/politica/2021/01/23/china-ofrece-a-la-argentina-tanques-y-aviones-que-ya-no-usan-sus-fuerzas-armadas/> and also: MP, "China strongly Lobbying To sell jet Fighters to Argentina", *MercoPress. South Atlantic News Agency* (February 10, 2022), <https://en.mercopress.com/2022/02/10/china-strongly-lobbying-to-sell-jet-fighters-to-argentina>

make China the dominant supplier of the Argentine Air Force. This kind of shift from traditional Western suppliers to Russia or China could be repeated in other cases.

In this regard, the sharp differences that separate Russia and China in seizing these opportunities must be highlighted. Moscow faces crushing international sanctions because of its war of aggression in Ukraine that are creating significant difficulties for it to properly sustain the equipment it previously transferred to its Latin American customers, leaving aside the possibility of embarking on new sales. On the other hand, while it is clear that the latest series of tensions between Washington and Beijing guarantees that the United States will not look favorably on any significant sale of military equipment by the PRC in Latin America, the truth is that the Chinese defense industry does not face international sanctions and, therefore, it remains an option formally open to those countries of the region interested.

An additional factor that plays into Beijing's favor in the competition for the Latin American defense market is that sales from its military industry are only one part — and not the largest — of a much broader effort by the PRC to gain influence in Latin America. Indeed, China's commercial penetration in Latin America has preceded and reached greater depth than its interests in the regional defense market, which are more recent and still very limited. This marks a huge difference from Moscow, whose entry into the region has relied mainly on the activities of its defense industry and, to a lesser extent, its energy sector. Therefore, its presence in the region is more fragile and promises to weaken further as the aforementioned international sanctions erode these two pillars of the Russian presence in Latin America.

In addition, China's growing influence on the continent offers Beijing a wide range of opportunities to use diplomatic and commercial tools to support the penetration of its defense industry. As previously mentioned, traditionally, the PRC has preferred to keep political-economic relations separate and search for opportunities for the sale of military equipment. However, some isolated

episode seems to indicate that this separation could blur in the future and give way to an explicit use of political or commercial levers to gain advantages in the field of military sales. In this sense, the episode of the renewal of the Argentine government's permission for the PRC to use a satellite control base located in Neuquén was a reminder of how economic interests can weigh on security decisions. After having rejected the agreement for the installation of such a base, signed by President Cristina Kirchner in 2014, the center-right administration of Mauricio Macri agreed, in 2018, to extend the presence of the Chinese facility until 2064.<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, President Macri's decision was conditioned by the fact that China was a fundamental client of the Argentine agricultural sector, key to the economic sustainability of the country and the political future of the president.

In parallel, the PRC is building a network of relationships with the region's armed forces that will make it easier for commercial offerings from its defense industry to be accepted.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Beijing has launched a program that offers officers of the Latin American armed forces the possibility of luxury stays with their families in the PRC to attend military education programs.<sup>22</sup> These are activities inspired by the International Military Training and Education (IMET) program of the United States. Certainly, Beijing is still a long way from building the ties that the U.S. military enjoys with its counterparts in the region. However, as this type of contact spreads over time, Beijing will

---

20 Erin Watson-Lynn, "The gravity of China's space base in Argentina", *Lowy Institute* (June 9, 2020), <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/gravity-china-s-space-base-argentina>; LPO, "Trump presiona a Macri para que cierre la base espacial de China en Neuquén," *The Policy Online* (16 April 2019), <https://www.lapoliticaonline.com/nota/118765-trump-presiona-a-macri-para-que-cierre-la-base-espacial-de-china-en-neuquen/> and LMN, "El permiso a la base china fue ratificado por Macri hasta el año 2064", *The Morning Neuquen* (December 3, 2018), <https://www.lmneuquen.com/el-permiso-la-base-china-fue-ratificado-macri-el-ano-2064-n615315>

21 Evan Ellis, "Chinese Security Engagement in Latin America", *Centro de Estudios Estratégicos del Ejército del Perú* (November 19, 2020), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinese-security-engagement-latin-america>; Caroline Houck, "Beijing Has Started Giving Latin American Generals 'Lavish,' All-Expenses-Paid Trips to China," *Defense One* (February 15, 2018), <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2018/02/beijing-has-started-giving-latin-american-generals-lavish-all-expense-trips-china/146040/>

22 Caroline Houck, "Beijing Has Started Giving Latin American Generals 'Lavish,' All-Expenses-Paid Trips to China," *Defense One* (February 15, 2018), <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2018/02/beijing-has-started-giving-latin-american-generals-lavish-all-expense-trips-china/146040/>

gradually be able to count on a network of Latin American officials receptive to its interests and open to listening to the proposals of its defense industry.

In that context, the outlook for the Russian and Chinese defense industries in Latin America may be substantially different. The share of the Latin American defense market lost by Moscow in the period 2017-2021 could ultimately prove irrecoverable. The possibilities of the Russian defense industry to regain its presence in the region will be seriously limited not only by the barriers created by international sanctions but also because, in addition, the entire Russian industrial infrastructure will have to concentrate on covering the enormous losses of material experienced by its Russian Armed Forces in the campaign in Ukraine. This need will become more urgent and overwhelming the longer the current war continues.

Faced with this scenario, the PRC may find an opportunity not only to recover the space lost in the Latin American defense market during the past years but also to substantially expand its role as an arms supplier to the region. A first favorable factor for the Chinese military industry is that blocking the supply of Russian weapons to the region will leave countries like Venezuela and Nicaragua without their main and – in some cases – sole supplier, creating a vacuum that Beijing can fill. At the same time, some of the Latin American governments that have shifted to the left –Chile, Colombia, etc.– could bet on opening to the purchase of Chinese military equipment. This increase in the penetration of Beijing's defense industry would be facilitated both by its growing political-economic influence in the region and by the collaborative ties that the Chinese People's Liberation Army is building with its Latin American counterparts.

### **Conclusion: A disputed market**

The relative success with which the United States and Europe have defended their hegemony as suppliers of military equipment to Latin America over the past three decades could fuel a false sense of complacency. Despite the fears raised by the entry of the Chinese and, above all, the Russian defense

industry into the region in the period 2012-2021, the truth is that the collapse of its sales in recent years shows how fragile its penetration was. Moscow and Beijing were only able to develop relations of a certain level with a few countries (Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua), in most cases based more on political affinities than on the actual attractiveness of their defense products. With a few very few exceptions, such as the Mi-17 helicopters exported by Russia, the few countries that chose to buy military equipment from Moscow or Beijing did so not because of its goodness, but because of their willingness to separate from Washington. With these markets closed due to economic or political problems, the commercial penetration of the Russian and Chinese military industries vanished with them.

In any case, the regaining hegemony of Western military equipment suppliers could be a temporary phenomenon. While the impact of the Ukraine war and Western sanctions on the Russian defense industry promise to eliminate it as a serious competitor in Latin America, this does not seem to be the case for the PRC. Beijing counts on its political and economic influence over Latin American governments and the network of military relationships it is building in the region as fulcrums to regain its lost position in the Latin American defense market and aspire to become one of its main suppliers. This race is likely to start with the replacement of Russia as the main supplier of countries such as Venezuela or Nicaragua. Beijing could then aim to expand its sales to other countries. The talks on transferring fighter bombers and armored vehicles to Argentina are a sign of where the PRC's ambitions are heading.

It is tempting to consider the evolution of the Latin American defense market as a marginal issue, of interest only to some arms companies, Latin American defense ministries always constrained by a lack of resources, and a few academics versed in the most cryptic part of security. Nothing would be more misleading. Indeed, if the United States and its European partners lose weight as suppliers of military equipment to the Latin American armed forces to the PRC, the region will have taken a decisive step toward its geopolitical fragmentation and increased risks of conflict. If Beijing becomes the main

supplier to some Latin American countries, it will use this position to assert its control over its foreign and security policy. This political–military influence, coupled with its economic preponderance, will create the conditions for the emergence of a sphere of influence that will fracture the Hemisphere, limit Washington’s ability to promote democracy and prosperity in the region and increase the risk of military friction within the continent.

This outcome is not inevitable but ensuring that it does not become a reality requires the United States to contain China’s expansion in the Hemisphere. To do this, Washington must compete with Beijing in several key areas of regional security, including the supply of military equipment and technical assistance required to address the legitimate defense needs of Latin American democracies.

### **About the author:**

**Román D. Ortiz** – *William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies / Center for International Security of the Francisco de Vitoria University*

*He has more than 30 years of experience as an academic and consultant on security and defense issues. He is an adjunct professor at the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies at the National Defense University (United States) and an analyst at the Center for International Security at the Francisco de Vitoria University (Spain). Between 2010 and 2014, he was an advisor to the Colombian Minister of Defense. During that period, he contributed his knowledge to the planning and execution of the military campaign “Sword of Honor.” In addition, he participated in studies for the transformation of the Colombian armed forces to adapt them to the new strategic scenario created by the peace agreement with the FARC guerrillas. He has developed projects for USAID on rural security and advised humanitarian NGOs on stabilization operations. He has also advised on the design of security sector reform processes in several Latin American countries. He holds a PhD (Laude) in Political Science from the Instituto Universitario Ortega y Gasset – Universidad Complutense (Madrid). His publications include articles in Foreign Affairs, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, and other academic journals.*

# TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM IN LATIN AMERICA

*Mariano López de Miguel*

## **Summary**

*Following the horrific attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States, the international community woke up to what many political scientists and historians called “multipolar chaos.” Two decades later, strategic and security challenges have not been limited and have risen dangerously to global alert levels. With geopolitics once again as a battleground, the horizon of terrorism has expanded or increased in traditionally safe areas, such as Latin America.*

**Keywords:** *International terrorism, Geopolitics, Southern Hemisphere, Latin America.*

## **Introduction**

Without a shadow of a doubt, the world changed on a sunny morning on September 11, 2001. With less than 45 minutes of difference, two commercial aircrafts crashed into the north and south towers of the *World Trade Center* in New York City, the financial heart of the United States. In addition, two other planes would crash that day. One was against the headquarters of American military power, the Pentagon, while the other would not achieve its objective of impacting the US Congress, after the heroic intervention of its passengers who paid with their lives for stopping such an attack. Faced with those facts, the former president of the United States, George W. Bush, warned that war against America had been declared. However, reality indicated that global terrorism, focused on a foreign enemy such as Osama Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda network, had already been present in Latin America for a long time.

The last two decades changed the global geopolitical and geostrategic landscape. From a kind of regional threat and/or terrorism, it has gone to the rise of global attacks, most likely due to globalization and a world that -in less than a decade- is interconnected through the *World Wide Web*. The “New World Order” advocated by leaders such as George W. Bush and political scientists such as Francis Fukuyama is a fact, but with a variant opposed to their initial theses. That would be, there was no rise of liberal democracies, nor an increase in world security. Some examples are the cases of terrorism (from Al Qaeda to the so-called Islamic State), wars in the heart of Europe (the former Yugoslavia or the invasion of Ukraine by Russia), and the terrible COVID-19 pandemic. Logically, Latin America was not going to be an exception.

### **The First Attacks in the Region**

The year 1992, which celebrated the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in America and began with the fall of the Soviet Socialist Bloc, was one of the most convulsive years in recent history, rapidly moving from optimism of global peace to the deepest disappointment. The Balkan War or Yugoslav Implosion, the crisis in the Horn of Africa (mainly in Somalia and Ethiopia), together with the beginning of the long Algerian Civil War, the fall of Kabul into chaos after the mujahideen victory against the Marxist government of Mohammad Najibullah, and many “low intensity” conflicts completely surprised the world chancelleries.

In the case of Latin America, the violence came through terrorist acts of extreme brutality, the most serious case being the attack on the Israeli Embassy in Argentina, which occurred on March 17, 1992. This act, committed by a suicide driver of a van loaded with TNT, destroyed the headquarters of the Israeli embassy and consulate, located in the city of Buenos Aires. Although Argentina had suffered attacks of parapolice terrorism in the moments before the coup d'état in 1976 that gave rise to the so-called “National Reorganization Process,” that country had never felt the actions of international terrorism, particularly the Fundamentalist

Group Hezbollah (in Arabic, the “Party of God”), a militant organization of international scope that maintains parliamentary representation in its country of origin, Lebanon.

According to the Government of the country, “the massacre constituted the first international terrorist attack perpetrated against Argentina.”<sup>1</sup> Two years later, the country would again suffer an even more brutal attack with the bombing of the Israeli-Argentine Mutual Association (AMIA), which occurred on July 18, 1994, this time killing 85 people and wounding 300 others. As singer-songwriter León Gieco named it: “All the dead of the AMIA and those of the Israeli Embassy. The secret power of weapons. The justice that looks and does not see. Everything is hidden in memory. Refuge from life and history.” Likewise, there was talk of the penetration of international terrorists into the southern cone through the so-called “Triple Frontier,” an area where the territorial limits of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil converge.

### **Hezbollah in Latin America**

In the end, Argentine authorities would conclude that “the decision to carry out the AMIA attack was taken, and the attack was orchestrated, by the highest officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the time, and that these officials instructed Lebanese Hezbollah... to carry out the attack.”<sup>2</sup>

According to a study conducted for the U.S. Special Operations Command, Hezbollah clerics “began placing operatives and recruiting sympathizers among Arab and Muslim immigrants around the tri-border area during the height of the Lebanese Civil War in the mid-1980s.”<sup>3</sup> The result was the

---

1 Ministry of Culture, “17 de marzo de 1992: 30 años del atentado terrorista contra la Embajada de Israel”, *Government of Argentina* (17 March 2022), <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/17-de-marzo-de-1992-30-anos-del-atentado-terrorista-contra-la-embajada-de-israel>

2 Matthew Levitt, “Iranian and Hezbollah Operations in South America. Then and Now”, *National Defense University Press* (PRISM 5 No. 4: April 2016), 118-133 [https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/06/Documents/prism/prism\\_5-4/Iranian%20and%20Hezbollah.pdf](https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/06/Documents/prism/prism_5-4/Iranian%20and%20Hezbollah.pdf)

3 Daniel Blinder, “El uso político del atentado a la AMIA: Irán y Hezbollah”. *Magazine Intellector* (ISSN 1807-1260-[CENEGRI], 7(14): June 2011), 1-28.

establishment of more formal Hezbollah cells in the region, composed of people of Lebanese descent, particularly Shia Muslims, who provided some financial support to Hezbollah.

All these factors were exploited by radical Shiite cleric Mohsen Rabbani, an Iranian who lived in Argentina for 11 years. Rabbani, the main architect of the AMIA plot, was sent specifically from Iran for the express purpose of running the state-controlled al-Tawhid Mosque in the Floresta neighborhood, but he also served as a representative of Iran's Ministry of Agriculture, which ensured that Argentine beef exported to Iran complied with halal-seal dietary decrees.

Investigators from the Argentine Intelligence Secretariat (SIDE) later concluded that Rabbani was “the driving force behind these efforts [to establish an Iranian intelligence network in Argentina] .... From the moment of his arrival in the country in 1983, Mr. Rabbani began to lay the foundations that allowed for the further implementation and further development of the [Iranian] spy network.”<sup>4</sup> Four months before the AMIA attack, Rabbani was suddenly named diplomat of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with full official status, which included diplomatic credentials and immunity. As for the Hezbollah operatives deployed to carry out the attack, Argentine law enforcement and intelligence officials would later determine that they left the country about two hours before the building exploded.

Following the AMIA attack, early Argentine intelligence reports reported that “the main activists suspected”<sup>5</sup> of being members of an Islamist terrorist organization included Mohammad Youssef Abdallah, Farouk Abdul Omairi, and Samuel Salman el-Reda, among others. As the investigation into the AMIA bombing progressed, it increasingly focused on these three Hezbollah operatives. The result of these activities was that Hezbollah built networks (formal and informal) of support in the tri-border area, a relatively simple

---

4 Isaac Caro, “Presencia de movimientos chiítas en América Latina: Su relación con los atentados de Buenos Aires (1992, 1994) y con el eje Caracas-Teherán”. *Latin American Research Review* (2011), 177-193, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41261375>

5 *Ibid*

process thanks to the abundant Lebanese and Shia origin population settled in that area. Hidden in plain sight, Hezbollah militants found themselves in an ideal operating environment to raise funds, provide logistical support and engage in operational activities in the region. This included, according to a protected witness, the formation of sleeper or “inactive” cells operating under strict safety guidelines, so that members of one cell were unaware of the acts of members of another. To avoid attracting attention, they allegedly settled and worked among friends or relatives in Ciudad del Este, where they used businesses, schools, and mosques.

Hezbollah would later link the AMIA bombing to the capture of a Hezbollah militant Mustafa Dirani by Israeli commands. However, in May 1993 (a year before Dirani’s capture by operatives sent from Jaffa) and then in November 1993, Rabbani visited car dealerships to ask about buying a Renault Trafic pickup truck, according to Argentine intelligence. No purchase was made at the time, though authorities became suspicious when they realized that Rabbani told each car salesman a different story explaining his interest in the purchase. Later, in a television interview after the AMIA bombing, Rabbani would deny having been informed about the purchase of a pickup truck, insisting that he was looking for a sedan all the time despite detailed testimonies from several sellers at multiple dealerships.

The day after the AMIA bombing, the terrorists attacked again, this time in Panama. On July 19, 1994, an Embraer twin-engine aircraft operated by Atlas Airlines exploded shortly after takeoff from Colón bound for Panama City. Of the 21 people on board (including passengers and crew) who lost their lives instantly, 12 passengers were Jewish, including four Israelis and three Americans. After the terrible attack on the AMIA and given the small size of the Jewish community in Panama, the tragedy strongly shook the Jewish community in that country. The community’s fears were quickly confirmed when Panama’s president-elect announced that the accident “was not a human error, but a terrorist act.”<sup>6</sup>

---

6 Philip K. Abbott, Terrorist Threat in the Tri-Border Area: Myth or Reality? *Military Review* (October 2004), 51-55, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/abbott.pdf>

That same year, not long after these attacks, Uruguayan police thwarted a Hezbollah-led arms smuggling operation with linkages to the tri-border area. The following August, Paraguayan police arrested three members of a Hezbollah “sleeper cell” with possible links to the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy. Imad Mughniyeh himself (Hezbollah’s top military commander) was reported to have hatched a plot in the mid-1990s to buy a large amount of beef from Paraguayan cold storage companies and poison the meat before shipping it for resale in Israel. Paraguayan police reportedly intercepted the shipment and prevented it from leaving the country.

The operational links between criminal activities such as drug trafficking and terrorism cases became evident shortly thereafter, such as the arrest in 1996 of Marwan Kadi (also known as Marwan Safadi), who was captured by US agents while he was under surveillance as part of an operation that prevented a plot to bomb the US embassy in Asunción, Paraguay. Convicted in a Canadian court of smuggling cocaine from Brazil, Kadi arrived in the tri-border area after escaping from a prison in Ottawa, possibly with the help of Hezbollah elements. He obtained a U.S. passport under an alias and returned to the tri-border area, where Brazilian police arrested him for cocaine possession. Inexplicably, he again escaped from prison and fled across the border into Paraguay. While under surveillance, police arrested him at his apartment in Ciudad del Este, where they found explosives, firearms, forged Canadian and American passports, along with a large amount of cash. However, after he was deported to the United States, prosecutors could only charge him with fraud by using false passports. He was subsequently deported to Canada to serve the remainder of his sentence.

Just months after mass surveillance of Hezbollah began in the region in early 2000, photos of local Lebanese businessmen appeared next to Iranian and Hezbollah al-Muqawama (“resistance”) flags at a training camp allegedly located in the surroundings of *Foz do Iguaçu*, Brazil. Argentine intelligence believes Hezbollah operated a military and ideological training camp in the tri-border area. According to a former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

agent who focused on Hezbollah in South America, Hezbollah operatives were also reportedly involved in military training in Panama and Venezuela. Assad Ahmad Barakat, the militant group's top adviser in Latin America, was reported to have planned attacks on Jewish targets in Canada, Argentina, and Ciudad del Este.

On December 22, 1999, Argentine intelligence arrested alleged members of Hamas and Hezbollah, along with an Iranian intelligence agent. However, they were later released. In 2000, an FBI delegation traveled to Argentina to help with the effort to investigate the AMIA bombing and coordinate with local authorities to deal with Hezbollah's presence in the region. Briefed extensively by Argentine intelligence both in Buenos Aires and in the tri-border area, the FBI agent who led the delegation left convinced that local intelligence services had the evidence about Hezbollah and its role in the AMIA bombing. Even so, Hezbollah's activity in the region would continue to thrive to this day, in some cases with the support of important political leaders such as former Venezuelan Vice President Tareck El Aissami.

### **Militant and Terrorist Activities in the Tri-Border**

After quoting in previous lines the almighty and almost omnipresent presence of Hezbollah in Latin America, the following question would be asked: Are there more militant groups or organizations in that area of such porous edges, such as the so-called "Triple Frontier"? Undoubtedly, previous experiences point to a resounding "yes". Connections between the region's Muslim groups and terrorism only increased after 2001, following the September 11 attacks in the United States. In a report that same year, the U.S. State Department singled out the Tri-Border as a financial sanctuary for Hezbollah and the Palestinian militant group Hamas. They claimed the presence of these groups precisely because a large Muslim community lived there, confusing the practice of Islam with the presence of terrorism. The report asserted that, by maintaining ties to their home countries, these groups served as channels for money laundering. Communications between the Brazilian government and the U.S. State Department typically

described the Tri-Border Area as an “ungoverned” area and a “zone of non-sovereignty,” so it would require immediate action to contain threats, according to research by Thomaz Costa and Gastón Schulmeister.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, the location and detention of numerous operatives in the region also showed the existence of terrorist groups in the Tri-Border Zone. Some were charged with financing terrorism, inciting terrorism, or planning attacks. Lebanese Argentine citizen Khalid el Din, for example, was arrested on terrorism charges after being identified as a collaborator in the 1994 AMIA bombing. In 1996, Paraguayan authorities established that explosives expert Marwan al Safadi lived in the Tri-Border Area and was eventually captured by Brazilian authorities. Another key figure, Mohamed Ali Abou Ibrahim Soliman (accused by Egypt of involvement in the 1997 terrorist attack in Luxor against Western tourists) was arrested by Brazil’s Federal Police in 1999. Other examples of key actors located in the triple border include the late head of Hezbollah’s military branch, Imad Mugniyah (1962 - 2008), who was directly linked to the establishment and development of terrorist cells in Ciudad del Este and Encarnación.

The area has also been called “the United Nations of crime, a safe shelter for terrorists,” and Mecca for counterfeiting activities. Although border regions are often referred to as “lawless,” the Tri-Border –for good reason– gained notoriety for its large amount of illegal activity.<sup>8</sup> This was largely due to its isolated jungle areas, but also to its urban centers that facilitate communications, transport, and banking services. Although the Tri-Border was a hotbed of illegal activity for decades, it made headlines again in April 2019 when then-U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo raised the issue of combating transnational crime and terrorist financing in the area during a

---

7 Thomaz G. Costa and Gastón H. Schulmeister, “The puzzle of the Iguazu tri-border area: Many questions and few answers regarding organized crime and terrorism links”, *Global Crime* (Taylor & Francis Journals, vol. 8, Iss. 1: 17 February of 2007) 26–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17440570601121845>

8 Gregory Shapiro, Terror Reigns Supreme and the Cycle of Violence Is Seemingly Endless in the Triple Frontier, *NYLS Journal of Human Rights* (Vol. 19, Iss. 3, Article 11: 2003), 895, [https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1557&context=journal\\_of\\_human\\_rights](https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1557&context=journal_of_human_rights)

meeting on counterterrorism in Buenos Aires.<sup>9</sup> Argentina State Department International Narcotics Control Strategy Report described the Tri-Border as “the center of a multibillion-dollar trade in illicit goods, including marijuana cultivation, Andean cocaine trafficking, and arms smuggling that facilitates significant money laundering in Paraguay.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite increasingly prolific legislation, as well as joint meetings and interventions between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and the United States, the tri-border is an empty space or rather “liberated” from state control. Criminal organizations take advantage of the state’s lack of presence to increase their authority. Therefore, it is considered a free zone for crime and terrorism, including planning, and raising resources for this purpose and others that could serve militant groups such as Hezbollah.<sup>11</sup> Undoubtedly, this area is a laboratory where States and organizations (civilian and military) do not stop learning, treating, combating, and studying the chameleonic phenomenon of terrorism (or a part of it). In that sense, there cannot be complete standardization in the treatment of this phenomenon, since each State responds differently depending on the situation, place, time, and people involved.

## Conclusions

The so-called Triple Frontier is certainly one of the most volatile, violent, and dangerous areas on the planet. Traditionally, it has been an area of synergy between migrants from the extinct Ottoman Empire (in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) and the Indian subcontinent. Since 1988, the area fell into an irrational spiral of violence, drug trafficking, and human trafficking, together with the presence of cells of militant

---

9 Oxford Analytica, “US will increase Paraguay money-laundering pressures”, *Emerald Expert Briefings*, (Oxan-db: 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1108/OXAN-DB243981>

10 Robert Muggah y Gustavo Macedo Diniz, “Securing the border”, *Strategic Paper*, (n.º 5: 2013), 1–29.

11 William Costanza, Hezbollah and its mission in Latin America, *Studies in conflict & terrorism*, (Vol. 35, Iss. 3: February 22, 2012), 193–210. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254335250\\_Hezbollah\\_and\\_Its\\_Mission\\_in\\_Latin\\_America](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254335250_Hezbollah_and_Its_Mission_in_Latin_America).

groups, mainly from the Middle East, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Palestinian group Hamas or the now extinct Gam'ah Egyptian Islamiyya. Unfortunately, the participation of governments considered “rebel states” (mainly the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and -previously- the Military Junta of Panama presided over by Manuel Antonio Noriega), involved in the lucrative drug trafficking business, does not help to stabilize the area.

In a globalized and hyperconnected world, “small problems” or “low-intensity conflicts” in geographically volatile areas can lead to dire results, especially today during a global financial crisis and an open war between Russia and Ukraine, following a pandemic that has officially left seven million dead worldwide. If borders as porous as those of the Donbas in Eastern Europe gave rise to a border conflict whose effects are felt to this day, the different nations of Latin America should be concerned about the impact and development of the existing threats in the Triple Frontier.

### **About the author:**

**Mariano López de Miguel** - *University of Murcia*

*Historian and Master in Contemporary History from the University of Cantabria, a specialist in conflicts in Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Balkans, and Former Yugoslavia), Caucasus (Chechnya, Abkhazia, and Georgia) and the Middle East (Arab-Israeli Conflict). He is also a contributor to various publications and blogs. Currently, he teaches Geography and History at the Ministry of Education of the Community of Madrid.*

*CHAPTER II:*

# **TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME**

CHALLENGES  
AND THREATS TO  
**SECURITY** IN  
LATIN AMERICA

# FIGHTING ILLICIT FINANCIAL FLOWS IN THE AMERICAS

*Celina B. Realuyo<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

*Illicit financial flows present a threat to the political, economic, and social development and security of countries around the world, particularly in the Americas. Dirty money serves as the lifeblood for illicit networks that include terrorists, criminals, traffickers, and their facilitators, and provide a window and a vulnerable entry point into these illicit organizations. Money laundering and terrorist financing enable terrorist groups and transnational criminal organizations to conduct their operations and promote their evil agendas which contribute high levels of insecurity and violence across Latin America. Armed groups in the Americas have become increasingly powerful and wealthy, undermining legitimate economies and democratic institutions. Over the past 20 years, governments have increasingly employed “following the money trail” to better understand, detect, disrupt, and counter illicit networks but must continue to keep abreast of evolving threat financing methods to combat criminal and terrorist networks and their illicit financial flows and promote security, prosperity, and good governance throughout the Americas.*

**Key Words:** *Illicit Financial Flows, Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing, Transnational Organized Crime, Corruption.*

## **Introduction**

Illicit financial flows present a formidable threat to the political, economic, and social development and security of countries around the world, particularly in the Americas. Dirty money serves as the lifeblood for illicit

---

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this chapter as those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, National Defense University, or the Department of Defense.

networks that include terrorist groups, insurgencies, criminal organizations, and rogue states. Financing is indispensable to support and sustain the command and control, personnel, arms, communications, logistics and operations of illicit networks. Transnational criminal organizations are involved in the trafficking of drugs, people, arms, contraband, illegal mining, money-laundering, and corruption which all contribute to high levels of violence in the Americas. Drug trafficking continues to be the most lucrative activity of transnational criminal organizations in Latin America and fuels violence, insecurity, instability, and corruption in nations where the drugs are produced, transported, distributed and consumed. It has been a scourge for the Americas for the past 50 years enriching the Colombian and Mexican cartels.

Illicit financial flows related to crimes, such as drug and human trafficking, undermine the global financial system and threaten political, economic, and social stability and security. As we have witnessed in various countries, illicit financial flows also promote bribery and corruption, finance insurgency and, in some cases, terrorist activities. Examples in the Americas include the Mexican cartels, Central American maras like MS-13, FARC dissidents and ELN in Colombia and the PCC in Brazil. These funds also destabilize and deter legitimate enterprise, foreign investment and development. Money-launderers and terrorist financiers exploit loopholes in and differences among national systems for countering money-laundering and the financing of terrorism and move their funds to or through jurisdictions with weaker or ineffective legal and institutional frameworks. This has been a particular challenge in the Americas.

Therefore, the nation states and the international community must work together to reduce illicit financial flows by detecting, monitoring, seizing, repatriating, and preventing them. Those engaged in illicit financial flows contribute to crime, violence, instability, corruption, and inequality. Since illicit financial flows know no borders or nationality, all countries must do their part to address them. This article will define illicit financial flows, distinguish between money laundering and terrorist financing, explain the

methods used to move illicit financial flows, describe strategies to follow the money trail to combat terrorism, crime and corruption and recommend measures for governments to fight illicit financial flows in the Americas.

## **Defining Illicit Financial Flows, Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing**

Illicit financial flows (IFFs) are a critical enabler of illicit networks that include terrorists, criminals, proliferators, and their facilitators and provide these groups with wealth and power to conduct their nefarious agendas. According to the World Bank, illicit financial flows (IFFs) refer to money illegally earned, transferred or used that crosses international borders with the following characteristics: (1) the acts themselves are illegal (e.g., corruption, tax evasion); (2) the funds are the results of illegal acts (e.g., smuggling and trafficking in drugs, people, minerals or wildlife); or (3) the funds are used for illegal purposes (e.g., financing of organized crime or terrorism).<sup>2</sup>

Illicit financial flows came under greater scrutiny with the disclosures of the Panama Papers in 2016, the Paradise Papers in 2017 and the FINCEN Files in 2020. They revealed how dirty money and front companies were distorting and undermining the international financial system and diverting funds away from development, particularly in the Americas. Illicit financial flows, whether they be from tax evasion or criminal activities, result in a loss of what are often desperately needed resources to fund public initiatives or critical investments. Collectively, for developing countries, this often represents hundreds of millions of dollars in lost or foregone tax revenues that could have otherwise been collected and used for promoting sustainable economic growth, creating jobs, reducing inequality, poverty, and addressing climate change. With billions of dollars estimated to be illicitly leaving developing countries

---

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank “Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) Brief”, *worldbank.org* (July 7, 2017), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/financialsector/brief/illicit-financial-flows-iffs>; International Monetary Fund, “The IMF and the Fight Against Illicit and Tax Avoidance related Financial Flows”, *imf.org* (March 8, 2021), <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2018/10/07/imf-and-the-fight-against-illicit-financial-flows>

every year, this drain of public resources undermines the efforts of countries to mobilize more domestic resources in order to meet the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goals by the target date of 2030.<sup>3</sup>

Money laundering is one of the most prominent manifestations of illicit financial flows. It is the process of disguising the proceeds of crime and integrating it into the legitimate financial system. According to the Vienna Convention and the Palermo Convention provisions on money laundering, it may encompass three distinct, alternative *actus reas*: (1) the conversion or transfer, knowing that such property is the proceeds of crime, (2) the concealment or disguise of the true nature, source, location, disposition, movement or ownership of or rights with respect to property, knowing that such property is the proceeds of crime, and (3) the acquisition, possession or use of property, knowing, at the time of the receipt, that such property is the proceeds of crime.<sup>4</sup> Money laundering involves three stages: (1) placement (the initial entry of illicit money into the financial system), (2) layering (the process of separating the funds from their source, often using anonymous shell companies), and (3) integration (the money is returned to the criminal from legitimate-looking source such as real estate).

Terrorist financing involves the solicitation, collection, or provision of funds with the intention that they may be used to support terrorist acts or organizations, according to the International Monetary Fund. The funding may come from both legal and illicit sources. More precisely, according to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, a person commits the crime of financing of terrorism “if that person by any means, directly or indirectly, unlawfully and wilfully, provides or collects funds with the intention that they should be used or in the knowledge that they are to be used, in full or in part, in order to carry out” a terrorist offense within the scope of the Convention. The primary goal

---

<sup>3</sup> Global Financial Integrity, “Illicit Financial Flows”, *gfintegrity.org*, <https://gfintegrity.org/issue/illicit-financial-flows/>

<sup>4</sup> International Monetary Fund, “Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism – Topics”, *imf.org*, <https://www.imf.org/external/np/leg/amlcft/eng/amli.htm>

of individuals or entities involved in the financing of terrorism is therefore not necessarily to conceal the sources of the money but to conceal both the financing and the nature of the financed activity.<sup>5</sup>

### **Various Methods of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing**

While terrorist financing and money laundering have different objectives, they share similar tactics that abuse international financial systems and involve illicit financial flows. Through money laundering, criminals try to disguise the proceeds, sources, or nature of their illicit activities. Terrorist financing uses funds to sponsor or facilitate terrorist activity that could include clean and dirty money. Methods of money laundering and terrorist financing are similar and include: the banking system, cash couriers, bulk cash smuggling, money services businesses, store of value cards, trade-based money laundering, mobile or internet payments, cryptocurrencies, non-profit organizations, real estate, and front companies.

***Cash Couriers/Bulk Cash Smuggling:*** Cash is king! Despite newer methods to move and hide money, paper currency is still regarded as the dominant and preferred mode of payment illicit networks including criminals, traffickers, and terrorists. Bulk cash smuggling is a money laundering and terrorism financing facilitation technique that is designed to bypass financial transparency reporting requirements.<sup>6</sup> It usually occurs in U.S. Dollars and Euros that are widely accepted as international currency and can always be converted. The currency is often smuggled into or out of countries concealed in personal effects, in shipping containers, or transported in bulk across the border via vehicle, vessel or aircraft. Physically, cash can be large, heavy, and difficult to conceal as one million U.S. dollars in \$100 dollar bills weighs about 22 pounds/10 kilos.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Financial transparency reporting requires Currency and Monetary Instrument Reports, which obligates the filer to declare if he or she is transporting across the border \$10,000 or more in cash or monetary instruments.

<sup>7</sup> Nickel, "How Much Does a Million Dollars Weigh?" *fivecentnickel.com* (May 21, 2009), <https://fivecentnickel.com/how-much-does-a-million-dollars-weigh/>

This is a favorite method of the Mexican cartels who move money frequently between the U.S. and Mexico derived from drug and human smuggling operations. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Mexican national Roberto Gallegos-Lechuga pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit international money laundering in July 2021 with his links to the Sinaloa Cartel for using money services businesses and currency brokers to recruit money couriers to transport bulk cash from various locations throughout Southern California and other parts of the U.S., then deliver it to stash houses in Mexico. Once in Mexico, the currency was exchanged at a favorable rate from U.S. Dollars to Mexican Pesos. The cartel also used fictitious entities to deposit repatriated U.S. currency in U.S. banks.<sup>8</sup> Cash continues to be the preferred payment method for drug transactions and operating expenses.

***Trade-Based Money Laundering:*** Trade-based money laundering is the movement of illicit funds through commercial transactions and organizations that are and/or appear to be legitimate. This involves practices such as over or under-reporting of the amounts of invoiced goods or services (e.g., shipping more items than documented to allow the recipient to profit from resale), repeating invoices (e.g., delivering one set of items but receiving payment for two sets), falsification of receipts (e.g., the goods shipped are described as a less expensive item when they're really something more costly), and sales of commodities for prices that are above or below market. The transactions can be simple (two parties colluding to use a commercial transaction to deflate the value of an exchange to benefit from the difference between the resulting understatement in cost and the value of the goods on the open market) or complex (involving multiple parties in numerous nations, knowingly or unknowingly involved in the fraudulent aspects of the transactions).

---

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "Decade-long ICE HSI investigation leads to prison sentence for Sinaloa Cartel associate", *U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement* (January 11, 2022), <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/decade-long-ice-hsi-investigation-leads-prison-sentence-sinaloa-cartel-associate>

These practices take advantage of commercial trade to hide their intended purpose and to mix illegally obtained funds into the legitimate financial system. A well-known version of this mode is the “black market peso exchange” (BMPE) very popular in the Americas. BMPE is regarded at the most commonly used money laundering method among Colombian transnational criminal organizations and plays a major role in the movement of funds for Mexican cartels and Lebanese Hezbollah as well.<sup>9</sup> Intelligence and law enforcement agencies are cognizant of many of these methods, but given the total volume of international trade, legal and otherwise, it is impossible to screen and detect fraud in every transaction.

**Cryptocurrencies:** A cryptocurrency is a medium of exchange that is digital, encrypted, decentralized and unregulated in contrast to the U.S. Dollar or the Euro. Cryptocurrencies offer online payment methods that are quick, secure, easier to use and pseudonymous. Even governments themselves are exploring the possible issuance of central bank digital currencies or digital cash. The Venezuelan government issued its own cryptocurrency, the “petro,” in 2018 purportedly backed by the country’s oil and mineral reserves, and El Salvador became the first country to adopt Bitcoin as legal tender in September 2021. During the COVID-19 pandemic, criminal organizations in the Americas became more active and reliant on cyberspace and on cryptocurrencies.

Bitcoin is perhaps the best-known cryptocurrency, and the growing of a number of exchanges make it easier than ever to use, especially when such platforms are based in offshore jurisdictions. While not completely private, your unique address is publicly available— and any transactions from it can be tracked. Following the digital money trail is helping to detect, disrupt and detain high-profile criminals and their networks. In April 2019, Mexican police arrested Ignacio Santoyo, a notorious human trafficker linked to a prostitution racket involving some 2000 women across The Americas. Mexican authorities tracked him down after he bought enough Bitcoin to trigger an alert under the new law in Mexico that requires the

---

9 NDIC, “National Drug Threat Assessment Report 2011”, *The United States Department of Justice* (2012), 40, <http://www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs44/44849/44849p.pdf>

reporting of suspicious virtual currency activity. Moreover, when making his transactions via a registered platform, Santoyo left personal details including his phone number and address that facilitated his capture. Human traffickers are complementing their activities online in terms of recruitment, marketing, and financial transactions. A July 2020 report by Polaris, a nonprofit organization addressing human trafficking, found that virtual currency was the second-most commonly accepted payment method on 40 platforms in the online commercial sex market.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Financial Action Task Force warned of an increased misuse of online financial services and virtual assets to move and conceal illicit funds. Cyberspace and cryptocurrency are emerging as a new frontier for organized crime groups battling for control of vast criminal markets for drugs, arms, sex, and people especially in the Americas. The U.S. Department of Justice has found virtual currency increasingly used to buy and sell illegal drugs on Dark Web marketplaces and by drug cartels to launder their profits, contributing to the opioid epidemic in the U.S.

The above-mentioned money laundering and terrorist financing techniques are just some of the ways illicit networks abuse the international financial system and cyberspace to move and fund their criminal or terrorist activities. “Following the money trail” or exploiting financial intelligence has enhanced the ability of Latin American governments to better understand, identify and combat transnational criminal organizations and terrorist groups in recent years.

### **Strategies to Fight Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing**

Since financing serves as the oxygen for any criminal or terrorist organization, depriving illicit networks of funding constrains their operating environment and ability to plan and execute their evil agendas. This is the objective of counter threat finance strategies that countries employ to combat terrorism and crime. Over the past 20 years, governments have increasingly exploited financial intelligence to “follow the money trail” to combat terrorism,

crime and corruption including in the Americas. Tracking how terrorists and criminals raise, move, store, and use money has been instrumental in degrading groups such as Al Qaeda, ISIS, Lebanese Hezbollah, the FARC in Colombia and the Sinaloa Cartel in Mexico. Strategies to counter threat financing, that includes money laundering and terrorist financing, consists of three lines of operation: (1) law enforcement and intelligence operations against terrorist financiers and money launderers; (2) public designations of terrorists and drug traffickers, sanctions, asset freezes and seizures; and (3) domestic and international training and capacity building in the counter-threat finance discipline for the public and private sectors.

***Law Enforcement and Intelligence Investigations:*** “Following the money trail” has greatly enhanced law enforcement and intelligence operations against illicit networks. How, when, where, and from/to whom money has been transferred are reliable data points that counterterrorism and counter-crime officials use to map out and identify armed groups, their facilitators, and their activities. In many cases, financial intelligence and forensics are determining factors in developing and prosecuting cases of transnational organized crime, terrorism, and the material support of terrorism. Unlike confidential informants and witnesses for the prosecution, the money trail presents clear evidence of a financial connection or link between two or more parties.

At the U.S. Treasury Department, the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence is responsible for the intelligence and enforcement functions to protect the U.S. financial system against illicit use and combat rogue nations, terrorist facilitators, weapons of mass destruction proliferators, money launderers, drug kingpins, and other national security threats.<sup>10</sup> After the September 11, 2001 attacks, the Treasury Department established the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program (TFTP) to identify, track, and pursue terrorists – such as Al-Qaida and ISIS – and their networks.<sup>11</sup> Since the

---

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Treasury Department, “Terrorist Finance Tracking Program”, *treasury.gov* <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/terrorist-illicit-finance/Terrorist-Finance-Tracking/Documents/TFTP%20Fact%20Sheet%20revised%20-%20%288-8-11%29.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

start of the program, the TFTP has provided thousands of valuable leads to partner agencies and other governments that have aided in the prevention or investigation of many of the most visible and violent terrorist attacks and attempted attacks and links to criminal organizations.

The convergence of terrorism and crime is best illustrated by Lebanese Hezbollah's cocaine trafficking and fundraising networks in the Americas. Hezbollah is a Shi'ite Muslim political party and militant group based in Lebanon and is designated as a terrorist group by the United States, Israel, and many other countries. After years of investigation, the Paraguayan and U.S. governments carried out a coordinated action in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, in the Tri-border area near Argentina and Brazil, on August 24, 2021, against the money laundering network of Kassem Mohamad Hijazi, a Brazilian citizen of Lebanese descent allegedly involved in funding Hezbollah terrorism. According to the U.S. Treasury Department, Hijazi's laundering network has been operating on a global scale since 2017 with the capability to launder hundreds of millions of dollars.<sup>12</sup> Hijazi along with other suspected Hezbollah financiers were investigated by the Paraguayan prosecutor Marcelo Pecci, who was assassinated in Cartagena, Colombia on May 10, 2022, while on his honeymoon. There are rumors that Brazil's PCC and even Hezbollah operatives were behind the killing.<sup>13</sup> Hijazi was convicted and finally extradited from Paraguay to the U.S. on June 20, 2022.

Investigators must now leverage financial and digital intelligence as criminal networks move into the cyber domain. One of the first cases of money laundering using cryptocurrency detected took place in April 2018 when the Spanish Civil Guard dismantled a criminal structure involved in cocaine trafficking that bought Bitcoins with illegal proceeds in Euros and sent the "legalized" money to accounts in Colombia to be withdrawn in Colombian

---

12 Juan Delgado, "Paraguay, US Capture Leader of International Money Laundering Network", *Dialogo Americas* (September 28, 2021), <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/paraguay-us-capture-leader-of-international-money-laundering-network/#.YsUZ-5PMKu4>

13 Catalina Oquendo, "Murder of Paraguay prosecutor Marcelo Pecci shows international crime links", *El Pais* (Bogota: June 9, 2022), <https://english.elpais.com/international/2022-06-09/murder-of-paraguay-prosecutor-marcelo-pecci-shows-links-between-international-criminals.html>

pesos. In total, the group used 174 bank accounts to launder \$9.3 million in cocaine proceeds from Europe. In a separate case, Brazil's Department of Narcotics Investigation agents apprehended a criminal running a crypto-mining operation in Porto Alegre and seized 25 cryptocurrency mining machines, which operated around the clock and are each valued at approximately \$65,000 in April 2019. Law enforcement and intelligence agencies will have to expand their understanding cryptocurrencies, their attributes and vulnerabilities to potential abuse and anticipate how illicit networks are exploiting cryptocurrencies to finance their criminal activities like drug and human trafficking, engage in cybercrime and launder their proceeds.

***Public Designations and Sanctions:*** Sanctions and public designations constitute another measure to combat and prevent money laundering and terrorist financing. Countries levy sanctions in different ways against governments, individuals, terrorist, and criminal groups. Sanctions are used to punish, shame, isolate and seize the assets of those targeted. The U.S. government has various designation programs to stem the flow of financial resources to a particular terror or criminal group. The first of these efforts is aimed at state sponsors of terrorism. The Secretary of State designates nation states who provide funding to terrorists or terrorist organizations as state sponsors of terrorism; currently, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Syria are on this list. Under Executive Order 13224 signed by President Bush after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. can designate and block the assets of organizations and individuals linked to terrorism. Over the past two decades, designations of terrorist financiers by the Treasury, State, and Justice Departments have been used to disrupt terrorist networks by blocking their assets and deterring would-be terrorist supporters from providing financial resources to terrorist groups. Some terrorist groups designated by the U.S. include Al Qaeda, ISIS, Hezbollah, Hamas, FARC dissidents and ELN (Colombia), and Boko Haram in Nigeria.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations", *United States Government* (2022) <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>

Perhaps more widely known in the Americas is the Drug Kingpin Act that is a U.S. law that targets significant foreign narcotics traffickers, their organizations, and agents with the purpose of denying them access to the U.S. financial system and to prohibit all trade and transactions between the traffickers and U.S. companies and individuals. The infamous leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, “El Chapo” Guzman was arrested, extradited from Mexico, and convicted in a U.S. court in 2019 for drug trafficking and money laundering as a “drug kingpin.” More recently, the U.S. launched a “maximum pressure” campaign that leverages diplomatic, economic and law enforcement measures to isolate Nicolas Maduro and his cronies and impede the regime’s access to the illicit economy and encourage a transition to democracy in Venezuela. The program has targeted regime leaders, the central bank, and key industrial sectors (like gold, oil, and gas) based on terrorism-related and drug-trafficking-related sanctions, under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act and sanctions for anti-democratic actions, human rights violations, and corruption under the 2014 Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act. As of May 23, 2022, the U.S. Treasury Department had imposed sanctions on roughly 166 Venezuelan or Venezuelan connected individuals and the State Department had revoked the visas of more than 1,000 individuals and their families. The illegitimate Maduro regime sustains itself through narcotics trafficking, illegal oil sales and illicit gold mining and relies on its network of allies, namely Colombia’s ELN and former FARC members, Cuba, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey to circumvent sanctions and keep itself in power.

***Building Capacity to Combat Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing:***

Counter threat finance assistance programs are aimed at building sustainable, dynamic anti-money laundering and counterterrorist finance regimes that adhere to international standards and implement effective programs in the legal, financial regulatory, financial intelligence, law enforcement and prosecutorial fields. Improving the capability of countries to combat and prevent terrorist financing significantly enhances the ability

to detect and isolate terrorist financiers and to “follow the money” to where it links global terrorists and their support networks. To successfully combat and prevent money laundering terrorist financing, governments must develop an effective counterterrorist finance regime based on five basic elements described below.<sup>15</sup>

- *Legal Framework to Criminalize Terrorist Financing.* Each country should have a legal framework that criminalizes terrorist financing and money laundering. This allows countries to comply with international standards pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 137326 and the Financial Action Task Force Special Recommendations on Terrorist Financing.
- *Financial Regulatory Supervision to Protect the Integrity of the Banking System.* Each country should develop a financial regulatory framework that vigilantly supervises the financial services sector. Additionally, the financial services sector must develop and employ strict anti-money laundering and counterterrorism finance compliance measures that ensure that their employees “know their customer” and file suspicious transaction reports that may indicate money laundering and terrorist financing activities.
- *Financial Intelligence Unit as the Link Between the Private and Public Sectors.* Each country should set up a financial intelligence unit to collect, analyze, and disseminate suspicious transaction reports submitted by the private sector associated with financial transactions. An effective financial intelligence unit leverages well-trained analysts, equipment, information technology platforms, and specialized analytical software to meet its mission to develop and refer relevant evidence of financial crime cases (including terrorist financing cases) to law enforcement authorities.

---

<sup>15</sup> Celina Realuyo, “Building a Counterterrorist Finance Regime”, in *The Global War on Terrorist Finance*, US Department of State Bureau of International Information Programs, *E-Journal USA: Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (September 2004), 10–13, <https://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/his/iiceo004.pdf>

- *Law Enforcement Investigations to Track Down Terrorist Financiers.* Each country should develop specialized financial crime units within their law enforcement agencies. These units must possess the deep technical skills necessary to follow financial forensics and develop financial crimes cases that include money laundering and terrorist financing. These financial crime units must follow the money trail of terrorist groups and complement counterterrorism and counter-crime investigations.
- *Judicial/Prosecutorial Process to Bring Terrorist Financiers to Justice.* Each country should possess a well-developed judicial system capable of bringing money launderers and terrorist financiers to justice. An effective regime would employ well-trained prosecutors who are able to “follow the money trail” and make their case to the judges and magistrates.

The U.S., other nations, and multilateral organizations such as the UN, World Bank, IMF and OAS are engaged in capacity building programs throughout the Americas to enhance countries’ ability to combat illicit financial flows that threaten the financial system and regional security. They conduct financial sector assessments, provide technical assistance in the financial and non-financial sectors, and monitor economic systems to ensure compliance with the international standards on Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation.

## **Conclusions**

Financing is the lifeblood of any organization, licit or illicit. “Following the money trail” has proven to be an important financial instrument of national power for governments fight illicit financial flows and to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. Not only is financial intelligence helpful for understanding illicit networks and how they operate but has been valuable in identifying the key financial leaders in threat networks who are difficult to replace. Denying these illicit networks their financing and targeting the financiers of terrorist groups

like Al Qaeda, FARC, ELN, ISIS, Hezbollah and transnational criminal organizations like the Mexican cartels and PCC in Brazil have been a critical component of military, intelligence, and law enforcement operations to identify, degrade, and dismantle these transnational terrorist and criminal threat networks.

To finance themselves, illicit actors engage in a broad spectrum of activities to raise, move, store, disguise, and spend money that are difficult to detect and disrupt. They include cash couriers, bulk cash smuggling, trade-based money laundering, cryptocurrencies, front companies, and real estate. To combat and prevent money laundering and terrorist financing, governments have developed complex, interagency, counterterrorism and counter-crime strategies that include law enforcement and intelligence operations that “follow the money trail” to pursue and prosecute terrorist financiers and sanctions and public designations. Countries have built significant capacity to criminalize money laundering and terrorist financing, regulate the financial services sector, establish financial intelligence units, and create specialized law enforcement and prosecutorial units to combat and prevent threat financing.

International initiatives such as those undertaken by the United Nations and Financial Action Task Force have raised awareness of the negative effects of illicit financial flows on international financial markets and increased regulation to safeguard the international financial system. Since illicit actors threaten all sectors of society, the private sector must be aware of these threats and engage in combating terrorism and crime. Public-private sector partnerships promote more understanding of financial innovation’s advantages and disadvantages and of how terrorists and criminals might finance themselves. All of these measures contribute to efforts around the Americas to combat and prevent money laundering and terrorist financing but must be reviewed and updated to keep up with evolving financial innovations and methods of threat financing.

**About the author:**

**Celina B. Realuyo** - *William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies*

*She is a Professor of Practice at the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies at the National Defense University, dedicated to issues of national security, transnational organized crime, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and money laundering prevention. As a former diplomat, international banker at Goldman Sachs, Director of Counter Terrorist Financing Programs at the State Department, as well as a professor at George Washington University and the Joint Special Operations University, she has two decades of international experience in the public, private and academic spheres. She is also a graduate of Harvard Business School, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, and Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and the Women in International Security. The Colombian government has decorated her with the Military Medal of the Colombian War College and the Faith in the Cause Medal of the Armed Forces. Professor Realuyo has traveled to 75 countries and is fluent in English, French and Spanish, and fluent in Italian, German, and Portuguese.*

# FROM REGIONAL TO GLOBAL. THE CONSOLIDATION OF CRIMINAL CONVERGENCE IN SOUTH AMERICA

*Keith Ditcham and Martin Verrier*

## Summary

*For decades, some South American countries –such as Brazil or Colombia– have suffered high levels of criminal violence, eroding the democratic governance of cities and regions across the continent. Often, this violence has been associated with drug trafficking, especially cocaine. However, the consolidation of this trafficking has led to a situation where criminal organizations have consolidated contact networks and alliances with other organizations, causing trafficking and smuggling routes to overlap, as well as enabling the emergence of ungoverned enclaves that act as facilitators and enhancers of organized crime. Many cocaine trafficking routes often coincide with those of illegal timber trafficking. Criminal organizations weave alliances with each other, both locally and internationally, including terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah. This scenario represents a new challenge for the States of the region that must implement changes to successfully face this phenomenon.*

**Keywords:** *convergence, organized crime, terrorism, drug trafficking.*

## Introduction

Currently, 38 of the 50 most violent cities in the world are in Latin America. In countries highly affected by drug trafficking, such as Mexico, Colombia and Brazil,<sup>1</sup> criminal violence generates productivity costs estimated at 3.5

---

<sup>1</sup> Chris Dalby, Parker Asmann and Gabrielle Gorder, “Why Does Latin America Dominate the World’s Most Violent Cities List?”, *Insightcrime* (Brazil: 24 of March of 2022), <https://insightcrime.org/news/latin-america-stranglehold-world-most-violent-cities-list/> (Consulted the 2 of June Nov 2022).

% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>2</sup> Much of this violence is especially associated with the trafficking of cocaine, which is produced and consumed locally and re-exported mostly by sea to high-value markets in the world, reaching a record 1,784 tons of annual production.<sup>3</sup> This expansive period of drug trafficking enhances the actions of organized crime, facilitating a phenomenon of growing concern: the confluence or criminal convergence. This criminal confluence operates on three levels: on the routes used, between criminal organizations (locally and intercontinental) and in areas of low governance that are exploited by non-state threats such as terrorism.

Various illegal goods are frequently trafficked together or moved through the same transit routes. For example, timber and gold are moved across the Atlantic to Europe along with cocaine. This phenomenon coincides with the development of alliances between criminal groups for mutual benefit, as is evident in the spread of Mexican and Colombian drug trafficking organizations abroad and their convergence with the most relevant European criminal organizations such as the ‘Ndrangheta, but also terrorist organizations eager to obtain sources of financing. In turn, this confluence gives way to the emergence of “crime *hubs*,” places where the state is replaced by criminal governance. These places provide criminal organizations with a solid base of support, where they usually have the support of the local population, undermining security and the exercise of state sovereignty.

### **Criminal Convergence in Illicit Goods Trafficking Routes**

In the Southern Cone of America, while cocaine has traditionally flowed from major producing countries (Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia) to North

---

2 Laura Jaitman, “Los costos del crimen y de la violencia Nueva evidencia y hallazgos” *Inter-American Development Bank* (2017), [https://publications.iadb.org/publications/spanish/document/The\\_Costs\\_of-Crime-and-of-Violence-New-Evidence-and-Findings-in-Am%C3%A9rica-Latina-and-the-Caribbean.pdf](https://publications.iadb.org/publications/spanish/document/The_Costs_of-Crime-and-of-Violence-New-Evidence-and-Findings-in-Am%C3%A9rica-Latina-and-the-Caribbean.pdf)

3 UNODC, “Global Overview: Drug Demand Drug Supply” booklet 2, *UN Office on Drugs and Crime* (2021), [https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21\\_Booklet\\_2.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21_Booklet_2.pdf)

America or Europe, increased production and police pressure on key routes have led to the emergence of new markets in Russia and Asia,<sup>4</sup> while cocaine overproduction in Colombia has shifted much of production from Peru and Bolivia to the South, especially to ports in Ecuador, Brazil, and Paraguay.<sup>5</sup> The diversification of this trafficking to other regions has opened new convergence points in smuggling routes of different goods, including gold and timber of illegal origin, weapons, and tobacco. These trafficking routes do not only operate in a single geographical direction but usually connect different regions and continents through traffic in both directions, south-north and East-West.

In many cases, the numerous and voluminous export routes of commodities and their difficulty to be controlled locally are exploited for trafficking not only in narcotics, but also in illegally extracted goods such as gold and timber. The relationship between criminal organizations dedicated to drug trafficking and the exploitation of gold and timber is direct, since usually the same areas in Peru and Colombia dedicated to the culture of coca plants, match with areas of mining and exploitation of forest resources. Likewise, the ease of money laundering through gold mines and the increase in the price in recent years has attracted the attention of drug trafficking organizations, who have adventured into this strategy, especially in Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador.<sup>6</sup>

On the routes northwards, particularly looking for the market of the United States, a similar phenomenon of displacement and convergence is observed. The Panama-Colombia border has proven to be a vital convergence point

---

4 Virginia Messi, "Cocaína en la embajada rusa: condenan a 18 años de prisión al misterioso 'Señor K'", *Clarín.com* (January 20, 2022), [https://www.clarin.com/policiales/cocaina-embajada-rusa-condenan-18-anos-prision-misterioso-senor-k-\\_o\\_IOLK8UAWoX.html](https://www.clarin.com/policiales/cocaina-embajada-rusa-condenan-18-anos-prision-misterioso-senor-k-_o_IOLK8UAWoX.html)

5 Emcdda, "Europe and the Global Cocaine trade", *European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction* (2022), [https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/cocaine/europe-and-global-cocaine-trade\\_fr](https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/cocaine/europe-and-global-cocaine-trade_fr)

6 John Basquill, "Gold exports 'more attractive than cocaine' to Colombia's criminal gangs, research finds", *Global Trade Review* (17 of February of 2021), <https://www.gtreview.com/news/americas/gold-exports-more-attractive-than-cocaine-to-colombias-criminal-gangs-research-finds/>.

for cocaine trafficking into Central America and the United States.<sup>7</sup> These routes are controlled by the so-called “Clan del Golfo,”<sup>8</sup> an organization that simultaneously operates a large number of illegal mining centers,<sup>9</sup> especially gold, on both sides of the border. Gold is also used by these organizations to launder the financial proceeds of drug trafficking. Venezuela plays a fundamental role as an intermediary country in this trafficking, with criminal organizations that export gold to destinations with low controls of legality of the origin of the mentioned material such as the United Arab Emirates, Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire and even Uganda.<sup>10</sup>

Illegally harvested timber also offers drug traffickers an additional resource of financing and a means to hide drug shipments. Frequently, illegally harvested timber is washed and provided with documentation that legalizes it, thus enabling its commercialization to the rest of the world. The timber transported by river and road has been used to move cocaine through South America. This is particularly the case with the movement of wood down the Amazon River to the port of *Belem do Pará* in Brazil.<sup>11</sup> Often, legal or illegal timber is used to hide (disguise) cocaine. This methodology has also occurred in transatlantic shipments of timber. For example, in 2010, 1.3 tons of cocaine were found hidden inside a container full of wooden briquettes shipped from Brazil in Hamburg, Germany,<sup>12</sup> and more recently, a shipment

---

7 Ibid

8 Aura Windy Carolina Hernández Cetina, Alejandra Ripoll and Juan Carlos García Perilla, “El Clan del golfo: ¿el nuevo paramilitarismo o crimen organizado?”. *The USB Agora* (28 July 2018), <https://revistas.usb.edu.co/index.php/Agora/article/view/3363>.

9 CNN Español, “Colombia: Incautan más de 2 millones de dólares en lingotes de oro al Clan del Golfo”, *cnnspanol.cnn.com* (23 July 2018), <https://cnnspanol.cnn.com/2018/07/23/colombia-incautan-mas-de-2-millones-de-dolares-en-lingotes-de-oro-al-clan-del-golfo/>.

10 Portfolio, “Las razones del incremento del tráfico ilegal de oro en la región”, *portafolio.co* (11 January 2020), <https://www.portafolio.co/tendencias/las-razones-del-incremento-del-trafico-ilegal-de-oro-en-la-region-536983>.

11 Casey W. Wilander, “Illicit Confluences: The Intersection of Cocaine and Illicit Timber in the Amazon”, *smallwarsjournal.com* (16 of October of 2017), [https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/illicit-confluences-intersection-cocaine-and-illicit-timber-amazon#\\_edn55](https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/illicit-confluences-intersection-cocaine-and-illicit-timber-amazon#_edn55).

12 UNODC, “The Transatlantic Cocaine Market Research Paper”, *UN Office on Drugs and Crime* (April 2011), [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-nalysis/Studies/Transatlantic\\_cocaine\\_market.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-nalysis/Studies/Transatlantic_cocaine_market.pdf).

of 7.2 tons of cocaine was found hidden in wood inside a container in Antwerp.<sup>13</sup>

The need for criminal organizations to arm themselves also fosters the convergence of drug and other routes of good's trafficking with those for weapons. The relationship between arms trafficking and drug trafficking is direct, as criminal organizations feed on them to confront other organizations, establish internal control, and sometimes confront state agencies. For example, in 2018 an arms trafficking operation was detected from the United States and Europe to Argentina and from there to Paraguay and Brazil in order to supply the Brazilian criminal group *Primeiro Comando Capital* (PCC), using the same cocaine and marijuana trafficking routes.<sup>14</sup>

As with Mexico's illegal arms trade, the southern states of the United States are the source of most of the weapons circulating in Latin America, being trafficked along the same cocaine routes, but downwards. It is estimated that annually about 200,000 weapons enter Mexico from the United States,<sup>15</sup> and from there, many of them end up in Central and South America. Just in 2021, in Bogotá, 1,156 weapons were confiscated, many of them entered from Ecuador and Venezuela.<sup>16</sup> These purchases are consolidated and smuggled into the region through seaports, especially those with a free port regime, as well as land routes supplied by Mexican drug criminal groups.<sup>17</sup>

---

13 GCR Staff, "Police find €2.3bn of cocaine in containers of construction putty and timber bound for Netherlands", *Global Construction Review* (25 of February of 2021), <https://www.globalconstructionreview.com/news/police-find-23bn-cocaine-containers-construction-p/>

14 Ministry of Security, "El decomiso de armas más grande de la historia de nuestro país", *Government of Argentina* (26 June 2019), <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/el-decomiso-de-armas-mas-grande-de-la-historia-de-nuestro-pais>.

15 Steve Inskeep, "Much of firearms traffic from the U.S. to Mexico happens illegally", *US National Public Radio* (7 of June of 2022), <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/07/1103445425/much-of-firearms-traffic-from-the-u-s-to-mexico-happens-illegally>;

16 Infobae, "Así funciona el comercio de armas ilegales en Colombia," *infobae.com* (November 4, 2021), <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2021/11/04/asi-funciona-el-comercio-de-armas-ilegales-en-colombia/#:~:text=el%20gran%20grosso%20de%20las,se%20incretaron%2C%20en%20Bogot%C3%A1%2C%201.156>.

17 Mark Ungar, "La arena armada: tráfico de armas en Centroamérica", *Latin America American Research Review* (September 8, 2020), <https://larrlusa.org/articles/10.25222/larr.421/>.

This convergence in transnational criminal trafficking also matches with money-laundering operations, which explains the phenomenon of cash trafficking using the same routes used to traffic other illicit goods. According to the *Basel Institute on Governance*, Paraguay, Bolivia and Venezuela are the countries considered most vulnerable to money laundering in South America, while the U.S. State Department identified Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela as the top money laundering jurisdictions.<sup>18</sup> According to this same report, the Tri-Border Area (ATF) shared with Brazil and Paraguay is one of the main routes to Argentina for multibillion-dollar money laundering based on trade and other criminal activities. According to a GAFILAT report, the most recurrent money laundering schemes in the financial sector include private banking, financial instruments, remittances, and exchange businesses, while money laundering outside the financial sector include: real estate, import and sale of luxury cars, trade in jewelry and precious stones, as well as agricultural activities.<sup>19</sup> Money laundering frequently involves bulk cash transfers, including on transatlantic routes. On Argentina's northern border, police forces frequently confiscate cash being moved from Argentina to Paraguay and Bolivia. This cash generally responds to drug purchase operations from foreign organizations.<sup>20</sup> Research conducted between 2003 and 2011 showed that Colombian cartels imported money in bulk from the Netherlands, mainly in vacuum-sealed packages of 500 euro notes.<sup>21</sup> This contributed to the suspension of the €500 note by European central banks in 2019. Likewise, illegal cash flows have been discovered in Ecuador in

---

18 US Department of State, "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Volume II", *state.gov* (1 de marzo de 2020), <https://www.state.gov/2022-international-narcotics-control-strategy-report-2/>.

19 GAFILAT, "Analysis of Regional Threats on Money Laundering", Financial Action Task Force of Latin America (December 2015), <https://www.gafilat.org/index.php/es/biblioteca-virtual/gafilat/documentos-de-interes-17/traduccion/361-analysisregionalthreatsgafilat/file>.

20 Argentine National Gendarmerie, "Viajaban en un camión con 165,387 dólares hacia la República del Paraguay", Government of Argentina (March 18, 2022), <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/viajaban-en-un-camion-con-165387-dolares-hacia-la-republica-del-paraguay>

21 Melvin Soudijn and Peter Reuter, "Cash and Carry: The High Cost of Currency Smuggling in the Drug Trade," *Crime, Law and Social Change* (July 12, 2016), [https://spp.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2019-07/cash\\_and\\_carry\\_published\\_version.pdf](https://spp.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2019-07/cash_and_carry_published_version.pdf)

shipments from the Netherlands and Mexico, as well as large amounts of dollars have been found inside civilian aircraft that make unreported flights from Mexico.<sup>22</sup>

### **Criminal Convergence Among Criminal Organizations**

The convergence in trafficking routes is fed by criminal convergence between criminal organizations. This criminal convergence occurs because of the growing interconnection between various criminal organizations, where each of them provides comparative advantages, which are: geographical domain or over the trafficking of some substance or the provision of illegal services such as money laundering.

Colombia's criminal organizations were some of the first to converge with others at the regional level. For example, in the 80s, Colombian cartels relied heavily on the provision of other actors located in Bolivia and Peru.<sup>23</sup> Currently, Mexican cartels dominate the scene, converging with local actors, especially in those countries located on the axis of the Andes Mountains. In Colombia, Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel has established alliances with "Los Urabeños" to send cocaine shipments to Europe and other areas.<sup>24</sup> This cartel has also operated in other countries in South America. In 2008, for example, an operation to set up a methamphetamine laboratory in Argentina was discovered.<sup>25</sup> In Ecuador, the Sinaloa Cartel has established alliances with the criminal group "Los Choneros" for the consolidation of cocaine shipments destined for the United States.<sup>26</sup>

---

22 Arturo Torres, "Las mulas del lavado son el eslabón más débil del crimen organizado transnacional", *elcomercio.com* (2021), [http://www.elcomercio.com/seguridad/lavado-eslabon-debil-crimen-transnacional-concejal-Quito-Concejo-Gafi-Gafisud\\_o\\_892710739.html](http://www.elcomercio.com/seguridad/lavado-eslabon-debil-crimen-transnacional-concejal-Quito-Concejo-Gafi-Gafisud_o_892710739.html)

23 BBC News Mundo, "Quién es 'Techo 'e Paja', el antiguo capo boliviano que fue socio de Pablo Escobar y ha vuelto a ser detenido", *bbc.com* (23 April 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-56698869>.

24 Emma Rosser, "The Chapo's drug trade Partners in Colombia", *colombiareports.com* (July 23, 2015), <https://colombiareports.com/el-chapos-drug-trade-partners-in-colombia/>.

25 Profile, "Los vínculos del 'Chapo' Guzmán con la Argentina," *perfil.com* (July 14, 2015), <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/internacional/los-vinculos-del-chapo-guzman-con-la-argentina-20150714-0030.phtml>.

26 Arturo Torres, "Los 'sombrerudos' del cartel de Sinaloa activan a sus enviados en Ecuador", *primicias.ec* (December 2, 2021), <https://www.primicias.ec/noticias/en-exclusiva/sinaloa-enviados-ecuador-arrested/>

This convergence not only occurs locally, but also has strengthened the convergence between criminal actors from different continents, who have chosen to establish alliances, enhancing their capacities instead of clashing for control of criminal flows. This is the case of the Italian ‘Ndrangheta, which has not only built a strategic alliance with Colombian cartels, but has lately also developed a close relationship with the Brazilian PCC.<sup>27</sup> Two of the most notorious members of the Calabrian organization were arrested in Sao Paulo in 2018, and the organization’s “capo” Domenico Pelle visited Brazil twice in 2016 and 2017 to meet with PCC deputy director Gilberto Aparecido.<sup>28</sup> More recently, in 2020, the Sao Paulo unit of Brazil’s Federal Police arrested Nicola Assisi and Patrick Assisi, suppliers of the ‘Ndrangheta and another head of one of the clans.<sup>29</sup> Rocco Morabito was arrested in Uruguay from where he escaped, and eventually got arrested again in Brazil.<sup>30</sup> This presence of the Calabrian mafia is directly related to the export of cocaine and explains the ‘Ndrangheta’s alliance with local groups that act as suppliers.

In a similar case of transatlantic convergence in Ecuador, Albanian criminal organizations have been identified operating in Ecuadorian ports coordinating shipments of cocaine smuggled from Colombia by local organizations. One of the main Albanian drug traffickers, *Arber Çekaj*, was responsible for a total of 108 shipments of cocaine disguised in banana shipments to Albania.<sup>31</sup> He, in person, supervised departures from the port. This organization has strengthened linkages with organizations operating

---

27 Semana Investigation, “Los detalles secretos de la caída en Colombia del segundo hombre más importante de la mafia italiana,” *semana.com* (November 7, 2020), <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/asi-cayo-en-colombia-el-segundo-hombre-mas-importante-de-la-mafia-italiana/202049/>

28 Yuri Neves and Mónica Betancur, “PCC-‘Ndrangheta, la alianza criminal internacional que inunda Europa de cocaína,” *es.insight.crime.org* (8 August 2019), <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/pcc-ndrangheta-la-alianza-criminal-internacional-que-inunda-europa-de-cocaina/>.

29 Ricerche e Rapporti, «‘Ndrangheta holding – Dossier 2008», *Eurispes – L’Istituto di Ricerca degli Italiani* (2008), <https://eurispes.eu/ricerca-rapporto/ndrangheta-holding-dossier-2008/>

30 Deutsche Welle, “Italia celebra captura del mafioso Morabito en Brasil,” *dw.com* (May 25, 2021), <https://www.dw.com/es/italia-celebra-captura-del-mafioso-morabito-en-brasil/a-57654767>.

31 Plan V and Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), “El Mayor Narcotraficante Albanés hizo negocios en Ecuador,” *planv.com.ec* (December 13, 2019), <https://www.planv.com.ec/investigacion/investigacion/el-mayor-narcotraficante-albanes-hizo-negocios-ecuador>.

in the Colombia's border area, especially in Sucumbios. The anarchic context of this region facilitated the arrival of international criminal organizations, mainly Albanian and Mexican cartels.<sup>32</sup> Cocaine pathways from Putumayo to Sucumbios are controlled by the alliance between the local group "La Constru" and other ex-FARC groups. Constru controls the entire cocaine supply chain locally, from coca leaf processing to moving cocaine hydrochloride to Ecuador. The various mafia organizations of the Ex-FARC are not restricted by the rigidity of a unified command, which causes recurrent clashes between them with the aim of controlling crucial areas of drug trafficking. The largest of these organizations is the one led by Miguel Botache Santillana, alias "Gentil Duarte," and frequently clashes with Colombia's 48th Front.<sup>33</sup> Corrupt local officials play a vital role as "local facilitators," enhancing convergence, providing forged documents, settling lawsuits and allowing shipments of illicit goods in the area. Other relevant local criminal groups include the 32nd Front, the Armed Peasant Guard, and Nuevo Horizonte. According to a report by the Ecuadorian Ombudsman's Office, these criminal organizations control local cocaine routes, illegal gold mining and drug trafficking.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most concerning variants of criminal convergence occurs when organizations dedicated to drug trafficking converge with those linked to terrorism. In Paraguay, drug trafficking organizations operating from Ciudad del Este also have strong linkages with money launderers and terrorist financing. The criminal nature of the Tri-Border and its extensive money laundering opportunities facilitated the installation of criminal groups which have been specializing in other criminal activities, including

---

32 James Bargent, "La provincia de Sucumbios en Ecuador: santuario de narcotraficantes", *es.insightcrime.org* (8 November 2019), <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/la-provincia-de-sucumbios-en-ecuador-santuario-de-narcotraficantes/>.

33 Colprensa, "La guerra, a sangre y fuego, que estaría librando 'Gentil Duarte' en Putumayo", *elpais.com* (7 August 2019), <https://www.elpais.com.co/colombia/la-guerra-a-sangre-y-fuego-que-estaria-librando-gentil-duarte-en-putumayo.html>.

34 Gina Benavides Llerena, "Comunidad de San José de Wisuya y Resguardo Buenavista, Territorio Colectivo Binacional Indígena Siona en Inminente Riesgo de Exterminio", *insightcrime.org* (Ombudsman's Office: January 14, 2019), <https://insightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/InformeVerificaci%c3%b3n-ADHN-FINAL.pdf>.

Hezbollah, which has been present in the Tri-Frontier since the mid-1980s. Hezbollah's operations in the area include drug trafficking, currency counterfeiting and organized crime to fund operations around the world.<sup>35</sup>

In 2018, Paraguayan authorities arrested Nader Mohammad Farhat, a currency trader from Ciudad del Este investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) for drug trafficking and money laundering. Its operations included the use of the exchange house Unique SA, and at least eight banks in Paraguay from where money was transferred abroad.<sup>36</sup> At the time of his arrest, \$1.4 million in cash was confiscated from his home. More recently, in August 2021, local authorities in Ciudad del Este arrested Kassem Mohamed Hijazi, a Lebanese-Brazilian accused of money laundering for drug trafficking organizations.<sup>37</sup> The link between money laundering and drug trafficking actors is most obvious in the case of Hezbollah, which has started to be involved with cocaine trafficking in the region.<sup>38</sup> The expansion of Hezbollah needed the cooperation and collaboration of national organizations that could secure the supply of cocaine. This is done by providing money laundering services to less sophisticated criminal organizations like the PCC that have access to the cocaine supply chain. The relationship with the PCC goes beyond money laundering. Hezbollah has also acted as a shadow facilitator, helping the PCC acquire firearms to protect Hezbollah operatives incarcerated in Brazilian prisons.<sup>39</sup>

---

35 Emanuele Ottolenghi, "Examining the Effectiveness of the Kingpin Designation Act in the Western Hemisphere", Congressional Testimony: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, *govinfo.gov* (Washington DC: 8 November of 2017), 5, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115hhrg27514/pdf/CHRG-115hhrg27514.pdf>

36 Last minute, "Red lavaba desde Paraguay cada tres meses hasta USD 1,4 millones", *ultimahora.com* (19 May 2018), <https://www.ultimahora.com/red-lavaba-paraguay-cada-tres-meses-usd-14-millones-n1148407.html>.

37 U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Targets Corruption Networks in Paraguay", *treasury.gov* (24 of August of 2021), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jyo332>.

38 Tony Badran and Emanuele Ottolenghi, "Hezbollah Finance in Lebanon," A Primary-Source Review, *Foundation for Defense of Democracies* (23 of September of 2020), <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/09/23/hezbollah-finance-in-lebanon/>.

39 Kyra Gurney, "Police Documents Reveal 'Hezbollah Ties' to Brazil's PCC", *Insight Crime* (10 of November of 2014), <https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/police-documents-hezbollah-ties-brazil-pcc/>.

## Criminal Convergence in Failed Spaces and Areas

Often, in many parts of Latin America, criminal activity promotes and generates an area of illegality that naturally displaces the presence of the State. Consequently, a vicious circle is generated where criminal groups are strengthened and the State is weakened, which further enhances the actions of organized crime, thus facilitating criminal convergence in these areas.<sup>40</sup> These spaces or areas are usually places located on the borders, but also vulnerable neighborhoods in large cities. However, large geographical areas are not the only ones that act as facilitators of criminal convergence, since prisons and ports today also function as facilitators of this convergence.

In recent years, some border points in Latin America have been transformed into places where state governance is diffuse and where organized crime has become entrenched. In these places converge criminal organizations, trafficking routes and territorial occupation. Two of the most emblematic places are located on the border between Ecuador and Colombia, as well as on the Triple Border between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay.

In 2021, Ecuador confiscated a total of 116 tons of cocaine.<sup>41</sup> Currently, Ecuador is an export destination for a third of the cocaine produced in Colombia,<sup>42</sup> while thousands of Ecuadorian citizens, living in a country with 52 % poverty, are exploited by criminal organizations as cheap labor, particularly at the border.<sup>43</sup> The FARC's continued operation along the Ecuadorian border during the 80s, 90s, and 2000s solidified criminal

---

40 Patrick Radden Keefe, "The Geography of Badness: Mapping the Hubs of the illicit Global Economy", *Convergence: illicit networks and national security in the age of globalization*, *National Defense University Press* (2013), 121, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/convergence.pdf>

41 Mexico Daily Post, "Ecuador seizes over 9 tons of cocaine destined for Mexico and the US", *mexicodailypost.com* (14 of August of 2021), <https://mexicodailypost.com/2021/08/14/ecuador-seizes-over-9-tons-of-cocaine-destined-for-mexico-and-the-us/>.

42 James Bargent, "Ecuador: A cocaine Superhighway to the US and Europe", *insightcrime.org* (30 of October Nov 2019), <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/ecuador-a-cocaine-superhighway-to-the-us-and-europe/>.

43 TelesurHD, "Over 52% of Ecuadoreans fell into poverty in 2020", *telesurenglish.net* (1 of January of 2021), <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Over-52-of-Ecuadoreans-Fell-Into-Poverty-in-2020-20210101-0000.html>.

trafficking routes into Sucumbios.<sup>44</sup> After the Colombian peace process in 2016, the FARC dissident group “48th front” continued to operate in the border area, encouraging the development of lawless areas where cocaine trafficking converges with other criminal activities such as smuggling, money laundering and arms trafficking.<sup>45</sup>

Cocaine produced in Nariño is smuggled into Ecuador via the Pacific route, while cocaine produced in Colombia’s Putumayo region is smuggled through routes deep within the Ecuadorian Amazon. Recently, Ecuador’s Sucumbios province has witnessed a significant increase in cocaine flows, which has also led to a thriving criminal economy in border regions. The fact that Ecuador uses the U.S. dollar as its national currency has made it an attractive country for money laundering operations and bulk cash smuggling, usually from neighboring Colombia using the same routes as cocaine and from Europe.<sup>46</sup> Drug trafficking converges in this area with illegal logging of forests, which is also a major challenge, as it makes use of existing smuggling and laundering networks, encouraging mass cash sending, corruption and commercial fraud.<sup>47</sup> Also, the gold is another commodity that is illegally mined in the area. The Buenos Aires region in northern Ecuador and some areas near Sucumbios are known to attract illegal miners who extract up to \$500,000 worth of gold per week.<sup>48</sup>

---

44 Jaime Ortega Carrascal, “El bombardeo a las FARC en Ecuador partió la historia de esa guerrilla, dice expert”, *EFE Agency* (2 March 2021), <https://www.efe.com/efe/america/politica/el-bombardeo-a-las-farc-en-ecuador-partio-la-historia-de-esa-guerrilla-dice-experto/20000035-4478059>.

45 In 2018, members of the Ecuadorean army were found to be trafficking arms to ex-FARC organizations: Parker Asmann, “Ecuador Soldiers Allegedly Trafficked Weapons to EX-FARC Mafia”, *insightcrime.org* (18 of October of 2018), <https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/ecuador-soldiers-trafficked-weapons-ex-farc-mafia/>.

46 James Bargent, “Ecuador Bulk Cash Smuggling Reflects New Laundering Trend”, *insightcrime.org* (April 11, 2013), <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/rise-in-ecuador-cash-smuggling-reflects-wider-crime-trends/>.

47 FATF Report, “Money Laundering from Environmental Crime”, *Financial Action Task Force FATF* (July 2021), <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Money-Laundering-from-Environmental-Crime.pdf>.

48 Antonio José Paz Cardona, “Ecuador: minera denuncia a más de 60 personas que se oponen a actividad extractiva en su territorio”, *Mongabay* (May 18, 2021), <https://es.mongabay.com/2021/05/ecuador-minera-denuncia-a-mas-de-60-personas/>.

The FARC used the regional capital, Lago Agrio, as a support base, setting up warehouses, clinics, bars and nightclubs.<sup>49</sup> After the FARC's demobilization, this area remained a service hub for the criminal economy. As mentioned, cocaine pathways from Putumayo to Sucumbios are controlled by the alliance between the local group "La Constru" and other ex-FARC groups, primarily the group led by alias "Gentil Duarte" and the 48th Front. This intense criminal activity has turned Sucumbíos into a crime *hub*, where cocaine trafficking is linked to arms trafficking, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, fuel and its precursor chemical trafficking, as well as gold extraction and trafficking.<sup>50</sup> As a result, in the area, some of these organizations have mutated into narco-insurgencies that occasionally confront elements of the Ecuadorian Armed Forces.<sup>51</sup>

Another region where criminal convergence has strengthened in recent years is the tri-border between Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil. Paraguay is the largest producer of cannabis in the region and one of the largest in the world, exporting most of its production to Brazil, Argentina and Chile. This illegal industry capitalized on the networks created by the illegal tobacco trade and benefited from weak governance and corruption. Ciudad del Este, the Paraguayan city that is part of the triple border along with the cities of Puerto Iguazú (Argentina) and *Foz do Iguazú* (Brazil), became a criminal center where multiple criminal activities have converged, facilitated by porous borders and easy access to resources and weapons.<sup>52</sup> The area is plagued by counterfeiting, money laundering, terrorist financing, smuggling and drug trafficking, particularly in Ciudad

---

49 James Bargent, "La provincia de Sucumbíos en Ecuador: ..."

50 Commerce, "Militares descubren armamento y droga en una zona de Sucumbíos," *elcomercio.com* (February 13, 2021), <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/seguridad/militares-descubren-armamento-droga-sucumbios.html>.

51 Editorial El Universo, "Dos soldados heridos tras incursión armada en destacamento de Putumayo; delincuentes se llevaron fusiles," *eluniverso.com* (May 17, 2022), <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/ecuador/dos-soldados-heridos-tras-incursion-armada-en-destacamento-de-putumayo-delincuentes-se-llevaron-fusiles-nota/>

52 Global Organized Crime Index, "Paraguay", Global Organized Crime Index, Global Initiative Against Organized Crime", *ocindex.net* (2021), [https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/ocindex\\_profile\\_paraguay.pdf](https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/ocindex_profile_paraguay.pdf).

del Este. A 2010 study estimated that the city generated between \$12 billion and \$13 billion in cash each year and that \$12 billion a year was laundered in the tri-border area.<sup>53</sup>

The smuggling of illegal tobacco from Paraguay originally to Argentina and Brazil in the early 90s opened routes that are now exploited by drug trafficking organizations.<sup>54</sup> Tobacco factories in Paraguay produce 20 times more tobacco than the domestic market needs, accounting for up to 10 % of all smuggled tobacco in the world.<sup>55</sup> This billion-dollar-a-year industry allowed for the establishment of illicit routes, the emergence of organized crime facilitators, and corrupt officials that paved the way for additional transnational illicit activities to be established in the area.<sup>56</sup>

Although illicit flows transit across borders, primarily with Brazil, organized crime groups have found a safe haven in Ciudad del Este, providing protection, connections and illicit services that facilitate transit to Brazil and Argentina if necessary. In 2021, more than 15 tons of cocaine leaving Paraguay were confiscated at the ports of Antwerp and Hamburg.<sup>57</sup> Increased criminal activities and weak law enforcement capabilities led to the expansion of other activities such as money laundering operations, arms trafficking, and terrorist financing,

---

53 Rex Hudson, "Terrorist And Organized Crime Groups In The Tri-Border Area (TBA) Of South America," *US DOJ Office of Justice Programs* (Washington D.C: 2003), revised in 2010, 3, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/terrorist-and-organized-crime-groups-tri-border-area-tba-south>.

54 Gabriel Di Nicola and Germán de los Santos, "Itati: tres clanes controlan el mercado de la marihuana en siete provincias," *The Nation* (January 12, 2017), <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/seguridad/itati-tres-clanes-controlan-el-mercado-de-la-marihuana-en-siete-provincias-nid1975091/>.

55 Marina Walker Guevara, Mabel Rehnfeldt and Marcelo Soares, "Landlocked Paraguay emerges as a top producer of contraband tobacco", Smuggling made easy, *Public Integrity* (June 29, 2009), updated 2014, <https://publicintegrity.org/2009/06/29/6343/smuggling-made-easy>.

56 Guillermo Garat, "Paraguay: The cannabis breadbasket of the Southern Cone", *Transnational Institute TNI & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung FES*, (July 2016), [https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/drug\\_policy\\_briefing\\_46.pdf](https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/drug_policy_briefing_46.pdf).

57 Martin Verrier, "The Unexpected Route", *Royal United Services Institute - RUSI*, (May 19, 2021), <https://shoc.rusi.org/blog/the-unexpected-route/>.

especially in Ciudad del Este. In addition, many of the routes used by organized crime groups overlap in some places.<sup>58</sup>

Likewise, the convergence of criminal organizations has been facilitated by the penetration of the institutional structures of the State. Tobacco trafficking was facilitated and at the same time fueled by corruption in the country. For example, during the administration of Fernando Lugo, an individual accused of trafficking tobacco to Argentina was appointed as director of intelligence for the Paraguayan Air Force.<sup>59</sup> More recently, the so-called “Mega Laundering” case showed that more than \$1.2 billion had been illicitly transferred abroad by government officials.<sup>60</sup> A former Paraguayan vice president was among the suspects. An investigation led by Brazilian authorities revealed a sophisticated scheme through which criminal groups transferred billions of Brazilian reais from Paraguay to Brazil, disguising the operation as a regular currency exchange for tourists visiting Ciudad del Este.<sup>61</sup> A former Paraguayan president, owner of one of the banks under investigation and one of the largest tobacco factories, is among those defendants and has allegedly been involved in illegal tobacco export operations.<sup>62</sup> Other senior officials involved in the business include senators from Alto Paraná and immediate family members, as well as local officials.<sup>63</sup> This criminal network, built on smuggling, was enhanced by the arrival of Brazilian cartels, particularly the powerful PCC.

---

58 UNODC, “Interview with UNODC official in Bolivia”, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2021), [https://www.unodc.org/documents/bolivia/proyectos\\_bolivia/The\\_UNODC\\_Bolivia\\_Country\\_Program\\_2010-2015.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/bolivia/proyectos_bolivia/The_UNODC_Bolivia_Country_Program_2010-2015.pdf).

59 Marina Walker Guevara and Mabel Rehnfeldt, “Paraguay: El gran ‘duty free’ del contrabando de cigarrillos”, *Research Center Journalistic CIPER*, (June 30, 2009), <https://www.ciperchile.cl/2009/06/30/paraguay-el-gran-duty-free-del-contrabando-de-cigarrillos/>.

60 Última Hora, “Fiscalía investiga megalavado y posible vínculo con el terrorismo”, *ultimahora.com* (November 1, 2018), <https://www.ultimahora.com/fiscalia-investiga-megalavado-y-posible-vinculo-el-terrorismo-n276919.html>.

61 El Nacional, “Receta Federal investiga ‘conexión paraguaya’ en lavado de dinero de cárteles brasileños”, *elnacional.com* (February 4, 2021), <https://www.elnacional.com.py/destacado/2021/02/04/receta-federal-investiga-conexion-paraguaya-en-lavado-de-dinero-de-carteles-brasilenos/>.

62 Ángela Olaya and Sergio Saffón, «Drug Trafficking and Political Protection in Paraguay: The Case of ‘Cucho’ Cabaña», *insightcrime.org* (February 25, 2021), <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/drug-trafficking-political-protection-paraguay-cucho-cabana/>.

63 *Ibid.*

The PCC gained territory, going on to dominate strategic points in the area, such as Ciudad del Este and Pedro Juan Caballero, displacing the local group “Clan Rotela.”<sup>64</sup> The PCC has chosen to collaborate and converge with other criminal organizations but has also used violence to dominate other local groups. It has also moved towards poly-criminality. In 2017, the PCC blocked Ciudad del Este, overwhelming local police, and stole more than \$40 million from Prosegur, a multinational security company.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in 2021, the southern Brazilian city of Araçatuba was taken over and allegedly PCC members robbed several banks there. The group routinely steals cars to exchange for cocaine or to equip local leaders in the country. The dominance of the routes in Paraguay and the triple border allowed the PCC to dominate the cocaine market of the Southern Cone.

Ports and prisons with weak management control and accountability systems also act as environments facilitating criminal convergence. Ports like Santos have become major exit points for cocaine to Europe and Africa. Brazil’s legal exports to Africa grew from \$64 million in 2000 to \$800 million in 2021. This explosive expansion in the legal trade between Brazil and the African continent has been exploited by organized crime to send cocaine to African coasts, the most recurrent method being the *Rip-on/Rip-off* method.<sup>66</sup> The port of Santos plays a vital role on this route. Cocaine confiscations increased from 1.6 tons in 2013 to 27 tons in 2019.<sup>67</sup>

Prison mismanagement, as in other regions of South America, also allows organized crime to consolidate power among inmates and use the prison as headquarters. In Brazil, the feared PCC was born in the prisons of Sao

---

64 InSight Crime, “Rotela Clan”, *es.insightcrime.org* (August 23, 2020), <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-crimen-organizado-paraguay/clan-rotela/>

65 ABC “El Robo del Siglo: El Asalto a Prosegur de Ciudad del Este, en Fotos”, *abc.com.py* (April 30, 2017), <https://www.abc.com.py/edicion-impresa/suplementos/judicial/el-robo-del-siglo-el-asalto-a-prosegur-de-ciudad-del-este-en-fotos-1588885.html>

66 Trading Economics, “Brazil Exports to Africa”, *tradingeconomics.com* (2021), <https://tradingeconomics.com/brazil/exports-to-africa#:~:text=Exports%20to%20Africa%20in%20Brazil%20is%20expected%20to%20be%2064.18,according%20to%20our%20econometric%20models>.

67 Proinde, “Drug Smuggling on Bulk Carriers out of Brazil on The Rise”, *proinde.com* (May 4, 2021), <https://proinde.com.br/circulars/drug-smuggling-on-bulk-carriers-out-of-brazil-on-the-rise/>

Paulo and unified under the leadership of Williams Herba Camacho, but always dominating the prisons of Brazil and surrounding countries such as Paraguay and Bolivia.<sup>68</sup> In Ecuador, two criminal groups are fighting for control of the country's prisons, the "Choneros" (linked to the Sinaloa Cartel) and the "Lagartos" (linked to the Jalisco New Generation cartel). This struggle resulted in the deaths of 51 inmates in 2020,<sup>69</sup> and more recently 119 inmates died in new clashes between these organizations, supported by Colombian and Mexican cartels.<sup>70</sup> Ecuador's lack of control over its prison system is also reflected in the province of Sucumbíos. During the years 2020 and 2021, inmates rioted on at least two occasions and some of them escaped from prison. Similarly, in Argentina, the organization "Los Monos" operates from prisons, surrendering similar groups and recruiting new adherents within them, forcing the authorities to permanently rotate the leaders through different prison units.<sup>71</sup> In all cases, prison, instead of fulfilling its role of resocialization and sentencing, ends up becoming the command and control center of criminal organizations.

## Conclusions

South America is going through the golden age of criminal convergence. Just as the old smuggling channels allowed the expansion of cocaine trafficking, today it strengthens and enables the trafficking of other illegal goods. In this scenario, the role of local facilitators and so-called super-facilitators (operating in hubs of illegality; operating with traffickers of arms, drugs,

---

68 EFE, "Bolivia entrega a Brasil a tres reos vinculados al Primer Comando Capital" *EFE Agency* (March 19, 2020), <https://www.efe.com/efe/america/politica/bolivia-entrega-a-brasil-tres-reos-vinculados-al-primer-comando-capital/20000035-4200006>.

69 El Universo, "Ecuador: 51 crímenes en las cárceles en el 2020; Choneros y Lagartos, en riña por control", *eluniverso.com* (January 3, 2021), <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2021/01/02/nota/9244891/guerra-bandas-carcel-choneros-vs-lagartos/>.

70 Norberto Paredes, "Ecuador: 4 claves que explican qué hay detrás de la masacre carcelaria que dejó al menos 119 muertos, la peor de la historia del país", *BBC News World* (September 30, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-58748756>.

71 Germán de los Santos, "La cárcel, el lugar donde el líder de Los Monos vive protegido y maneja los hilos del negocio", *Digital Air* (December 27, 2020), <https://www.airedesantafe.com.ar/santa-fe-la-carcel-el-lugar-donde-el-lider-los-monos-vive-protegido-y-maneja-los-hilos-del-negocio-m8471>.

natural resources; and getting involved in terrorist financing operations) allows the interconnection between them. The convergence between criminal organizations forces us to revise theories that frame criminal organizations as actors tending to confront others in the bidding for dominance of a given market. This article has shown how large criminal organizations sometimes tend to bravely choose an intelligent international division of labor, just as the CCP and the 'Ndrangheta do, to the detriment of confrontation through violence. The role of organized crime enhancers offered by areas of low governance, whether border cities or prisons, allows criminal organizations to escalate in the use of armed violence and criminal structure, corrupting, penetrating and co-opting the institutional structures of the States. These places are the same that are exploited by parastatal actors, terrorist organizations and narco-insurgencies strengthening themselves.

In this context, the States and particularly police forces (usually slow in response, bureaucratic in their organization and top-down in their formation) must necessarily transform themselves if they want to successfully confront this new phenomenon. In this regard, they should encourage the creation of smaller, more autonomous police units, with decision-making capacity and highly interconnected. Governments will have to adapt their organizational charts to this new reality, providing sub-units with greater flexibility and transversal coordination capacity, enhancing local and international cooperation, expanding intelligence sharing mechanisms and multiplying joint operations.

Finally, the cases of convergence analyzed demonstrate that the problem of origin lies in the absence of the State, the lack of sovereign control or effective exercise of sovereignty, which in turn enables the possibility for a criminal organization to dominate a trafficking route, a city, a prison or a port. Therefore, any strategy that seeks to contain and successfully attack organized crime in these places must be developed as a multi-agency strategy, where the police is only one element in a set of interventions that include the development of opportunities for disadvantaged populations, the structural improvement of penitentiaries and the improvement of port controls.

## **About the authors:**

### **Keith Ditcham** – *Royal United Services Institute*

*With more than 22 years of experience and thematic knowledge on organized crime, he has worked with government organizations and security forces in the Americas and Europe. He also has experience in police and security sector transformation, including capacity building in conflict-affected countries and fragile states. Most recently, it provided support to the Colombian National Police and the attorney general's office. He holds a master's degree in International Criminal Justice and is about to submit his doctoral thesis on juvenile criminal exploitation. Currently, he is director and Senior Research Fellow of the "Organized Crime and Policing" area of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI).*

### **Martin Verrier** – *Royal United Services Institute*

*He has more than 18 years of experience as an international consultant in public and private security. Currently, he works as a consultant for a major software company, professor of strategy for the fight against organized crime at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies (Germany) and researcher in international security at King's College London and the Royal United Services Institute (United Kingdom). He served as Argentina's Undersecretary of State for the Fight Against Drug Trafficking between 2015 and 2019.*

# EVOLUTION AND IMPACT OF GANGS IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND BRAZIL

*Douglas Farah and Marianne Richardson*

## Summary

*Two prison-based gangs –the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) in Central America and the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) in Brazil– amassed military, economic and political power, as well as extensive territorial control, to the degree that they now pose existential threats to the states in which they operate. They now form key components of formidable transnational criminal structures with deep ties to drug trafficking and other criminal activities on multiple continents. The groups honed their rise using different models and retain significant differences in structure and capabilities. Despite this, both are now key drivers of corruption, violence, criminal activity and alternative governance structures that pose a significant challenge to democratic governance across Latin America. These violent non-state armed groups are rooted in their home communities. In many places they are viewed as more legitimate authorities than the state, making effective action against them extremely complex and difficult.*

**Key Words:** *Gangs (Maras), MS-13, PCC, Drug Trafficking, Territorial Control.*

## Introduction

In the mid-1990s a new generation of street gangs emerged across Latin America. Economic displacement, migration, family fragmentation, growing youth unemployment and the end to multiple armed conflicts created of a vast a pool of potential recruits, many with extensive military training and experience. The gangs –in both cases, more than 90 % male in their composition– provided an alternative to the formal economy and traditional informal economic outlets.

Over time, many criminal groups disappeared, and others grew to become important local actors. Two of these gangs – The *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) in Central America and the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC) in Brazil – evolved from street-level criminal activity to transnational criminal actors wielding enough power, resources, control, and legitimacy to pose an existential challenge to the states where they operate. According to Central American police estimates, the MS-13 has some 27,000 members in El Salvador and about 17,000 in Honduras.<sup>1</sup> The PCC is estimated to have about 11,000 members.<sup>2</sup>

Combatting corruption often focuses on senior government officials taking money or favors to allow illicit activities to proceed. However, the MS-13 and PCC assault the state from multiple directions: top down, bottom up, and lateral attacks across local, municipal and national systems of governance. The end result leaves the non-state armed groups replacing state functions, territorial control, and perceived legitimacy.

### **Similarities Between the Groups**

Both non-state armed actors, with their growing access to income from multiple illicit commodity chains such as cocaine and human trafficking, have become important drivers of corruption, state collapse and criminal takeover of state institutions and functions in the hemisphere. Both groups made calculated decisions over the past decade to enhance their political legitimacy by providing specific functions and services that the state is not capable of providing.<sup>3</sup>

Both groups are now transnational and aspire to become vertically integrated structures controlling the supply, transport and sale of cocaine. While both

---

1 IISS, “El Salvador and Honduras chapters” in *Armed Conflict Survey 2021*, *International Institute for Security* (September 2021), <https://www.iiss.org/publications/armed-conflict-survey/2021/armed-conflict-survey-2021>

2 Leonardo Coutinho, “The Evolution of the Most Lethal Criminal Organization in Brazil – The PCC” in PRISM 8, n.º 1, *National Defense University Center for Complex Operations* (February 19, 2019), <https://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/1761039/the-evolution-of-the-most-lethal-criminal-organization-in-brazil/the-pcc/>

3 Douglas Farah y Marianne Richardson, “Gangs No Longer: Reassessing Transnational Armed Groups in the Western Hemisphere” in *Strategic Perspectives* 38, *National Defense University Institute for National Strategic Studies*, (May 2022), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-38.pdf>

groups initially provided transportation and protection services from drug trafficking organizations, they both now purchase cocaine directly from wholesale providers in Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador for resale further up the value chain. Both groups have also made inroads controlling parts of the supply chain of precursor chemicals used in synthetic drug manufacturing.<sup>4</sup> The MS-13 leadership in Honduras developed a strategy for becoming the primary cocaine cartel in Central America by 2025, according to gang members familiar with the plan.<sup>5</sup>

There are other similarities. Both groups: (1) Have a culture glorifying violence and crime as legitimate tools to achieve power, accumulate resources, and eliminate enemies; (2) Emerge from poor neighborhoods where the state historically maintained a brutal and corrupt presence. Most gang members, then, began as “other” in their own societies, marginalized from formal economies and social structures; (3) Have hierarchical structures that are both rigid and allow for local autonomy. Leaders achieve coordination through bodies known as *sintonias* (PCC) and *ranflas* (MS-13), but local groups have significant freedom implementing decisions that leadership makes; and (4) Rely on territorial control in heavily populated areas such as national and regional capitals, as well as key drug trafficking routes, to gain political and economic leverage and vertically integrate their trafficking structures.

## Differences Between the Gangs

Evaluating the groups’ similarities sets the stage understanding why impacted states should engage with this analysis; given the commonalities, there are opportunities to learn from states which face similar challenges and

---

4 For MS-13 development see: Douglas Farah y Kathryn Babineau, “The Rapid Evolution of the MS 13 in El Salvador and Honduras from Gang to Tier-one Threat in Central America and U.S. Security Interests” in Perry Center Occasional Paper, *National Defense University, William Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies*, (March 2018), <https://www.ibiconsultants.net/upload/mediaandpublications/document/the-rapid-evolution-of-the-ms-13-march-23-2018-final.pdf>. For PCC development see: CLALS, “The Rise of the PCC: How South America’s Most Powerful Prison Gang is Spreading in Brazil and Beyond” *InSight Crime and American University’s Center for Latin American & Latino Studies* (December 2020), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3747122>

5 Farah interview with gang members in San Pedro Sula, (Honduras: March 2022).

have tried different approaches. In the same vein, the following differences between the groups' history and development yield insights regarding their potential next steps, providing useful perspectives for developing strategies that could confront or counteract any upcoming decisions.

Some key differences between the groups are as follows: (1) The PCC has a significant public social media and cultural presence, using music videos that showcase their access to guns, cars, beautiful women, motorcycles and extravagant jewelry. This use of media for cultural signaling helps create a social legitimacy and cultural penetration among unemployed youth. The MS-13 has not yet achieved this; (2) While both groups increasingly use bribery, payoffs, and threats to gain political influence, the MS-13 successfully established itself as a power center inside the national and municipal governments of El Salvador and Honduras, with interlocutors at the cabinet level. Current analysis indicates the PCC is not yet as integrated into the highest levels of power and is instead focused on regional and municipal government structures; and (3) The PCC has the sophisticated logistical capability and skill to carry out high profile robberies of banks and jewelry stores, not only in Brazil but in other countries, a type of assault the MS-13 has yet to carry out.

### **The Development of the MS-13 in El Salvador and Honduras**

Each gang presents significant differences in the paths followed to acquire power, influence, and resources. Between the gangs there are significant differences as well. The MS-13, initially formed in prisons in Los Angeles, California in the 1980s before being exported to post-conflict Central America in mid-1990s,<sup>6</sup> has long been recognized as a significant strategic

---

6 In the mid-1990s, as the civil wars in Central America ended, the Clinton administration began deporting thousands of gang members as they completed their prison terms in the United States, primarily California, flooding the Northern Triangle with thousands of violent felons the reconfigured back into the mirror images of the gangs they had formed in the United States. For a detailed look at the policies and history of the gang deportations and enormous difficulties this policy has caused in Central America see: Ana Arana, "How the Street Gangs Took Central America", *Foreign Affairs* 84, n.º 3 (May-June 2005), 98-110, <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.cofc.edu/dist/e/509/files/2012/02/Street-Gangs.pdf>

challenge for the United States, in part because of its U.S. roots and ongoing proximity and engagement across the U.S. The group was declared “significant transnational criminal organization” by the U.S. Treasury Department in 2012.<sup>7</sup>

Our fieldwork with the MS-13 over the past three years found that, as gang leaders and members grow older and raise families, they increasingly desire a different, less violent lifestyle for their children and grandchildren while remaining active in the criminal world. PCC experts said the same overall trend is occurring within that group as well.

Now, in both Honduras and El Salvador, the MS-13 has a group of 10 to 12 “elder statesmen” who are consulted and, in some cases, have the final say over the strategic decisions of the group in each country. Over the past several years, this process produced an increased focus on investing growing earnings from drug trafficking into buying access to political structures through corruption –rather than relying on brute force and intimidation– to achieve gang objectives such as impunity, territorial expansion, and increased leverage inside formal power structures. Furthermore, the group now also invests millions of dollars derived from the drug trade and other illicit economic activities into legitimate businesses. This includes near-total control of urban transport companies in major cities and other cash-intensive businesses that simultaneously enhance territorial control.<sup>8</sup> The road taken by the MS-13 in El Salvador through direct political power differs significantly from the road to power taken by the Honduran branch. In Honduras, the MS-13 sought power through direct links with international cocaine cartels and networks that coordinate human trafficking and human smuggling.

In El Salvador, expanding territorial control, infiltration into the police and military, and political-economic pacts with the government of President Nayib Bukele have made the group a major political, economic and military

---

7 Press Releases, “Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organization”, *U.S. Department of Treasury* (October 11, 2021), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/lg1733>

8 Based on IBI Consultants field work, (November 2021).

force with direct access to cabinet-level officials.<sup>9</sup> In July 2021, the U.S. State Department took the unusual step of sanctioning and revoking the visas of four senior Bukele administration officials, designating them as corrupt actors.<sup>10</sup> On December 8, 2021, the U.S. Treasury Department designated two senior Bukele administration officials as corrupt actors specifically for “covert negotiations between government officials and the MS-13,” noting these meetings “were part of the Government of El Salvador’s efforts to negotiate a secret truce with gang leadership.”<sup>11</sup>

In Honduras, the MS-13 focused on taking the cocaine and synthetic drug trafficking routes, as well as refining coca base into cocaine in increasingly sophisticated laboratories. As the ties to drug trafficking networks grew, the MS-13’s financial, military and political power expanded and the group’s political engagement and legitimacy with the populations under their control grew exponentially.<sup>12</sup> As both branches increased their financial resources, they took steps to mitigate the behavior that most alienated them from the communities in which they live. The best example of this is their decision to reduce extortion (commonly called a “war tax”) of businesses and individuals in the neighborhoods they control. While extortion of external businesses (such as corporate chains) remains in place, in all of Honduras and parts of El Salvador under MS-13 control the hated and economically crippling extortion of local businesses has ended. The most significant gain from this decision is the grassroots political support the gang garnered in return. In most MS-13-controlled neighborhoods in and around the gang stronghold of San Pedro Sula, the group is now referred to as “the good

---

9 For an in-depth look at the Salvador MS-13 ties to the Bukele administration see: Douglas Farah y Marianne Richardson, “Corruption is the System”: Strategic challenges of the abdication of the state in the Northern Triangle of Central America”, *NDU/INSS* (September 28, 2021).

10 U.S. Department of State, “Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors Report”, *United States Government* (July 1, 2021), <https://www.state.gov/reports/section-353-corrupt-and-undemocratic-actors-report/>

11 U.S. Department of Treasury, “Treasury Targets Corruption Networks Linked to Transnational Organized Crime”, *United States Government* (December 8, 2021), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0519>

12 For details of this development see: Douglas Farah y Caitlyn Yates, “The MS 13 in Honduras and El Salvador: From Gang to Community Embedded Transnational Armed Group”, (March 28, 2020).

gang” (*la mara buena*), in contrast to other groups, which are referred to pejoratively as simply gangsters (*pandillas*).<sup>13</sup>

### **The Development of the PCC in Brazil**

The PCC was founded in prison in the 1990s and most of the original leadership remains incarcerated. The organization has drawn far less U.S. policy attention than the MS-13 because neither its drug trafficking activities nor other criminal endeavors directly touch the United States. However, the organization is in many ways far more sophisticated and international than the MS-13, and more destabilizing in the hemisphere. This is because the PCC has a broad multi-continental reach, direct ties to cocaine trafficking and distribution across South America, extensive territorial control and military capacity in the most economically significant country in Latin America, a demonstrated ability to carry out spectacular multi-million dollar heists, and the capacity to achieve social legitimacy through music and social media. The PCC was designated as Specially Designated Entity in the global drug trade by the U.S. Treasury Department in December 2021.<sup>14</sup>

The first PCC members were prisoners from São Paulo, which they viewed as Brazil’s true capital. As Leonardo Coutinho, a leading PCC expert, wrote:

On August 31, 1993, the Capital prisoners held a self-organized championship soccer tournament, appearing at the first game wearing standard white T-shirts; scrawled in blue ballpoint pen ink on the left breast were three letters—PCC, referring to *Primeiro Comando da Capital*, or First Capital Command. After the tournament the PCC assassinated the most feared criminals in Taubaté prison, earning the respect and loyalty of their fellow

---

<sup>13</sup> Farah interviews in San Pedro Sula and vicinity with community and gang members, (November 2021 - March 2022).

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Treasury, “Issuance of Executive Order Imposing Sanctions on Foreign Persons Involved in the Global Illicit Drug Trade; Counter Narcotics Designations and Designations Updates,” *United States Government* (December 15, 2021), <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/financial-sanctions/recent-actions/20211215>

inmates and establishing themselves as the new prison bosses. In 1993 Brazil's prisons were still reeling from what had until then been the biggest ever outbreak of prison violence. Less than a year earlier, 111 inmates were shot dead by police in an operation to stem a rebellion in the Carandiru prison in São Paulo city. The tragedy began as a banal fight between two rival gangs for possession of a few boxes of cigarettes. In 1993, as they assumed the dominant position within the prison gang hierarchy, the PCC adopted the discourse of unity, arguing that in the previous year's carnage the prisoners themselves were to blame as they were fratricidal and ungoverned by an organization strong enough to keep the peace amongst them and represent them both inside and outside the prisons. An inmates' charter was drafted, and the criminals pledged to the motto, "Brother does not kill brother. Brother does not exploit brother. The 'Founders' are the leaders."<sup>15</sup>

While the PCC, unlike the MS-13, does not have operational U.S. branches and does not operate near a U.S. border, the structure "has a demonstrated capacity to disrupt and destabilize multiple countries in the hemisphere – most notably Paraguay and Bolivia – as well as the operational capacity to deliver cocaine and other illicit products to Brazil, Africa and Europe. This broad reach, now extending into Colombia, Peru and Venezuela, in turn, drives massive corruption and state collapse in multiple countries."<sup>16</sup> As noted, the PCC mastered a powerful tool for recruitment, social acceptance and cultural penetration: a popular music style known as *Proibida Funk*, a sub-genre of *carioca* music also known as *Favela Funk*. PCC artists, using YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and other social media outlets, share their music, singing explicitly about gang life, criminal activity, violence and murder. These songs are similar to Mexican *narcocorridos* glorifying drug traffickers, and are regularly played at *bailes funk*, the pervasive dance parties in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.<sup>17</sup>

---

15 Leonardo Coutinho, "The Evolution of the Most Lethal Criminal Organization in Brazil..."

16 Douglas Farah and Marianne Richardson, "Gangs No Longer..."

17 Paul Sneed, "Favela Utopias: The "Bailes Funk" in Rio's Crisis of Social Exclusion and Violence," *Latin American Research Review* 43(2), (2008), 57–79, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20488129>

## Gangs' Relationship to TCOs

The relationships between the gangs and more traditional TCOs also varies significantly from group to group. Until recently, the Mexican cartels and other transnational groups viewed the MS-13 as undisciplined and unreliable partners, limiting the group's access to the drug trade outside of local retail sales. Now the restructured, compartmentalized MS-13, particularly the Honduras branch, is moving to consolidate itself as a cocaine and synthetic drug trafficking structure, reorganizing into a disciplined, compartmentalized and efficient transportation and retail structure for cocaine and other products. While this evolution in the drug trade is significant, it still places the MS-13 on the lower end of the supply chain and thus of the revenue streams. While able to sell multi-hundred kilo units of cocaine to Mexican cartels, the Central American group is still not in a position to access the lucrative retail markets.

In the absence of access to the cocaine retail market, the MS-13 established a monopoly on a less lucrative but valuable market driven by consumption in the region, making it less risky and less costly to move. The sale of a marijuana derivative known as *krispy* or *kreepy* is laced with chemicals that make the product far more potent than regular marijuana, but also generates about five times the profits. The advantage, in addition to the revenue streams generated, is that the market is growing rapidly across the Northern Triangle, offering the gang low-risk/high profit markets with extremely high growth potential. The revenues from the *krispy* trade far exceed the money gained from neighborhood extortions, and generate both community goodwill and political legitimacy.<sup>18</sup>

The MS-13 also took tentative but important steps to move into the cocaine trade in other ways. Since at least 2018 the organization attempted to grow coca plants in and around Santa Barbara and Copan, and building small cocaine laboratories around San Pedro Sula, Puerto Cortes and the

---

18 Seth Robbins, "MS13 Profits from Marijuana Boom in Honduras", *InSight Crime* (Honduras: November 11, 2021), <https://insightcrime.org/news/ms13-profits-marijuana-boom-honduras/>

surrounding hills in an effort to create a supply closer to home. It is not clear if there have been any large-scale successful harvests, but police who have carried out the raids on coca cultivations over time said the most recent seizure of several hundred coca plants was far more sophisticated than the earliest seizures of small, weak plants.

There is also evidence that Honduras transitioned from a transit country to one that also produces relatively small but important amounts of refined cocaine, almost all produced in territory that the MS-13 controls.<sup>19</sup> A March 2020 DEA complaint justifying the March 2020 arrest of Honduran national Geovanny Fuentes in Miami detailed how Fuentes borrowed \$65,000 to establish a laboratory near the beach town of Omoa, which he ran from 2009–2012, producing 300–500 kilos of pure cocaine a month.<sup>20</sup> According to our field investigations, the laboratory remained operational under the control of the MS-13 after 2012, when the organization took over the territory of Omoa and began pioneering new drug trafficking routes to Mexico via Belize. The laboratory was later moved further up the mountains to the northwest.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast, the PCC focused on controlling the high-end cocaine market in Brazil and lucrative markets in nearby countries. Brazil is one of the largest cocaine consumers in the world, making the local market extremely profitable. Chile, Uruguay and Argentina are also major consuming nations on a per capita basis. Supply of processed cocaine from Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela and Colombia, all which share porous borders with Brazil, is both cheap and plentiful.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, the PCC has both expanded into both international cocaine trafficking and other lucrative illicit activities. The PCC's international expansion phase was clearly visible by 2017, when authorities documented

---

19 Héctor Silva Ávalos, "Honduras Goes from Transit Nation to Cocaine Producer", *InSight Crime* (March 19, 2020), <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/honduras-transit-nation-cocaine-producer/>

20 Sworn affidavit of DEA Special Agent Ravi Baldeo in the Southern District of New York in support of the arrest of Geovanny Fuentes, (February 28, 2020).

21 Farah field research in Honduras, (May 2020).

22 Douglas Farah and Marianne Richardson, "Gangs No Longer..."

international cocaine shipments through Uruguay, kidnappings and robberies in Bolivia, attempts to recruit dissident FARC combatants from Colombia, and the largest bank heist in Paraguay's history.<sup>23</sup> The PCC now has operations, routes, or market access across Latin America, Europe, and Africa. An investigation by Brazil's intelligence and security agencies found that outside Brazil, Paraguay, and Bolivia (the three countries with the most members), the PCC had at least 387 active members in 16 other countries.<sup>24</sup>

Geographic proximity, endemic corruption, and lax criminal prosecution made Paraguay an attractive haven for the PCC to expand economic initiatives, and the group established a base there by 2011.<sup>25</sup> In Bolivia, PCC members move freely in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, where they invest in jewels, medical clinics, ranches, and restaurants. PCC members also have been able to obtain passports from the Bolivian state, as seen in the case of PCC member Fuminho who was carrying a Bolivian passport when authorities captured him in Mozambique.<sup>26</sup>

In Europe, the PCC's most important relationships are reportedly in Italy, where the 'Ndrangheta crime group became one of the PCC's first international trade partners since at least 2014. This relationship, documented by Brazilian law enforcement and supported by interviews with regional Italian intelligence officials, will likely open doors to relationships with other criminal structures, in part due to the Italian organization's existing ties in Colombia, Mexico and Argentina.

---

23 Luís Adorno and Flávio Costa, "Preso em Moçambique, Fuminho planejava controlar tráfico na África", *Notícias Universo Online* (São Paulo: April 14, 2020), <https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2020/04/14/preso-em-mocambique-fuminho-planejava-controlar-trafico-na-africa.htm>

24 Luís Adorno, "Investigação detecta membros do PCC em EUA, Europa e América do Sul", *Notícias Universo Online* (São Paulo: October 6, 2020), <https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2020/10/06/investigacao-brasileira-detecta-ao-menos-387-membros-do-pcc-em-16-paises.htm>

25 Jen Sokatch, "Brazil Drug Gangs have Offices in Paraguay: Police", *InSight Crime*, (May 19, 2011), <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/brazil-drug-gangs-have-offices-in-paraguay-police/>

26 ED, "Bolivia se convierte en el santuario del 'Narcosur': el cartel de droga del PCC," *El Deber* (October 18, 2021), [https://eldeber.com.bo/pais/bolivia-se-ocnvierte-en-el-santuario-del-narcosur-el-cartel-de-droga-del-pcc\\_251510](https://eldeber.com.bo/pais/bolivia-se-ocnvierte-en-el-santuario-del-narcosur-el-cartel-de-droga-del-pcc_251510)

## Conclusions

The MS-13 gang in Central America and the PCC gang in Brazil, by exercising territorial, political, economic and military control over large parts of their home regions, have evolved into primary engines for corruption, violence, instability and state collapse in the Western Hemisphere. They provide enduring, violent criminal structures with deep roots in their home communities and growing ties to TCOs and local and national political structures. The emergence of both groups from prison structures and continuing reliance on prison leadership in both groups have created new challenges to taking effective actions against the gangs. Massive corruption in the prison systems has allowed both gangs to effectively establish the centers as secure bases of operation, where the leadership is protected rather than isolated.

Both groups operate across multiple countries in the hemisphere, multiplying the corruptive influence they exercise and the violence they are able to inflict with relative impunity. The diverse paths to power show the creativity and adaptability of the gang structures. The PCC, through its massive social media reach, has incorporated a new, socially-legitimizing tool to its ability to gain acceptance as a valid interlocutor.

The community ties grew stronger as these groups developed a more nuanced and sophisticated skills managing political, economic and social relationships. As each group nears three decades of existence, the lessons learned and high cost of living as outsiders in their own societies produced leadership changes toward finding new, less exclusionary paths to criminal livelihoods. This mature leadership -and their willingness to give up economic gains from practices such as extortion in exchange for political support- has in fact led to larger economic and political gains. As the gangs gain community support, most visibly in Honduras, they expand and secure their access to illicit economies.

Both groups are increasingly active in the global cocaine trade. While the PCC made far greater strides toward becoming a fully developed drug

trafficking structure, with operations on three continents, the MS-13 has also made significant strides. The MS-13 and PCC also control other lucrative parts of multiple illicit supply chains. These include control and taxation of sections of major ports, including the port of Santos in Brazil, one of the largest in the world; human smuggling and human trafficking in Central America and Mexico; a monopoly on *krispy* and other enhanced variations of marijuana; and advances into the distribution market of precursor chemicals for synthetic drugs. Taken together, these revenues streams provided massive new resources to the gangs. These resources rocketed them into the ranks of TCOs that pose a threat not only to their home countries but to the democratic governance of most of Latin America.

The growing infusion of revenues from criminal activities fundamentally changed the nature of gangs and their relationship to the state, as well as their relationship to regional TCOs. Rather than extorting in their home communities and engaging in dangerous but relatively local criminal activities, both groups are now important political, economic and military actors that are able to challenge and often overwhelm the state, either through force, corruption or co-optation.

The broad patterns of confronting the state that the gangs now engage in are: (1) buying and extorting their way into the formal political structure to co-opt parties, the judicial system and parts of the executive, intelligence and law enforcement communities at the highest level in El Salvador; and (2) establishing in essence separate, gang-governed territories with broad popular legitimacy, concentrated on key cocaine trafficking route while negotiating specific deals with government authorities in Honduras.

## About the Authors:

**Douglas Farah** – *National Defense University (Institute for National Strategic Studies, Center for Strategic Research)*

*Douglas Farah is a visiting senior fellow at the Center for Strategic Research, Institute for National Security Studies at National Defense University, leading the Western Hemisphere Illicit Network Review project. He is also president of IBI Consultants, LLC. Farah specializes in field research and works as a consultant on security challenges, transnational organized crime and transnational gangs in Latin America. Farah frequently briefs senior military and government audiences and guest lectures at universities and has testified before Congress more than a dozen times. For the two decades before founding IBI Consultants in 2005, Farah worked as a foreign correspondent and investigative reporter for The Washington Post covering civil wars in Central America, conflict and organized crime in South America, diamond and gold wars in West Africa, and radical Islamic finances. He is the author of two books: (1) Blood from Stones: The Secret Financial Network of Terror; and (2) Merchant of Death: Money, Guns, Planes and the Man Who Makes War Possible (With Stephen Braun).*

**Marianne Richardson** – *National Defense University (Institute for National Strategic Studies, Center for Strategic Research)*

*Marianne Richardson is the research coordinator for Western Hemisphere Illicit Network Review project at Institute for National Security Studies / National Defense University. Her work focuses on migration, transnational systems, and finance. Prior to this position Ms. Richardson worked for the city of Austin's COVID-19 disaster response team to develop real-time tracking tools for testing and mass vaccination sites. She also conducted research on migration drivers at the Central America and Mexico Policy Initiative at the Strauss Center for International Security and Law. She holds a Master of Arts in public affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin.*

*CHAPTER III:*

# **NEW CHALLENGES AND REGIONAL STABILITY**

CHALLENGES  
AND THREATS TO  
**SECURITY** IN  
LATIN AMERICA

# CYBERSECURITY IN LATIN AMERICA: CHALLENGES, CONCERNS AND OPPORTUNITIES

*Boris Saavedra*

## **Summary**

*The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the evolution of global geopolitics, and emerging digital technology has become its center of gravity. The lack of cybersecurity policies and strategies to address the vulnerabilities to freedom of expression in cyberspace, the use of Artificial Intelligence, 5G wireless communications, critical infrastructures, cyber diplomacy, cryptocurrencies, as well as cloud technology for data storage and use are important sources of threats and challenges for cybersecurity in Latin America. This situation has created great opportunities for the cybersecurity sector to respond to the increase in attacks in cyberspace, including a growing number of companies that require such services. In this context, this article analyzes -politically and strategically- the threats, challenges and opportunities presented by cybersecurity in Latin America.*

**Keywords:** *Digital Technology, Emerging and Convergent, Policy, Strategy, Cybersecurity.*

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the sustained evolution of global geopolitics, with emerging digital technology at its center of gravity. A combination of regulations and growing threats are defining the landscape of technological security, stimulating the need for increased educational efforts in cybersecurity understanding and collaboration between public and private organizations. Therefore, this article analyzes, from the political and strategic point of view, eight key areas (freedom of expression, Artificial Intelligence, 5G wireless communications technology, critical

infrastructures, data acquisition, supervision and control system – SCADA, cyber diplomacy, cryptocurrencies and cloud technology) that describe the cybersecurity overview, as well as the concerns, challenges and opportunities for these processes in Latin America.

On the one hand, freedom of expression is a fundamental pillar of liberal democracy in the West. The use of social networks has had a disruptive impact on this right, with serious consequences on the stability of this democratic exercise. Likewise, advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the field of security and defense require knowledge and understanding of the current scope of this technology, as ignorance can lead to operational errors, as well as the loss of effective employment opportunities in cybersecurity.

On the other hand, the fifth generation (5G) of wireless communications technologies increases the speed of data transfer and improves bandwidth. In the military field, 5G technology could improve intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), enable new command-and-control (C2) methods, and streamline logistics systems for greater efficiency. However, all this requires knowledge and understanding of their strengths and vulnerabilities to ensure the competent and safe use of these capabilities. In addition, critical infrastructures cover a wide range of functional aspects of the State, such as power plants, industrial and sanitary systems, land, air and maritime traffic, and the economic and financial system. However, as they become more vulnerable to *cyber ransomware* attacks, their protection begins with the design of policies and implementation of cybersecurity strategies for the protection of the country.

Likewise, the SCADA System is a *software* and *hardware* architecture for the acquisition, supervision, and control of data in real time, used in industrial, commercial, and institutional processes. Attacks on the SCADA system are proliferating worldwide and are a major concern in the region. Likewise, the new cyber domain has become a scenario of constant confrontation

between individuals and between nations. Therefore, cyber diplomacy is a recent tool that must be known and used to achieve the objectives of global governance of cyberspace.

In this context, cryptocurrency is one of the engines of new financial and economic models and is becoming one of the priorities of countries and organizations. Cryptocurrencies and the operation of this novel digital monetary system are unknown to most authorities responsible for the design and implementation of public policies and strategies. In addition, cloud technology is a major source of cybersecurity threats, making it increasingly difficult to protect the data stored in it. Consequently, policies and strategies authorities urgently need serious training to know and understand the efficient use of this technology in the framework of cybersecurity.

Therefore, the cybersecurity agenda in democratic societies in Latin America requires the determined effort and commitment of its leaders to develop appropriate policies and strategies. In this sense, this article analyzes the decisive aspects for the exercise of cyberspace governance through regional cooperation cybersecurity, being an important contribution to the development and welfare of the region within the framework of the rule of law and liberal democracy.

### **Freedom of Expression and Social Media in Latin American Cyberspace**

The trend of internet and telephone communications unrestricted government surveillance of and the lack of effective legal oversight are part of an ongoing battle in Latin American countries. Surveillance capabilities and technologies are increasingly intrusive and prevalent, surrounded by a culture of secrecy and views rooted in the abusive use of government power, which is pitting security against privacy. This situation has generated growing resistance from society against the government's biometric surveillance and distrust in the authorities. A clear example has

been the repeated attempts, in 2021, to force people to give their biometric data to access mobile phone services in Mexico, Paraguay and Colombia, with strong opposition from civil society.

In this regard, in Mexico, the Supreme Court of Justice indefinitely suspended the creation of the National Registry of Mobile Phone Users (a national registry of mobile users associated with their biometric data) after the federal agency in charge of implementing the registry filed a unconstitutionality lawsuit, asserting its duty to guarantee users' rights to privacy, data protection and access to information.<sup>1</sup> In Paraguay, a bill requiring users to register their biometric data to enable a mobile phone service was rejected by a parliamentary committee and has since been held up in Congress. Meanwhile,<sup>2</sup> in Colombia, the Karisma Foundation stressed, in October 2021, that internet blackouts and online censorship and surveillance violate the right to protest online.<sup>3</sup> Amid this turmoil, the *Electronic Frontier Foundation* has put together a set of resources to help people navigate safely in digital protest environments.<sup>4</sup>

Colombian police “patrolling” on the web has also reinforced concerns about its invasive nature. Karisma notes that a 2015 Colombian police resolution authorizing “cyber-patrolling” by law enforcement is unclear about its scope, procedures, tools and specific limits.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Colombian Ministry of Defense of June 2021 reports on activities during the national strike indicating that digital patrolling served to detect cyber-threats,

---

1 Juan Omar Fierro, “La Suprema Corte Confirma La Suspensión Indefinida Del Panaut”, *Process*, (October 20, 2021), <https://www.proceso.com.mx/nacional/2021/10/20/la-suprema-corte-confirma-lasuspension-indefinida-del-panaut-274293.html>; Legislative Information System, “Technical File Sheet”, *National Congress*, (May 11, 2021), <http://silpy.congreso.gov.py/expediente/123507>.

2 Legislative Information System, “Ficha Técnica del Expediente”, National Congress, (May 11, 2021), <http://silpy.congreso.gov.py/expediente/123507>

3 Carolina Botero and Juan Pablo Parra, “Guns versus cellphones”, *Foundation Karisma*, (September 2021), <https://web.karisma.org.co/guns-versus-cellphones/>.

4 Veridiana Alimonti and Shirin Mori, “#ParoNacionalColombia and Digital Security Considerations for Police Brutality Protests”, *Eff*, (May 19, 2021), <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2021/05/paronacionalcolombia-and-digital-security-considerations-police-brutality-protests>.

5 Ministry of National Defence, “Resolution No. 05839”, *Colombian National Police*, (December 31, 2015), <https://www.policia.gov.co/file/32305/download?token=OAOOIAOJ>.

profile suspicious individuals and activities related to *acts of vandalism*, and combat; deemed by the government as online disinformation. In the latter case, cyber-patrolling was combined with a narrative dispute over the truth of reports, images and videos of excessive use of police force, attracting national and international attention.<sup>6</sup>

Although there are some legislative advances in some countries, fears remain regarding the regulatory framework, privacy, and freedom of expression. One such example has been Brazil's legislative project 2630/2020, called the *fake news* bill, which continued to be debated in the Congress of the Republic during 2021.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, Brazilian civil society groups and activists remained firm in their opposition to the traceability rule, which forces instant messaging applications to massively retain the chain of forwarded communications, undermining users' privacy expectations, as well as guarantees, and end-to-end encryption principles. However, the traceability mandate was removed in the latest version of the bill, although privacy dangers remain in other provisions.

In El Salvador, Apple warned journalists from the well-known independent online media *El Faro* about possible attacks on their iPhones by state-sponsored attackers. Similar warnings were sent to Salvadoran leaders of civil society organizations and opposition political parties. However, these allegations have not led to any investigation by the responsible government authorities.<sup>8</sup> At the regional level, leading cyberspace rights groups in Latin America requested a thematic hearing before the Inter-

---

6 Ministry of National Defence, "Informe Del Sector Defensa: Garantías a la Manifestación Pacífica y Control de Acciones Violentas", (June 9, 2021), [https://www.policia.gov.co/sites/default/files/informe\\_sector\\_defensa\\_-\\_garantias\\_a\\_la\\_manifestacion\\_pacifica\\_y\\_control\\_de\\_acciones\\_violentas\\_-\\_28\\_de\\_abril\\_a\\_4\\_de\\_junio\\_de\\_2021\\_20210609\\_vf.pdf](https://www.policia.gov.co/sites/default/files/informe_sector_defensa_-_garantias_a_la_manifestacion_pacifica_y_control_de_acciones_violentas_-_28_de_abril_a_4_de_junio_de_2021_20210609_vf.pdf).

7 Latin American Observatory for Media Regulation and Convergence, "Proyecto de ley de Fake News de Brasil tiene nuevo texto y será votado en breve", (November 1, 2021), <https://www.observacom.org/proyecto-de-ley-de-fake-news-de-brasil-tiene-nuevo-texto-y-sera-votado-en-breve/>.

8 David C. Adams, "Periodistas de El Salvador fueron sistemáticamente espíados con un software israelí que solo se vende a gobiernos." *Univision News*, (January 12, 2022), <https://www.univision.com/noticias/america-latina/software-de-espionaje-pegasus-fue-utilizado-contr-a-periodistas-en-el-salvador>.

American Commission on Human Rights to discuss the human rights risks caused by social media surveillance methods.<sup>9</sup>

The widespread use of malicious *software* by Latin American governments generally occurs without clear and precise legal authorization, much less with strict standards of necessity and proportionality, in the absence of legislation that establishes the scope, limits and due process in the framework of freedom of expression. Therefore, the United Nations High Commissioner, as well as various experts and organizations worldwide, have proposed a regional moratorium on the use of *malware* technology, until States have solid legal guarantees and effective controls to ensure the protection of human rights. This would put an end to persistent abuses and arbitrary violence related to the use of spyware by governments and *hackers* in general.

Social discontent will persist until governments recognize that the hostility of intelligence agencies and law enforcement toward device security puts all citizens in danger. Instead of exploiting system vulnerabilities, governments should align themselves in favor of robust cybersecurity for all. Moreover, there is no doubt that the new frontiers of fake news require some sort of legal intervention. Governments in the region, for the most part, continue to use digital communication tools to influence political opponents and citizens in general, employing unsophisticated technology.

Large social media companies such as Facebook and Twitter have been used to control, rather than release healthy communication, as they should have had enough foresight to prevent powerful political actors, and even ordinary people, from trying to use their platforms to repress or demoralize. Social *bots* (*software* to perform automatic remote attacks) on Twitter have played an important role since the platform was launched to instantly report not only on the latest news or banal announcements, but also on conspiracy and propaganda. Currently, companies in *Silicon Valley* in the United States were

---

9 Network in Defense of Digital Rights, "Organizaciones advierten riesgos de tecnologías de vigilancia en audiencia ante la CIDH," (October 28, 2021), <https://r3d.mx/2021/10/28/organizaciones-advierten-riesgos-de-tecnologias-de-vigilancia-en-audiencia-ante-la-cidh/>.

warned that their technologies were being used by the powerful to manipulate the weak. Most attacks have been carried out by human *bots* or cyborgs (living beings whose capabilities are enhanced by computer implants or mechanical body parts) easily compared to current technologies (such as AI, machine learning or deep learning), since they did not involve deep fakes or human-like technology. However, smarter technology is expected to be available soon.

For example, the machine learning and deep learning in used today, with increasing availability of AI tools, have implications for online written, visual, auditory, and tactile communication. Social *bots* are becoming more interactive: *deepfakes* (specially designed images, audio, and video content that use AI technologies to look like legitimate content) are becoming more compelling, and artificial voices — like Siri and Cortana — sound more human. With these innovations and along with the increased general understanding of digital misinformation, disreputable PR firms, corrupt political consultants, and a host of other groups using fake news are changing their tactics. The way social media operations are being launched makes people act more like robots and robots look more like humans to confuse algorithms set up to track fake news. These groups are seeding and fertilizing fake news to confuse users on other widely used platforms in Latin America (such as WhatsApp, Telegram and TikTok).

Knowing how these social media companies have operated and are operating in the world, but particularly in Latin America, the following question arises: What should be done at the political and strategic level to counter this threat to society and liberal democracy in the region? To prevent targeted attacks and fake news campaigns through social media, regulations and policies must be created to protect everyone – but particularly the most vulnerable classes – from online manipulation. New regulations should make clearly illegal for social media companies to sell targeted ads to the most vulnerable with misinformation or politically featured disinformation.

In that sense, social media companies must provide safe online spaces for users and facilitate their daily use by protecting and moderating them.

Companies such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, WhatsApp and others need to be policed more vigorously for fake news, hate speech, religion and politics, as well as so-called post-truth. It should not be accepted that companies have the discretion to select cases of disinformation, one by one, at their own discretion, selecting only those that may have media attention for political, ethnic or religious reasons.

The policy and strategy should consider social networks users as age groups since, depending on the age, social platforms continue to be spaces for manipulation of information, generally aimed at young people, although adults can also be affected due to lack of knowledge in the operation of electronic devices with high digital technology. According to Sam Wineburg and Sarah McGrew, young people have been shown to assume that by mastering devices and social media, they are better prepared and less exposed to manipulations of information, which is exactly the opposite.<sup>10</sup> In Latin America, WhatsApp and Instagram are the most used networks for their ease of operation and wide range of operation for different age groups.

In liberal democracy, legally binding restrictions must be established for those entrusted with the performance of authority; that is, restrictions on the exercise of political power to prevent abuses. In fact, the idea of applying moderation as a principle of political systems is one of the most venerable in political theory, with roots dating back to ancient Greece. Currently, most liberal democratic societies agree that the development of policies and strategies for restraining government (executive power) is necessary and strengthens democracy as such.

### **Artificial Intelligence and its Implications in Latin American Cyberspace**

Security and defense as an occupational discipline has long used technological advances to enhance its efforts in protecting a country's

---

<sup>10</sup> Sam Wineburg and Sara McGrew, *Evaluating information: The cornerstone of civic online reasoning* (Stanford: Stanford Digital Repository, 2016), <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:fv751yt5934/SHEG%20Evaluating%20Information%20Online.pdf>.

assets, as the new cyber domain presents threats that pose a risk to the nation. Currently, such technological developments include advances in AI.<sup>11</sup> However, many authorities within the security and defense sector, out of ignorance, describe this technology beyond its technical capabilities, resulting in misunderstandings in the functionality, opportunities for advancement and knowledge gaps in the risks associated with such development in Latin America.

According to experts on AI and its use in security and defense matters, AI is at an elementary stage, with limited capacity for intelligent and autonomous decision-making. AI does not think, but it calculates, processes, applies rules, and is used in machine learning.<sup>12</sup> AI applications can even generate rules based on data learning. However, AI is fallible and inflexible, and subsequently operates in a black-and-white environment. In contrast, humans think, create, and can understand unusual environmental changes or disturbances fluently enough to analyze and contextualize human constructs such as intention and motivation.

Such a representation shapes the understanding of AI in security and defense technologies, as it requires understanding of context, and not just computing or processing. Presently, AI does not have the capacity for human understanding, nor can it adapt as a human being does. Consequently, by its very nature, it cannot provide guarantees, under dynamic conditions, to areas such as security and defense, presenting serious deficiencies in terms of protection.

Intelligent autonomy levels for security and defense technologies are unlikely to change significantly over the next ten years. On the contrary, the era of quantum computing is likely to facilitate the development of AI beyond current expectations. Quantum computing will probably be the key factor that allows AI to reach the point of singularity and reach the level of

---

<sup>11</sup> Michael Coole, Deborah Evans and Jennifer Medbury, *Artificial Intelligence in Security: Opportunities and Implications* (American Society for Industrial Security, 2021), <https://store.asisonline.org/artificial-intelligence-in-security-opportunities-and-implications.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

pro-autonomy. Until then, AI could yield reasonable economic benefits, such as increased productivity and reduced costs. However, the overwhelming benefit to security and defense in the developing future will be the use of responsive technologies, such as drones and robotics, to protect and defend humans.

### **5G Wireless Communications and its Impact on Cybersecurity in Latin America**

The fifth generation (5G) of wireless communications technologies increases data transfer speed and improves bandwidth over existing fourth generation (4G) technologies, while enabling new military and commercial applications. 5G technologies are expected to support interconnected systems or autonomous devices, such as smart homes, autonomous vehicles, precision systems, industrial, machinery, and advanced robotics. Additionally, for the military, 5G could improve ISR, enable new C2 methods, and streamline logistics systems for greater efficiency, among other uses. However, as 5G technologies are developed and deployed, states should consider the necessary adjustments to their cybersecurity policies and strategies for national security spectrum management, as well as the implications for defense capabilities, particularly in military operations.

5G wireless communication technology uses three segments of the electromagnetic spectrum: the high band (also called millimeter wave or MMW, which operates between 24 and 300 GHz), the mid-band (which operates between 1 GHz and 6 GHz) and the low band (which operates below 1 GHz). The mid and low bands are often collectively referred to as U-6. According to some analysts, spectrum sharing is necessary, reserving enough U-6s for commercial purposes. This would require the security and defense sector to relocate certain applications to other parts of the spectrum, such as high band. It is estimated that this form of distribution would allow the spectrum to be completed in 5 years. Otherwise, it would

take about 10 years to complete the distribution.<sup>13</sup> From a security and defense standpoint, 5G wireless communications could have several potential military applications, for autonomous vehicles, C2, logistics, maintenance, augmented and virtual reality, as well as for ISR systems, all of which would benefit from improved data rates and a shorter time delay.

Currently, at the political and strategic level, government authorities should discuss and coordinate with Congress on the following issues for the development of appropriate policies and strategies regarding 5G wireless communication technology: (1) What approach should be given to spectrum management? e.g., spectrum sharing, as well as security and defense allocation to better protect the missions of the Ministry of Defense, while meeting growing business demands. (2) What are the risks to the country's national security posed by foreign 5G infrastructure? Can that risk be managed, if so, how? (3) Should the country limit intelligence share with countries operating 5G equipment supplied by potential enemies? (4) Are changes in operational concepts, force structure, doctrine or posture necessary due to military 5G developments or applications? (5) To what extent would commercial 5G technologies be vulnerable to jamming attacks from potential adversaries?

Without governance policies, strategies, and structures, the socio-political, legal, and security and defense risks of the application and use of 5G wireless communications technology may overshadow any benefits of these technologies. Security, privacy, individual rights, and potential impact on humanity must be fundamental considerations for the use of any AI and 5G application in security and defense. The pursuit of technological and military supremacy can undermine these basic rights, and the consequences can be irreversible and irreparable. Therefore, Latin American governments must establish a viable platform, from which AI, 5G and development can be managed in a politically and socially desirable manner, for the benefit of the security and defense of every country in the region.

---

13 John R. Hoehn and Kelly M. Saylor, *National Security Implications of Fifth Generation (5G) Mobile Technologies* (Washington, D.C: Congressional Research Service, 2022), <https://www.asisonline.org/globalassets/foundation/documents/digital-transformation-series/ai-guidance-document-final.pdf>.

## Critical Infrastructures in Latin America from the Cybersecurity standpoint

In 2021, the U.S. government and corporations struggled to contain the damage caused by the attack on network management *software* provider SolarWinds, which compromised nine federal agencies and dozens of companies. In the same period, *ransomware* attacks increased in frequency and severity, disrupting operations at the major *Colonial Pipeline* which supplies fuel to the U.S.<sup>14</sup> East Coast, and at the Brazilian meat processor JBS, a Brazilian company located in this country.<sup>15</sup> The vulnerability in a widely used piece of open-source software left thousands of companies, including SaaS-as-a-service software providers and cloud services, vulnerable to cyberattack.

Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russian cyber threat actors deployed destructive *malwares* and *ransomware* against critical infrastructure in Ukraine to destroy computer systems and render them inoperable. Between January 15 and February 23, 2022, Microsoft's threat intelligence center and cybersecurity<sup>16</sup> researchers revealed that malicious programs known as *WhisperGate* and *HermeticWiper* were used to attack critical organizations and facilities by destroying devices, windows critical to systems operations.

As National Critical Infrastructures become more vulnerable to cyberattacks, their protection is critical for any organization and nation. In addition, the ability to attribute an action in cyberspace is a vital element in preventing impunity in the digital space. However, the greatest security is the ability to prevent.

---

14 Kartikay Mehrotra and William Turton, "Hackers Breached Colonial Pipeline Using Compromised Password," *Bloomberg*, (June 4, 2021), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-06-04/hackers-breached-colonial-pipeline-using-compromised-password#xj4y7vzkg>

15 "Hackeo paraliza producción en emparadoras de carne en EEUU, Canadá y Australia", *Telemundo* 57, June 2, 2021, <https://www.telemundo51.com/noticias/eeuu/estados-unidos-hackeo-empacadoras-de-carne-jbs-brasil-rusia-canada-australia/2106161/>

16 "Destructive malware targeting Ukrainian organizations", *Microsoft Security*, January 15, 2022, <https://www.microsoft.com/security/blog/2022/01/15/destructive-malware-targeting-ukrainian-organizations/>.

## **The Data Acquisition, Supervision and Control System - SCADA**

While technological advances have unquestionably benefited the world, they also present an adverse side that can be turned against humanity. Hackers can activate monitors to spy on people, while hackers can attack vulnerabilities by using *ransomware* and *malwares* to disrupt critical infrastructure. For example, by attacking the SCADA system, which enables the operations of chemical, power and water supply plants, bridges, highways, sanitary systems, ports, and airports, as well as economic and financial organizations.

The SCADA system is a *software* and *hardware* architecture for the acquisition, supervision, and control of real-time data of industrial, commercial, and institutional processes composed of computers, graphical user interfaces and remote network data communications, among others. This system collects a significant amount of data and, to do so, it integrates a variety of sensors and measuring devices in digital or analog format, depending on the application. When the data is collected, it is sent to a remote terminal unit or programmable logic controller. Once received, the collected data is translated into usable information and transferred to a human-machine interface where operators can analyze the data and interact with field devices such as valves, pumps, motors, and sensors, some located in inaccessible locations.

Today, SCADA systems are the target of cyberattacks. It is worth noting that attacks on these systems affect a substantial number of people, causing significant damage and ultimately threatening human lives. Post-attack investigations link them to exploitation of vulnerabilities deeply rooted in the system's design philosophy, which focuses on operational readiness rather than security.

## **Cyber Diplomacy**

The new cyber domain is rapidly deteriorating on several fronts marked by the increasing sophistication of cyberattacks, as well as the lack of consensus on global Internet governance and intensifying competition among the major powers. These challenges are critical turning points among nation-

states to recalibrate prevailing cyber diplomatic commitments. Cyber diplomacy is a post-liberal global practice, considering that cyberspace was a creation of the liberal order. The role it plays in shaping a new order or building bridges between different political visions, and what it means for the future of cyberspace, are key points of discussion.

The potential demise of liberal democracy will affect cyberspace as it is conceived in the West. The consequences of a liberal post-democratic cyberspace will significantly impact the current global order. In this context, the *concept of cyber diplomacy involves the use of resources and the performance of diplomatic functions to protect national interests with respect to cyberspace*. In that sense, cyber diplomacy is a type of diplomacy in which state representatives engage to protect the interests of national cyberspace, which often include cybersecurity, cybercrime, and freedom to use the Internet. Therefore, what differentiates cyber diplomacy from traditional diplomacy is the fact that it uses non-traditional diplomatic partners, such as representatives of Internet companies, technology companies and civil society organizations. Cyber diplomacy depends on these private actors as they handle most of the information and property in cyberspace.

It is also important to recognize what cyber diplomacy is not, as it is not necessarily involved in all interstate interactions about technology or cyberspace. Moreover, cyber diplomacy is not necessarily the practice of state representatives using the Internet or technology to interact with each other, but rather, e-diplomacy or digital diplomacy, and may include, for example, a state organization that posts infographics on Instagram or two diplomats having an exchange via Twitter. This can be complicated due to the fact that, historically, cyber diplomacy, e-diplomacy and digital diplomacy were used somewhat interchangeably. However, cyber diplomacy has emerged as a term of its own denoting a practice.

Cyber diplomacy presents benefits and vulnerabilities that, in an international system marred by uncertainty and security paranoia, can be a solution to a new wave of insecurity spread by cybersecurity issues.

The goal of the international community must be to decisively establish voluntary rules and regulations for cyberspace. This takes into account the following three main problems that cyberspace poses to traditional defense strategies: (1) deterrence is less effective due to the variety of actors and strategies; (2) the means of cyberattack make it difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to attribute responsibility to an actor or group of actors; and (3) the security and technology gap between cyber powers and developing states widens vulnerabilities.

Since traditional defense strategies cannot meet most of these challenges, cyber diplomacy is one of the only methods states must prevent, resolve, and punish attacks. An example of a questionable success of cyber diplomacy would be that of China and the United States. Years of mutual accusations and proven cyberattacks between these two countries gave way to the 2015 cybersecurity agreement between Obama and Xi Jinping: cooperation and mutual assistance in the investigation of cybercrimes, mutually restricting economic cyber espionage, and establishing a monitoring mechanism and hotline for escalating cyber problems. Instead of entering into conflicting, both countries sought to establish mutual rules for interaction.

There is a set of tools to achieve the main objective of cyber diplomacy, which is the creation of voluntary standards and regulations for cyberspace. In this regard, after a series of negotiations, in June 2013, the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts (UNGGE) established that cyberspace, like the high seas or outer space, was a global common good and was subject to international law (including the UN Charter). Other international organizations, such as NATO, in 2014, confirmed the UN's decision and added that cyber defense would be integrated into the collective defense strategies of the alliance.

Some scholars have argued that international organizations should expand their cyber domain beyond simply setting standards. However, individual states have also created tools to deal with the cyber threat. Therefore, cyber diplomacy has three models to follow. In the first model, states create a

department or agency to develop cyber policies and manage cyber issues; for example, the UK's National Cyber Security. In the second model, states create a coordinating unit to synchronize policy between various departments and agencies; for example, the Office of the Coordinator of Cyber Affairs, within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Finally, in the third model, states select a hybrid model in which they create an agency that coordinates policy between agencies (often on domestic issues and cooperation with the private sector) and deals more unilaterally with cyber issues (for international cyber negotiations); for example, the German Federal Office for Information Security.

Like almost all cyber issues, the novelty of cyber diplomacy led to it being underdeveloped for years and left to the domain of engineers, seen as a technical matter. However, in 2003, UN cyber meetings proliferated internationally. By 2010, at least three major cyber powers (UK, China, and US) had developed separate policies, but these focused mainly on domestic politics and coordination with the private sector. To date, few states have developed independent cyber diplomacy policies, including: the U.S. National Strategy for Cyberspace (2018),<sup>17</sup> Japan's International Strategy on Cybersecurity and Cooperation (2015),<sup>18</sup> the EU Council Conclusions on Cyber Diplomacy (2015),<sup>19</sup> and Australia's International Engagement Strategy (2015).

There are also difficulties in developing appropriate channels for cyber diplomacy and cyber issues. States focus on cybernetics of an inter-institutional nature, lacking cooperation. For example, Germany had, in 2010, 12 independent departments that developed policies to design its cyber strategy. Another challenge is that many States may view the establishment or implementation of international standards on cyberspace

---

17 The White House, *National Cyber Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington: The White House D.C, 2018), 1-26 <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/National-Cyber-Strategy.pdf>.

18 "Cybersecurity Strategy", The Government of Japan, September 4, 2015, <https://www.nisc.go.jp/eng/pdf/cs-strategy-en.pdf>.

19 General Secretariat of the Council, *Council conclusions on the Cyber diplomacy* (Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council, 2015), <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6122-2015-INIT/es/pdf>.

as an intrusion on sovereignty and an impact on their national interests. Therefore, cyber diplomacy must demonstrate that cooperation in creating common standards for cyberspace is a vital national interest of all States, sharing information regarding cyberspace and building mutual trust to prevent conflict. Finally, perhaps the most pressing challenge for cyber diplomacy is the lack of research and literature on the subject.

The study of cyber diplomacy poses with many challenges as it is a new field with few case studies, which departs far enough from traditional diplomacy. Within the framework of the study and analysis of critical infrastructures, the convergence between cyber diplomacy and the SCADA system is essential to achieve the efficient and effective protection required in cyberspace. In this sense, the tools of cyber diplomacy can be largely applied to SCADA. Consequently, any conversation or negotiation about critical infrastructure should include a discussion on SCADA systems and their vulnerabilities. Undoubtedly, the biggest challenge is that this system is perceived as an internal problem because international organizations prefer to focus on standards and mutual trust, rather than building mutual defense through cyber diplomacy.

However, so far cyber diplomacy cannot be used to strengthen SCADA defenses worldwide, but it can be used to provide rules and regulations as to how states should interact with these systems. Likewise, cyber diplomacy can be used to create regional or global agreements. The case of Central America is emblematic since regional energy exchange is very important. Standards for SCADA systems are especially critical in regions that share systems between bordering countries, which is common practice throughout Latin America. In addition, states with large cyber technology gaps are the most vulnerable.

## **Cryptocurrency**

New technologies are transforming markets and sectors. In this context, the digitalization of the world represents a radical change in the way of doing business. Undoubtedly, cryptocurrencies are one of the drivers of this change as new financial and economic models become one of the priorities

of developed countries and organizations. However, cryptocurrencies and their operation are unknown by most authorities responsible for the design and implementation of public policies and strategies in this novel digital monetary system. This situation does not favor its development and use as a common element in markets and commercial relations, not to mention the implications for the security and defense of the State. Therefore, it is necessary that professionals, academics, and scientists from the public and private sectors know what is researched and developed on this topic, taking into account aspects such as cybersecurity and its relationship with cryptocurrencies.

Cryptocurrency is, essentially, electronic money; that is, it only exists in digital form. This allows buying and selling them like any current currency but taking advantage of the digital means. Cryptocurrencies can be used to make quick payments and avoid transaction fees.<sup>20</sup> They can also buy cryptocurrencies as an (speculative) investment in the hope that their value will increase. Likewise, cryptocurrencies can be purchased by credit card or through a process called “mining.” The latter is a competitive process that verifies and adds new transactions to the system protected by *blockchain* technology, in which the miner makes money if the transaction is accepted.<sup>21</sup>

Although cryptocurrencies have suffered ups and downs in their short history, they have managed to consolidate and grow. There are important countries and institutions that are studying the possibility of launching their own cryptocurrency. This gives an idea of the projection and potential of these virtual currencies, but there are still many doubts about their operation, evolution, and adaptation to the real world.<sup>22</sup> The popularity and value of cryptocurrencies has made them an object of desire for many

---

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Carol and Michael Dakos, “A critical investigation of cryptocurrency data and analysis”, *Quantitative Finance* 20, no. 2 (2020): 173–188.

<sup>21</sup> Diego Valdeolmillos et al, “Blockchain technology: a review of the current challenges of cryptocurrency,” (document presented in *International Congress on Blockchain and Applications* Avila Spain, June 26, 2019), [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-23813-1\\_19#chapter-info](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-23813-1_19#chapter-info).

<sup>22</sup> Jiaqi Liang, Linjing Li, and Daniel Zeng, “Evolutionary dynamics of cryptocurrency transaction networks: An empirical study,” *Plos one* 13, no. 8 (2018): E0202202

users. As a result, a high number of fraud attempts are hidden behind cryptocurrency transactions that never take place. The goal of these frauds is always the same: data theft. The organization's cybersecurity could be severely affected if these attacks occur on a company's or its employees' computers.<sup>23</sup>

Financial reward cyberattacks have also proliferated through learning how to take advantage of the cryptocurrency environment. Without adequate measures to prevent them, it is easy to gain access to the physical cyber network of a company and demand payment in cryptocurrencies in exchange for solving the problem. Likewise, tracking such transactions is virtually impossible, which makes computer forensics work very difficult.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to understand cryptocurrencies from a comprehensive approach, considering the characteristics that refer to the cryptocurrencies themselves, but also those that have to do with the security of the digital world. If the cybersecurity issues associated with this type of digital currency are not defined, its growth, evolution and adaptation will be affected, despite being a booming trend with strong roots in sectors of high financial and economic value.

Finally, policy and strategy developers will need to know and understand the design of the digital currency operating system to perform a bibliometric network analysis to identify the intellectual structure of cryptocurrencies and cybersecurity research fields. Bibliometric studies provide valuable information on scientific articles published in different countries and allow comparing scientific results of productivity in terms of identifying current issues.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, bibliometrics is defined as the set of methods and tools to evaluate and analyze the evolution of scientific and academic

---

23 Nikolaos A. Kyriazis, "A survey on efficiency and profitable trading opportunities in cryptocurrency markets", *Journal of Risk and Financial Management* 12, no. 2 (2019): 67.

24 Gabriel Kabanda, "Cybersecurity risk management plan for a blockchain application model", *Trans Eng Comput Sci* 2, no. 1 (February 2021): 1-18, <https://gnosscience.com/uploads/journals/articles/129841736561.pdf>.

25 Jose Ricardo Lopez-Robles et al, "30 years of intelligence models in management and business: A bibliometric review", *International Journal of Information Management*, vol. 48, pp. 22-38, 2019.

knowledge of publications and their citations. Its objective is to analyze their impact and evaluate how they contribute to the progress of science in the main subject areas. Likewise, bibliometrics makes possible to measure the productive scientific and academic quality in the field of research.<sup>26</sup>

For the study and analysis of the development and evolution of cryptocurrencies and their relationship with cybersecurity there are two categories of bibliometric techniques: performance analysis (operability) and co-occurrence mapping. In performance, the analysis focuses on the impact of publications based on their output and citations evolution, while the co-occurrence mapping represents how the major publications, research topics or authors interrelate. This last category is widely used to understand, discover, and visualize hard-to-see or hidden relationships among topics central to the development of the field. In terms of bibliometric performance, the literature related to cryptocurrencies and cybersecurity showed a remarkable increase in recent years due to the large volume of publications and citations received in this field. Interest is expected to continue to grow and support other areas of knowledge, such as information and communication technologies, financial technologies, entrepreneurship, and new business models.

Undoubtedly, it is necessary to link the concepts of cryptocurrencies and cybersecurity, and priority must be given to the discussion of trends, challenges, opportunities, and technologies that are required for the operation of the purchase, and sale transfers sector, as well as cryptocurrency mining. For this reason, it is necessary for analysts responsible for the design of policies and implementation of strategies to understand the use of cryptocurrencies in the digital market, so research must be developed with the bibliometric methodologies that support the corresponding analysis. In short, the goal is to use of this new financial system efficiently and effectively,

---

26 Alberto Face-Mendoza et al, "Intelligent processes in the context of Mining 4.0: Trends, research challenges and opportunities", (document presented in *International Conference on Decision Aid Sciences and Application*, 2020), 480-484, [https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?arnumber=9317095&casa\\_token=cMjVb97CzNkAAAAA:YzYiVbeXKc2hUrpX-AYPQOifVwKaYl37SaJP\\_7ocB-3mxOxzNgnKkb97qm4mwHtCCg9BBmu1](https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?arnumber=9317095&casa_token=cMjVb97CzNkAAAAA:YzYiVbeXKc2hUrpX-AYPQOifVwKaYl37SaJP_7ocB-3mxOxzNgnKkb97qm4mwHtCCg9BBmu1).

but with the required level of cybersecurity. This analysis methodology establishes the first research framework related to both topics and could be used to promote new knowledge.

## Cloud Technology

The U.S. government often uses the term “cloud” for any technology solution provided by a third-party provider. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) defined several cloud deployment models, with progressive increases in management by third-party vendors, including: (1) Infrastructure as a Service (where providers provide the infrastructure and *hardware*), (2) Platform as a Service (where vendors provide a managed environment for a customer’s application), and (3) *Software* as a service (where providers provide a fully managed application and customers only need to provide their data).

In practice, many of the offerings of major suppliers do not have well-defined limits. Regardless of the common use of the term “cloud,” *it is most accurately applied to those solutions that exhibit five essential cloud computing characteristics, as defined by NIST: on-demand service, broad network access, resource pooling, rapid elasticity, and metered service.*<sup>27</sup> Developed nearly a decade after the *First Cloud*, the *Intelligent Cloud* emerges, equipping agencies with actionable insights and recommendations drawn from some of the country’s most impactful public and private sector use cases.

Unlike the first cloud, which gave agencies broad authority to adopt cloud-based solutions, the intelligent cloud offers practical implementation guidance to government missions to fully leverage the potential of such technologies while ensuring secure operations. Additionally, cloud misconfigurations are also a major source of cybersecurity threats. Therefore, protecting data across the environment is becoming

---

<sup>27</sup> “Cybersecurity Predictions: What to Look Out for in 2022 and Beyond”, *Global Data Systems*, <https://www.getgds.com/resources/blog/cybersecurity/cybersecurity-predictions-what-to-look-out-for-in-2022-and-beyond>. (Consulted July 7, 2022).

increasingly difficult. Users need more effective training to understand their cybersecurity responsibilities, while organizations struggle to hire enough security experts to meet their needs.<sup>28</sup>

With the intensification of the use of cyberspace, the following question arises: What should organizations and institutions expect from cloud technology in 2022? In this regard, *Global Data Systems* projects the following four predictions about the security landscape for this year:

1. *Phishing will remain the dominant threat.* For the past few years, *phishing* has been the most prevalent cyberattack organizations face. According to Verizon's 2021 Data Breach Investigations Report, 43 % of breaches begin with a *phishing* attack. Security analysts expect it to remain the dominant threat in 2022, although cybercriminals are changing a bit their techniques. Instead of sending many emails to groups of users, they will produce highly targeted attacks on selected individuals, making *phishing* more difficult to detect. Organizations will need to improve their email and endpoints security and provide users with effective cybersecurity training to address this threat.
2. *Organizations will need to monitor, manage, and secure the growing IT [Information Technology] footprint.* The shift to hybrid and remote working models translates in more terminals used outside the secure perimeter. At the same time, organizations are expanding their Internet of Things (IoT) initiatives, deploying a wide range of sensors and other devices to automate processes and monitor operations. This growing IT footprint means hackers have an ever-growing attack surface to exploit.
3. *Evolution of ransomware attacks will require increased vigilance.* Ransomware dominated security news in 2021, particularly with high-profile incidents like the Colonial Pipeline attack. In 2022, enterprise organizations should expect to become more *ransomware* targeted; targeting healthcare organizations, oil and gas industry, and other organizations that are willing to pay the ransom to avoid disruptions. Criminals will also use data exfiltration and other tactics to get larger payouts. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) will face

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

an increasing number of attacks generated by *Ransomware-as-a-Service* operators, who charge as little as \$50 per month for subscription-based vulnerabilities.

4. *Supply chain attacks will result in the quadruple extortion model.* Ransomware attackers have been using double extortion: they encrypt the victim's data and threaten to expose sensitive information. The supply chain attacks with a four-pronged extortion threat. In a supply chain attack, cybercriminals exploit vulnerability in a company's security to gain access to the networks and data of its trading partners. This method of attack has become a favorite of groups backed by Russia, China, North Korea, and other adversary governments. In addition to traditional ransomware tactics, perpetrators may threaten to post the violation. If that doesn't work, they can start spreading the attack among trading partners, extracting data, and demanding ransoms along the way. A successful supply chain attack can easily compromise hundreds of organizations.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted global society, which has shown a great spirit of resilience to face the serious health crisis and the restrictions imposed, adopting new forms and habits to work and communicate. In this context, institutions have been forced to rapidly digitize their operating models; creating remote work environments to further manage employee functions through digital channels. This situation has created great opportunities for the cybersecurity sector to respond to the rapid increase in cyberattacks, as well as the growing number of businesses requiring cybersecurity services. From the political and strategical point of view, eight fundamental areas are identified in Latin America and the Caribbean (freedom of expression, AI, 5G wireless communications technology, critical infrastructures, the SCADA system, cyber diplomacy, cryptocurrencies, and cloud technology), which describe a cybersecurity landscape marked by concerns, challenges, and opportunities to have a secure cyberspace available to everyone in the region.

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

**About the author:**

**Boris Saavedra** – *William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies*

*Dr. Boris Saavedra is a retired general officer of the Venezuelan Air Force and holds a degree in Military Sciences and Arts, with an emphasis in Aeronautics. He has completed the Course of Higher Military Studies at the École Supérieure de Guerre Interarmées in France and the Higher Course in National Defense at the Institute of Higher Studies in National Defense of Venezuela. In addition to his PhD from the Gutiérrez Mellado Institute at the National University of Distance Education in Spain, he holds a master's degree in International Politics and Practice from George Washington University in the United States. In his area of expertise, Peace and International Security, he has co-authored several books and journal articles. Currently, he is a professor at the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies. Prior to joining the Perry Center, he was Chief of Academic Affairs at the Inter-American Defense College and Director of Secretariat at Venezuela's Ministry of National Defense.*

# VENEZUELAN MIGRATION IN PERU: PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES

*Paul Eduardo Vera Delzo*

## **Summary**

*The deep crisis in Venezuela has generated the largest migratory flow in Latin America. It is estimated that, by the end of 2022, Peru –the second host country after Colombia– will have a population of Venezuelan migrants and refugees close to 1.45 million. In this regard, it is clear that no population is prepared either to forcibly leave their country of origin –due to the critical existing crisis– or to welcome a large number of immigrants in such a short time, generating a context of extreme vulnerability for the migrant population, as well as discomfort and even rejection in the host or receiving population. Achieving the full integration of the Venezuelan population into Peruvian society and economy requires the decisive involvement of the State and civil society with a view to promoting an intensive and progressive change of mentality among Peruvians (moving from rejection to empathy) through education and culture. Otherwise, situations could arise that seriously affect not only security, but also the stability required for the integral development of the country.*

**Keywords:** *Crisis in Venezuela, Venezuelan Migration, Migratory Trajectory, Xenophobia.*

## **Introduction**

During the last decade, the political and economic situation in Venezuela has generated a deep crisis, causing the forced and massive migration of more than six million Venezuelans in search of better opportunities, of which some five million have been welcomed in different countries of Latin

America.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the region faces the largest flow of refugees and migrants in its history, creating a series of challenges and opportunities for both the migrant population and the host or receiving population.

Undoubtedly, no population is prepared either to forcibly leave their country of origin, or to massively receive immigrants in a short period of time. These circumstances generate a context of extreme vulnerability for the migrant population, as well as discomfort and even rejection by the receiving population, especially when the State of the host country is not able to manage this situation. For example, on September 26, 2021, there was a demonstration of almost five thousand people, expressing their rejection of the arrival of Venezuelan immigrants who occupied some public spaces in the Chilean city of Iquique, located in the north of the country, resulting in the burning of personal belongings and tents where the migrants were staying.<sup>2</sup>

Although this aggression was widely rejected by the Chilean population and organizations, including the central government, it shows how the receiving population can externalize its discontent and frustration through xenophobic expressions and violent acts against the migrant population, especially when the authorities are not able to generate empathy in their citizens or face the challenges caused by the massive arrival of foreigners. During this demonstration, approximately three thousand Venezuelan migrants were stranded in Iquique, many of them occupying parks and public places in the city waiting to regularize their migratory status.<sup>3</sup>

What happened in Chile is not an isolated event in the region. Similar cases of xenophobia and violence against Venezuelan citizens have occurred in Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil and Peru, which –coincidentally–

---

1 R4V - Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela, Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela, (May 5, 2022), <https://www.r4v.info/es/refugiadosymigrantes> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

2 BBC News World, “Chile: la marcha contra migrantes que terminó con la quema de pertenencias y carpas de extranjeros”, (September 26, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-58700359> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

3 Ibid.

are the Latin American countries that have welcomed the largest number of Venezuelans. It is estimated that, as of May 2022, Colombia had received around 1.8 million Venezuelans, followed by Peru with 1.3 million, Ecuador with 513,000, Chile with 448,000 and Brazil with 345,000 Venezuelans.<sup>4</sup>

To understand both the painful situation experienced by Venezuelan migrants, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by the Peruvian State during this migratory process, this article analyzes the existing crisis in Venezuela, the difficult migratory trajectory that Venezuelans must follow, as well as the reaction of the Peruvian population to migrants and refugees, including the influence of the media on the perception of the population. In this sense, the institutions of the Peruvian State must play a more active role to turn this situation into an opportunity for integration and growth, for the benefit of the country and the citizens who inhabit it. Otherwise, situations could be generated that would seriously affect not only the security of the Venezuelan population residing in Peru, but also the stability required for the integral development of the country.

### **Crisis in Venezuela**

In practice, Venezuela has had only two presidents in the past 23 years. After the death of Hugo Chávez (who governed between 1999 and 2013), Nicolás Maduro assumed the presidency, remaining in office to date, even though governments of various countries do not recognize him as such. On the one hand, the political crisis, with a fragmented and practically annulled opposition, is undeniable in Venezuela. On the other hand, the economic crisis has deteriorated the living conditions of Venezuelans. It is estimated that the annual inflation rate of that country reached 1,300,000 % during

---

4 R4V, Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela.

the year 2018.<sup>5</sup> This hyperinflation caused a very rapid and sustained rise in the price level, causing money to quickly lose its value.<sup>6</sup>

Venezuela's proven oil reserves are the largest in the world. However, the country is experiencing an unprecedented economic crisis. The international fall in the price of crude oil in 2014 was devastating for the Venezuelan economy, because oil represented about 95 % of its export earnings.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the country ran into a foreign exchange deficit, limiting the importation of goods and causing critical shortages of goods. As a result, companies increased the prices of scarce products, generating inflation, which was aggravated by the Venezuelan government's decision to issue more paper money to cover its currency needs and increase the minimum wage as a populist measure.<sup>8</sup>

Although in 2021 there would have been an annual inflation of 686.4 % (showing some improvement), Venezuela continues to have the highest inflation in the world.<sup>9</sup> In March 2022, the government of Nicolás Maduro ordered the increase of the minimum wage by 1,705 %, from 1.6 to almost 29 dollars.<sup>10</sup> Despite this significant increase, the minimum wage in Venezuela is insufficient to cover the basic food basket; it is estimated that an average Venezuelan family of five needs at least \$ 353 per month to meet their minimum food needs.<sup>11</sup>

The Venezuelan State has not only made its citizens dependent on government services and products causing the collapse of the private

---

5 BBC News World, "Crisis en Venezuela: 5 claves que explican cómo se ha desarrollado hasta ahora", (January 10, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-46821723> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Daniel González, "Cómo salió Venezuela de la hiperinflación y qué significa para la golpeada economía del país," *BBC News World* (11 January 2022), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-59939636#:~:text=La%20hiperinflaci%C3%B3n%20de%20Venezuela%20ha,8%25%2C%20dijo%20el%20BCV> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

10 EFE Agency, "Nuevo salario mínimo en Venezuela, insuficiente para salir de la pobreza", (March 17, 2022), <https://gestion.pe/mundo/nuevo-salario-minimo-en-venezuela-insuficiente-para-salir-de-la-pobreza-noticia/?ref=gsr> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

11 Ibid.

sector but has also imposed mechanisms of control and coercion through various social programs. After the collapse of the socialist system imposed on Venezuela, citizens have been left without supplies. In that sense, the departure of Venezuelans abroad constitutes what Alexander Betts calls a “survival migration”<sup>12</sup> as the political and socioeconomic crisis existing in that country generates the total lack of protection and deprivation of human rights of its citizens. In this context, food insecurity has been a key factor in making this migration so massive.<sup>13</sup> Food security “exists when all people have at all times, physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their daily energy needs and food preferences for active and healthy lives.”<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the majority of Venezuelans who have left their country have done so to obtain a job that will ensure an income to get food.

After the closure of the border with Colombia in 2015 and the shortage of food in Venezuelan stores<sup>15</sup> and supermarkets, social programs and state enterprises were the only alternatives for citizens to get food. In the Food Markets (MERCAL), for example, the head of the family –according to the ID number– had a day assigned to buy food according to his family size, with problems regarding quality and availability of the products.<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, in 2016, the Venezuelan government ordered the Local Committees of Supply and Production (CLAP) to distribute bags or boxes with basic foodstuffs, sold (at a subsidized price) to each family previously registered in the Communal Councils. Although what is received through this program only is sufficient to feed a family for a week, the followers

---

12 Alexander Betts, “Survival Migration: Failed Governance and the crisis of Displacement”, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 4. <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/30779/642723.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (Agreed the 11 of June of 2022).

13 Stéphanie Borios, “Huir para vivir: crisis social y migración de supervivencia”, in *Migrant trajectories: Venezuelan youth in Peru*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 47.

14 Food and Agriculture Organization, “Una introducción a los conceptos básicos de la seguridad alimentaria”, (2011), <https://www.fao.org/3/a036s/a036s00.pdf> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

15 BBC World, “Venezuela: Maduro decreta el estado de excepción en una parte de la frontera con Colombia”, (August 22, 2015), [https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/08/150821\\_venezuela\\_estado\\_excepcion\\_colombia\\_ep](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/08/150821_venezuela_estado_excepcion_colombia_ep) (Accessed June 11, 2022).

16 Borios, “Huir para vivir ...”, 55.

of the Maduro government praise this measure because, otherwise -they would- not have food on their tables. Meanwhile the government's detractors say that the need for food makes Venezuelans accept and, without much choice, assume a position favorable or, at least, neutral to the government.<sup>17</sup>

As of 2018, after the entry of imported products into Venezuela, food can be found in stores, but at very high prices and out of reach of most Venezuelan families. This situation clearly shows the food insecurity existing in that country since this is not only due to the absence of food but also due to the impossibility to acquire it when available.<sup>18</sup> According to a 2019 assessment by the World Food Programme (WFP), an estimated of one in three people in Venezuela (32.3 %) is food insecure and in need of assistance.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the WFP points out that Venezuelan families have had to adopt different survival strategies to face this crisis. These include: reducing the variety and quality of food consumed, reducing the size of the portion of their meals, working in exchange for food, and selling family goods to cover basic needs.<sup>20</sup> Parents, as a consequence, prefer to eat little or skip meals to prioritize the feeding of their children and / or other dependents.

With regard to sources of income in Venezuela, the WFP points out that 59 % of households do not have enough income to buy food and 65 % are not able to buy essential hygiene items, clothing and footwear.<sup>21</sup> In this context, remittances sent by relatives who managed to leave the country constitute

---

17 Herminia Fernández, "Comités locales de abastecimiento: instrumentos de Maduro para paliar el hambre," *France 24* (11 February 2019), <https://www.france24.com/es/20190210-comites-locales-abastecimiento-maduro-venezuela> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

18 Borios, "Huir para vivir...", 56.

19 Reliefweb, "WFP Venezuela - Evaluación de seguridad alimentaria: Principales hallazgos. Datos recolectados de julio a septiembre de 2019", (February 23, 2020), <https://reliefweb.int/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/wfp-venezuela-evaluaci-n-de-seguridad-alimentaria-principales#:~:text=El%20Programa%20Mundial%20de%20Alimentos,de%20los%20hogares%20en%20Venezuela> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

a fundamental pillar allowing Venezuelans who have remained to get food. However, the constant outflow of migrants, while allowing remittances, generates a worrying loss of human and social capital in Venezuela, including a reduction in the number of professors, doctors, scientists and other skilled workers.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, in relation to basic services in Venezuela, the WFP indicates that four out of ten households have daily interruptions in electricity service, affecting food conservation and impacting the health of the population. Likewise, 25 % of Venezuelan households do not have stable access to drinking water, while 72 % of households have an irregular gas supply, resulting in a reduction in the number of meals per day due to such problems.<sup>23</sup>

The lack of a diversified diet (due to low consumption of meat, fish, eggs, vegetables and fruits) has generated inadequate nutritional intake in most Venezuelan households. According to Caritas, child malnutrition in Venezuela rose to 26 % between December 2019 and March 2020.<sup>24</sup> This has undoubtedly been aggravated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation has different repercussions (short and long term) both on the health and performance of the population, mainly affecting the most vulnerable.

The collapse of the health system is another reason why Venezuelans choose to leave their country.<sup>25</sup> It is estimated that during 2016, infant (under one year) and maternal mortality increased by 30.12 % and 65.79 % respectively compared to the previous year.<sup>26</sup> In that sense, insufficient and inadequate

---

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Caritas “Lucha contra la desnutrición infantil en Venezuela”, (2020), <https://www.caritas.org/ayudenos-a-luchar-contr-la-desnutricion-infantil-en-venezuela/?lang=es#:~:text=La%20desnutrici%C3%B3n%20infantil%20en%20Venezuela%20subi%C3%B3%20al%2026%25%20entre%20diciembre.m%C3%A1s%20desfavorecidas%20con%20numerosos%20programas> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

25 BBC News World, “Crisis en Venezuela: falta de medicamentos, equipos rotos y hasta cucarachas en los hospitales,” (February 8, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47177510> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

26 Venezuelan Health Observatory, “ El Boletín Epidemiológico Venezolano ¿Por qué ahora y no antes?”, (May 23, 2017) <https://www.ovsalud.org/noticias/2017/el-boletin-epidemiologico-venezolano-por-que-ahora-y-no-antes/> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

food for patients, the deterioration of infrastructure and equipment, the lack of medicines and medical supplies, as well as the shortage of qualified personnel are some of the problems that affect the care of patients in public health facilities in Venezuela.<sup>27</sup> In this context, the shortage of medicines in pharmacies and hospitals endangers the lives of thousands of chronic patients and transplant patients in that country.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, the economic crisis also impacts the Venezuelan education system. Low budgets not only affect the infrastructure of educational institutions, but also educators, many of whom have left the country or have had to engage in other work due to low salaries. As of 2019, more than 50 % of students at the Libertador Experimental Teaching University (Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador) had dropped out of classes because they didn't have money to pay for their tickets or because they had to work to help their families survive. The situation is aggravated because the university does not have water or permanent electricity and the student dining facility has stopped operating.<sup>29</sup>

Widespread corruption is another reason why Venezuelans are leaving their country. Venezuela is among the nations with the highest perceived corruption in the public sector in the world, leading to serious violations of the social rights of its citizens.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, the Venezuelan judicial system acts as an instrument of repression against dissent and voices critical of the government.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the obstacles to the issuance of passports and criminal records, as well as the apostille of documents have

---

27 Ibid.

28 Álvaro Fuente, "La escasez de medicinas mata en Venezuela", *The Country* (Caracas: May 7, 2018), [https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/23/planeta\\_futuro/1524502559\\_810295.html](https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/23/planeta_futuro/1524502559_810295.html) (Accessed June 18, 2022).

29 Management "Venezuela: Sistema educativo golpeado por la crisis", (Lima: December 4, 2019) <https://gestion.pe/gestion-tv/venezuela-sistema-educativo-golpeado-por-la-crisis-noticia/?ref=ges> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

30 Alejandra Arredondo, "Venezuela entre los países más corruptos del mundo: informe de Transparencia Internacional," *Voice of America* (Washington D.C.: January 25, 2022),

<https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/informe-corrupcion-transparencia-internacional-/6411242.html> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

31 Ibid.

not only become a strategy used by the Venezuelan government to hinder the emigration of qualified citizens, but have also allowed corruption and slowness to dominate these administrative processes.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, it is interesting to analyze the role of the “homeland identity card,” as an instrument of control and blackmail used by government supporters to avoid attending to those who, according to them, are enemies of the nation.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to corruption, other problems, such as violence and criminality in Venezuela, influence Venezuelans’ decisions to leave their country. In 2017, Venezuela had become the second country with the highest number of homicides, with Caracas being the most violent city in the world Venezuela has 71 murders per 100,000 inhabitants and more than 90 % impunity.<sup>34</sup> This situation is exacerbated by violence caused by some of the so-called “Colectivos,” groups of armed civilians who threaten and attack opponents of the Maduro regime.<sup>35</sup>

As can be seen, the Venezuelan State does not safeguard the rights of its citizens, thus putting them in a situation of survival.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, what motivates Venezuelans to begin a difficult migratory journey is the search for a place where they can enjoy these rights.

## A difficult migratory journey

Migratory trajectories have two essential elements: the migratory project (which includes the choice of a destination, route, time of stay, and purpose

---

32 Yazmely Labrador, “Corrupción, burocracia y dólares: las trabas para emigrar de una Venezuela inmersa en crisis”, *El Diario de Caracas* (2 July 2019), <https://medium.com/@ElDiariodeCCS/corrupci%C3%B3n-burocracia-y-d%C3%B3lares-las-trabas-para-emigrar-de-una-venezuela-inmersa-en-criisis-149b7f212572> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

33 Borios, “Huir para vivir...”, 78.

34 Transparency Venezuela, “Inseguridad para el pueblo hecha en revolución”, (2021), <https://transparencia.org.ve/project/inseguridad-pueblo-hecha-revolucion/#:-:text=Venezuela%20se%20ha%20convertido%20en,m%C3%A1s%20de%2090%25%20de%20impunidad> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

35 Daniel García, “Qué son los colectivos y cómo operan para ‘defender la revolución bolivariana’ en Venezuela”, *BBC World* (7 July 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40527998> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

36 Borios, “Huir para vivir...”, 82.

of migration) and migration strategies (the actions to execute said project).<sup>37</sup> In addition, as a process, a migration trajectory includes preparation, migration, settlement and, ideally, integration.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, it can be affirmed that the migratory strategy adopted by Venezuelans depends on the nature of the migratory project, the characteristics of the host country, the time of permanence, the work aspirations, the intentions of return and, mainly, the type of documents available.<sup>39</sup>

Faced with this reality, Venezuelan migrants are forced to adapt their trajectories, modifying not only the routes, but also the strategies along their journeys in order to deal with the migratory controls imposed by the countries of the region.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, the migratory trajectory should not only be understood as a route between two points, but also as a life experience that is shaped by the reality between the possible destination (the one that the limitations and the legal framework allow) and the ideal destination (the one really desired).<sup>41</sup> Therefore, it is essential to know and understand the migratory trajectories followed by Venezuelans to reach Peru. In this regard, Robin Cavagnoud identifies different types of migratory trajectories from two mobility modalities: the individual and the family group.<sup>42</sup>

On the one hand, migration as an “individual initiative” occurs when young Venezuelans choose to leave their country without being accompanied by their direct relatives. Under this approach, three types of migratory

---

37 Elizabeth Salmón, et al. *Trayectorias migrantes: la juventud venezolana en el Perú*. (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 29.

38 *Ibid.*, 30.

39 Luciana Gandini, et al. *Crisis y migración de población venezolana. Entre la desprotección y la seguridad jurídica en Latinoamérica*. (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2019), p 10, <https://www.sdi.unam.mx/docs/libros/SUDIMER-CyMdPV.pdf> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

40 Cécile Blouin, “Entre la esperanza y el miedo: las trayectorias legales de la población venezolana en la región de Tumbes”, in *Migrant trajectories: Venezuelan youth in Peru*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 134.

41 *Ibid.*, 138.

42 Robin Cavagnoud, “Género, cuidados y responsabilidades familiares de los jóvenes venezolanos: una tipología de las trayectorias migratorias en contexto de crisis”, en *Trayectorias migrantes: la juventud venezolana en el Perú*, December 2021), 185.

trajectories towards Peru can be identified. The first is that of “adventure” migrations, carried out by those young people who migrate without a pre-established travel plan or specific objectives of economic support of the family that remains in their country. Most of these are men between 18 and 22 years old, who did not finish secondary education and who have no parental responsibilities or obligation to send remittances to their relatives in Venezuela.<sup>43</sup> The permanence of these young people in a place depends on the opportunities that arise, the friendships that are developed along the way or friends already living abroad who inform them about the work options in some locality. These young people have limited access to health services and perform mostly informal jobs (such as street vendors, construction workers, or food deliverers).<sup>44</sup>

The second type is that of “self-denial” migrations. These are carried out by young Venezuelans who also travel alone to Peru, but with the explicit objective of supporting their immediate family in Venezuela.<sup>45</sup> Mostly, they are men and women between 25 and 35 years old, who are in better physical condition to travel long distances and who contemplate –at some point– family reunification, although not necessarily in Peru. These young people perform mostly informal work (Street trade, domestic activities in private homes, care of children or the elderly, among others).<sup>46</sup>

The third type is that of “exploratory” migrations. These are carried out by young people (mostly women) who leave Venezuela to work, send remittances to their families and –based on an economic income and stable accommodation– contemplate the possibility of bringing their immediate relatives to Peru. Unlike the previous category thus, these young people do contemplate family reunification with continued residence in Peru.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, Venezuelans who engage in these three types of migratory trajectories often suffer both situations of labor exploitation, as well as discrimination.

---

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 188.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 191.

47 Ibid., 192.

By contrast to “individual initiative” migration, according to Cavagnoud, “family dynamic” migration is what occurs when young Venezuelans leave their country accompanied by their direct relatives. Cavagnoud identifies within this category three types of migratory trajectories that converge in Peru. The first is “family reunification” migration, which aims at family reunification linked to “exploration” migration.<sup>48</sup> The reconstitution of these families may lead to the birth of new children of Peruvian nationality, reinforcing the decision to stay in the country for the long term, thus ruling out the possibility of returning to live in Venezuela in the future.

The second type is that of “nuclear family” migration, in which family members make the decision to travel together to Peru, involving a significant economic investment by them.<sup>49</sup> Although this is a smaller group, after a period of adaptation, these families achieve some stability (including the schooling of their children) and send remittances to their relatives (particularly their parents) who remained in Venezuela. These families manage to overcome the initial condition of migrants without the intention of returning to Venezuela.

Finally, the third type is that of migration “from a single-parent family.” This is carried out by mothers separated from their partner or the father of their children, and who migrate with their young children under very precarious conditions.<sup>50</sup> These families have many needs, but they are allowed to enter the country, benefiting from the exceptions granted to people in vulnerable situations. In addition to being diverse and complex, the typologies presented here are also framed in changing migration policies of the Peruvian State.

### **The Peruvian State Response**

As mentioned previously, Peru is the country in Latin America which hosts the second largest number of Venezuelans. Most of them (almost 90 %) have entered by land, and require immediate satisfaction of their basic needs,

---

48 *Ibid.*, 195.

49 *Ibid.*, 198.

50 *Ibid.*, 201.

such as food, housing and health services. It is estimated that, by the end of 2022, there will be 1.45 million Venezuelans in Peru.<sup>51</sup> In that sense, the permanent and massive arrival of Venezuelans has forced the Peruvian State (particularly the executive branch) to make various changes in its migration policy. In recent years, this policy has oscillated between “hostility” (due to the tightening of immigration control, expulsions, rejections at the border, and identity controls, among others) and “selective hospitality” (seeking to differentiate between desirable and undesirable persons within the immigrant population).<sup>52</sup>

These changes in Peruvian migration policy have generated ambiguous situations and contributed to a lack of protection for Venezuelan migrants. In 2017, the adoption of the Temporary Stay Permit (PTP) was a clear example of the selective hospitality policy, insofar as it was only intended for the Venezuelan immigrant population and, being temporary, did not grant them residence, thus limiting their rights.<sup>53</sup> Subsequently, in 2018, the Peruvian State demanded the presentation of passports by Venezuelans as a condition for entry into the country. However, both the high cost and the collapse of the Venezuelan administrative system for the issuance of this document made it extremely difficult to obtain.

In 2019, the Peruvian State began to require a humanitarian visa for Venezuelans entering the country. Although the processing of this document is free, it contemplates as a requirement -among others- of the presentation of an internationally certified document of one’s criminal record in Venezuela, for anyone over 18 years of age.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, the process of certification of this document is expensive and extremely bureaucratic. This situation has forced Venezuelans to request asylum

---

51 Working Group for refugees and migrants GTRM, “Plan de respuesta para refugiados y migrantes 2022. Capítulo Perú” (2022), 5, [https://www.r4v.info/sites/default/files/2021-12/RMRP%202022%20Peru%20no%20oficial%20ESP\\_PL\\_Vfinal.pdf](https://www.r4v.info/sites/default/files/2021-12/RMRP%202022%20Peru%20no%20oficial%20ESP_PL_Vfinal.pdf) (Accessed June 18, 2022).

52 Blouin, “Entre la esperanza y el miedo...”, 144.

53 Ibid., 145.

54 Unique digital platform of the Peruvian State, “Visa humanitaria para ciudadanos venezolanos” Obtener visa para ingresar al Perú”, *gob.pe* (4 July 2022), <https://www.gob.pe/1063-obtener-visa-para-ingresar-al-peru-visa-humanitaria-para-ciudadanos-venezolanos> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

in Peru to avoid these migratory procedures, expanding to 530,000 the number of Venezuelans seeking asylum in the country.<sup>55</sup>

While States have the sovereign power to regulate the entry of any alien, they also have a duty to respect the human rights of these persons, including the right to non-refoulement.<sup>56</sup> However, in order to issue policies and legislate on migration issues, States –including Peru– must also face the challenges arising from the lack of an internationally accepted concept of both “migrant” and “family.” On the one hand, the International Organization for Migrants (IOM) points out that the term “migrant” includes “all cases in which the decision to migrate is taken freely by the person concerned for ‘reasons of personal convenience’ and without the intervention of external factors that obligate them to do so.”<sup>57</sup> However, this concept does not include those people who migrate forced by serious crisis in their country in order to survive, as is the case with Venezuelan migration. On the other hand, the Royal Spanish Academy defines the “family” as the “group of related people who live together,”<sup>58</sup> but this concept does not involve those families whose members have had to migrate to achieve certain conditions that allow them to bring the rest of their family to their side and reunify it.

In recent years, Peruvian migration policy has undergone a series of changes as a result of the creation of various entities and new jurisprudence. In this context, in 2011, the Intersectoral Working Group for Migration Management was created, as part of to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to develop the guidelines of the comprehensive migration policy in Peru. Subsequently, in 2012, the National Superintendence of Migrations was created, attached

---

55 Working Group for Refugees and Migrants GTRM, “Plan de respuesta para refugiados y migrantes 2022. Capítulo Perú”, 3.

56 Organization of American States, “La CIDH urge a los Estados proteger los derechos humanos de las personas migrantes, refugiadas y desplazadas frente a la pandemia del COVID-19,” (Washington: April 17, 2020), <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2020/077.asp#:~:text=Vinculado%20a%20lo%20anterior%2C%20la%20pandemia%20de%20COVID%20D19> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

57 International Organization for Migration, “Glosario sobre Migración. Derecho Internacional sobre Migración”, (2006), [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml\\_7\\_sp.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_7_sp.pdf) (Accessed June 25, 2022).

58 Royal Spanish Academy, “Familia” in Dictionary of the Spanish language, (2001), <https://www.rae.es/drae2001/familia> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

to the Ministry of the Interior, as an agency responsible for the migration control of nationals and foreigners.<sup>59</sup>

Despite such changes, it was only after the application of Legislative Decree 1350 of January 7, 2017 and its subsequent regulation that the most important modifications took place from the perspective of the rights of migrants and their families.<sup>60</sup> This new regulatory framework includes the principles of family unity and the best interests of children and adolescents. It also recognizes the rights of the family based on marriage and de facto union. It distinguishes between the migratory status of the foreign holder and that of their relatives, as well as broadening the recognition of persons in vulnerable situations.<sup>61</sup>

In a similar fashion, in 2017, through Supreme Decree 015-2017-RE, the National Migration Policy 2017-2025 was approved in order “to guarantee respect for and protection of migrants, promoting equality, equity, inclusion, integration and observance of national security, through an efficient integral management of the migration process, and which articulates the State and society according to the needs, interests and expectations of the migrant population and their families.”<sup>62</sup> However, despite advances in Peruvian legislation, regulatory frameworks for family ties have not been sufficiently expanded to include extended families (grandparents, grandchildren, etc.) or families based on same-sex couples.<sup>63</sup>

This situation was aggravated by the restrictions adopted by the Peruvian State to limit entry into the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. The later generated an increase in irregular entries through new routes to

---

59 Marcela Huaita Alegre, “Políticas públicas, familias y reunificación en el contexto de la migración venezolana al Perú”, in *Migrant trajectories: Venezuelan youth in Peru*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 232.

60 *Ibid.*, 230.

61 *Ibid.*, 238.

62 El Peruano, “Decreto Supremo que aprueba la Política Nacional Migratoria 2017 – 2025”, (Peru: April 27, 2017), <https://busquedas.elperuano.pe/normaslegales/decreto-supremo-que-aprueba-la-politica-nacional-migratoria-decreto-supremo-n-015-2017-re-1513810-1/>

63 Huaita Alegre, “Políticas públicas, familias y reunificación...”, 248.

avoid migration controls, putting the lives of Venezuelan migrants at risk by exposing them to criminal organizations dedicated to the smuggling of migrants and human trafficking. Correspondingly, it is necessary to understand the harsh conditions to which Venezuelan migrants arriving in Peru are exposed.

### **Attitudes Toward Venezuelan Migration in Peru**

The massive arrival of Venezuelan migrants has rapidly transformed Peru's migratory posture from a country of origin of migrants, to a destination country. Undoubtedly, the migratory trajectories chosen by Venezuelans to reach Peru are difficult and complex. The rapid insertion of Venezuelans into the informal sector of the Peruvian economy, although it allows them to generate income, exposes them to different forms of exploitation and discrimination, particularly xenophobic discourses.

Xenophobia includes “attitudes, prejudices and behaviors that reject, exclude and often defame people based on the perception that they are outsiders or strangers to the community, society or national identity.”<sup>64</sup> In that sense, xenophobia “manifests itself through beliefs, attitudes and behaviors hostile towards people of origin other than one's own, such as contempt, discrimination, and physical or verbal aggression.”<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, xenophobia and racism often go hand in hand.

According to a survey conducted by the Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP) in 2019, 73 % of respondents disapproved of Venezuelan migration to Peru. This was due to economic and labor reasons (perceiving they take away jobs, affect the economy, and increase informality), their perceived role in increasing crime and insecurity, and poor relationship with Peruvians,

---

64 UNHCR “Guía sobre Racismo y Xenofobia: Cómo ACNUR puede abordar y responder ante situaciones de racismo y xenofobia que afectan a personas bajo su mandato”, (2020), 16, <https://www.unhcr.org/6087cc104.pdf> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

65 Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid Euskadi, “Diccionario de Asilo”, <https://diccionario.cear-euskadi.org/xenofobia/> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

among others.<sup>66</sup> However, 83 % of those who expressed their disapproval with Venezuelan migration had not had contact with them. This clearly shows that the reasons for their rejection are unfounded, and are based on perceptions, as is the case with the increase in crime and insecurity allegedly due to the fault of Venezuelan migrants.

In this regard, according to the National Police of Peru, of the 730 thousand complaints received in 2019, only 1.8 % involved foreign citizens, with the rest being Peruvians.<sup>67</sup> Despite this evidence, in January 2020, the Ministry of the Interior announced the creation of the “Special Brigade against Criminal Migration.” and the then Minister of the Interior, Carlos Morán, publicly stated that “foreign criminals, those Venezuelans who have come to commit crimes, have two paths: leave the country or go to jail.”<sup>68</sup> The negative perception towards Venezuelan migrants is therefore motivated by both inadequate political discourses and media messages.

It is important to emphasize that in countries or places with notable deficiencies in public services, as well as with structural problems rooted in society, migrants are often identified as the culprits of these ills, thus contributing to their rejection.<sup>69</sup> Peru is no exception to this type of behavior. There are examples in its recent history that show how social and symbolic mechanisms operate to link migrants with problems specific to the country.<sup>70</sup>

As an example, the arrival of Chinese migrants in the late nineteenth century generated discrimination and rejection of their presence due to

---

66 Institute of Peruvian Studies, “Conocimiento y actitudes hacia la migración venezolana”, (Lima, June 2019), 9, <https://iep.org.pe/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Informe-OP-Junio-2019-Actitudes-hacia-la-migraci%C3%B3n-venezolana.pdf> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

67 Milagros Berrios, “Polémica por creación de brigada especial contra la ‘migración delictiva’”, *The Republic* (27 January 2020), <https://larepublica.pe/sociedad/2020/01/22/policia-crea-brigada-especial-contra-la-migracion-delictiva-ministerio-del-interior-dirincri/> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

68 Ibid.

69 Pablo Vega Rome, “Experiencias de discriminación hacia jóvenes migrantes venezolanos: construcción del discurso e impactos en la vida cotidiana”, en *Trayectorias migrantes: la juventud venezolana en el Perú*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 264.

70 Ibid.

racial prejudices existing in the population of Lima. They were accused of lack of hygiene, of practicing vices, and of causing bad odors and filth in the area, yet at that time the lack of sanitation and hygiene in the streets was an already existing problem in the country.<sup>71</sup> In a similar fashion, the massive internal migration to the cities, which occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, once again generated discrimination and rejection against migrants from Andean regions, who were considered sole responsible for urban deterioration due to their informal economic activities, their poor hygiene habits and even their appearance.<sup>72</sup>

At present, in the XXI century, similar attitudes are manifesting themselves against Venezuelan migrants, who are blamed for all the social problems already existing in the country, such as informality, lack of employment or citizen insecurity. In this context, the term “veneco” has been used to refer disparagingly to a Venezuelan, presenting the same negative connotation of words such as “cholo” or “serrano” with which migrants from the Andes and their descendants are still discriminated against in large cities such as Lima.<sup>73</sup>

Unfortunately, not only negative and unfounded political discourses influence attitudes of rejection towards Venezuelan migrants, but also the hostile rhetoric towards this population by the Peruvian media, which conducts media coverage of both expulsions of and criminal acts committed by Venezuelans, despite the fact that statistics show their scarce involvement in this type of actions in Peru.<sup>74</sup> The daily consumption of this type of information by the Peruvian population predisposes them to assume a negative attitude when interacting with Venezuelan citizens in public spaces.<sup>75</sup>

The restrictions imposed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic also negatively impacted Venezuelans in Peru, insofar as they could not go

---

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., 271.

74 Blouin, “Entre la esperanza y el miedo...”, 159.

75 Vega Rome, “Experiencias de discriminación hacia jóvenes migrantes venezolanos...”, 275.

out to earn a daily living, while those who worked without legal contracts (the vast majority) were left unprotected. In addition, the Peruvian government did not provide economic aid bonds to Venezuelan migrants who were living in poverty or extreme poverty, leaving such support in the hands of international cooperation agencies.<sup>76</sup> In this prevailing policy, the Peruvian government was reflected, in part, by the sentiments of former congresswoman Esther Saavedra, who during an intervention in the Congress of the Republic, in September 2019, rebuked former President Martín Vizcarra, saying that “a million immigrants both legal and illegal, workers and criminal bandits, have to eat, have to sleep, and have come to take away jobs from our Peruvians. (...) I want to tell you *that he is the president of all Peruvians and not of foreigners, (...), not of Venezuelans. Good or Bad, Venezuelans must now leave the country: let them go.*”<sup>77</sup>

However, a large part of Peruvians disagree and condemn this attitude of rejection towards the Venezuelan population, showing empathy and commitment to facilitate or promote their insertion into society.

The Peruvian State must be much more proactive and emphatic in valuing, promoting and disseminating the innumerable contributions and opportunities offered by Venezuelan migration to Peru, and thereby avoid generating scenarios of instability that do not favor the inclusive and sustainable development of the country.

### **Contribution and Opportunities of Venezuelan Migration in Peru**

According to the survey conducted by the IEP in 2019, 22 % of respondents agreed with Venezuelan migration to Peru, because: (1) their country is in crisis and they have nowhere to go, (2) historical reciprocity (Peru is a

---

76 Bia Alcázar, “En Perú, familias migrantes hacen frente a la pandemia gracias a las transferencias de efectivo,” *United Nations Children’s Fund* (Peru: December 16, 2020), <https://www.unicef.org/lac/historias/en-peru-familias-migrantes-hacen-frente-la-pandemia-gracias-a-transferencias-de-efectivo> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

77 Canal N, “Esther Saavedra: Venezolanos malos o buenos tienen que salir del Perú,” (September 30, 2019), <https://canaln.pe/actualidad/esther-saavedra-fuerza-popular-venezolanos-malos-buenos-tienen-que-salir-peru-n300200> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

country of migrants and has been supported by other countries), (3) they are friendly, hardworking and well-educated, and (4) because they will help economic growth, contributing more labor to the labor supply.<sup>78</sup> These reasons show a high level of understanding and empathy internalized in a part of the Peruvian population, which the State must help develop in its entire population.

In this regard, according to a 2019 World Bank study, the Venezuelan population that has emigrated to Peru is mainly young (42 % are between 18 and 29 years old), has come mostly from urban areas and is highly qualified (57 % have some type of higher education, of which half have completed higher university education).<sup>79</sup> It is estimated that the investment in education of this Venezuelan population would have cost Peru about 3.3 billion dollars, which represents a third of the country's annual education budget.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, this organization highlights that Venezuelan migration to Peru takes place primarily in family groups, which are composed of men and women, including some 117,000 children who, in many cases, will be an active part of the future of Peru.<sup>81</sup>

Venezuelan migrants and refugees represent a great economic opportunity for Peru. They are able not only to increase the country's productive capacity, but also to boost its growth significantly.<sup>82</sup> For example, 8 % of the growth of the Peruvian Gross Domestic Product in 2018 was due to the contribution of Venezuelans as consumers and workers. Likewise, the Venezuelan population could contribute more than 600 million dollars in net tax revenues to Peru between 2020 and 2024, as well as possibly

---

78 Institute of Peruvian Studies, "Conocimiento y actitudes hacia la migración venezolana".

79 World Bank "Una oportunidad para todos. Los migrantes y refugiados venezolanos y el desarrollo del Perú", (2019), 23, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/107621574372585665/pdf/Una-Oportunidad-para-Todos-Los-Migrantes-y-Refugiados-Venezolanos-y-el-Desarrollo-del-Per%c3%ba.pdf> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

80 *Ibid*

81 *Ibid*.

82 World Bank, "La migración venezolana puede impulsar la productividad y el crecimiento económico del Perú," (Peru: November 26, 2019), <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/news/press-release/2019/11/26/migracion-venezolana-peru> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

increasing labor productivity by 3.2 % (based on the number of migrants who were in the country in 2018).<sup>83</sup>

If this opportunity is to be seized, it requires both the adequate formulation and implementation of policies, as well as the active participation of public institutions to properly integrate the Venezuelan population into Peruvian society and the Peruvian economy.<sup>84</sup> In fact, 30 % of Venezuelan migrants who held positions as scientific and intellectual professionals in their country now work as cooks of prepared food on the street, kitchen assistants and street vendors in Peru.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, Venezuelan migrants who have technical or professional university training (who represent 57 % of Venezuelans in Peru) cannot occupy positions for which they are trained, since the vast majority do not have legal permission to work or have not validated their studies in the country.

In this context, it is worth highlighting the great work done by Venezuelan health professionals and technicians who joined the Peruvian health system to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the current lack of health professionals in Peru, coordinated work among the corresponding entities must continue in order to incorporate as many of these Venezuelan professionals into the country's health system. As of 2019, of the nearly 500,000 Venezuelans who had obtained PTP in Peru, 3,147 were doctors.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusions

As mentioned, no population is sufficiently prepared either to leave their country forcibly, or to welcome large numbers of outsiders in a short time. On the one hand, the Venezuelan State is not able to safeguard the fundamental rights of its population, forcing a considerable part of it to emigrate. On

---

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 World Bank, "Una oportunidad para todos.", 30.

86 International Labour Organization, "El aporte de las personas refugiadas y migrantes venezolanas frente a la pandemia de la COVID-19 en los servicios esenciales de salud", (February 2021), 22, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---Americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms\\_794074.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---Americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_794074.pdf) (Accessed June 25, 2022).

the other, the Peruvian population usually identifies Venezuelan migrants as the culprits of the structural problems already existing in the country, generating a rejection expressed through discriminatory acts and discourses.

Achieving the full integration of the Venezuelan population into Peruvian society and economy requires the involvement of the State and civil society to achieve a change in the mentality of Peruvian citizens (from rejection to empathy) by means of information, education and culture. In that sense, developing empathy –that is, the ability to identify with someone and share their feelings–<sup>87</sup> requires putting oneself in another’s shoes and feeling like them. Peruvians should be aware that many Venezuelans have had to migrate abroad in order to survive, experiencing terrible deprivation and suffering during their migratory journey. Likewise, Peruvians cannot be indifferent to discrimination and misunderstanding since in recent decades many of their relatives and friends also had to emigrate to other cities in Peru or from various countries of the world to seek a better future. Therefore, Peruvian society must be in solidarity with migrants, acknowledging them as opportunities instead of as threats.

The social and cultural composition of many countries reflects the result of large and constant migratory processes. This statement also applies in Peru, where internal migration, as well as that from Europe, Africa and Asia has generated a rich and diverse social and cultural conformation, reflected in different expressions (artistic and culinary, among others) that are a source of local pride and international recognition. It therefore makes no sense for some Peruvians to reject and discriminate against Venezuelan migrants from a perception of “what is Peruvian” or “what is ours”, when such purity does not exist in Peru.<sup>88</sup>

---

87 Royal Spanish Academy, “Empatía” in *Dictionary of the Spanish language*, (2001), <https://dle.rae.es/empat%C3%ADa> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

88 Gonzalo Gamio Gebri, “Ética y migración: reflexiones sobre la migración venezolana en tiempos de crisis”, in *Migrant trajectories: Venezuelan youth in Peru*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 303.

To be sure, the Peruvian state has made some appropriate decisions to protect Venezuelan migrants, but these measures are still insufficient. In this regard, political and awareness-raising measures must be adopted by various State institutions to enable the change of mentality of the Peruvian population. Likewise, the media must assume the responsibility to inform without sensationalism and avoid the construction of a negative perception towards Venezuelans. Unfortunately, the fight against xenophobia -as a form of discrimination- takes time. Thus strategies to combat it must not only be thought out in the long term, but must also facilitate the creation of an intercultural project that fosters mutual knowledge, respect, dialogue and encounter between the receiving population and the migrant population.<sup>89</sup> These strategies should allow Peruvian society (including its political class) to face with a positive attitude the challenges of a migration process, as well as recognize the opportunities and potentialities of this process.

### **About the author:**

**Paul Eduardo Vera Delzo** – *Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies*

*Colonel of the Peruvian Army. He holds a master's degree in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College, a master's degree in Strategy and Geopolitics from the Argentine Army War College, a master's degree in Military Sciences from the Peruvian Army War College, as well as a master's degree and Doctor in Administration. He has completed the Senior Executives Program in National and International Security at the John F. Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University (Harvard Kennedy School) and the Staff Officer Course at the Argentine Army War College. He has been a Military Observer at the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, professor at the Argentine Army War College and Liaison Officer of the Peruvian Army at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. Currently, he is director of the Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies.*

---

89 Vega Rome, "Experiencias de discriminación hacia jóvenes migrantes venezolanos...", 281.

# THE CHALLENGE OF UNRESTRICTED WAR ON MODERN CONFLICT IN LATIN AMERICA

*David E. Spencer*

## **Abstract**

*This article discusses the concept of Unrestricted Warfare and its doctrinal origins. It then shows how this concept has been applied in Latin America starting with the social protests in Bolivia from 1995-2005 that brought the MAS party to power and finally briefly discussing the similarities and differences of recent mass social protests in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru between 2019 and 2021.*

**Key words:** *Unrestricted Warfare, Social Protest, Insurgency, Illicit Money.*

## **Introduction**

Unrestricted War is the latest development in the art and science of Asymmetric Warfare. Asymmetric Warfare is the strategy of weaker adversaries to combat stronger ones and win. It can be used by nations, subnational and transnational groups that are attempting to take territory, defend sovereignty, dominate territory, overthrow governments or even international regimes. This article discusses the evolution of Unrestricted Warfare and its Application in Latin America today.

## **Development of the Theory**

Asymmetric Warfare has a long history going back to before the beginning of recorded history, but it was not really codified and disseminated until the 19th century by Marxist and Anarchist revolutionaries such as Marx, Bakunin and then later by Lenin, Mao, Che Guevara and Truong Chinh, among others. The most sophisticated methodology was developed by Mao

Tse Tung for the Chinese Revolution and then interpreted by Truong Chinh for the Vietnamese Revolution with such concepts as strategic and tactical phases, bottom-up popular mobilization, and the combination of all forms of struggle or war of interlocking. Although most of their recommendations for asymmetric warfare had the objective of establishing Marxist regimes, the methodology was about achieving victory through asymmetric warfare which had universal application to the degree that such diverse non-Marxist groups as the Provisional Irish Republican Army, Al Qaeda and the Islamic State adopted them and modified them for their own uses.<sup>1</sup>

These essential principles of asymmetric warfare remained unchanged for around 100 years until two Chinese colonels, one from the Air Force and one from the Army, wrote the book *Unrestricted Warfare*, published in 1999. While they claim their ideas are not Maoist, the influence is unmistakable, not only of Mao but of many of the classic Marxist thinkers as well. Colonels Qiao and Wang start out asking the same question that Mao asked: how a weaker country can defeat a technologically advanced country like the United States? The answer is they come up with is the implementation of “new principles of war” which consist of “using all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one’s interests.”<sup>2</sup>

The thesis of *Unrestricted War* is actually not original. Truong Chinh’s advocated that the best way to achieve victory was through what he called the war of interlocking or combination of all forms of struggle, explaining that the war of interlocking meant conflict occurring simultaneously in many domains: military, political, economic, propaganda, international and as many other forms of struggle that were pertinent to the cause. The form of struggle that predominated in time and space depended on the relative

---

1 See *How to Survive in the West*, a manual attributed to the Islamic State that began circulating on the Internet in 2015, *How to Survive in the West: A Mujahid Guide* (2015), <https://blazingcatfur.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ISIS-How-to-survive-in-the-west.pdf>, (accessed March 30, 2022).

2 FBIS abridged translation of: Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, February 1999), at <https://www.c4i.org/unrestricted.pdf>, (accessed March 28, 2022).

correlation of forces vis a vis the enemy.<sup>3</sup> In other words if the situation was such, given the correlation of forces, that you could achieve or approach victory through political, or economic struggle, then that was the form that should predominate. If it was through military struggle, then that form should predominate. However, none of the other forms of struggle were to be discarded, but rather played supporting roles to the main form of struggle. It was possible that in time, the correlation would shift again, and one of the supporting methods would come to the fore, while the heretofore main effort became a supporting effort.

Truong Chinh's concepts were themselves an interpretation of Mao's teaching about the mobilization of the masses and other forms of struggle to become the sea in which the enemy forces would drown.<sup>4</sup> Mao's writings in turn reflected the ideas of Vladimir Lenin. In his 1906 article on Guerrilla Warfare, Lenin wrote:

Marxism differs from all primitive forms of socialism by not binding the movement to any one particular form of struggle. It recognizes the most varied forms of struggle; and it does not "concoct" them, but only generalizes, organizes, gives conscious expression to those forms of struggle of the revolutionary classes which arise of themselves in the course of the movement. Absolutely hostile to all abstract formulas and to all doctrinaire recipes, Marxism demands an attentive attitude to the mass struggle in progress, which, as the movement develops, as the class-consciousness of the masses grows, as economic and political crises become acute, continually gives rise to new and more varied methods of defense and attack. Marxism, therefore, positively does not reject any form of struggle. Under no circumstances does Marxism confine itself to the forms of struggle possible and in existence at the given moment only, recognizing as it does that new forms of struggle, unknown to the participants of the given period, inevitably arise as the given social situation, changes.<sup>5</sup>

---

3 Truong Chinh, *Primer for Revolt*, (New York: Praeger, 1963), 139-153.

4 Mao Tse Tung, *On Protracted War*, (May 1938), [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_09.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm), (accessed March 28, 2022).

5 Vladimir I. Lenin, *Guerrilla Warfare*, (1906), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/gw/i.htm#v1pp65-213> (accessed March 19, 2022).

So, clearly these ideas have been evolving since at least 1906. Yet, since the Russian Revolution Marxist or Marxist-trained insurgents have almost universally been focused on developing the military struggle as the primary method. Why? An answer may be found in a founding FARC document:

We are revolutionaries that fight for a change of regime. However, we wanted and fought for that change employing the least painful path for our people: the peaceful path, the democratic path of the masses. That path was violently closed on us with the fascist pretext of combating supposed “Independent Republics” and as we are revolutionaries that in one way or another play our historic role that corresponds to us, we had to find the other way: the armed revolutionary path for the struggle for power.<sup>6</sup>

Whether the FARC’s statement was true or not, 20th Century revolutionaries commonly believed that non-military paths were closed to them, and therefore the main effort had to be military to open space for other forms of struggle, particularly the political. In some cases, revolutionaries didn’t even bother to attempt to develop non-military forms of struggle for their campaigns. However, this was a grave mistake. Virtually all the groups that were overly focused on the military struggle were defeated.

Qiao and Wang’s contribution bring the doctrine of the combination of all forms of struggle full circle. While they don’t reject armed struggle, they reject its universal primacy. To them it is merely one tool among many. In particular, Qiao and Wang are skeptical about the primacy of military struggle in an age where technological advances give a country like the United States a lopsided domination of the battlefield. They were particularly impressed by the United States overwhelming superiority during the 1991 war with Iraq. In 30 days of a preliminary air campaign and 3 days of ground war, the United States and its allies totally defeated the Iraqi Army (that at the time was the third largest in the world) in conventional battle. Few doubted the outcome of the war, but most observers thought it was going to be a

---

6 FARC-EP, *Programa Agrario de los Guerrilleros de las FARC-EP*, (July 20, 1964), <https://partidofarc.com.co/farc/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2.9-INFORMACION-ADICIONAL-PROGRAMA-AGRARIO-DE-LOS-GUERRILLEROS-DE-LAS-FARC.pdf>, (accessed March 28, 2022).

much longer and bloodier affair. The Iraqi route after three days of ground combat stunned the world, to include the United States military.

Qiao and Wang assert that this stunning victory employing advanced technology by one side called for a rethinking the tools of war to broaden them from purely military means to all means, including military, but not exclusively or even primarily military, to help a country or cause to achieve their strategic objective.<sup>7</sup>

This author prefers the concept of unrestricted war over the more popular “hybrid warfare” that has been featured in many recent publications and discussions. Hybrid Warfare is understood as a form of warfare that is still predominantly military but is combined with many other elements: conventional warfare, irregular warfare, cyber-attacks, economic attacks, and so forth. As such, hybrid warfare can be thought of as a subset of unrestricted warfare as unrestricted warfare may or may not include military means in the lead or supporting roles, while hybrid warfare still regards the military effort as playing a principal or leading role. Thus, unrestricted warfare allows for hybrid warfare, where hybrid warfare would not allow for unrestricted warfare that was not led by a military effort.

According to Qiao and Wang, the new principle of war is to use all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one’s interests.<sup>8</sup> How do they break out this concept? What are the new rules or parameters? Listed below are a few of the most important, although there may be more: (1) According to Qiao, the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules, nothing is forbidden;<sup>9</sup> (2) The military is no longer the predominant instrument of war, but rather is one more tool; (3) The war can begin long before weapons are fired in anger, if this even occurs; (4) The enemy can

---

7 Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 2.

be attacked with cyber-attacks, artificial economic crises, subtle biological attacks, etc.<sup>10</sup> In other words, nontraditional weapons of war; (5) Actions can be carried out in various combinations at all levels: international, national, state, sub-state, non-state; (6) Civil society is part of the conflict even if they are not conscious of being involved or willing to be involved;<sup>11</sup> and (7) A country can be at war with another country without the second being aware.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Application of Unrestricted Warfare in Latin America**

How has this and is this playing out in Latin America? The last traditional insurgencies that occurred in Latin America were the FARC insurgency in Colombia and the Communist Party of Peru Shining Path (PCP-SL) in Peru. These insurgencies failed because they overfocused on the military struggle and were unable to adapt their combination of forms of struggle to the new reality of the region. They remained focus on military forms of struggle even though the entire region, except for Cuba, democratized by 1990. The political doors were no longer slammed shut as the FARC claimed in 1964.<sup>13</sup> However, both organizations had become so vested in the armed struggle that they were unable to adjust to the new reality. As time went on the organizations became less and less relevant to Colombia and Peru's political arena and more and more isolated from the population. This facilitated their defeat as they had alienated their would-be supporters.

However, the one aspect of these organizations allowed them to survive and even flourish, well beyond their ability to mobilize the population, were revenue streams from drug trafficking. It can be debated whether FARC or PCP-SL were true drug trafficking organizations or not. That is not the point here. What is clear is that at a minimum, both organizations relied heavily on money from the narcotics industry to finance their revolutionary

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 123-124.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> FARC-EP, *Programa Agrario de los Guerrilleros de las FARC-EP*.

war. In this sense, FARC and PCP-SL can be seen as bridges from traditional insurgency to new forms of insurgency in the region that employ an “unrestricted war” methodology.

The first successful Unrestricted War insurgency occurred in Bolivia. It is improbable that they were conscious of the new doctrine since they essentially began their new approach in 1995, and the Chinese book wasn't translated into English until shortly after publication in 1999. Nevertheless, the Bolivians employed a new methodology that aligns very closely with the ideas of Qiao and Wang. The following discussion will summarize my previous article on the Bolivian insurgency authored with Hugo Acha that is referenced below.<sup>14</sup>

A large number of Bolivian cocaleros were originally miners that went to the Chapare to grow coca after the mines went bankrupt in the mid-1980s. This eventually attracted the attention of the United States that carried out combined counternarcotics operations with the Bolivian government against the burgeoning coca crops and cocaine production in the country. The cocaleros reacted by organizing to resist. First, they organized coca growers' unions. Then they began resisting through social protest and armed militias. The reaction on the government side was to double down, increasing counternarcotics operations and passing increasingly harsh counternarcotics laws. The conflict escalated on both sides and the cocaleros increasingly moved towards guerrilla warfare in their attempts to resist the escalating counternarcotics operations. They even brought in foreign guerrilla instructors from PCP-SL, and MRTA from Peru, the FARC and ELN from Colombia and the ETA from Spain.<sup>15</sup>

On the verge of adopting largescale classical insurgency, the key political adviser, Filemón Escobar, convinced them not to go down this path. He asserted that it would attract the full attention of the United States and

---

<sup>14</sup> David E. Spencer and Hugo Acha Melgar, “Bolivia, a new model insurgency for the 21st century: from Mao back to Lenin”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 28:3 (2017), 629-660, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2017.1307617>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 636.

would end in disaster when the latter fully intervened. Instead, to avoid U.S. intervention, he advocated for a much more subtle approach, employing social protest combined with political participation as the way to shift the situation in their favor.

As time passed the final objective changed. Initially the goal had been to resist, then to effect a change in the law, and finally to take over the state. The combination of methods of struggle also evolved over time, but in the end it combined five elements: (1) Violent social protest as the main form of struggle; (2) Financing of the protests through coca profits; (3) Guerrilla forces to protect the source of cocalero income, coca crops and processing labs, from eradication. They also carried out very targeted acts of violence when required; (4) The formation of a legal political party to participate in national politics to promulgate laws to consolidate the gains made by the social protests; and (5) A national and international information campaign to portray the violence as about indigenous rights and not about taking power and legalizing coca.

Protest as the main form of struggle was brilliant because it made it difficult for the government to combat. The government had developed forces to combat an armed insurgency, but these forces were neutralized because their new opponents didn't resemble the threat they had trained for. Nevertheless, an important part of the social protest was mob violence, particularly aimed at sabotaging infrastructure and generating a climate of fear. Occasionally the violence was directed at soldiers and police, particularly when it could be done surreptitiously and provoke the authorities to overreact against the crowd. The problem for the security forces was that many, if not most of the protesters were unarmed civilians, so distinguishing between armed or violent elements and the unarmed majority was difficult. When the police or military did overreact, it was usually caught on film and then rebroadcast repeatedly on the evening news to mobilize even larger crowds against the government.

A brilliant tactic employed by the protesters was to block the main highways between eastern and western Bolivia. Western Bolivia and particularly

La Paz were dependent on food produced in eastern Bolivia and cutting off the roads for prolonged numbers of days caused desperation among the population of the capital city who blamed the government more than the protesters for its inability to keep the roads open. These prolonged roadblocks were possible because of funding from coca production. The cocaleros funded full-time protesters that were assigned for a year or two so that roadblocks and protests could be theoretically sustained indefinitely, the heretofore weakness of social protest as a main tactic. Eventually people must go back to work to eat, but not the professional protesters.

Additionally, coca money corrupted government officials, bought political influence, and allowed the cocaleros to coopt similar oriented social organizations such as the indigenous movement and the miner's unions. In this manner they could present their struggle as a poor against rich, and an indigenous versus white struggle, rather than one about illicit narcotics. As we shall see, money also bought them a political party.

The armed element did not disappear, but played a vital, yet secondary role. They protected coca crops from government eradication campaigns. These armed elements conducted a low intensity guerrilla war against the government military and police forces carrying out counternarcotics operations. Their tactics consisted mostly of mining coca fields and road barricades with improvised explosive devices, as well as harassment and sniper fire against moving government units producing a low intensity but steady flow of casualties. However, on occasion the cocalero militias carried out full ambushes of government units, and occasionally attacks on government outposts or units. This low intensity warfare produced about 40 dead and over 100 injured per year among the security forces, proportionally (based on Bolivia's population) this equaled about 50 % of the casualties per annum of the guerrilla war in Colombia.

Besides occasional training from foreign guerrilla organizations mentioned above, the main source of training and weapons for the cocalero militias was

the government itself. The cocalero youth were ordered to present themselves for national military service and served almost exclusively in the elite Bolivian units. Furthermore, purchasing weapons and ammunition from military units was not difficult for the right price, which the cocaleros had in abundance. However, both the government and the cocaleros had different reasons to deny the armed aspect of the conflict. The government didn't want to admit the gravity of the situation and call it terrorism, to avoid having to recognize that they were at war and make things even worse. The cocaleros didn't want the government to label them as terrorists because then it could take action like declaring their political party illegal. Both sides spoke euphemistically of the actions as being carried out by nameless "drug traffickers."

Besides resisting drug eradication, these armed elements also helped the cocaleros push the government to the brink of collapse in October 2003, by infiltrating the marches and exacerbating violence during massive protests in La Paz. However, the cocaleros and their allies intentionally stopped short of overthrowing the government through violence, because they needed to create the perception of coming to power through legitimate political means, via elections. In this way it would make external action against the revolution very difficult. Democratic elections were the best way to establish the required legitimacy.

To come to power via elections, the cocaleros needed a political party. Initially they tried to buy space within an existing leftist political party, but soon they realized that this party was willing to take their money but was not willing to be their tool. So, they found an existing legal party -Movement to Socialism, MAS- that was on life support and outright bought it. This party was directly controlled and represented the interests of the cocaleros. This party served to legalize the gains made by the social protest and served as a vehicle for cocaleros to be elected to power.

Much of this was facilitated by a public relations campaign that presented to the world and to Bolivians that the struggle was not about illicit crops, but rather the 500-year struggle between the indigenous and poor peoples

of the country and the legacy of colonialism: the white elites. The main candidate of the MAS was chosen because he looked indigenous, but in fact, other than his looks, he had little to do with the indigenous communities. He was tall, unlike most indigenous men and didn't speak either Quechua or Aymara. The myth of the centrality of the indigenous struggle was perpetuated in part thanks to sympathetic NGOs and news organizations from the United States and Europe.

As mentioned earlier, this came to a head in October 2003, when the cocalero/indigenous and miners coalition led a particularly violent uprising over the pretext of Bolivian gas being exported to the world via a pipeline to be built through Chile. Chile seized Antofagasta from Bolivia in the War of the Pacific in 1879, and this has been a point of contention between Bolivia and Chile ever since. The outcome was the forced resignation of President Sanchez de Losada and an interim government under Carlos Mesa until elections could be held in December 2005, in which Evo Morales won with 54 % of the vote. The MAS had remained in power ever since, except a one-year break from November 2019 to November 2020, after Evo Morales was forced to resign when electoral fraud was too blatant, after which the military and police refused to repress anti-Morales demonstrations. However, the MAS was able to return to power through new elections because their opposition failed to create a united front or offer a better program than the MAS.

A couple of observations on the Bolivian insurgency and Unrestricted Warfare. First, it was so innovative that it was only several years later that it was acknowledged as having been an insurgency. This was because the military method was not the primary means of struggle, while at the same time not unimportant. Furthermore, the cocaleros were able to deflect the blame for the military action on "nameless drug traffickers." They were also able to disguise the connection of this violence or coca cultivation to their strategy to take power. Finally, the MAS came to power through a democratic election, not triumphant guerrilla columns marching through the capital. So, while people knew that something had happened, they were unaware that it had been an insurgency.

The reason this is important is because this model was subsequently spread to other parts of Latin America. Violent social protests in Ecuador, Chile, Colombia and Peru in 2019, 2020 and 2021 fit the pattern. There is another article in this volume that describes the social protests in Colombia. It and the other cases share many common elements. The first is general dissatisfaction with the performance of the existing government. Perception is more important than politics, so whether deserved or not, a climate existed in all these countries in which the governments were being perceived as being corrupt, inept, unresponsive or all of the above.

Second, social organizations existed that had been organizing and proselyting for months if not years. Third, even though these organizations often represented special interests, they had been forming coalitions around shared values for months. The most important shared value was that they could not achieve their agendas through the existing political system. Something extra-institutional had to happen to break the stranglehold on power, such as a revolutionary social uprising, although most stopped short of supporting guerrilla warfare. Nevertheless, there were important segments of these coalitions who were not so hesitant to support revolutionary violence, and there were also insurgent and criminal organizations that sought to manipulate and control the social protests. Finally, there were foreign elements, Cuba, Venezuela, and Russia that sought to manipulate the social protests morally, materially and informationally for their own ends. The insurgents, criminals and foreign interests injected money and agents into the various scenarios to enhance their violence and give them a more revolutionary character.

It very well may be that the protests would have occurred without the insurgent, criminal, and foreign elements. However, it is also probable that they would have been less violent and had much less of a strategic impact. The government might have been able to negotiate much more limited agreements to satisfy the protesters demands. Likewise, there were some interesting recurring patterns that are worth noting. First, most of the pretexts for the protests were very innocuous: a new tax law in Colombia,

an international loan negotiation in Ecuador, an increased subway fare in Chile, and the impeachment of an essentially dysfunctional president in Peru, the Peruvian case being the least innocuous of them all.

However, the subsequent rapid explosion of the social protests out of proportion to the pretext indicated planning and organization with an agenda far beyond the initial cause. In Ecuador it became about overthrowing the Moreno government. In Chile it became about rewriting the constitution. In Colombia it became about 104 leftist demands that, had they all been implemented, would have converted Colombia into a socialist state. In Peru, the agenda remained essentially static, over the impeachment of President Vizcarra for corruption.

Unlike Bolivia, much of the coordination and mobilization for the protests was done by social media and smart phone, which hadn't existed or been in widespread use between 1995 and 2005. In contrast, by 2019, nearly everyone rich or poor had such a device. In addition, there was also significant foreign interference through social media with a concerted bot or troll campaign coming out of Russia that was disseminating disinformation to exacerbate the situation and stir up the protesters to commit acts of violence, such as sabotage.<sup>16</sup>

In Colombia both the FARC dissidents and the ELN were heavily involved with the protests, particularly their more violent aspects. They funded and trained the so called "first line" which were the shock troops of the protest movements. They also paid people to commit acts of vandalism as well as bussed and fed protesters from rural areas to the cities where the most violent protests took place.<sup>17</sup> In Chile, the degree to which the Mapuche insurgent movement was involved or coordinated with the protests is unknown. It is a subject for further research.

---

16 Lara Jakes, "Con las protestas en Sudamérica también aparecieron troles rusos en Twitter," *New York Times*, (Washington: January 21, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2020/01/21/espanol/america-latina/troles-rusos-sudamerica.html>, (accessed April 3, 2022).

17 Noticias Semana, "La peligrosa 'primera línea': ¿un nuevo grupo criminal nació en Colombia?", *Revista Semana* (July 17, 2021), <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/exclusivo-asi-opera-y-estos-son-los-planes-de-la-peligrosa-primera-linea/20218/>, (accessed April 3, 2022).

However, in October 2020, the Colombian government killed an ELN commander named Uriel and captured a computer which revealed that not only were the ELN involved in the protests in Colombia, but also Chile.<sup>18</sup> There is also less solid information about Colombian FARC dissidents involved in the October 2019 protests in Ecuador, but more solid information about Venezuelan agents involvement. In other words, not only were the violent protests in each of the respective countries coordinated among radical national organizations, but also counted on reinforcement, training, advice and funding from regional groups and countries as well.<sup>19</sup>

A final tactic employed in Bolivia, Brazil and Chile has been the use of forest fires to effect political outcomes. This is a very irregular tactic, but well within the unrestricted war concept, and has the advantage of making it difficult for the target to know they are being attacked. As election day approached in Bolivia in 2019, in which Evo Morales sought reelection, severe forest fires suddenly broke out in Santa Cruz, the main center of the opposition. By the end over a million acres of forests were burned. This was not a natural phenomenon as the progress of the fires went against the prevailing winds. Eventually, 452 persons were charged for causing the fires, 20 of them criminally.<sup>20</sup> It is thought that the fires were set in part to disrupt the mobilization of the opposition to vote against the President.<sup>21</sup> Morales won his reelection bid but was then accused of fraud and overthrown.

---

18 Noticias Infobae, "Matar a los hijos de Álvaro Uribe, secuestrar en Argentina e infiltrar protestas en Chile: revelan los planes de Uriel, el abatido jefe del Eln", *Infobae* (January 30, 2021), <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2021/01/30/matar-a-los-hijos-de-alvaro-uribe-secuestrar-en-argentina-e-infiltrar-protestas-en-chile-revelan-los-planes-de-uriel-el-abatido-jefe-del-eln/> (accessed April 3, 2022).

19 Noticias LF, "¿Disidencias de las Farc infiltraron protestas en Ecuador?", *La FM Colombia* (October 11, 2019), <https://www.lafm.com.co/internacional/disidencias-de-las-farc-infiltraron-protestas-en-ecuador>, (accessed April 3, 2022); Sabrina Martin, "Lenín Moreno: protestas en Ecuador están infiltradas por FARC y chavistas", *Panam Post* (October 11, 2019), <https://panampost.com/sabrina-martin/2019/10/11/lenin-moreno-denuncia-infiltracion-en-protestas/>, (accessed April 3, 2022).

20 Yvette Sierra Praeli, "A million hectares ablaze as forest fires sweep through Bolivia", *Mongabay* (November 20, 2020), <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/11/a-million-hectares-ablaze-as-forest-fires-sweep-through-bolivia/>, (accessed April 3, 2022).

21 Interview with Hugo Acha Melgar, October 10, 2020.

Shortly before, a series of fires were set in Brazil. Between January and August of 2020, there were 44,013 outbreaks of fire in the Amazon and Pantanal. The volume of fire was as great as the previous six years combined. Experts determined that the fires in Pantanal were caused by humans.<sup>22</sup> President Bolsonaro by all accounts reacted badly and was ostracized by the international community. There are accusations that these fires were set to cause him political difficulties. It is yet to be determined if this is accurate.

Finally, in Chile, the terrible forest fires of 2016–2017 were widely reported to have been caused by human beings. It was portrayed as having been caused by human carelessness. There were persistent rumors of those fires being set deliberately by Mapuche dissidents, but not until 2019 did the Chilean Minister of Interior declare that some of the fires over the years were indeed associated with the Mapuche cause.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusions

The use of violent social protest financed by illicit markets is pretty well established as a new methodology to effect political change or overthrow governments in the region. However, the use of the forest fires is still a little uncertain. If a political tool, we don't know what the intent of the method is. However, if it is a new struggle tactic, it is an excellent example of how very unorthodox methods are being employed under the unrestricted war concept. This begs the following questions: What else is currently being used as unorthodox weapons against western nations that we are unaware of? How will this impact Latin America? What new things do we need to prepare for?

---

22 Carlos Madeiro, "Agosto atinge recorde de focos de incêndio no ano; AC e Pantanal preocupam", *Universo Online* (September 12, 2020), <https://noticias.uol.com.br/meio-ambiente/ultimas-noticias/redacao/2020/09/01/agosto-atinge-recorde-de-focos-de-incendio-no-ano-ac-e-pantanal-preocupam.htm?cmpid=copiaecola>, (accessed April 3, 2022); G1 MG, "Polícia investiga responsáveis por focos de incêndio que deram início a grandes queimadas no Pantanal de MT", *Mato Grosso* (September 12, 2020), <https://g1.globo.com/mt/mato-grosso/noticia/2020/09/12/policia-investiga-responsaveis-por-focos-de-incendio-que-deram-inicio-a-grandes-queimadas-no-pantanal-de-mt.ghtml>, (accessed April 3, 2022).

23 Daniel Labarca, "Rodrigo Ubilla, ministro (S) del Interior: 'Algunos incendios del último tiempo están asociados al tema de la causa mapuche'", *La Tercera* (February 19, 2019), <https://www.latercera.com/politica/noticia/rodrigo-ubilla-ministro-s-del-interior-incendios-del-ultimo-tiempo-est-an-associados-al-tema-la-causa-mapuche/532043/>, (accessed April 3, 2022).

**About the author:**

**David E. Spencer** – *William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies*

*Dr. Spencer is a professor at the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies. He has been responsible for Colombia/South America in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats (2014–2017), and director of Colombia Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Western Hemisphere Affairs (2011–2012). He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from George Washington University (2002), where he studied Latin American politics, specializing in regional insurgency and terrorism. He earned his master's and bachelor's degrees (both in International Relations) from Brigham Young University, in 1992 and 1988, respectively. Likewise, he has been director of the fight against terrorism at Hicks & Asociados, has worked in different positions in support of Plan Colombia, and has spent five years in El Salvador as a consultant for the Ministry of Defense during the 1979–1992 civil war. Dr. Spencer has worked for a number of research groups and consulting firms, such as the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) and the Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC). Dr. Spencer grew up in Latin America, where he lived in Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Venezuela.*

# VIOLENT SOCIAL DEMONSTRATION AND DEMOCRATIC INSTABILITY

*Vicente Torrijos and Daniel Jiménez*

## Summary

*Social protest in Latin America is part of a regional regulatory framework that recognizes it as a peaceful and democratic citizen action. Although most of the states in the region recognize themselves as democratic, the social mobilizations that took place in 2019 hinted at the fissures suffered by democracies in the hemisphere. Social protest, which by definition must maintain a peaceful character for the assertion of rights, has been marred by acts of violence that have affected the institutional order of countries. The response of the security forces to such a threat has been tested in its ability to accommodate the rights at stake. This article analyzes the participation of social movements in the social protest that took place in Latin America during the mobilizations of 2019 and how these actors may exacerbate the political-social conflict in the States of the region.*

**Keywords:** *Social Protest, Demonstration, Violence, Rights, Democracy.*

## Introduction

The growing social unrest in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is part of an international context marked by political, social, economic, and environmental pressures that have led to massive mobilizations in different parts of the world. Since the end of 2018, the Yellow Vest movement in France has called on thousands of people to mobilize against the rise in fuel prices, tax injustice, and the loss of purchasing power. These protests were echoed in other countries in Europe and Canada.

2019 was a year marked particularly by social demonstrations at a global level. In the European case, in addition to the Yellow Vests in France,

there were also mobilizations in Catalonia (Spain), the Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom. Moving on to the Middle East, protests in Lebanon against progressive taxes on digital social networking services forced the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the demonstrations in Egypt and Algeria are indicative of an atmosphere of widespread social unrest in the region. In the case of Asia, the most notable situation was the massive mobilization in Hong Kong against the repressive measures adopted by the Beijing government. Amid this panorama, Latin America was permeated by an environment of social unrest that has manifested itself in different ways on other continents. To this are added a series of endogenous causes that, over the years, have been accumulating a growing dissatisfaction with the persistent inequality in the region.

In this sense, the set of endogenous and exogenous factors that have increased social unrest in LAC led several countries in the region to witness social demonstrations from 2019 to 2022. It is worth noting that in certain cases it has become evident that demonstrations go beyond the peaceful sphere and become vandalism and violent mobilizations, drawing attention for their coordination and articulation. This situation affects collective security and the governability of States, constituting a factor of instability. For this reason, an essential question arises: Can certain social movements in Latin America distort the right to social protest and exacerbate the political-social conflict, affecting the institutional and democratic stability of States?

In addition, a reflection is made on the nature of the demonstrations that have been experienced in LAC during 2019, their implications for the public and democratic order of the countries, as well as the response that has been given by the public force to this situation.

---

1 DW, "Protestas en Líbano, la 'revolución del WhatsApp'", *Deutsche Welle* ( October 18, 2019), <https://www.dw.com/es/protestas-en-l%C3%ADbano-la-revoluci%C3%B3n-del-whatsapp/a-50894507https://www.dw.com/es/protestas-en-l%C3%ADbano-la-revoluci%C3%B3n-del-whatsapp/a-50894507>

## Contentious Social and Political Protest in LAC

Social movements have been an active feature of society. However, their conceptualization and historical study are relatively recent. Eric Hoffer, a pioneer in the study of social movements, addresses a psychosocial perspective on the motivations that lead individuals to form these groups. For him, all mass movements gain followers by appealing to a set of emotions, frustrations, and personal motivations.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, authors such as Charles Tilly and Craig Calhoun defined the term “social movement” as the only form of political contestation.<sup>3</sup> According to the authors, democratization fosters the formation of social movements, which combine three types of demands: programmatic, identity and opposition. In addition, the political context, imitative processes, communication, and collaboration facilitate the creation of social movements.

Since the twentieth century, social movements have been placed in a context focused on industrial and technological development, where technological and information penetration is incorporated into human customs and traditions. As Dylan Taylor describes it, this situation has transformed society and its structures in terms of economic and political control, as it expands towards the pursuit of control of information, networks, and technology.<sup>4</sup> Pursuant to the historical conceptualization that has been made about social movements, in the inter-American framework, social mobilization and/or social protest is understood as a form of individual or collective action aimed at expressing ideas, visions or values of dissent, opposition, denunciation, or vindication.<sup>5</sup>

---

2 Eric Hoffer, “El Verdadero Creyente, sobre el Fanatismo y los Movimientos Sociales.” *Harper & Brothers* (1951).

3 Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring, “The History of Social Movements in Global”. *Springer* (2017) <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-30427-8>

4 Dylan Taylor, “Social movements and democracy in the 21st century”. *Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan* (2017), 66, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-39684-2>

5 RELE, “Protesta y Derechos Humanos”, *Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression OAS/IACHR*, (Washington D.C.: September, 2019) <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/publicaciones/ProtestayDerechosHumanos.pdf>

Social protest is also linked to the defense and promotion of democracy. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has recognized that, in situations of rupture of the democratic order, a social protest must be understood “not only within the framework of the exercise of a right but also in the fulfillment of the duty to defend democracy.”<sup>6</sup> In this sense, democratic societies contemplate social protest as a legitimate citizen exercise through which rights are claimed and duties are claimed.

Under this logic, social protest is called to make visible processes of vindication and expression of social movements that use this democratic mechanism as a strategy to promote ideas, interests, and rights. Among the groups that make these calls are: organized civil society, Non-Governmental Organizations, religious entities, educational centers, research institutes, unions, professional associations, and political parties. However, as pointed out by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), social protest can also be spontaneous, since through it a single person, small groups of people, or multitudinous groups can be expressed in which thousands of individuals can articulate without a specific associative membership with more structured organizations.<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the modalities of social protest, it should be noted that, although they are established through national and international legislation, some of the modalities generate conflict in terms of the weighing of rights. Without going into a legal analysis of some of these forms of protest, it is clear that there are situations in which complexities arise to harmonize the rights at stake.

In this regard, the IACHR has indicated that “whatever the modality of the protest, the inter-American instruments establish that the right to assembly must be exercised peacefully and without weapons.”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, it is indicated that the State may restrict participation in public demonstrations

---

6 Inter-American Court, “Caso López Lone y otros vs. Honduras”, *Inter-American Court of Human Rights* (October 5, 2015), 148, [https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec\\_302\\_esp.pdf](https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_302_esp.pdf)

7 RELE, “Protesta y Derechos Humanos”

8 Ibid.

and protests to persons who commit acts of violence or who carry weapons. Likewise, the United Nations Human Rights Council noted that “States have the duty to adopt the necessary measures to prevent acts of violence, guarantee the safety of people -including demonstrators- and maintain public order.”<sup>9</sup>

A social protest whose beginning and end are developed for the sake of the vindication of rights through peaceful means has the legitimacy and protection granted by a democratic State. However, those demonstrations aimed at vandalizing and destroying public space must be considered violent social mobilizations, which the State must control according to the provisions of the law and the international normative framework.

The academy has made a study of that modality used by certain social groups that incite violent mobilization. Also, over the past two decades, political science scholars have sought to unify the analysis of various forms of confrontational politics (from peaceful protests and populist movements to violent terrorist campaigns and insurgencies) in an academic field called Contentious Politics.<sup>10</sup> As described by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, contentious politics focuses on collective grievances and calls to action ranging from the most peaceful expressions of collective support to the most devastating and violent attacks.

In this context, violence becomes a mechanism of political action that includes strategies that promote robberies, looting, kidnappings, and rapes. Under this modality, victims are killed randomly and indiscriminately. Thus, it is appropriate to compare what the academy has called social protest, a violent and contentious political demonstration with what took place in LAC in 2019.

---

9 United Nations Human Rights Council, “Informe del Relator Especial sobre los derechos a la libertad de reunión pacífica y de asociación”, *United Nations* (New York: 2012), [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session20/A-HRC-20-27\\_sp.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session20/A-HRC-20-27_sp.pdf)

10 Eugene Cream and Benati Stefano. “The mechanics of contentious politics” *The Journal of Mathematical Sociology* Vol. 44, Iss. 3 (2020), 163–198, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/002250X.2020.1753187>

## Democratic Stability of States in LAC

If there is one region in the world that has come to an agreement on the importance of democracy as a form of government of states, that is the Americas. With the signing and adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IAC), the States of the Americas committed themselves to the active defense of democracy.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the Commission is an instrument of the Inter-American Human Rights System that recognizes the right of the peoples of the Americas to democracy, as well as the obligation of their governments to promote and defend it.

Under these provisions, the States of the region have committed themselves to a number of elements that they must comply with to be recognized as democratic States. In this sense, it is emphasized that all citizen action and participation must be done within the framework of the constitutional order admitted, which leads us to think that the scope of application of these provisions implies a deep reflection on the true state of democracy in LAC countries.

According to the postulates of Barbara Walter, to analyze the situation that the world experienced in 2019, one of the best indicators of whether a country will experience a civil war is whether it approaches or moves away from democracy.<sup>12</sup> Under this logic, those countries that call themselves democratic, but that are far from the principles that make a state truly democratic, are called “Anocracies.” This term coined by Professor Ted Robert Gurr refers to those countries that are neither complete autocracies nor democracies, but something in between.<sup>13</sup> For Walter, countries that have characteristics of anocracies are the most likely to enter a civil war. This is due to the constant instability of these governments in political, institutional, and military terms. In fact, the

---

<sup>11</sup> OAS, “Carta Democrática Interamericana” Treaty, *Organization of American States* (Lima: September 11, 2001), [https://www.oas.org/charter/docs\\_es/resolucion1\\_es.htm](https://www.oas.org/charter/docs_es/resolucion1_es.htm)

<sup>12</sup> Barbara F. Walter, “How Civil Wars Start: And How to Stop Them” (New York: Penguin Random House, 2022)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

leaders of an anocracy often do not have enough power to handle dissent and ensure the loyalty of their allies.

When reviewing these theoretical considerations versus the reality of democracies in LAC, it could be glimpsed that more than one of the States in the region meets the description of the Anocracies. In the context of the 2019 demonstrations in LAC, there was an erosion of trust in institutions by citizens. In the region, exclusion and inequality continue to be factors that generate new identity groups and coalitions that mobilize political agendas. All this occurs under a weak institutional framework in which States do not guarantee the social welfare of their citizens, nor do they have the sufficient public force to deal with threats to public order, which results in a climate of disorder and anxiety that is exploited by certain social movements to create chaos. Faced with this scenario, as Walter mentions, there are the variables that in an anocracy lead to civil war.

While this may apply to cases in countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, and Bolivia, one cannot speak of the same reality in the case of countries such as Chile or Costa Rica. According to the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) 2019 report on the Global State of Democracy, three LAC countries (Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay) are among the top five countries in the world with the highest levels of representative government.<sup>14</sup>

This situation denotes that in the region it is not possible to talk in the same way about the state of democracy in each of the countries. While some of the region's states are among the most stable democracies in the world, other LAC countries are far from democratic. Despite this, the social mobilization of 2019 occurred both in democratic and non-democratic countries. Therefore, it is necessary to review those elements that exacerbate the political-social conflict in the countries of the region and how these

---

14 IDEA, "The Global State of Democracy 2019 Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise", *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance* (Stockholm: 2019), <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/the-global-state-of-democracy-2019-summary.pdf>

have been reflected in violent social protest or mobilization, which has demanded an institutional response within the democratic framework of their governments.

### **Inequality and the Technology Gap as a Cause of Social Discontent**

LAC remains one of the most unequal regions in the world in terms of income. The richest 10 % of the population captures 22 times more national income than the poorest 10 %<sup>15</sup> Towards the end of 2019, the citizens of the region showed signs of discomfort, demanding more and better services, as well as greater opportunities for social mobility. Such was the case in Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador, where citizens mobilized demanding a broad agenda of legitimate rights of a democratic society. From the perspective of public opinion, the media identified the inequality factor as the main cause of social unrest in these countries.

Although inequality is a crucial element when studying social movements in LAC, in the case of the mobilizations of 2019, it is not the only element to consider. In fact, by studying separately the most significant cases of social mobilization in the region, it can be seen that those countries with similar levels of inequality had very different citizen reactions. For example, according to the most recent data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Chile has the lowest level of inequality on the continent; however, it was the country in the region where social protest gained the most strength. Therefore, the factor of inequality is not exclusive compared to other elements that encourage citizen mobilization.

In that sense, it could be said that –currently– citizens perceive reality differently and mobilize for other causes. As Taylor already mentioned, twenty-first-century citizenship is expressed through networks and

---

15 Matías Busso and Julián Messina, “La crisis de la desigualdad, América Latina y el Caribe en la encrucijada”, *Inter-American Development Bank* (2020), 24, <file:///C:/Users/51988/Downloads/La-crisis-de-la-desigualdad-America-Latina-y-el-Caribe-en-la-encrucijada.pdf>

technology. This new discussion scenario has acquired a fundamental relevance when reading the feelings and thinking of the population. For this reason, the social unrest of today's citizens is expressed in social networks, which gives it a dynamic that transcends beyond the limits of the borders of countries. In the case of the social protests of 2019, which occurred in a context of international social unrest, they had a large-scale replicating effect throughout the LAC region.

According to a study by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), active citizenship in social networks in LAC reached –until June 2019– 454 million users, a very significant number in the region. This situation reflects that the debate, the convening, the mobilization, and the perception of the situations go through a new virtual scenario. In this context, the debate in networks has also been permeated by fake news, cyberattacks, and other modalities difficult to control, having a multiplier effect and influence on people's perception. As described by David Denning, this type of action developed in the virtual world of cyberspace can be considered as computer crimes and even cyberterrorism,<sup>16</sup> given their means of intimidation and coercion to promote a political or social objective. They have also demonstrated their ability to produce greater and faster effects than physical movement.

In light of the political objectives of social movements, the use of the media, communication, and technology, raises scenarios that may threaten public order and peaceful protest since it leads to radicalization, the spread of violence, and deep divisions in society, which lead to greater levels of instability, chaos and anarchy.

### **Exacerbation of Political-Social Conflict and Violence**

The processes of redefining citizenship is confronted by new forms of exclusion (such as technology), resulting in different forms of collective

---

16 Dorothy E. Denning, "Activism, hacktivism, and cyberterrorism: The Internet as a tool for influencing foreign policy" *Networks and netwars: The future of terror, crime, and militancy*, *Journal STORage* (2001), 239–288, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/40.7249/mr1382osd.13?seq=5#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/40.7249/mr1382osd.13?seq=5#metadata_info_tab_contents)

action that require innovative responses from the State. In 2019, ALC had a strong political and criminal turmoil, experiencing clashes between security forces and protesters.<sup>17</sup> The Latin American capitals where massive social mobilizations took place did not escape the effects of corruption, violence, and organized crime.

Although Latin America –since the nineties– had been the region with the most homicides in the world, by 2019 this trend increased, with a homicide rate for men aged 18 to 19 estimated at 46 per 100,000, much higher than the risk faced by their peers in other regions.<sup>18</sup> This figure is accompanied by the fact that the largest number of homicides were perpetrated with firearms, which is due to a problem of the presence of an illegal arms market that has a strong connection with drug trafficking, as well as with human trafficking.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, in Latin America, armed violence is directly related to the growing presence of illegal markets in urban environments. These markets consolidate territorial control and protection mechanisms not associated with State agencies and local governments.

Latin American violence is heterogeneous. It encompasses phenomena such as armed conflicts, wars between illicit drug cartels, as well as other manifestations of organized crime and violence that are spreading throughout the region.<sup>20</sup> All these violent groups outside the law have taken advantage of the social disorder caused by the social demonstrations of 2019 to advance their contentious political agenda in the region.

During these mobilizations, concrete acts of violence were characterized that broke into the peaceful character of the protest. In fact, the security forces

---

17 María Alejandra Navarrete and Anastasia Austin, “Balance de homicidios en las capitales de América Latina en 2019”, *Insight Crime* ( March 5 2020), <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/balance-homicidios-capitales-2019/>

18 UNODC, “Estudio Mundial sobre el Homicidio”, *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* (Vienna: July 2019), [https://www.unodc.org/documents/ropan/2021/HOMICIDIOS\\_EN\\_ESPANOL.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/ropan/2021/HOMICIDIOS_EN_ESPANOL.pdf)

19 Lucia Dammert, “Estrategias globales de reducción de violencia urbana en América Latina,” *One Institute for Disarmament Research UNIDIR* (2020), <https://unidir.org/commentary/estrategias-globales-de-reduccion-de-violencia-urbana-en-america-latina-1>

20 Ibid.

of several countries in the region had to face: (1) attacks against them, (2) kidnapping of soldiers and policemen, (3) theft of war material, quartermaster and communications, (4) obstruction of military, police and judicial operations and procedures, and (5) prohibition or declaration of closed zones to prevent the presence of troops in reservations and indigenous territories.

At this point, it is worth differentiating between social protest that occurs in a rural environment and that which occurs in an urban environment since, according to the environment in which it takes place, different modalities of protest and violence are visualized. In the Latin American context, in rural areas where illicit crop eradication operations are carried out, it has been evident that during the days of protest the communities attack the public force and the civil eradicators, to prevent the decontamination of the cultivated areas from being carried out. In this way, they delegitimize the actions of the State (represented in its public force), favoring criminal organizations and their illicit sources of financing.<sup>21</sup> This leads to a situation in which criminal organizations take advantage of social protests to advance their violent agenda against public order and legality.

On the other hand, in urban contexts it has also been possible to evidence the infiltration of criminal groups that manage drug trafficking and sale in certain areas of cities, where the situation of chaos and disorder is exploited. In this sense, the carrying of weapons, the destruction, and looting of public and private establishments, the vandalization of public space, as well as the frontal attack against the public force are elements that characterize violence in urban contexts in the framework of social protests.

As Mary Kaldor points out, in the twenty-first century, confrontation has migrated from large rural spaces to urban spaces where there is constant tension between different social groups. According to Kaldor, cities simultaneously nurture inclusive, cosmopolitan, and multicultural communities, alongside

---

21 Roberto D. Ortiz, "Guerrilla y narcotráfico en Colombia" *Center for Security Studies and Analysis University of Granada* (2000), <https://www.ugr.es/~ceas/America%20Latina/Guerrilla%20y%20narcotrafico%20en%20Colombia.pdf>

racism, class politics based on growing income inequality and religious fundamentalisms to segregate, exclude, and, worse, generate sieges and violent attacks.<sup>22</sup> Within this scenario, destabilizing actors, including criminal and terrorist organizations, emerge that spread fear and promote chaos. This mode of action is what some theorists have called the politics of contentious or politics of confrontation. This form of confrontation also usually occurs under the modality of leaderless resistance, or phantom cell structure.<sup>23</sup> The latter is a strategy of social resistance in which small, independent groups (covert cells) or individuals (a cell called a “lone wolf”) challenge an established institution, law, economic system, social order, or government.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of these excesses and acts of criminality and vandalism carried out in the context of the protests, the public forces of several LAC countries have been forced to take extraordinary measures to maintain public order. These measures include orders for operations in military assistance to the police, applying the doctrine for military control in urban areas. In the Colombian case, priority was given to the use of military units with differential capabilities and less lethal weapons, such as the Urban Special Forces and Military Police Groups.<sup>25</sup> All this led to the public force having units trained and equipped to control localities and combat violent social protests in urban scenarios.

From the point of view of the security forces, at the moment when a social protest turns into a violent mobilization, the responsibility of confronting this type of threat must be assumed to guarantee the normal social development of the population and public order, especially when that internal threat is represented by criminal organizations and illicit economies, protected by violent social protest. If one analyzes this situation by applying Carl von Clausewitz’s theory of the inseparable “wonderful trinity”, one should

---

22 Mary Kaldor and Saskia Sassen, “Cities at War: Global Insecurity and Urban Resistance” (Columbia University Press, March 2020).

23 Eugene Decream and Benati Stefano. “The mechanics of contentious politics”

24 Louis Beam, “Leaderless Resistance”, *louisbeam.com* (February 1992), <http://www.louisbeam.com/leaderless.htm>

25 CEDOC, “Protocolo de actuación frente a eventos de violencia o vías de hecho por parte de personal civil contra integrantes del Ejército Nacional,” (Bogotá, Education and Doctrine Command of the National Army of Colombia, 2019).

follow the idea that (1) the *Government* establishes national interests and objectives, as well as makes the political decision, (2) the *Public Force* is responsible for the strategy to achieve them and (3) the *Society* supports the decisions of the government, respecting the institutionality.<sup>26</sup>

The problem consists, then, in how to maintain the balance between these three trends, as if they were three poles of attraction. The actions of the security forces in the context of social protest are governed by the domestic legal system and the inter-American legal framework. Much has been said about the excessive use of force and proportionality when it comes to containing acts of vandalism in mobilizations. Each of the entities has initiated the respective investigation processes, as well as visits have been made by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to clarify the facts. However, an image of distrust has been generated about the institutionality and legitimacy of the action of the security forces.

This situation shows the imbalance that exists in what Clausewitz determined as the “wonderful trinity” because, according to the theory, it is understood that the government is the one who plans the policy on behalf of the people, while the public force is the entity in charge within the institutional order with the capacity and effectiveness to enforce said policy. In situations of violent social mobilization, the public force responds to the policy directed by the State, on behalf of citizens, to guarantee peace and order. The moment that balance is broken, the social-political conflict is exacerbated. Therefore, the strength of democratic institutions plays a fundamental role in maintaining order and stability.

## Conclusions

Social movements in LAC are an active part of social protest. This affirmation translates an explicit reality that is glimpsed in the public

---

26 Carlos Enrique Álvarez, Carlos Giovanni Corredor and Omar Ferney Vanegas, “Pensamiento y cultura estratégica en Seguridad y Defensa: bases para la construcción de una gran estrategia del Estado”, *Military School of Cadets General José María Córdova* (Bogotá: 2019), <https://librosesmic.com/index.php/editorial/catalog/download/20/16/219?inline=1>

square, in the streets, and in the networks, where social movements are seen that demand rights in situations of profound inequality. Likewise, social protest does not arise exclusively as a result of inequality in LAC. As previously analyzed, when reviewing the indicators of social well-being, security, poverty, education, and governance, there is a very uneven reality among the countries of the region. Although certain countries could fall into what Walter calls the Anocracy, a social manifestation of the magnitude that was experienced in Chile does not respond to the same reality or circumstances, since it is a country with a more consolidated economic, social and democratic performance.

The same applies to the analysis of the state of democracy in the region since it reaffirms the idea that not only in less democratic countries is social protest more recurrent. In fact, social protest is framed in the legislation of genuinely democratic countries. So, how is the political-social conflict exacerbated in Latin American societies in the twenty-first century?

Although giving a single answer that covers the reality of the entire region is very difficult, it has been possible to identify certain elements that characterize situations common to most of them. The citizens of the XXI century are mobilized in scenarios where social unrest escalates rapidly until it reaches even beyond the limits of the borders of the countries, at a great speed, enhanced by new technologies. In that sense, citizens are permeated by the public debate that today also reaches social networks and encourages the massive mobilization of people.

This new scenario of convocation and discussion, such as social networks, is also infiltrated by actors outside the law that promote disinformation and violence. In particular, Latin America – where criminal and terrorist groups advance a political agenda that destabilizes institutions – has been a victim of the actions of these groups in social mobilizations, taking them out of their peaceful sphere. The modality of operation of these social movements that destabilize and generate chaos has been characterized by academics as “contentious politics.” The challenge for the security

forces has been to respond to those threats to institutional security and stability without violating the democratic right to protest. All this is for the sake of maintaining the balance of the “wonderful trinity” mentioned by Clausewitz. To this end, the armies of the region have developed innovative methodologies that allow them to identify criminal actors in the multiple scenarios where they operate today.

The social mobilization of 2019 in LAC (1) occurred in both democratic and non-democratic countries, (2) occurred in deeply unequal countries and those with better welfare indicators, (3) occurred in countries with important technological advances and those lagging behind, as well as (4) it was a transversal phenomenon in which citizens demanded a wide range of demands that ended up tarnished in most of the cases of violence. This has exacerbated the political-social conflict, affecting the institutional stability of the States and jeopardizing the state of democracy in the region.

### **About the authors:**

#### **Vicente Torrijos - Colombian War College**

*Tenured professor at the Colombian War College and the author of eight books on political issues. He is also a visiting professor at the Joint Special Operations University of the United States, an adjunct professor at the W. J. Perry Center, and a collaborator of the Center for Strategic Studies of the Peruvian Army. He has been presidential commissioner for crisis management with Venezuela, security and defense advisor to the Presidency of the Republic, and member of the Historical Commission of the Conflict and its Victims installed in Havana by the Negotiating Table between the National Government and the FARC, in August 2014. He has also been decorated with the Medal of Colombia's Superior War College, the Medal of Military Intelligence of Colombia, the Medal of Distinguished Services to the Military Forces, and the Order of the Congress of the Republic.*

#### **Daniel Jimenez Salcedo**

*Political scientist and Internationalist from the Universidad del Rosario with a Master's Degree in International Politics from Sciences Po Bordeaux.*

# THE TYPOLOGIES OF MODERN CONFLICT AND ITS IMPACT ON STATE SECURITY: SOMETHING NEW UNDER THE SUN?

*Carlos Ojeda Bennett and Fabián Cabello Alfaro<sup>1</sup>*

## Summary

*The expressions of contemporary conflict have encouraged the dissemination of various typologies within the academic community for understanding them. However, far from being a “new” phenomenon, there are indications of the presence of complex threats as the relationship between combatants and criminals blurs, as they threaten to harm the security of States and individuals. These challenges demand strategic alternatives to confront them, in which operational foresight is included as an integral approach to guide planning with a view to anticipating phenomena, either oriented toward preventing or provoking the desired future.*

**Keywords:** *Threats, Conflicts, Strategy, War, Prospective.*

## Introduction

The international reality of the twenty-first century has posed a growing challenge for epistemic communities in addressing an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world (VUCA). This reality extends to contemporary conflicts, which “fluctuate from classic inter-state struggle, through collective interventions against a state –a phenomenon of a recent type– to asymmetrical wars between an organized state and factions in a

---

<sup>1</sup> Work carried out from the presentation “The typologies of the modern conflict and its impact on the security of the States” dictated by Dr. Carlos Ojeda Bennet, at the Naval School of Cadets “Almirante Padilla” on February 18, 2022, in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia.

lawless area.”<sup>2</sup> Consequently, talking about new forms of armed conflict implies the identification of dynamics of change and continuity in how they develop and how the security of States is conducted against them, considering that such security is understood as the conditions that allow a country to preserve its national interests and advance its intended objectives with the least interference of risks and threats, and in which citizens are guaranteed the exercise of their constitutional rights and duties.<sup>3</sup>

One of the fundamental frameworks of change in the security of States is the shift from a state-centric to a *human security* approach, which places the individual as the “subject of study,” identifying a threshold at which human life is threatened by a wide range of diverse conditions,<sup>4</sup> which vary by geographical locations, and which include social problems (such as migration, poverty, and organized crime), food and health challenges.

In this sense, this article aims to contribute to the understanding of the so-called new forms of modern conflict (including the manifestation of multidimensional threats) and propose prospective work as a strategic solution to face them. To this end, (1) a definition of multidimensional threats and their development will be established in the literature, (2) the manifestations of these threats in the “new” forms of contemporary conflict will be established, (3) their urgency and novelty will be examined, as well as their theoretical development, and (4) the reader will be introduced to the field of operational foresight as a strategic alternative towards anticipating these threats.

## **What are Multidimensional Threats?**

A threat is defined as the consequence of the premeditated action or intention of an adversary, perceived –given the capacity of this– as tending

---

2 Carlos Ojeda, “Multidimensional Threats: A Reality in South America”, in ANEPE Research Collection N° 30, *National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies* (Chile: December 2013), 15-16, <https://anepe.cl/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/LIBRO-ANEPE-30.pdf>

3 Ibid., 43.

4 UNTFHS, “Teoría y práctica de la Seguridad Humana”, *Inter-American Institute of Human Rights IIHR* (Costa Rica: 2009), 7, [https://www.iidh.ed.cr/multic/UserFiles/Biblioteca/IIHDSeguridad/12\\_2010/97c70a6a-82ff-409c-a1de-438406607896.pdf](https://www.iidh.ed.cr/multic/UserFiles/Biblioteca/IIHDSeguridad/12_2010/97c70a6a-82ff-409c-a1de-438406607896.pdf)

to harm one's own interests. Consequently, the mechanisms that the State must deal with is in the area of national security.<sup>5</sup> The multidimensional nature is part of the consolidation of the *human security* approach, which interrelates different problems that go beyond a particular sector of public administration. Therefore, multidimensional threats are a combination of capacities for the development of illicit and transnational activities that affect the security of States, among which are: terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime, and arms trafficking.<sup>6</sup>

The Latin American case of multidimensional threats is especially representative, identifying a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, we speak of the most peaceful region on the planet due to the absence of inter-State armed conflict, but, on the other hand, we speak of a region characterized by increasing violence and crime, which directly affects the security of millions of people.<sup>7</sup>

The multidimensional approach to *human security* is incorporated regionally within the framework of the Declaration on Security of the Americas (DSA), ratified in 2003 in Mexico City, providing a notable contribution to the conception of new threats.<sup>8</sup> However, the DSA does not specify the concept of threat, risk or any phenomenon that causes them to mutate “as well as which phenomena were grouped in each category, since it indicates a long list of items of varied nature that would have the capacity to affect States transversally.”<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the formulation and implementation of a joint security policy is difficult, noting that there is still a barrier to

---

5 Carlos Ojeda, “Amenazas Multidimensionales...”, 44.

6 Ibid., 99.

7 Hugo Palma, “Retos e implicancias de la adopción de un concepto multidimensional en la región”, in The multidimensionality of national security: challenges and challenges of the region for its implementation, (Spain: 2015), 234, [https://www.cenae.org/uploads/8/2/7/0/82706952/libro\\_seg\\_multidimensional\\_iugm.pdf](https://www.cenae.org/uploads/8/2/7/0/82706952/libro_seg_multidimensional_iugm.pdf)

8 Aracely Banegas, “Estrategias para combatir las amenazas multidimensionales en la región”, in ANEPE Research Collection N° 40, *National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies* (Chile: April 2017), 28, <https://anepe.cl/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/LIBRO-ANEPE-40.pdf>

9 Carlos Ojeda, “Amenazas Multidimensionales...”, 32.

the conceptual transition to true operability.<sup>10</sup> According to the above, the DSA has failed to overcome the declarative framework towards a true internationalization of policies that face multidimensional threats.

According to Pablo Celi, the absence of a clear and concise definition of multidimensional threats has limited the Organization of American States politically and institutionally to face them jointly, insofar as a plurality of understandings and definitions among the States of the region has prevailed, resulting in dissimilar perceptions and policies on threats and risk factors, reflected in the particularities of national defense policies.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, there is a risk of excessively securitizing social reality in the international context, as well as in national security agendas.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, although the consolidation of the *human security* approach and multidimensional threats in the Latin American region are identified, the absence of standardization in response to the perceptions of the latter has generated difficulties for international cooperation and the development of joint policies.

### **Manifestation of Multidimensional Threats**

The understanding of multifunctional threats, in their impact on the security of States and people, requires a deeper understanding of their dynamics and manifestations. In this sense, the “new” typologies of armed conflict as opposed to traditional warfare will then be addressed here, expanding the range of actors beyond States with respect to the realization of objectives by violent means, where the characteristics of multidimensional threats make a substantial contribution. To this end, the relationship between war, technology and traditional conflicts will be established, as well as their evolution towards the concepts of *irregular warfare*, *asymmetric warfare*, *hybrid warfare* and *gray zone conflicts*, respectively.

---

10 Aracely Banegas, “Estrategias para combatir las amenazas...”, 12.

11 Hugo Palma, “Retos e implicancias de la adopción...”, 17.

12 Carlos Ojeda, “Amenazas Multidimensionales...”, 17.

*Modern warfare* began with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, establishing warfare as an exclusive competence of nation-states, now known as the “monopoly of violence,” involving all traditional instruments of power: diplomatic, information, military and economic (DIME). This has expanded in the literature with the inclusion of financial elements, intelligence, and legal (DIME-FIL).<sup>13</sup>

The literature deals with the evolution of modern *warfare* in generations, the first three generations being traditional, while the fourth encompasses new modern conflicts. In this context, William Lind’s proposal helps to determine the main and distinctive characteristics of these generations. According to Lind, the first generation emphasizes the formalization of battles between states, distinguishing military from civilians; The second generation identifies with the consolidation of a culture of military obedience; the third generation stands out for its maximum expression: the *Blitz-krieg* or “blitzkrieg”, while the fourth generation corresponds to the loss of the monopoly of war by the State to “minor” organizations of a non-State character,<sup>14</sup> giving room to expressions of international crime, a generally distinctive feature of multidimensional threats, as an instrument of action.

The key element in this transition is attributed to technological progress. However, traditional warfare and its theoretical development, according to Colon, fail to grasp the complexity, motivations, and implications of the modes of struggle characteristic of non-state groups.<sup>15</sup> It leaves aside that during World War II (the most traditional of wars) there was an intensive and coordinated use at the highest level of irregular forces, of disinformation actions, and of what we could assimilate today to cyberwar. In this way, the

---

13 Department of the Army, “Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare” *Intelligence Resource Program-Federation of American Scientists* (September 2008), 1-1, <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm3-05-130.pdf>

14 William S. Lind, “Understanding Fourth Generation War”, *Homeland Security Digital Library* (September 2004), 12, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=482203>

15 Guillem Colom, “Vigencia y limitaciones de la guerra híbrida”, in *Revista Colombiana de Estudios Militares y Estratégicos* 10, *revistacientificaesmic.com* (Colombia: June 2012), <https://revistacientificaesmic.com/index.php/esmic/article/view/228/325>

emergence of multiple concepts that have been consolidated in the first decades of the XXI century is identified, in support of the establishment of solid theoretical frameworks when addressing contemporary conflicts in a *VUCA* world, overcoming the limitations of the traditional conception of war.

## Irregular Warfare

The theoretical conception of the new forms of warfare has its origins in the *unconventional realm*, with the creation of the Office of Strategic Services of the United States during World War II, studying guerrilla actions and covert operations in territories controlled or influenced by the enemy.<sup>16</sup> After the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, however, this concept took a back seat to *irregular warfare*, defined by the United States Department of Defense as the struggle between state and non-state actors for the legitimacy of their actions in a population of interest.<sup>17</sup> This theoretical conception, thus recognizes that non-State actors may present threats in the twenty-first century. Its distinctive element, however, is its focus on the person as the center of gravity of an armed conflict.<sup>18</sup>

Although the concept of *irregular warfare* establishes a break with the traditional conception and expands what has been developed around *unconventional warfare*, its use is simplified to the *modus operandi* employed by one or all the belligerents through surprise attacks, guerrilla tactics and terrorism, which favor the counterparts considered weaker, in the achievement of their political objectives.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, this limitation

---

16 Department of the Army, “Field Manual (FM) 3-05.130, Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare”, (September 2008), 1-2, <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm3-05-130.pdf>

17 U.S. Department of Defense, “Summary of the Irregular Warfare Annex to the National Defense Strategy” *media.defense.gov* (2020), 2, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Oct/02/2002510472/-1/-1/0/Irregular-Warfare-Annex-to-the-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.PDF>

18 “Department of the Army”, “Field Manual (FM) 3-05.130...”, 1-5.

19 Marine Miron, “La guerra irregular, insurgencias y cómo contrarrestarlas: Una perspectiva comparativa entre los enfoques centrados en el enemigo y en la población”, in *Revista Colombiana de Estudios Militares y Estratégicos* 17, *revistacientificoesmic.com* (Colombia: July 2019), <https://revistacientificoesmic.com/index.php/esmic/article/view/497/620>

gives irregular *warfare* a matrix character, since by describing a series of strategies and tactics it lays the foundations for the development of new definitions and concepts that deepen the contribution of this approach.

### **Asymmetric warfare**

The concept of *asymmetric warfare* is attributed to Van Creveld who, in 1991, stressed that in a conflict whose warring sides present great differences, victory can be achieved by the one considered weaker.<sup>20</sup> As early as 1975, however, Andrew Mack pointed out that military capabilities were irrelevant in determining military victory.<sup>21</sup> Taking the case of the Vietnam War as an example, Mack pointed out that governments – since they were not conflicts that meant a military defeat on their own soil – underestimated these wars categorized under the term “limited,” this in the framework of the Cold War.<sup>22</sup>

Lind’s *concept of fourth-generation warfare*, as noted above, focuses on the “minor actors” of an armed conflict, establishing a synonymy with the concept of *asymmetric warfare*. Lind, however, highlights the influence of public opinion,<sup>23</sup> where cultural, ethnic, and religious claims can be motivators of conflict.<sup>24</sup> In this way, such narratives acquire a leading role in *fourth-generation wars*.

Asymmetries are not limited to the realm of capabilities but become multifaceted given the differentiated perceptions of opposing counterparts. For example, while for the stronger party, war is presented as a “limited

---

20 Manfred E. Grautoff, “De Clausewitz a La Guerra Asimétrica: Una Aproximación Empírica”, in *Journal of International Relations, Strategy and Security* 2, *Nueva Granada Military University* (Colombia: July 2007), <https://revistas.unimilitar.edu.co/index.php/ries/article/view/194/2331>

21 Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” in *World Politics*, Vol. 27, *Cambridge University Press* (July 18, 2011): 177, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009880>

22 *Ibid.*, 184.

23 Manfred E. Grautoff, “De Clausewitz a La Guerra Asimétrica...”, 134.

24 Juan R. Sánchez et al., “Discusión epistemológica de la Guerra Asimétrica: Adopción contemporánea de la asimetría interestatal”, in *Revista Colombiana de Estudios Militares y Estratégicas*, *Estudios Militares* 10, *revistacientificaesmic.com* (Colombia: June 2012), <https://revistacientificaesmic.com/index.php/esmic/article/view/229/346>

war,” for the weaker party war is a total war, insofar as it is perceived that the survival of its community is at stake. In view of the above, it is not difficult to conceive of aspects far from internationally accepted norms as valid instruments in the actions of the weaker parties.<sup>25</sup>

In short, the concept of *asymmetric warfare* deepens the understanding of contemporary conflicts, consolidating the importance of the perceptions of populations as strategic objectives for groups with lower military capabilities (generally of a non-state nature), as well as breaking with traditional limits when it comes to concretizing these “new” forms of struggle with the inclusion of the expressions of multidimensional threats.

### **Hybrid warfare**

The concept of *asymmetric warfare*, as well as its benefits when explaining the dynamics of contemporary conflicts, encouraged the use of various alternative terms to address the same phenomenon. In this context, the concept of *hybrid warfare* was first introduced by Frank Hoffman, with the aim of bringing about a change in the way the US Army perceived military forces and their usefulness after the end of the Cold War. From this perspective, *hybrid warfare* proposes an analytical framework to explain the success of a relatively “weak” opponent against military forces that are vastly superior numerically and technologically. Thus, from the beginning, *hybrid warfare* was a new label for *asymmetric warfare*.<sup>26</sup>

According to Guillem Colom, given the need to differentiate this concept from its predecessors, the use of the concept of *hybrid war* has a double objective. On the one hand, it seeks to explain the complex nature of contemporary and future conflicts, where traditional and multidimensional threats have

---

25 Federico Aznar Fernández-Montesinos, “Repensando la guerra asimétrica”, in analysis paper, Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies IEEE (November 2018), [https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2018/DIEEEA11-2018\\_Guerra\\_Asimetrica\\_FAFM.pdf](https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2018/DIEEEA11-2018_Guerra_Asimetrica_FAFM.pdf)

26 Mikael Weissmann, “Hybrid warfare and hybrid threats today and tomorrow: towards an analytical framework”, in Journal on Baltic Security 5, *researchgate.net* (June 2019), [file:///C:/Users/53988/Downloads/Hybridwarfareandhybridthreatstodayandtomorrow\\_towardsanalyticalframework\\_WEISSMANN.pdf](file:///C:/Users/53988/Downloads/Hybridwarfareandhybridthreatstodayandtomorrow_towardsanalyticalframework_WEISSMANN.pdf)

repercussions on national defense planning. On the other hand, it seeks to warn about the danger of maintaining a traditional orientation of the armed forces in the face of these “new” forms of war.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, the concept of the “hybrid” has emerged as a way of understanding the evolution of military confrontations towards more ambiguous and uncertain forms,<sup>28</sup> in such a way that the threats associated with this logic of war are considered in the defense strategies of States. The foregoing allows us to infer that this type of conflict manifests itself after the point of no return of a crisis, and that within it there is a profuse use of all of both legal and illegal elements, constituting the power of a State, including. This includes the use of regular, non-regular and special forces, as well as disinformation operations and the different variants that consider multidimensional threats.

### **Grey Zone Conflicts**

*The concept of grey zone* conflicts are the most recent development within epistemic communities concerned with the national defense sector. Its distinguishing aspect is its location within the framework of an unstable peace; that is, the absence of a conflict as such, and focusing on a time even prior to the crisis, made important by the risk of activating a response mechanism by third parties.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, according to Josep Baqués, the emergence of the *gray zone* has the potential to render conceptually obsolete the new typologies of armed conflicts, insofar as that many of them will not even become wars.<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, being a distinctive form of the use of legal and illegal violence for the realization of specific objectives, the *gray zone* has a series of defining elements that allow a better understanding of the phenomenon

---

27 Guillem Colom, “Vigencia y limitaciones de la guerra híbrida”, 132

28 Román D. Ortiz, “El concepto de guerra híbrida y su relevancia para América Latina” in Revista de Ensayos Militares 1, *Chilean Army War Academy* (November 2015), <https://www.revistaensayosmilitares.cl/index.php/acague/article/view/110/11>

29 Josep Baqués, “Hacia una definición del concepto Gray Zone (GZ)”, GESI International Security Study Group (April 26, 2017), <https://www.seguridadinternacional.es/?q=es/content/hacia-a-definicion-of-the-concept-gray-zone-gz>

30 *Ibid.*, 8.

from different contributions in the literature. According to Javier Jordán, these defining elements are: (1) the *ambiguity* in the distinction between a peaceful relationship and an armed conflict, (2) the *multidimensional strategies* referring to the integrated use of various instruments of power (political, economic, social, etc.), (3) the *substantial interests* at stake or of high strategic value around which the conflict in question revolves, and (4) the *gradualism* reflected in the adaptation and strategic readaptation to obtain progress in the use of this form of conflict,<sup>31</sup> being able to link this last element to the popular “moral of the frog.”

From the defining characteristics on the *gray area*, by presenting interests of high strategic value, it is identified that the actions extend to revisionist states (which seek to alter the *status quo*),<sup>32</sup> taking advantage of the ambiguities of the international legal framework, as well as the “good faith” of international community. This allows them to avoid an armed response from opponents. In this context, narrative and the capacity for deterrence provide a special contribution to this type of approach. Consequently, *grey zone* conflicts present challenges for their users, one of them being the impossibility of defining a victory since there is no explicit surrender of the adversary or signatures of documents that account for it.

### **Something New Under the Sun?**

In the conception of modern conflict, the Vietnam War has been a turning point toward discussions of “new forms of conflict,” positing a “war without limitations,” which is fought outside conventions or not entirely within them. That is, the ideal conditions are created to conceive a scenario without a beginning, without fronts, without soldiers, without decisive battles and,

---

31 Javier Jordán, “El conflicto internacional en la zona gris: una propuesta teórica desde la perspectiva del realismo ofensivo”, *Spanish Journal of Political Science* (2018), <https://www.ugr.es/~jjordan/Conflicto-zona-gris.pdf>

32 Julio Soto, “La zona gris. Un desafío para la conducción política y estratégica”, in Cuaderno de Trabajo N° 6, *Center for Research and Strategic Studies CIEE* (November 2021), <https://www.publicacionesanepc.cl/index.php/cdt/article/view/939/606>

above all, without victories.<sup>33</sup> The use of *irregular warfare* is not an exclusive feature of non-State actors in the twenty-first century, since both States and political, strategic, or military considerations may resort to non-conventional methodologies for the use of violence. The identification and exploitation of all one's own advantages (material, technical and/or moral) constitute the instrument by which the military factor creates superiority in the strategic field.<sup>34</sup>

The terms *irregular*, *asymmetric*, and *hybrid warfare* are relatively synonymous, characterizing phenomena as old as history itself, but under new labels.<sup>35</sup> However, according to Weissmann, even though it is “old wine in new bottles” it is still a “good wine.” Therefore, while there is nothing new about these typologies per se, they are a useful tool for thinking about past, present, and future wars.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, “the first barrier that seems to be blurred is the traditional separation between military actions and organized crime activities,”<sup>37</sup> in associating the new typologies of conflicts to multidimensional threats, insofar as illicit activities affect the national security of a State.<sup>38</sup>

In the novel “The Lost World,” Dr. Jack Thorne, who taught applied engineering at Stanford University, notes that “academia is moving toward increasingly specialized knowledge, expressed in increasingly opaque jargon.”<sup>39</sup> This famous phrase in the work of Michael Crichton, is particularly revealing about the typologies of modern conflict, highlighting the importance of understanding the proper use of all available means by the strategist, beyond idealizing the most recently created term.

---

33 Juan R. Sánchez et al., “Discusión epistemológica de la Guerra Asimétrica...”, 96.

34 Manuel Montt Martínez, “La guerra: Su dirección política y estratégica”, in Colección de Investigaciones ANEPE N° 23, *National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies ANEPE* (Chile: August 2010), 138, <https://anepe.cl/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/LIBRO-ANEPE-23.pdf>

35 Mikael Weissmann, “Hybrid warfare and hybrid threats today and tomorrow...”, 19.

36 *Ibid.*, 19.

37 Román D. Ortiz, “El concepto de guerra híbrida...”, 134.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Michael Crichton, “El Mundo Perdido”, 1st edition (Argentina: Emecé Editores S.A, 1996), 52, <http://www.jfk.edu.ec/jfk/images/libros/pdf/Michael-Crichton---El-mundo-perdido-1-150.pdf>

## How to Deal with Multidimensional Threats?

From the undeniable coexistence of different systems organized in a logic of “systems of systems,” where an action in each context can produce consequences in others,<sup>40</sup> a *VUCA* world characterized by a deep interdependence demands the adaptation of organizations responsible for addressing multidimensional threats in their various fields. In this context, operational foresight and systemic analysis of reality are presented as a comprehensive and unavoidable approach to strategic planning, since prospective work is a tool to help in a decision-making process for the present context, which aims to define an attitude (either the prevention or the provocation of a desired change), in order to adopt actions against threats and / or opportunities in the future.<sup>41</sup>

Foresight -through strategic anticipation- seeks “the ability to detect what may happen in the future, before it happens,”<sup>42</sup> so that decision making allows the organization to build the most favorable scenario for the mission and vision of the same, in this case, national and human security. Operational foresight is a mandatory approach, continuous and that offers an increasingly reduced time horizon, given the *VUCA* characterization of the world in which the organization operates.

## Conclusions

This article has addressed multidimensional threats in a general fashion, as a derivation of the *human security* approach, as well as examining their manifestations through the “new” types of conflict, whether in their asymmetric, hybrid or gray zone variants. In addition, the usefulness of

---

40 Jay Forrester, “World Dynamics”, 2nd Edition (England: Wright-Allen Press, 1973), 1, [https://monoskop.org/images/d/dc/Forrester\\_Jay\\_World\\_Dynamics\\_2nd\\_ed\\_1973.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/d/dc/Forrester_Jay_World_Dynamics_2nd_ed_1973.pdf)

41 Carlos Ojeda, “Los trabajos prospectivos: Una herramienta para la toma de decisiones”, *es.scribd.com*. (April 25, 2011), 1, <https://es.scribd.com/document/53755770/Art-Los-Trabajos-Prospectivos>

42 Eduardo Balbi, “Construyendo el Futuro: Metodología Prospectiva. Método MEYEP de Prospectiva Estratégica” *Network Scenarios and Strategy in Latin America EyE* (May 2014), 2, [https://archivo.cepal.org/pdfs/GuiaProspectiva/Balbi2014\\_NvoMEYEP\\_COMPLETO\\_final.pdf](https://archivo.cepal.org/pdfs/GuiaProspectiva/Balbi2014_NvoMEYEP_COMPLETO_final.pdf)

these concepts to address contemporary conflicting phenomena has been reflected, establishing that these typologies are not new and can complicate the analysis of the international reality.

Similarly, this work has been established how multidimensional threats are closely related to the blurring between armed conflicts and illegal activities, thereby affecting the security of States, individuals, and armed forces. In the context of the fight against this scourge, the main components of operational foresight have been introduced, as a systemic approach for continuous anticipation in support of prevention or pro-action, as a guide for strategic planning of organizations.

Finally, this work has been made clear that the use of unconventional and multidimensional elements, according to their time, have been an ever-present phenomenon in the history of human conflict and political, strategic, and military leadership, therefore, “nothing new under the sun.”

### **About the authors:**

**Carlos Arturo Ojeda Bennett** - *National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies*

*Army Colonel (R) specialized in operational foresight, security studies and crisis management. PhD in Political Science and Master in Foresight in International Affairs from the University of Paris V. Master in Higher Diplomatic Education (International Relations) from the Center for Diplomatic and Strategic Studies of Paris, as well as Master in Planning and Strategic Management from the War Academy of the Chilean Army. He has advanced his studies at the Institute of Higher Studies of National Defense in France, the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, and the United States Naval Graduate School. He has been Director of the Center for Military Studies and Research of the Chilean Army. He is also co-creator and current head of the Prospective and Simulation Laboratory, full professor, and member of the faculty of the doctoral program of ANEPE, adjunct professor at the William J. Perry Center and lecturer at the Inter-American Defense College.*

**Fabián Andrés Cabello Alfaro** - *Institute of International Studies, University of Chile*

*He holds a degree in international studies from the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities and the Institute of International Studies of the University of Chile. He is an aspirant to the professional title of Internationalist. He completed his professional practice at the Prospective and Simulation Laboratory of ANEPE in 2022. He has served as an international security analyst in the Directorate of International and Human Security of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile as an intern for part of 2021. He was also part of the Documentation Centre for the SOM-1 (Senior Officials Meeting) during APEC Chile 2019, between the months of February and March 2019.*

*CHAPTER IV:*

**ARMED FORCES  
IN THE NEW  
STRATEGIC  
SCENARIO**

CHALLENGES  
AND THREATS TO  
**SECURITY** IN  
LATIN AMERICA

# **WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA AS A RESPONSE TO SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THREATS IN LATIN AMERICA**

*Fabiana Sofia Perera<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

*Latin America faces a number of challenges to security and defense. A focus on women's participation in the defense sector in Latin America should be viewed as a way to address these new challenges, rather than as a challenge itself. The region has made some progress towards addressing women's participation in security and defense, but there are still areas of opportunity.*

**Key words:** *Gender, Women, Peace, Security.*

## **Introduction**

As described in this book, Latin America faces a number of unprecedented defense challenges, including increasing demands on the Armed Forces to defend against unconventional and new threats, protect the environment and vulnerable populations, and act in the cyber domain. These challenges are arising as many countries in the region grapple with economic landscapes changed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which impose their own constraints. This chapter addresses the issue of the inclusion of women and gender perspectives in the defense sector in Latin America in the context of these challenges. It provides a background on efforts to include women in security and defense at the international and regional levels. It argues that a focus on women's participation in the defense sector in

---

<sup>1</sup> The author gratefully acknowledges excellent research assistance provided by Ms. Nicole Benalcázar-Pavlik

Latin America should be viewed as a way to address these new challenges, rather than as a challenge itself.

The chapter begins by outlining the origin of the ideas and commitments around gender inclusion and gender representation in the defense sector, with reference to the relevant academic literature. Recognizing that existing scholarship on this issue as it relates to Latin America is limited, the chapter goes on to describe the status of the issue in the region. It summarizes countries' achievements on gender integration in the Armed Forces as well as the institutional commitments that guide these efforts. The chapter concludes by providing thoughts on how the inclusion of women and gender perspectives in defense in Latin America might lead to more effectiveness in addressing the challenges described in detail in the other chapters in this volume.

### **Origin of WPS**

The United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted UNSCR 1325 on October 31, 2000. The resolution is the reference point for efforts to increase the participation of women in security and defense under the banner of “women, peace, and security” initiatives. Though the phrase “women, peace, and security” does not appear in the text of the resolution itself, the resolution is the origin of the “women, peace, and security” (WPS) agenda. Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury who served as Under-Secretary General of the United Nations (2002–07) and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to UN (1996–2001) at the time the resolution was adopted, has spoken about the name of the resolution. Ambassador Chowdhury commented that “the actual title proposed for this resolution by us is “Women and Peace and Security” with two “ands”. But one of them was dropped and a comma was added.” He added that “the original intent in calling it Women and Peace and Security, however, was to frame the concept as two areas: “women” as one, and “peace and security” as the other – not as three: Women, Peace, and Security, as is now done in the context of the WPS

agenda.”<sup>2</sup> The idea expressed by Ambassador Chowdhury is manifested in WPS activities which can be described as fitting into three groups: programs that focus on women’s participation, efforts aimed at peacekeeping and peace agreements, and the inclusion of gender perspectives in defense issues. This chapter falls within the first group because it focuses narrowly on the issue of women’s participation in security and defense, even though both of the other issues mentioned are also present and relevant in the region.

UNSCR 1325 then sought to address what has increasingly been understood as two separate issues: the lack of participation of women in peace processes, peace operations, and defense in general, and the lack of awareness of the different needs of protection that women and men have in conflict situations. The resolution was introduced by Namibia during its tenure as President of the UNSCR. The introduction of a resolution on this subject matter in this forum by a non-permanent member of the Council was a great achievement for Namibia and non-permanent Security Council members.

Table 1: United Nations Resolutions related to WPS

UNSCR (Year)	Summary	Sponsors
1820 (2009)	Declares that sexual violence, including rape, is a weapon of war and “can constitute a war crime, crime against humanity, or constitutive act with respect to genocide.” Calls for military training with respect to preventing and responding to sexual violence and calls for increased deployment of women in peace operations.	50 sponsors, including Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Panama

<sup>2</sup> Saira Yamin, “UNSCR 1325 on Women and Peace and Security: Assessment and Recommendations”, *The Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies* (Honolulu, USA: February 2021), [https://apcss.org/nexus\\_articles/unscr-1325-on-women-and-peace-and-security-assessment-and-recommendations/](https://apcss.org/nexus_articles/unscr-1325-on-women-and-peace-and-security-assessment-and-recommendations/)

1888 (2009)	Builds on UNSCR 1820 in reaffirming that sexual violence is an obstacle to international peace and security and intensifies war. Calls for the appointment of a Special Representative on sexual violence in war and for the deployment a team of experts where sexual violence takes place.	68 sponsors, including Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Panama
1889 (2010)	Addresses post-conflict peacebuilding and women's participation in such processes. Requests the creation and development of indicators to measure the implementation of UNSCR 1325.	21 sponsors, including Costa Rica and Mexico
1960 (2011)	Calls for an end to sexual violence in armed conflict and urges the Secretary-General to list those credibly accused of sexual violence in annual reports. Calls for referral of those accused of sexual violence to the ICC and UN Sanctions Committee as well as reparations for victims.	68 sponsors, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, and Peru
2106 (2013)	Emphasizes the implementation of obligations/ initiatives rather than creating new ones. Addresses women's role in combating sexual violence and supports resorting to justice system in cases of sexual abuse.	46 sponsors, including Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Guatemala
2122 (2013)	Emphasizes addressing root causes of armed conflict and security threats women face. Lays out approaches to increase women's participation in peace and security.	46 sponsors, including Argentina, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Uruguay
2242 (2015)	Urges evaluation of progress of the WPS agenda and calls for more funding of gender-responsive training, analysis, and programs. Emphasizes the need to collaborate with civil society.	72 sponsors, including Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Jamaica, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela
2467 (2019)	Urges member states to address the root causes of sexual violence and to create a survivor-centered approach when addressing this issue. Encourages states to challenge notions of male invulnerability in these situations and advocates for justice for women who are victims of sexual violence in the form of reparations and strengthened criminal law.	Germany

2493 (2019)	Urges member states to implement all measures of the WPS agenda and increase the number of women in peace and security processes. Encourages member states to promote women's rights (economic, political, and civil) and increase funding of WPS programs, including aid during and post-conflict.	22 sponsors, including Uruguay
----------------	---	--------------------------------

Moreover, UNSCR 1325 recognized that how peace was implemented could have different effects for men's and women's respective access to resources and power. That is, "peace" does not automatically have the same "quality" for women as it does for men.<sup>3</sup> Thereby, there was a need for gender mainstreaming, that is, adapting all work to create peace, ensuring that men and women benefited equally. Hence, participation, protection, and gender mainstreaming have become three themes in the implementation of the resolution. Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, 9 resolutions have been adopted on these themes. Table 1 summarizes the UN Security Council resolutions on the theme of women, peace, and security.

### Why is WPS important?

The arguments for the importance of the issues addressed in UNSCR 1325 come from three different areas corresponding broadly to Aristotle's three types of persuasion: emotional appeals, emphasis on democratic norms, and arguments about the effectiveness of the military. Emotional appeals focus on the role of women in society. Appeals like the one made by UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson asking that we "finally recognize the role and power of women to help us build a peaceful world"<sup>4</sup> fall into this camp. Other examples include appeals by male leaders discussing what they would want for their daughters or their sisters, and portrayals of women as caregivers. Emotional appeals are similar to persuasion based on emotion

<sup>3</sup> Louise Olsson and Theodora-Ismene Gizelis, "Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325", (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, "'Wherever There Is Conflict, Women Must Be Part of the Solution,' Security Council Told in Day-Long Debate Urging Their Inclusion in Restoring Fractured Societies", *Meetings Coverage and Press Releases* (November 30, 2012), <https://press.un.org/en/2012/sc10840.doc.htm> (Accessed July 5, 2022).

as described by Aristotle. The aim is to call attention to the role women play in security issues by associating words like “peaceful” with women.

There is also an ethos argument for WPS, that is, an argument based on shared values. The argument for the importance of WPS from this perspective focuses on how central WPS aims are for a successful democracy. Michelle Bachelet, former president of Chile and current UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, often argues for WPS by appealing to democratic values. For example: “Decisions on peace that do not reflect women’s voices, realities and rights are not sustainable. Addressing discrimination, inequality, denials of women’s civic space and gender-based violence must be a priority for building peace.”<sup>5</sup> The European Parliament lists “equality between women and men” as one of the values shared by its member states.<sup>6</sup>

Lastly, perhaps the most persuasive argument regarding WPS is a logic-based argument, an appeal to the importance of WPS for effectiveness in security and defense. Research into the participation of women has yielded important insights. According to an analysis of 181 peace agreements between 1989 and 2011, when women are involved in negotiating peace agreements, these agreements are 35 % more likely to last 15 years or more.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, a study of forty peace negotiations since the end of the Cold War reveals that agreements are more likely to be reached when women hold significant influence in the peace-making process.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, when women exerted significant influence in negotiations, agreements were more likely to be implemented.<sup>9</sup> From the 1998 Good Friday Agreement

---

5 United Nations News, “Bachelet: Women’s participation forging peace worldwide, ‘vastly worse’ post pandemic”, *Global perspective Human stories* (June 18, 2022), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/01/1109992> (Accessed July 5, 2022).

6 European Parliament Liaison Office in Washington DC, “Shared Values”, *European Parliament* <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/unitedstates/en/eu-us-relations/shared-values> (Accessed July 21, 2022).

7 Marie O’Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin and Thania Paffenholz, “Reimagining Peacemaking: Women’s Roles in Peace Processes”, *International Peace Institute* (New York: June 2015), <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IPI-E-pub-Reimagining-Peacemaking.pdf>

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

to the 2006 peace talks in Uganda, real-life successes in securing peace affirm again and again the value and necessity of women’s participation in the peace process.<sup>10</sup>

## **WPS in Latin America**

Though the region celebrates a number of heroines for their contributions to early battles for independence – María Remedios and Juana Azurduy in Argentina, Maria Quitéria de Jesus in Brazil, Manuela Beltrán in Colombia – the contributions of these celebrated heroines two centuries ago didn’t translate into immediate gains for women in security and defense. Notwithstanding the periods of inaction, Latin American countries have embraced UNSCR1325. Leaders from nearly every country in the region and of every political orientation have voiced their support for the goals laid out in the UN document over twenty years ago. Most notably, since 2000, women in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, and Chile have been elected president. Women have made even more significant inroads as Defense Ministers: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela have all appointed women to this post.

Though the election and inclusion of women in top jobs is a very visible indicator of progress in the region, often these very celebrated milestones don’t necessarily reflect progress (or lack thereof) being made in security and defense more broadly. There are two widely used indicators of progress on WPS: the adoption of a National Action Plan (NAP), a requirement under UNSCR1325, and the percentage of women participating in security and defense-related activities, like participation in the Armed Forces, peacekeeping missions, and peace processes, when applicable.

In the region, six countries have adopted a National Action Plan. Three more are currently engaged in an effort to draft their first NAP (see Table 2).

---

<sup>10</sup> United States Agency for International Development, “The United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security”, *usaid.gov* (June 2016), <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/National%20Action%20Plan%20on%20Women%2C%20Peace%2C%20and%20Security.pdf> (Accessed July 5, 2022).

The regional leader in drafting a NAP was Chile, which adopted one in 2009, coming even before Canada (2010) and the United States (2011). Recognizing deficiencies in women’s participation in peace and security, Chile’s NAP calls for a gender perspective when analyzing conflict prevention as well as during and following the conflicts themselves. It emphasizes the protection of women’s rights during and post-conflict, particularly protection from sexual violence in accordance with the UN’s Zero Tolerance Policy. It also stresses the importance of increased women’s participation in peacemaking and security decisions, notably in overseas peacekeeping missions.

Table 2: National Action Plan Status in Latin America and the United States

National Action Plan					
N°	Countries	Year	N°	Countries	Year
1	Argentina	2015	11	Guatemala	2017
2	Bolivia	none	12	Honduras	none
3	Brazil	2017	13	Mexico	2021
4	Chile	2009	14	Nicaragua	none
5	Colombia	none (i)	15	Panama	none
6	Costa Rica	in development	16	Paraguay	2013
7	Cuba	none	17	Peru	none
8	Dominican Republic	none	18	United States	2011
9	Ecuador	in development	19	Uruguay	in development
10	El Salvador	2017	20	Venezuela	none

(i) Ministry of Defense published its own plan

In addition to its progress on creating a framework for WPS, Latin America has also made some progress on increasing female participation in its Armed Forces, though overall rates of participation remain low. On average, female participation in the Armed Forces in the region is 4 %, a number far below parity and below the 30 % threshold of participation needed for minority

participation to be significant.<sup>11</sup> Though nearly every country has opened all its forces and specialties to women, participation remains low and uneven. Across Latin America, as is true of other regions, the Air Forces boost the highest rates of female participation (28.7% in the Dominican Republic, the highest of any service in any country in the region.) Table 3 summarizes the rates of female participation in the Armed Forces in Latin America. Most countries declare intentions to increase rates of participation in their NAPs, and Mexico set a threshold of at least 15%.

Table 3: Women’s Participation Rates in Latin American Armed Forces (2008, 2016, 2020)<sup>12</sup>

Participation of Women in Armed Forces								
Country	Armed Force		Army		Navy		Air Force	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Argentina	17.3%	13,507	14%	6,930	19%	3,177	26%	3,400
Bolivia(2)	2%	663	2%	N/A	1%	N/A	2%	N/A
Brazil	7.6%	25,507	4%	8,110	13%	1,552	15%	9,848
Chile	10%	6,172	9.8%	3,971	8.4%	1,601	3.16%	600
Colombia	6%	3,654	3.75	1,512	7.9%	899	18.2%	1,243
Costa Rica	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cuba	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dominican Republic	20.8%	12,309	15.5%	4,420	21.2%	2,540	28.7%	5,349
Ecuador	2.7%	1,173	1.73%	462	4.28%	429	4.21%	282
El Salvador(2)	5.46%	1,312	6.5%(1)	1,070(1)	5.1%(1)	34(1)	10.3%(1)	72(1)
Guatemala	7.7%(3)	1,704(3)	7.7%(3)	1,395	6.7%(2)	122(2)	1%(2)	187(2)

11 Drude Dahlerup, “The Story of the Theory of Critical Mass” Politics and Gender, *Cambridge University Press* (Cambridge: November 28, 2006), 511-522, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X0624114X>

12 Marcela Donadio, “Women in the Armed and Police Forces”, *RESDAL* (Buenos Aires: 2010), <https://www.resdal.org/genero-y-paz/women-in-the-armed-and-police-forces.pdf>; Marcela Donadio, “A Comparative Atlas of Defence in Latin America and Caribbean”, *RESDAL* (Buenos Aires: 2016), <https://www.resdal.org/ing/atlas-2016.html>; Women in International Security, “Enhancing Security in Latin America and the Caribbean”, *WIS* (2020), <https://wiisglobal.org/programs/enhancing-security-lac/> (Accessed July 21, 2022).

Honduras(2)	4.2%	642	2.5%	373	1.4%	217	0.34%	52
Mexico	12.4%	37,958	11.8%	25,395	14%	12,100	11.6%	463
Paraguay	8.6%(2)	908(2)	N/A	129	N/D	55	N/D	48
Peru	10%	7,830(3)	9%(1)	N/A	7%	N/A	1%	N/A
Trinidad and Tobago	14.3%	726	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Uruguay	11%	2,465	10%	1,432	13%	595	17%	438
Venezuela(2)	21%	76,860	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Panama	N/A	N/A	National Aeronaval Service		National Borders Service		National Migration Service	
			9.3%	367	38.9%	566	N/A	129

Unnumbered: Women in International Security (WIIS)

(1) Came from RESDAL 2008

(2) Came from RESDAL 2016

(3) Calculated using a mix of RESDAL and WIIS information

N/A: Not available

In the context of eroding trust in the Armed Forces and the challenges faced by the security and defense sectors in Latin America, increasing female participation should be viewed as a way to directly address these issues. A number of countries in Latin America, including Peru and Mexico have tried to increase the number of female police officers as a way to improve trust and decrease perceptions of corruption.<sup>13</sup> Though the Armed Forces in the region generally enjoy high levels of trust,<sup>14</sup> increasing female participation could further fortify this perception. Maintaining high levels of trust will be important for security and defense forces as they prepare to face new and ever more complex challenges.

13 Marie Chêne, “Anti-Corruption and Police Reform”, *Transparency International: The Anti-Corruption Knowledge Hub* (Berlin: May 31, 2010), [https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/helpdesk/247\\_Anti\\_corruption\\_police\\_reform.pdf](https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/helpdesk/247_Anti_corruption_police_reform.pdf); Sabrina Karim, “Madame Officer”, *Americas Quarterly* (August 9, 2011) <https://www.americasquarterly.org/fulltextarticle/madame-officer/> (Accessed July 20, 2022); UN Women, “Women’s Police Stations in Latin America Case Study: An Entry Point for Stopping Violence and Gaining Access to Justice (Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Nicaragua)”, *Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women and Girls* (New York: 2011), [https://www.endvawnow.org/uploads/browser/files/security\\_wps\\_case\\_study.pdf](https://www.endvawnow.org/uploads/browser/files/security_wps_case_study.pdf)

14 Daniel Montalvo, “Do you trust your armed forces?” *AmericasBarometer Insights: 2009* (Vanderbilt University: 2009), <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/10827en.pdf> (Accessed July 20, 2022).

Both indicators have shortcomings. National Action Plans indicate a high-level commitment to WPS at a specific point in time but don't necessarily come with enforcement and accountability mechanisms. Rates of participation are indicative of one of the objectives of UNSCR1325 and are singled out as an objective in many NAPs, such as in Brazil's NAP published in 2017.<sup>15</sup> Rates of participation in specific missions like peacekeeping are in turn affected by broader dynamics. Gender equality, whether or not a state is democratic, population size, modernization, and the size and location of a mission all impact the likelihood that a country chooses to deploy female personnel in peacekeeping missions.<sup>16</sup> States might also be compelled to increase women's participation in peacekeeping missions to defend their reputations, set an example for what women's military participation should look like, or out of a sense of obligation to the international community.<sup>17</sup>

### **Operationalizing WPS to Face Security and Defense Challenges in Latin America**

The challenges facing the defense and security sectors in Latin America are multifaceted and complex. Meeting the challenges will require that every country in the region take careful account and consideration of its resources and marshal them appropriately. As such, women should be considered as an asset that can play an important role in addressing these challenges. Rather than treating the WPS agenda as a separate issue, it should be thought of as a way to strengthen the security and defense sectors to better counter threats and guarantee the safety of the citizens of the country and the integrity of its territory.

Consider the challenge of cybersecurity, an issue very important to the security and defense sectors in the region. Cyberdefense is a mission

---

15 Government of Brazil, "National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security", *Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão* (2017), [http://funag.gov.br/loja/download/1220-PNA\\_ingles\\_final.pdf](http://funag.gov.br/loja/download/1220-PNA_ingles_final.pdf) (Accessed July 20, 2022).

16 Kerry F. Crawford, James H. Lebovic and Julia M. Macdonald, "Explaining the Variation in Gender Composition of Personnel Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations", *Armed Forces and Society* (2014), 258-281, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48609188>

17 Ibid.

area that is well-poised for increased female participation. In the United States, this appears clear to the U.S. military. The U.S. Department of Defense created a television ad titled “hackers” that appears to be aimed at increasing female participation in the cyber domain. The ad shows a young woman in a military uniform confidently working at a computer. The young woman is then shown explaining to her mom that she wants to do this because she “wants to take on the world’s toughest hackers.” She then asks her mom for support. The tagline for the ad is “Their Success Tomorrow Begins With Your Support Today.” In the U.S., currently 24 % of the cyber defense force is made up of women,<sup>18</sup> a rate higher than any of the uniformed services. The U.S. Air Force, which boasts the highest female participation out of the services, has a female participation rate of 20.2 %. The goal of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency is to achieve equal participation by women and men in cybersecurity by 2030.<sup>19</sup>

There are examples of success in nearly every mission area in every country in the world. In 2007, an all-female police unit deployed to the UN Peacekeeping mission in Liberia, the first of its kind. This group of women, all from India, played a large role in addressing security issues the country faced, particularly sexual and gender-based violence, passing on their knowledge to the Liberian national police and instructing Liberian women in self-defense.<sup>20</sup> As a result of this deployment, Liberian women were inspired to join the country’s security sector: 17 % percent of Liberia’s security sector is made up of women as compared to 6 % nine years before.<sup>21</sup>

---

18 Nicole Sganga, “Women make up just 24% of the cyber workforce. CISA wants to fix that,” *CBS News* (March 20, 2022), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cyber-workforce-cisa-director-jen-easterly/> (Accessed July 20, 2022).

19 Ibid.

20 UN News, “Hailed as ‘role models,’ all-female Indian police unit departs UN mission in Liberia”, *United Nations* (February 12, 2016), <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/hailed-role-models-all-female-indian-police-unit-departs-un-mission-liberia> (Accessed July 20, 2022).

21 Ibid.

## **Conclusions**

Latin America is on track to add many more examples of success in WPS. To continue to make progress in this area, countries in the region must understand and accept the importance of the WPS agenda as described in the effectiveness arguments for it. It is the logos argument, the effectiveness argument, that matters most for security and defense. Progress on the WPS agenda and on the inclusion of women in the security and defense sectors especially, will lead to progress in addressing the challenges facing the region.

## **About the author:**

**Fabiana Sofia Perera** - *William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies / Modern War Institute*

*Fabiana Sofía Perera is an Associate Professor at the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies and a Non-Resident Fellow at the Modern War Institute of the United States Military Academy at West Point. Prior to joining the Perry Center, Fabiana worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Under Secretary for Policy, Western Hemisphere Affairs. Fabiana has a master's degree in Latin American Studies from Georgetown University and a Ph.D. in Political Science from George Washington University.*

# NEW COMPETENCES OF THE MINISTRIES OF DEFENSE

*Raúl Oswaldo Jarrín Román*

## Summary

*Within the panorama of international security governance, classical theories of geopolitics have been revitalized, and others have been incorporated, including territorial encroachment and the security dilemma. The lessons learned from Russia's invasion of Ukraine accentuate the Westphalian foundations of states and the importance of geostrategic assessment for determining strategic objectives that support national interests and the foundations of collective security. At the regional geo-economic level, the importance of socio-economic factors in the democratic development of countries, as well as the necessary participation of the armed forces in the prevention of political conflicts and crises stand out. Finally, the correlation of security and political conflict is demonstrated throughout their evolution, from deterrence to stability operations, in order to achieve resilience and resolve conflict in an environment of order and social peace.*

**Keywords:** *Governance, Territorialization, Conflict, Crisis, Deterrence.*

## Introduction: Restructuring the Community of Nations

The world is engrossed in President Putin's decision to conduct a "special military operation," planned and cloaked in a cover of deception to conceal an invasion that violates international law. The economic-financial sanctions, including the cutting of access to the Swift system for Russia's commercial transactions with the world and the suspension of the certification of the North Stream2 gas pipeline, did not limit the aggressiveness of Russia's invasion on Ukraine, mainly because of the boomerang effect that characterizes this type of deterrence mechanisms. However, the political

objectives set by Putin, in the face of NATO's eastward expansion, were to achieve the security which did not materialize at the Bucharest Summit in 2008, when Georgia and Ukraine wanted to join NATO.

After participating in the Summit, Putin saw the need to form a buffer region along its borders with NATO and influence the countries of the former USSR. In that sense, Russia aspires to form a front, from the North Sea to the Caspian Sea, including the Black Sea, following the border limits not only of the Baltic countries, but also of Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, to which its military bases of Kaliningrad in the Baltic and Transnistria in Moldova are incorporated, connecting the Sevastopol base of Crimea with that of Tartus in Syria. Another of Putin's political objectives was the liberation of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, in addition to the demilitarization and "denazification" of Ukraine, based on ethnic, cultural, and historical arguments, and on the Treaty of Minsk of 2015, in which decentralization and autonomy were granted to the Donbas region. The third objective relates to Crimea, illegally annexed in 2014 through a Russian-led referendum. However, the UN, through a binding resolution, declared the annexation illegal, as well as invalidating the referendum, for not having had the authorization of Ukraine, thus categorically supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity.

As can be seen, war is the result of an international crisis that is still active, since a crisis, according to Michael Dobry, is not reduced to an event or a system of automatic causality.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the present crisis will only be overcome through a political negotiation that makes it possible to overcome the breakdown of the existing strategic rivalries between the powers, where Ukraine is but a simple element in the framework of the disorder of the international system. In this regard, Yves Lacoste points out that geopolitics, in the current era, is interpreted as the power rivalry between States and other actors in each space.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the war between Russia

---

1 Michael Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, (Paris: Presses de Sciences, 2009).

2 Yves Lacoste, «Pour une histoire critique des idées géopolitiques», in *Les Grands théoriciens de la géopolitique*, by Florian Louis, (Paris: Press Univesitaires, 2006), 20.

and Ukraine involves not only these two countries, but also the major world powers, amid a crisis over the redistribution of global power.

The strategic panorama is a cumulative consequence of the dynamic shift in the world's center of gravity from West to East, in the face of the poor performance of the United States as a superpower since 1990.<sup>3</sup> Seen in this light, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has not been a surprise; the emergence of a new power and the friction that is generated with the dominant power, known as the Thucydides Trap, has been studied by the Harvard University School of Government referring to the current situation between China and the United States,<sup>4</sup> but metaphorically also applicable to the case of Russia and NATO. Another related theory is that of the security dilemma, according to which the development of capabilities of one State can be interpreted as a threat to another, depending on the interests and problems between them.

The pragmatism of both theories, typical of *realpolitik*, deserves to be discussed based on the original approach of the vision of Woodrow Wilson who, after the devastation of the First World War, sought the construction of new institutions that would allow the peaceful resolution of international conflicts: "The members of the League of Nations must implement not a balance of power, but a community of power, not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace."<sup>5</sup> This Kantian-inspired approach warns that if a country violates the principles of the organization and uses force, it should be considered an aggressor, and the members of the organization should unite to resist and confront the aggressor. In this fashion, collective security functions, as in the case of NATO, to act when the rules of international peace have been violated, opposing all offensive behavior. Obviously, however, Article 5 of the NATO Charter limits intervention in the current war because Ukraine is not a member of the organization.

When this war ends, it will be convenient to return to Wilson's proposal for a new approach to world order that will ensure peace and reduce its fragility. In this

---

3 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision*, (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

4 Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (New York: First Mariner Books, 2017).

5 Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, (New York: Penguin, 2015), 262.

context, it will be necessary to reorganize the UN Security Council to achieve better representativeness and ensure that the pre-eminence of UN decisions is guaranteed, rather than the supremacy of the veto of its permanent members (China, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Russia). For the moment, the UN has achieved a reform that requires explaining the reasons for the veto issued, representing a breakthrough in peace and security issues.

The *governance* of international security also requires the development and sharing of the rules and standards of relations in the international system. Part of this process is being fulfilled by Finland and Sweden to join NATO,<sup>6</sup> while Switzerland reviews its historical neutrality as part of its renewed strategic vision. It also requires confidence in both cooperative security and open diplomacy that encourages international law and human rights for the solution of problems and the preservation of peace. All these adjustments in strategic vision correspond to the advisory role of defense ministries to heads of state, as is the case of Germany, which will invest 100 billion euros to strengthen its armed forces, raising defense spending to more than 2 % of its GDP.<sup>7</sup>

The war in Ukraine has imparted an important lesson in morale, unity, and determination in the defense of sovereignty and territorial integrity. It has also recovered the essence of the role of the State created with the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, since it has highlighted that sovereignty and territorial integrity are an essential part of national security, and that the State must have the capacity to defend its interests and exercise control over its territory. Although borders are fundamental geographical spaces in terms of trade, effective control of the territory must avoid *processes of territorialization* in which actors gradually seek to occupy geographical spaces to achieve a certain legitimacy, and subsequently demand the

---

6 Vitoria Wilson, “Finlandia y Suecia se integrarán en la OTAN en junio, según ‘The Times’”, *The World News* (April 11, 2022), <https://theworldnews.net/es-news/finlandia-y-suecia-se-integraran-en-la-otan-en-junio-segun-the-times>

7 EP International, “Alemania destinará 100.000 millones de euros a fortalecer sus Fuerzas Armadas”, *Europapress* (Berlin: February 27, 2022), <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-alemania-destinara-100000-millones-euros-fortalecer-fuerzas-armadas-20220227123706.html> (Accessed April 20, 2022.)

recognition of sovereignty over these territories,<sup>8</sup> as has happened in both the case of Georgia and Crimea, and in the Donbas in Ukraine.

Within this context, a function of defense management is the determination of defense policy, expressed in *White Papers*.<sup>9</sup> This process, based on an evaluation of the geostrategic environment, is carried out every four years to identify changes in the international environment, and define the strategic objectives of national defense. This policy should be periodically readjusted to guide the functioning of the defense system and the direction of national defense policy by the Minister of Defense.<sup>10</sup>

### **Latin American geostrategic and geoeconomic context**

Historically, Latin America has been recognized as a stable hemisphere since the likelihood of interstate conflict is minimal. In this region, although there are some territorial differences, the priority is focused on addressing the strategic interests that destabilize the countries that make it up. Therefore, governments seek political formulas to achieve greater economic and social development that ensures the well-being of the population.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the disregard of Latin America by the United States has caused for powers such as Russia and China to find opportunities to intervene and obtain benefits through commercial, financial, and military exchange, with manifest geopolitical interest and influence in the region.

Latin America's geographical position, resources, markets, and infrastructure deficit offer great geostrategic and geoeconomic opportunities to powers such as Russia and China, which, through a skillful

---

8 Alexander C. Diener and Josua Hagen, *Borders: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

9 In Anglo-Saxon countries, the Defense Policy is known as NSS; in other countries, it is called *White Papers*, *Livre Blanc*, or *Livro Branco*,

10 See: Raúl Oswaldo Jarrín Román, "Gobernanza de la Política de la Defensa y Seguridad: Ecuador 2017-2021," at Perry Center Occasional Paper, *William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies* (Washington DC: January 2022), [https://www.williamjerrycenter.org/sites/default/files/publication\\_associated\\_files/Gobernanza%20de%20la%20Política%20de%20Defensa%20y%20Seguridad.pdf](https://www.williamjerrycenter.org/sites/default/files/publication_associated_files/Gobernanza%20de%20la%20Política%20de%20Defensa%20y%20Seguridad.pdf)

11 Macarena Vidal Liy, "China y Venezuela una relación basada en deuda", *The Country* (Beijing: January 29, 2019), [https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/01/25/actualidad/1548438622\\_696886.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/01/25/actualidad/1548438622_696886.html)

*soft* power diplomacy developed during international confrontation and instability, have been positioning themselves in this region. Russia, for instance, wants the Caribbean to become a “geostrategic pivot” on which it would swing north, if necessary. The overflights of the TU-160 bombers and the presence of warships in Nicaragua and Venezuela, as was the case during the anniversary of the Nicaraguan Naval Force,<sup>12</sup> are clear examples of this posture, to which we can add various economic, military, and technological cooperation agreements of Russia with Cuba, Nicaragua,<sup>13</sup> and Venezuela.

In the case of China, its geoeconomic ambition is broader, more pragmatic, and forceful, achieved through a strategy of investment in infrastructure (*soft power*) in Latin American countries. This strategy provides great development opportunities for Chinese companies, ensuring them access to the region’s oil and raw materials. All this pursued within the framework of Chinese foreign policy, as established in its 2016 *White Paper* toward Latin America, and in its *One Belt One Road* initiative. China’s investments in Latin America have reached 13.8 %, ranking second in the world, after its investments in Asia.<sup>14</sup> However, these investments have generated certain obligations for countries. Venezuela for example, received 62 billion dollars, of which 5 % is charged in oil at a rate of 437 thousand barrels/day. Ecuador, which, to date, owes 5 billion dollars of the 20 billion received, had to deliver 120 million barrels of oil until 2024 for the payment of such debt.

In addition, China has signed 47 commercial, financial and transportation agreements with Panama,<sup>15</sup> has installed a radar in Neuquén (Argentina)

---

12 Elizabeth Romero, “Ortega recorre buque ruso anclado en Nicaragua”, *The Press* (Nicaragua: August 15, 2013), <https://www.laprensani.com/2013/08/15/politica/158706-ortega-recorre-buque-ruso-anclado-en-nicaragua> (Accessed April 16, 2022.)

13 Nicaragua withdrew from the OAS, citing the disqualification of its elections. It is the second country along with Venezuela to withdraw from the OAS.

14 Frank Tetart, *Grand Atlas*, (Paris: Radio France Internationale, 2015), 18.

15 Agreements between China and Panama, signed on December 3, 2018, which aim to connect the Silk Road project with Panama, in view of the great usefulness of the expansion of the port and its connection with the Atlantic ports of North America, Latin America and Europe.

for the purpose of interplanetary exploration, a satellite control and data collection (possibly for military use), and has been building the mega deep-water port of Chancay, in Peru, with an investment of 3 billion dollars. Likewise, China is planning the construction of a 1,400-kilometer bi-oceanic railway to connect Brazil with Peru, with an investment of 11 billion dollars, as well as the construction of a bi-oceanic river land canal in Nicaragua for 50 billion dollars. With all these projects of financial investment and infrastructure construction, China tries to cover the deficit of South American infrastructure, generating dependence and reducing the sovereignty of States, by being subject to credits and investments without technology transfer and subject to Chinese contractual regulations.

In a globalized world, States must also focus on geoeconomic aspects, since it is up to them to defend the interests of the national economy, mainly its resources. To this end, States must be integrated into blocs to capture segments of the international market. “All in all, geoeconomics is today a planetary phenomenon, representing a new space of competition between developed mercantile nations.” In this context, the Ministries of Defense contribute to the strategic vision and presidential decisions, by integrating into the periodic geostrategic assessment of the national territory the various resources available, and the projects of national scope essential to achieve economic growth and distribution of wealth in the different sectors of society.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the Ministries of Defense, together with other ministries, contribute to the creation of opportunities through public and private ventures to carry out projects of national interest.

The current era is characterized by regional governance that links security with the region’s geoeconomic projects. Countries are interdependent, with economic flows and networks that make each region a place of interconnection with respect to capital, technology, resources, and wealth.

---

16 Pascal Lorot, *Introduction to Geoeconomie*, (Paris: Institut Europeen de Geoeconomie, 1999), 20.

The Pacific Alliance<sup>17</sup> is the best example of how nature, including marine and industrial resources, thanks to the geographical location of the Pacific, offers opportunities for the formation of a bloc of countries that benefits from the regionalization of trade and the campaign for the conquest of international markets.

To make viable and strengthen this trade bloc, the capabilities of the Ministry of Defense and the armed forces are needed, in order to carry out oceanographic research and ensure maritime transport, ports, and communication lines. In this way, fishing fleets, maritime industries, container ships, and all activities necessary for export and import will be protected from transnational organized crime and piracy. Therefore, the opportunities offered by geoeconomic dynamics in the region must be guaranteed and secured through international cooperation and partnership, for the benefit of trade and the preservation of national sovereignty.

### **Risk factors for conflict and political crisis**

Latin America is “a region of great contrasts, where wealth and prosperity coexist with vulnerability and extreme poverty.”<sup>18</sup> Additionally, it is an inequitable region, with political crises and a declining democracy, and where transnational threats and criminal violence increasingly involve the armed forces in the field of internal security. However, it is important to consider that in the region there has been a militarization of the police, or a policing of the military, which is a superficial assessment since this will depend on the way in which the new threats are faced within the country.

In this regard, Ruth Diamint, referring to a press conference of the president of Ecuador (accompanied by the Military High Command) for

---

<sup>17</sup> Ecuador, for several years, has been applying to join the organization and has the support of several countries. Currently, it is managing a trade agreement with Mexico, to be one of the requirements for admission as a full member.

<sup>18</sup> UNDP, “Atrapados alta desigualdad y bajo crecimiento en America Latina. Informe Regional de desarrollo Humano 2021”, *United Nations Development Programme* (June 22, 2021), <https://www.undp.org/es/press-releases/atrapados-alta-desigualdad-y-bajo-crecimiento-en-america-latina-y-el-caribe>

the crisis experienced in October 2019, mentions that although *coups d'état* seem banished, new forms of military power have been emerging in the continent, including a new militarism that is seen as a “politicization of the military.”<sup>19</sup> Francisco Sánchez, referring to the same press conference, states that the presence of the military in accompanying the President of the Republic can have two interpretations: negatively, it can be said that civilian power is subject to military power; positively, it can be seen that the armed forces are under civilian control.<sup>20</sup>

In both situations, comparisons can be made between powers, without considering the primacy of the Constitution. However, laws and political situations provide room for interpretation during the handling of crisis situations. For example, in 2019, the head of the Bolivian Armed Forces, General William Kaliman, faced with the internal political crisis derived from a referendum held by President Morales to remain in power for a fourth consecutive term, suggested that Morales resign, in accordance with the Law of the Armed Forces, “*to allow pacification and the maintenance of stability.*”<sup>21</sup>

To understand the turbulence in the functioning of democracy, one must appreciate the structure and functioning of defense and security institutions in the region. In terms of structure, some countries do not have armed forces; others have armed forces and police, including various types of police; meanwhile, a third type has an intermediate force (carabineros, gendarmeries and national guards), which implies different laws for the operation and fulfillment of their missions. Mexico, for example, has a national guard that performs missions as national police for public security, combating organized crime in the country, while Argentina has, in addition

---

19 Angelo Atanassio, “Protestas en America Latina: cómo los militares volvieron al primer plano de la política en la región,” *BBC News World* (2 December 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-50586948> (Accessed April 20, 2022.)

20 When the Chief of state determines the state of emergency or emergency and there are doubts about the decision taken, the Constitutional Court or, where appropriate, Congress evaluates the decision to use the Armed Forces.

21 Kevin Parthenay, *Crises at Amerique Latine*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 2020).

to the national police, a gendarmerie for border control and strategic objectives, and a naval prefecture as a security force for the prevention of public order, environmental protection, judicial police, among others. In general, these institutions fulfill various functions since, in addition to the law, they obey government decisions to fulfill internal security missions, as is the case of Brazil, whose armed forces were eventually put in charge of public security in Rio de Janeiro.

In some Central American countries, there is inter-agency and intelligence collaboration for the coordinated use of the armed forces and the police, while in others the support of the armed forces to the police is sporadic and in specific matters. There are cases such as in El Salvador, where the president, by decree, gave special powers to the military to control gangs, or cases such as Kazakhstan where the president ordered demonstrators to “shoot to kill without warning” in a revolt over the increase in fuel prices, causing 165 deaths.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Defense said that “security forces were ordered to shoot without warning against anyone who damages public property or threatens life” during protests over the country’s severe economic crisis, in May 2022, causing 8 deaths and 219 injuries.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the management of conflicts and political crises is one of the main challenges of the Ministries of Defense since they must guarantee the stability of the country with absolute consideration for professional military management and the defense and security law, and respect for human rights.

The solution to such problems discussed here ultimately lies in the State. For Max Weber, the human community, politically organized, is the one that claims the monopoly of the use of force in a given territory, considering

---

22 Ana Buil Demur, “Preocupación internacional tras el “disparar a matar sin previo aviso” del presidente de Kazajistán”, *Euronews* (January 7, 2022), <https://es.euronews.com/2022/01/07/preocupacion-internacional-tras-el-disparar-a-matar-sin-previo-aviso-del-presidente-de-kaz> (Accessed April 30, 2022).

23 DW World, “Sri Lanka ordena disparar sin aviso previo para atajar disturbios”, *Deutsche Welle* (May 10, 2022), <https://www.dw.com/es/sri-lanka-ordena-disparar-sin-aviso-previo-para-atajar-disturbios/a-61751442> (Accessed May 10, 2022).

that for its direction and administration, it has a set of institutions with authority and power to apply the laws, at the same time that it has the capacity to elaborate public policies that give attention to the demands and social needs, orienting itself towards the common welfare.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, a proportional ratio of democratic functioning can be established between law based on morality and power based on the political power of the State: Morality / Law = Power.

In that sense, morality is the set of norms, traditions and culture that seeks to ensure the behavior of people in a community for their survival and well-being. The State converts these into laws and public policies to exercise political control. As a consequence, the exercise of political power in determining public policies for the solution of demands in an effective and timely manner is the foundation of governance. However, this political process will be subject to the availability of resources.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, it is important to maintain an undistorted policy environment, including macroeconomic stability, in order to invest in infrastructure and basic services, protecting the most vulnerable and avoiding lagging behind in their growth and development. Failure to do so generates political and social unrest that threatens the stability of the State.

The high rates of corruption and the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America have contributed to the distrust in democracy. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), “the extreme poverty rate in Latin America would have increased from 13.1 % in 2020 to 13.8 % in 2021, which means an increase of 5 million people in extreme poverty and a setback of 27 years.”<sup>26</sup>

---

24 Francis Fukuyama, *State Building. Governance and world order in the 21st century*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 92-103.

25 Open knowledge repositior, “World development report 1997: The State in a changing world” *World Bank* (1997), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/5980> (Accessed April 20, 2022.)

26 United Nations, “Pobreza extrema en la región sube a 86 millones en 2021 como consecuencia de la profundización de la crisis social y sanitaria derivada de la pandemia de COVID-19”, *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ECLAC* (January 25, 2022), <https://www.cepal.org/es/comunicados/pobreza-extrema-la-region-sube-86-millones-2021-como-consecuencia-la-profundizacion-la> (Accessed April 20, 2022)

On the other hand, the level and escalation of violence in the streets depends on the circumstances in which social unrest occurs and how it is controlled. While it is true that the population has the right to mobilize and protest, it does not have the right to extreme violence, the destruction of property and strategic installations, or the blocking of roads, among others. Unfortunately, in Latin America, the volume of social demands is high, while the capacity of States to meet these demands is low. However, what are the factors that produce this imbalance that affects the region?

One of these factors is the macroeconomic imbalance (external debt, inflation, unemployment, etc.) that affects the population, mainly the poorest. Undoubtedly, another factor is the corruption existing at different levels of government and branches of government, to which we must add the uncontrollable action of transnational organized crime, especially drug trafficking. However, there is a new factor, the regional trend towards populism. Although this political style can be right or left, when populism is radical left, it has as its strategy the refoundation of the State.<sup>27</sup> In every region of the world, democracy is under attack by populist leaders and groups who reject pluralism and demand unchecked power to advance the interests of their supporters, usually at the expense of minorities and other perceived enemies.”<sup>28</sup>

The authoritarian root of radical populism, which denies democratic institutions and promotes a dialectic of peoples and social classes as a product of social division, is reflected in the posture, “We are the people, and they are the dominant oligarchy.” However, greater social political participation is not necessarily achieved through the refoundation of the State and political instability. In Ecuador, for example, the proposed economic reforms (which included the renegotiation of the debt with IMF assistance and the elimination of fuel price subsidies) were the

---

27 Ernesto Laclau, “Populismo y transformacion del imaginario politico en America Latina”, in *Bulletin of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, Centrum voor Studie en Documentatie van Latijns Amerika CEDLA (June 1987), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25675327> (Accessed April 27, 2022).

28 Freedom House, “Democracy in Decline,” *Freedomhouse* (2022), <https://freedomhouse.org/issues/democracies-decline> (Accessed April 25, 2022.)

arguments for the instability that occurred in October 2019,<sup>29</sup> which began with a national strike, and escalated into violent acts against the National Assembly and the presidential palace. During these events, an important measure was to support the government authority, evacuating the president and ministers from Quito (the capital of the country) to Guayaquil, based on an Executive Decree that provided for the change of the seat of government. These actions not only demonstrated the subordination of the armed forces to the political power constituted in the country, but also allowed the continuity of the political handling of the crisis by the national government.

Subsequently, violent protests began in Chile over the increase in transport fares, leading to the declaration of a state of emergency and curfew. President Piñera apologized “for the lack of vision” and announced a broad social agenda of reforms, including the approval of a proposal to change the Constitution. Colombia continued in this wave of instability due to the dissatisfaction of trade unionists and student and indigenous organizations with the new tax and pension reforms. The political crisis in Peru, on the other hand, occurred because of the declaration of presidential vacancy due to moral incapacity of President Martin Vizcarra, in November 2020. When relieved by the president of the Congress, Manuel Merino, there were several detrimental items that came to light that led to his resignation, being replaced by the new president of the Congress, Francisco Sagasti. All this occurred in just over a week.

After a long professional training and clarity in the civic thinking of the armed forces in Latin America, it is hoped that there will be no militarism that will seize power through a *coup d'état*. However, there is a risk of a political instrumentalization of the armed forces by the political actors in conflict. In other words, when the police, armed forces and intelligence

---

29 Ecuador sought a way out of the immense external debt that reached 450 billion dollars carried over from previous governments and that had increased by 3,400 million in the last year due to the effect of the fall in the price of crude oil and the strengthening of the dollar.

services engage and take part in infighting, efforts to improve democratic civilian control are weakened.<sup>30</sup>

### **Military competencies in the correlation of security and conflict**

Considering that security is the absence of danger or risk in which the State is free of threats,<sup>31</sup> the armed forces in Latin America are increasingly immersed in this field, particularly in support of the police, in states of emergency, to restore and maintain legal order and social peace. However, in the case of border security, the armed forces often do not have the legal power, training, and equipment to combat crimes in these areas, nor to differentiate their actions in managing citizen security in urban and rural areas.<sup>32</sup>

According to Ralf Dahrendorf, conflict will always be present in a post-capitalist society due to the established state and government structures and should not constitute a dangerous situation since it is up to politics to handle conflicts. Likewise, Michael Lind believes that conflicts are shaped by the current economic structure, including the laws, nature, and operation of businesses, as well as the rights of workers with populist influence who are trying to overthrow liberal democracy.<sup>33</sup> Based on these discrepancies, hostile attempts are made to maintain or achieve a right.<sup>34</sup> In this context, the State is interested in the transformation of the conflict.

This dynamic of contradictions is characteristic of the human relationship and of the political forces that seek to satisfy aspirations to stimulate

---

30 Centre for Democratic Control of the Armed Forces, "Control parlamentario del sector seguridad", *Inter-Parliamentary Union and Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces* (Geneva: 2003). [https://dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/ipu\\_hb\\_spanish.pdf](https://dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/ipu_hb_spanish.pdf)

31 Ole Waever, "Securitization and desecuritization", in *On Security*, by Lipschutz Ronnie, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 52-59.

32 Ecuador's Regional Security Working Group, "Los militares en la seguridad interna: realidad y desafíos para Ecuador." *Friederich Ebert Stiftung* (May 2013), 6, [https://www.resdal.org/cacef-resdal/assets/ecuador---"the-military-in-the-internal-security--reality-and-challenges-for-ecuador"--\(gtsr\)-ecuador.-fes-ildis.-may-2013%2C-p.5...pdf](https://www.resdal.org/cacef-resdal/assets/ecuador---)

33 Michael Lind, *The New class war*, (New York: Penguin, 2020).

34 Fernando A. Milia, *El Conflicto analisis estructural*, (Buenos Aires: Instituto de publicaciones navales, 1985), 70.

economic growth and obtain new opportunities and constructive changes in favor of the common good. Although resources are always considered scarce, political skill must be deployed to achieve consensus and seek alternatives for conflict resolution. Throughout this process, the Ministries of Defense are responsible for supporting government bodies, ministries and political actors, through stability operations,<sup>35</sup> which consist of protecting the population, maintaining border security and the functioning of basic public services, unblocking roads, ensuring the supply of the population, guaranteeing administrative functioning, supporting the police in public security, and imposing social order to create the conditions that allow the resolution of the conflict.

These stability operations accompany, in a progressive and proportionate manner, the evolution of the conflict, through cooperation and support to the police and local authorities to achieve positive governance. The cooperation of the Ministry of Defense with other ministries and with local authorities in remote regions is essential to create effective spaces for State participation, avoiding the creation of grey areas where illegal non-State groups try to replace State institutions, taking advantage of social discontent in the absence of State presence.<sup>36</sup> These illegal groups not only build stadiums and health centers, but also provide employment, obtaining in exchange legitimacy to exercise control of the territory and the frightened population. For example, Colombian drug trafficker Pablo Escobar “tried to win the people’s vote in multiple ways, whether it was building more than 100 soccer fields... or building a neighborhood for the lower classes in the region that was known as ‘Medellín sin tugurios’ [Medellin without Shanty Towns], all paid for with cocaine money.”<sup>37</sup>

---

35 Department of the Army, *Stability, Army Doctrine Publication 3-07*. (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 2019).

36 Vanda Felbab-Brown, Harold Trinkunas and Shadi Hamid, *Militants, Criminals and War Lords: the challenge of local governance in an Age of disorder*, (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

37 Manuel P. Villatorio, “La verdadera historia de Pablo Escobar, el narcotraficante que asesinó a 10.000 personas,” *Abcplay* (November 16, 2014), [https://www.abc.es/play/cine/noticias/abc-verdadera-historia-pablo-escobar-narcotraficante-asesino-10000-personas-202005071720\\_noticia.html](https://www.abc.es/play/cine/noticias/abc-verdadera-historia-pablo-escobar-narcotraficante-asesino-10000-personas-202005071720_noticia.html) (Accessed May 5, 2022).

On the other hand, when negative or weak governance undermines the principle of sovereignty and the primacy of the law on which the functioning of the State is based, governance escalates to a crisis. In this context, cooperation measures are reinforced by dissuasive actions of a preventive nature,<sup>38</sup> which involve discouraging the adversary by demonstrating that it legally possesses all the capacity and political will to act to defeat it or, at least, to warn that any aggression will be very costly compared to the benefits it intends to obtain.

In Brazil, the largest criminal gangs (the Red Command and the First Capital Command)<sup>39</sup> can control detention centers, organize protests, structure criminal networks, and manipulate violence in the streets. Similarly, in Ecuador, disputes between organized crime networks have led to riots in detention centers, killing hundreds of inmates. The connections of these groups involved in organized crime are due to three nuclei of networks in Latin America: (1) in Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), (2) in the Pacific (Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru), and (3) the Atlantic Axis (Bolivia, Venezuela, and Brazil).

Regarding actions against the different forms of transnational organized crime, the police and justice officials are responsible for intelligence, prevention, prosecution, combat, detention, and rehabilitation. However, in case of need, and having declared a state of emergency, the armed forces act in support of the police, providing logistics, transport, and communications, among others. In this situation, without merging military and police units, “international law requires military force to focus on essential tasks that establish a safe and secure environment.”<sup>40</sup>

In this regard, contingency and stability operations that take place in crisis and insurgency situations<sup>41</sup> involve joint and interministerial actions to achieve unity of effort, maintain legitimacy, improve governance, address

---

38 Antulio Echevarria, *Military Strategy*, (London: Ashford Colour Press, Osford, 2017), 49.

39 Vanda Felbab-Brown, Harold Trinkunas and Shadi Hamid *Militants, Criminals and War Lords: ...*, 104.

40 Army FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*, (Washington DC: Headquarters Army, 2008).

41 David Petraus, *Ounterinsurgency: FM 3-24*, (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 2007).

the causes of the insurgency, and recover constitutional order and peace. For the execution of military operations, it is essential to precisely determine both the norms of behavior in relation to the population and other institutions, and the rules of engagement, as stipulated by the United Nations<sup>42</sup> and the International Committee of the Red Cross.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusions

Political instability constitutes a threat to the international system, collective security, and States. Therefore, its analysis is fundamental to understand the new competencies of the Ministries of Defense in Latin America. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the fragility of collective security systems in the face of the danger of redistribution of powers, based on classical geopolitical theories and strategies such as containment, deterrence, and the security dilemma, to which others, such as territorialization and preventive attack, are added. Latin America continues to be one of the most inequitable and violent regions in the world, with frequent social mobilizations and political conflicts. Unfortunately, the existing political instability serves as a platform for the emergence of grey areas in which negative governance is established, taking advantage of weak institutions and the limited presence of the State.

The ministries of Defense of Latin America, with the renewal of their competences, must periodically update their joint strategic capabilities, as they are fundamental components for the stability of the countries and the consolidation of positive governance. To this end, the execution of deterrence and stability operations is a fundamental part of the correlation between security and conflict, avoiding escalation and facilitating the resolution

---

42 UN, "Principios Básicos sobre el empleo de la fuerza y de armas de fuego por los funcionarios encargados de hacer cumplir la ley", *United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights* (August 27, 1990), <https://www.ohchr.org/es/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-use-force-and-firearms-law-enforcement>

43 ICRC, "Manual de Normas Internacionales que rigen las operaciones militares", *International Committee of the Red Cross* (March 7, 2014), <https://www.icrc.org/es/publication/manual-de-normas-internacionales-que-rigen-las-operaciones-militares>

of conflicts. In this regard, the Ministries of Defense are key collaborators of governmental and non-governmental bodies for the development of geoeconomic projects that integrate security and the economy.

### **About the author:**

#### **Raúl Oswaldo Jarrín Román**

*General (R) of the Ecuadorian Army. He holds a PhD in Education Sciences and a degree in Administration and Military Sciences. He has been Minister of Defense of Ecuador twice, Undersecretary of Defense, Secretary of the National Security Council, head of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces, Director of Army Operations in the Cenepa War, Director of the Army War Academy, Director of the Eloy Alfaro Military Superior School, Military Attaché of Ecuador in the Republic of Argentina, and founding dean of the Faculty of Military Sciences of the Polytechnic School of the Army. Additionally, he has been a professor at the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, the San Francisco University of Quito, the International University of Ecuador, the National Polytechnic School, the Joint Chiefs of Staff Course of the Armed Forces, and the General Staff Course of the National Police. General Jarrín has trained in Continental Defense by the Inter-American Defense College and a in a postgraduate degree in Strategic Intelligence by the Argentine Army War College. He has also taken courses in Defense Management in England, Counterterrorism at Herzliya University in Israel, and Curriculum Design for Defense in the United States.*

# EFFICIENCY OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

*Jacinto Maia Neto*

## Summary

*The 21st century has meant that organizations must adapt to a world characterized by the speed and intensity of change. Regarding military organizations, new demands have arisen either in the strictly military field or in support of society's needs. Therefore, the focus of this article is to understand how these organizations can make use of the strategic management concepts so recurrent in the business environment. The large amount of existing information, as well as the speed with which strategies need to be modified to meet new demands that affect the achievement of the organization's objectives, are part of the scope of defense. Knowing why, when, and how to change strategies is also part of defense management. To this end, the defense documents of ten Latin American countries were analyzed.*

**Keywords:** *Strategy, Strategic Management, Armed Forces.*

## Introduction

“Strategy” has become the central focus of many management studies, especially in the field of public administration. Initially, the term strategy was used in the military field and was intended to achieve military objectives. Subsequently, it was taken to the business world, considering “the market” as the new battlefield, while strategies were configured into vectors that led organizations to achieve their objectives in an increasingly complex and constantly changing environment.

---

<sup>1</sup> The author is grateful for the support and contributions of Camila Basilio da Costa from the Defense and International Strategic Management course at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, who contributed greatly to this work (camilabasilio21@gmail.com).

In this context, Alfred Chandler proposed that strategy consisted of adopting the actions that the company should take to achieve its basic and long-term objectives, such as the allocation of resources that would make it possible to achieve organizational goals.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, for Harry Igor Ansoff, strategy was related to the process that leads to decisions (decision-making process), considering the relationships that the organization has with its internal public (internal environment) and the environment in which it is inserted (external environment).<sup>3</sup> Precisely in this external environment, which is characterized by its complexity and competitiveness, strategies are the offensive or defensive actions that protect the organization and allow it to successfully face the competitive forces of the market, so that the focus of the strategy of any industry is to obtain a greater return from the market relative to its investment, characterizing what Michael Porter called competitive strategy.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, Henry Mintzberg, Bruce Ahlstrand and Joseph Lampel point out that strategy should be considered as a mediating force between the organization and its environment.<sup>5</sup> Strategy thus allows the elaboration of a pattern in the organization's decision-making process, as a way of facing and adapting to the environment. By proposing a structuring of strategy, especially its formulation, these authors present the compilation of this knowledge in ten schools of strategic thinking. Even if such a proposal may be considered somewhat reductionist, it is an attempt to organize the infinity of existing information and divergences on the subject.

In this brief overview of the concept of strategy, this article seeks to introduce the topic of strategic management and to show how this tool can contribute to improve the effectiveness of defense structures in Latin America. To this

---

<sup>2</sup> Alfred D. Chandler, *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the American Industrial Enterprise*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962)

<sup>3</sup> Harry Igor Ansoff, *Corporate Strategy*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1965).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Porter, *Competitive Strategy: Técnicas para análise de indústrias e da concorrência*, (São Paulo: Campus Editor, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> Henry Mintzberg, Bruce Ahlstrand and Joseph Lampel, *Safári de estratégia: um roteiro pela selva do planejamento estratégico*, (Porto Alegre: Bookman, 2000).

end, it is proposed to analyze the threats to the State contained in defense documents and the national defense objectives of some Latin American countries, especially: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.

### **Defense and Security Demands**

Today, when studying the military field and its relations with society, one cannot fail to mention the existing perspectives on civil-military relations. This relationship has focused on the debate about the fundamental need for civilian control over the military. However, the existence of new security and defense demands (such as new *threats*), new demands for peace operations (such as *Peace Building* operations),<sup>6</sup> the increase of operations in the field of public security (*Constabulary Function*), humanitarian assistance or support to government agencies, could prompt a new debate on military effectiveness. This new debate is already premised on civilian control over the military and seeks to optimize resources, beyond the debate on civilian control.

The characteristics of the new conflicts include an environment of continuous changes and uncertainties that is increasingly diffuse and asymmetric, thus which requires a defense management that allows understanding of this new environment. With this approach, it is important to address the meaning of the word “threat” in the context and broad sense of the new requirements of National Security and Defense. In this regard, Héctor Saint-Pierre states that the concept of threat can be characterized through division into two types: “External threats: [those related to] territorial integrity and national sovereignty [and] Internal threats: [those related to] constitutional order and internal peace [of the country].”<sup>7</sup>

---

6 Organization of American States, *Declaração sobre segurança nas Américas*, Conferência dos Ministros de Estado da Defesa, (Mexico: 2003).

7 Hector Saint-Pierre *As novas ameaças às democracias latino-americanas: uma abordagem teórico conceitual*. In Eliézer Rizzo de Oliveira (Org.), *Segurança e Defesa Nacional: da competição à cooperação regional*, (São Paulo: Fundação Memorial da América Latina, 2007), 78-79.

Concern over what these threats or new threats have been on the agenda of meetings of the Organization of American States (OAS). Since the Special Conference on Security in Mexico City in 2003, member states have issued statements alerting everyone that “many of the new threats, concerns, and other challenges to hemispheric security are transnational in nature and may require appropriate hemispheric cooperation”.<sup>8</sup> Among the new threats that came up almost continuously at the Conferences of Defense Ministers of the Americas are terrorism, transnational organized crime, drugs, corruption, illicit arms trafficking, extreme poverty, natural disasters, human trafficking, and attacks on cybersecurity.<sup>9</sup> Many of these threats need to be contextualized within each of the Latin American countries, and there is no one model that can be applied in a generalized way.

### **Strategic Management**

Strategic management has its origins in the 1950s, when the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation sponsored an investigation into the curriculum of American business schools.<sup>10</sup> A summary of the research was presented in the Gordon–Howell<sup>11</sup> report, which recommended that business education cover a broader range of topics, integrating knowledge from other disciplines into real-world situations involving the integration of different areas of business and integrative solutions for them.

Over the years, new topics were introduced to the discipline, such as: (1) considerations on global organizations and their environment, (2) social responsibility, (3) ethics, (4) mission analysis, (5) general objectives, (6) strategy formulation, implementation, and control, and (7) potential impacts of the political, legislative, and economic environment. Hence, the

---

8 Organization of American States. *Declaração sobre segurança nas Américas*.

9 Ibid.

10 Peter Wright, Mark J. Kroll and John Parnell, “Administração Estratégica: conceitos”, *Atlas Editor* (São Paulo: 2000), <https://comexitape.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/wright-administrac3a7c3a30-estratic3a9gica-01-introduc3a7c3a30-c3a0-administrac3a7c3a30-estratic3a9gica.pdf>

11 Robert A. Gordon and James E. Howell, *Higher education for business*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

discipline came to be known as *Strategic Management*. The term *Strategic Management*<sup>12</sup> was used by Harry Igor Ansoff, who presented –for the first time– the concept of strategic management incorporating a restricted perspective related to organizational form or architecture.<sup>13</sup> This study was also based on the work of Alfred Chandler, who demonstrated the dependence of organizational structure on goals and strategies.<sup>14</sup>

The 1970s, however, would be marked by the rise of *Strategic Planning*, understood as formal and rational planning, with the objective of producing an articulated and systemic result. Strategic planning and its system of strategy formulation and evaluation would not only be able to meet the growing demand for change in this era of knowledge, but also of “hostility and rapid change”.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the concept of organizational change became a constant in planning and, especially, in the strategy implementation phase, making planning more systemic and dynamic, and making the previously defined model unfeasible.<sup>16, 17</sup>

In this context, strategic management (re)emerged as a new management paradigm, based on a new vision of politics and business planning, through the studies of Dan Schendel and Charles Hofer,<sup>18</sup> who define it as “a process of dealing with the business dimensions of the organization, its renewal and growth, and, more particularly, with the development and use of strategies to guide the operations of organizations.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, strategic management is understood as an “advanced and coherent form of strategic thinking,

---

12 Peter Wright, Mark J. Kroll, and John Parnell, “Administração Estratégica...”

13 Harry Igor Ansoff, *Corporate Strategy*.

14 Alfred D. Chandler, *Strategy and Structure...*

15 Paulo R. Motta, *Gestão Contemporânea: a ciência e a arte de ser dirigente*. 16th ed., (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007).

16 António J. Robalo Santos, *Strategic Management: grants, models and instruments*, (Lisbon: Escolar Editora, 1999).

17 Rolando J. Soliz Estrada and Martinho I. Ribeiro de Almeida, “A eficiência e a eficácia da Gestão Estratégica: do planejamento estratégico à mudança organizacional”, *Revista de Ciências da Administração*, v. 9, n. 19, (September/December 2007), 147-178, <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/2735/273520310007.pdf>

18 Dan Schendel and Charles W. Hofer, *Strategic Management*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1979).

19 Paulo R. Motta, *Gestão Contemporânea...*

which seeks to extend the strategic vision to all units of the organization, encompassing its entire administrative system.<sup>20</sup> As Motta already said, this is the significant difference that the term strategic management brought compared to the previously used strategic planning models.<sup>21</sup>

Motta's critique is mainly directed at the attempt to separate strategy formulation by organizational levels in a watertight and non-integrated manner, without considering that the strategy permeates all levels and sectors of the organization. In that sense, there is no strategic vision that is broken down into strategic, operational, and tactical levels; what exists is an interaction between these three levels during the formulation and implementation of strategies to achieve the proposed objectives. Under this understanding, the implementation of the strategic vision focuses on the constant search for results, within a continuous process of anticipating future changes, taking advantage of opportunities and course correction.

The concept of strategic management has been strongly associated with organizational change and is often decisive in differentiating it from the term "strategic planning." It is believed that by requiring strategists, managers, or leaders to act in changing the behavior of everyone in the organization and not just certain sectors, they become an agent of change.<sup>22</sup> Thus, strategies are intensely rethought and modified, not only by members of top management or by the planners of these strategies, but also by all members, especially those who will be directly affected by their implementation.

Strategic management, when transferring its applicability to the public sector, modifies its main focus related to the search for benefits and competitive advantages over competitors, but maintains the broad concept of performance and the search for better services for society.<sup>23</sup> However, its applicability in

---

20 G. S. Toft, *Synoptic (One Best Way) approaches of strategic management*. In: Rabin, J.; Miller, G. J.; Hildreth, W.B. *Handbook of Strategic Management*, (New York: Marcel Dekker, Inc, 1989), 3 - 34.

21 Paulo R Motta, *Gestão Contemporânea...*

22 J. G. Whittington, G. Johnson and K. Scholes, *Fundamentals of Strategy*, (Porto Alegre: Bookman, 2011).

23 George A. Boyne and Richard M. Walker, "Strategic management on public service performance: the way ahead" *Public Administration Review, Special Issue* (December 2010), 85 - 191, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40084123>

the public sector requires some different approaches from the manager, mainly related to the difficulty of establishing and implementing long-term strategies, since the life cycle of this manager or his top management in the organization is usually located in a period of two or four years. As a result, a difficulty for public organizations is the maintenance of their management staff throughout the strategy process, requiring constant training of new personnel, which may hinder the continuity of strategies.<sup>24</sup>

### The Dynamics of Defense Documents

Defense documents are the basis for the strategic planning of defense structures, allowing direct alignment with defense preparedness and deployment plans. In this sense, it is understood that they guide the “what to do” (Policies) and the “how to do it” (Strategies). Regardless of the nomenclature used by different countries, these documents make it possible to delimit and guide actions in the area of defense towards the achievement of the National Defense Objectives (NDOs). In this context, the main documents that guide the strategic management of defense in the region’s countries were analyzed, especially their NDOs:

Table 1 - Defense Documents

Country	Document	Year
Argentina	National Defense Policy Directive	2021
Bolivia	Defense White Paper	2004
Brazil	National Defense Policy	2020
	National Defense Strategy	2020
Chile	National Defense Policy	2020
Colombia	Defense and Security Policy	2019
Ecuador	Defense Policy Agenda 2014-2017	2014
Mexico	National Defense Sector Program 2020-2024	2020
Paraguay	National Defense Policy 2019-2030	2019

24 G. S. Toft, *Synoptic (One Best Way) approaches of strategic management*

Peru	White Paper on National Defense	2006
Uruguay	National Defense Policy	2020

Source: prepared by the author

In each document analyzed, the main threats and NDOs were verified. It was noted that not all documents directly explained what an NDO was. One group of countries separated their objectives into two areas, external security, and internal security. However, these documents were chosen because they list the main threats to the state and explain the objectives guiding strategic defense management in their respective countries.

For the purposes of the analysis, the countries were divided into two groups: (1) Alpha Group (those that explicitly define N SDGs: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay) and (2) Bravo Group (countries defining an external security context, internal security, or permanent national objectives: Bolivia and Chile). Regarding the Alpha Group, NDOs are the following:

Table 2 - Group Alpha: National Defense Objectives

Country	National Defense Objectives
Argentina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the life and freedom of its inhabitants</li> <li>• Safeguard the sovereignty, independence, and self-determination of the Nation</li> <li>• Preserve its territorial integrity and safeguard its resources and strategic valuables</li> </ul>
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guarantee sovereignty, national heritage, and territorial integrity</li> <li>• Preserve national cohesion and unity</li> <li>• Contribute to regional stability as well as international peace and security</li> <li>• Safeguard people, property, resources, and national interests located abroad</li> <li>• Increase Brazil's projection in the international relations and its insertion in international decision-making processes</li> <li>• Ensure the capacity of the Defense to fulfill the Constitutional missions of the Armed Forces</li> <li>• Promote technological and productive autonomy in the area of defense</li> <li>• Increase the participation of the Brazilian society in National Defense matters.</li> </ul>

Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guarantee sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity</li> <li>• Protect the population and contribute to its well-being</li> <li>• Achieve institutional control of the territory</li> <li>• Preserve and defend water, biodiversity and natural resources, as strategic assets of the Nation and national interests</li> <li>• Consolidate security in support the rule of law and contribute to entrepreneurship and the achievement of equity</li> <li>• Innovate, transform, and strengthen the defense and security sector</li> <li>• Guarantee the protection, professionalization, and welfare of the members of the Military Forces, as well as the National Police and their families.</li> </ul>
Ecuador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guarantee the defense of sovereignty and territorial integrity and participate in integral security</li> <li>• Support national development in the exercise of sovereignty</li> <li>• Contribute to regional and world peace</li> </ul>
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote true leadership at all hierarchical levels</li> <li>• Implement a comprehensive austerity policy and eradicate corruption</li> <li>• Contribute to and preserve National Security and guarantee Internal Security</li> <li>• Support government actions in the areas of Public Security, Social Welfare and Economic Development for the benefit of the country's</li> <li>• Optimize the operation of the Armed Forces on the ground and in the air</li> <li>• Strengthen civil-military relations</li> </ul>
Paraguay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence, freedom, independence, and sovereignty of the Paraguayan State</li> <li>• Integrity of the national population, its territory and the Republic's heritage, both tangible and intangible, inside and outside the country</li> <li>• Full validity of the rule of law, republican, representative, participatory and pluralist democracy</li> <li>• Preservation of the identity and unity of the Nation integrated as a State to the international community</li> <li>• Civil defense in cases of catastrophes or adverse events of significant impact on society</li> </ul>
Peru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and defense of national interests</li> <li>• Strengthen the democratic political system</li> <li>• Maintain the Economic-Strategic conditions that may ensure peace, integration, and prosperity</li> <li>• Strengthen national awareness and identity</li> <li>• Protect and promote national interests in the international arena.</li> </ul>

Uruguay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guarantee the sovereignty of the State in the terrestrial, maritime, aerospace, and cybernetic fields.</li> <li>• Guarantee peace in the Republic, as well as the strict compliance with the Constitution and its Laws</li> <li>• Ensure strategic alignment of Foreign Policy and National Defense</li> <li>• Contribute to creating the conditions for Human Security and social welfare of the population</li> <li>• Deepen the relations of cooperation and mutual trust with hemispheric and extra-continental countries</li> <li>• Contribute to the protection of the environment and ensure the protection of strategic renewable and non-renewable natural resources</li> <li>• Participate in missions abroad in the framework of international organizations and international treaties to which the State is a party; for defensive, humanitarian, stabilization, and peacekeeping purposes</li> </ul>
---------	---

Source: prepared by the author

Within this first group, some objectives are common to all countries, such as: sovereignty, territorial integrity, freedom (or integrity) of the population and independence (i.e., self-determination, cohesion, conscience, identity, or national unity). All of these are essential clauses for countries, being the axes of defense and, therefore, the basis for the strategies to be implemented.

A growing theme is the defense of national patrimony, biodiversity, water or natural resources, characteristic of some countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Uruguay, as well as the welfare of the population. Likewise, there is a relationship with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), despite the fact that the 2030 Agenda was presented by the United Nations only in 2015, when many country defense documents already existed. In that sense, concern for regional and global peace is an agenda included in some defense documents, comprising those of Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay, which refers to the SDGs and the preservation of a regional environment of cooperation between countries. Likewise, the eradication of corruption and a comprehensive austerity policy are Mexico's major national motivations and are also central to the defense field. Therefore, uniformed personnel will tend to strengthen actions to combat corruption within their organizations, including internal security operations.

Another concept that many countries include is integrated or comprehensive security. In this type of security, Armed forces contribute strongly to internal security, public security, and the multidimensional vision of security. Additionally, the objectives related to innovation, technological development, as well as technological and productive autonomy are characterized by the concern for a strong and operational national defense industry at regional and global levels. In that sense, the contribution to national development, despite being explained as an NDO in only two countries (Ecuador and Mexico), is included in most defense documents.

As for the Bravo Group, it includes the countries that have defined permanent objectives (Bolivia) and those which differentiate External Security and Internal Security (Chile) as drivers of the defense area:

Table 3 - Bravo Group: Permanent and Security Objectives

Country: Bolivia	Country: Chile
<b>Permanent National Objectives</b>	<b>External and Internal Security Objectives</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve the existence of the State, with freedom, independence, sovereignty, and integrity of the national patrimony</li> <li>• Consolidate national unity</li> <li>• Ensure the integral development of the State</li> <li>• Consolidate social justice and internal peace</li> <li>• Promote maritime reintegration with national sovereignty</li> </ul>	<p><b>External Security Objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and to protect the population from external threats</li> <li>• Contribute to the creation of conditions of stability, the maintenance of peace, security, and international governance.</li> </ul> <p><b>External security and Development Objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribute to national sovereignty throughout its territory</li> <li>• Contribute to the National Civil Protection System</li> <li>• Contribute to national development and cooperate in the achievement of other State capacities</li> </ul>

Source: prepared by the author.

The objectives of Bolivia and Chile are guidelines for their defense documents. On the one hand, the Bolivian objectives were established by the Superior Council of National Defense in 1997, and are the basis for the 2004 Defense White Paper.<sup>25</sup> Among the permanent national objectives, Bolivia includes the promotion of maritime reintegration with national sovereignty that they lost in the 19th century. In Chile, on the other hand, the central idea is that the national defense structure should have objectives in external security as the vast majority of the Alpha Group countries (sovereignty, integrity, independence and against external threats) and in internal security with the Civil Protection System (disasters or adverse events of significant impact on society).

Support for national development is also reflected in the defense documents of the countries of the region, contributing to a defense overview in Latin America that is inseparable from development. Likewise, the objectives present in the countries that are part of the Alfa and Bravo groups are the starting point of the defense documents and guide the strategies that the countries need to achieve these objectives. Therefore, the use of strategic management seeks to present a different vision of this linearity, so that defense planning can be more sustainable in the face of threats or opportunities that arise.

Whether due to the external or internal environment, the role of defense is constantly changing. Consequently, the capacity of the defense structures of the countries of the region need a different dynamic from the current one. This is something in which strategic management can be immensely helpful. In this sense, the idea of performance when applied to the achievement of objectives, allows for a long-term vision that goes beyond government plans (which have a four or five-year period), as well as military commanders (who remain two or three years in a position, whether command or execution).

---

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Bolivia, "Libro Blanco de Defensa de la República de Bolivia", *Organization of American States* (2004), <https://www.oas.org/csh/spanish/documentos/Bolivia%20-%202004.pdf>

Another example is the implementation of a strategic vision that focuses on the constant search for results, in a continuous process of anticipating future changes, taking advantage of opportunities and possible course corrections, if necessary. Even the objectives can be changed since there should be no perpetuity if the external and internal environments change.

Therefore, the application of the fundamentals that govern strategic management, the constant and integrated analysis of societal demands and conflict dynamics, the interaction of strategic levels that facilitate the formulation of new strategies and the adoption of new systems that allow a more agile decision-making process in the face of constant changes can be incorporated into defense management of Latin American countries, especially those that were part of this study.

In this area, there are some concepts that suggest different approaches for defense management, such as strategic direction, with the consequence of the conceptual revision of strategic plans: (1) knowledge can be generated at any level of the organization, shared among its members and sought in other public or private spheres; (2) defense must be treated as a public good (based on this premise, transparency, anti-corruption actions and accountability will allow reaching another level in civil-military relations); (3) the strategic vision must be shared at all levels of the organization, allowing changes to be implemented more quickly; (4) the formulation and implementation of the sectoral objectives resulting from the NDO (permanent, external or internal security) should seek the participation of the different organizational levels; (5) the delegation of responsibilities should allow for initiative and feedback on the implementation of strategies and results; and (6) defense agencies must adapt to new demands, having the ability to create or extinguish structures as needed, whether, *ad hoc*, temporary or not.

## Conclusions

This paper sought to show the new demands of defense in a constantly changing environment and how they can affect organizational strategies. In this context, the strategic direction of defense is presented as a proposal for the implementation of strategies and visions at all organizational levels, which allows a new direction of these strategies in the face of changes in the external and internal context of defense organizations, through the participation of all management levels in the formulation and implementation of new strategies for the achievement of objectives.

The analysis of documents from ten Latin American countries provided an overview of the national objectives that guide the respective Defense sectors, whether they are permanent objectives, defense objectives, external security and internal security objectives, or development objectives. In this way, the countries were categorized into two groups, those who explicitly cited their NDOs and those who based their planning on the other types of goals. However, the proximity of the various proposed goals, regardless of their categorization, made it possible to create a profile of these goals and to group countries with similar goals together, highlighting the particularities.

The defense environment and its new demands require new managerial skills from military managers. The classical conception of military strategy as generally restricted to the battlefield and the alignment of military objectives with the objectives of war, defined by political power, does not correspond to this new environment. Therefore, the adequacy of management tools -such as strategic planning- no longer supports the understanding of this environment full of uncertainties and vertiginous changes. Dysfunctions of the bureaucracy, such as excessive formalism, excessive appreciation of rules and the hierarchization of the decision-making process, in addition to affecting public management, also affect defense management.

**About the author:****Jacintho Maia Neto** – *Brazilian War College*

*Degree in Military Sciences from the Agulhas Negras Military Academy. He has completed the Higher Military Studies Course at the Army Command and General Staff School and has an MBA in Project Management from the Getulio Vargas Foundation. He holds a Master's degree in Military Sciences from the Army Command and General Staff School and a PhD in Administration from the Getulio Vargas Foundation. He was Defense and Army attache in the Kingdoms of Spain and Morocco, head of the Center for Strategic Studies of the Army and deputy chief of the Operations Center of the Southern Military Command. He is also a member of the Brazilian Association of Defense Studies and the Latin American Association of Political Sciences, as well as a principal investigator of the Observatory on Security and Defense. He has experience in the area of Defense, with emphasis on governance, management, and strategic studies, focused on the transformation process of the armed forces and its impacts on the strategic management of defense. Currently, he is Dean of Research and Postgraduate Studies at the Brazilian War College.*

# CHALLENGES OF DEFENSE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT: THE COLOMBIAN CASE

*Maria Johanna Alarcon Moreno*

## Summary

*Defense in Colombia, realized through the actions of its Armed Forces, is the means to guaranty the protection of the territory of the nation as part of the security of the State. In this sense, defense contributes to territorial and decision sovereignty, as well as the well-being of its citizens and institutions, allowing it to meet the national objectives that as a society have been set. That is, both defense and national security are important factors for the development of national interests and the prevention of the evolution of complex challenges affecting the nation. In this regard, strategic planning and its consecutive management are the tools that will allow Colombia to face its risks, threats, and opportunities. To this end, the State has set up a National Security Council, whose task is to carry out the pertinent coordination.*

**Key words:** Security, Defense, Strategic Planning.

## Introduction

Currently, Latin America is seen in the international system as one of the most peaceful regions in terms of the development of inter-state conflicts, unlike other regions that maintain a dynamic of constant confrontation between States. However, although this type of confrontation does not occur in this region, there are internal problems, many of them with transnational characteristics, which have affected the national interests of the countries that make up the region. In this sense, it is essential for the State to fulfill its function of creating the necessary conditions for the development of

society, generating institutional and legal bases for such development.<sup>1</sup> Every State must be able to meet its own needs, those of the international regime of which it is a part, as well as those of its citizens; otherwise, there State delegitimization, as well as institutional delegitimization.

Colombia is a resilient nation in the midst of an armed conflict that has demanded the constant implementation of plans to face the different internal and, in some cases, external threats. That response has led to a dynamic and flexible political and strategic management of national security, including defense. In this context, strategic planning is a tool that allows to articulate, fundamentally, the ends, the means and the ways in which action is taken, which entails establishing a point of arrival or Desired End State (DES), as well as the way in which the components of national power will be used for this purpose.

The situation of not having diverse plans articulated from the political-strategic level would have a strong impact on the national decision-making process and the Armed Forces, which would go against the logical proverb that has been coined from what Lewis Carroll points out in chapter VI of *Alice in Wonderland*: “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.” To this end, it is essential to have the appropriate bureaucratic structures. However, in view of the risks and threats that Colombia faces and that today not only affects its security but also its defense, the military instrument has the obligation to manage its capabilities in favor of the integral protection of sovereignty, through “strengthening cooperation, improving capabilities and promoting the export at bilateral and multilateral levels.”<sup>2</sup>

---

1 Miguel Ángel Centeno, Blood, and Debt. *Cities, State and Nation-Building in Latin America* (Colombia: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Instituto de Estudios Urbanos, 2014), 39.

2 Ministry of National Defense, “Ciberdefensa”, *Government of Colombia* (2022), <https://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/portal/Mindefensa/contenido?NavigationTarget=navurl://7b9925a5c97767f3abfa571ba71d738c> (accessed May 7, 2022)

In this context, the strategic management of national defense<sup>3</sup> helps the Colombian State to face different risks and threats that, for the most part, could be called “multidimensional,” linked to transnational crime. To understand the challenges related to the area described, this article will address the context that makes planning of this magnitude necessary, the role of the structure for its management from the perspective of the National Security Council and, finally, the strategic planning process for national security and defense in Colombia, including some military considerations.

### **Context of Strategic Security and Defense Planning**

First of all, it should be noted that strategic planning refers to the creation of solutions where science and art have a place. However, if such planning is to be carried out, the broader process in which this occurs is referred to as strategic management. Strategic planning is a key aspect of security and defense, as it allows convergence between the desired end, the available means, and the way in which the former will be achieved. In other words, strategic planning is the tool that makes it possible to take coherent actions in the short, medium, or long term to achieve a DES.

In this regard, there seems to be a contradiction when talking about short or medium term versus strategic planning. However, to understand this point, it is necessary to consider that the characteristics of the current environment mean the effect of time, in the midst of uncertainty, have increasing weight.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, when talking about strategic security and defense planning, the focus should be on the process that leads the

---

3 National Defense is integral and dynamic but flexible and circumstantial, in accordance with resources, threats and circumstances of time, manner and place. It is based on two purposes: The first refers to a structural organization of a permanent nature, endowed with personnel, material and equipment, whose functions and responsibilities are related to the National Interests and the requirements imposed by State Security. The second is circumstantial; it refers to the activities carried out under the responsibility of the Government to deal with threats, (Martinez, 2014), 171.

4 Carlos Ojeda Bennett, “La prospectiva como sustento de la anticipación estratégica en inteligencia,” *Colombian War College* (Colombia: April 11, 2022), <https://anepe.cl/academicos-de-la-anepe-participaron-en-seminario-de-la-cscuela-superior-de-guerra-de-colombia/>

Colombian authorities to determine a course of action or strategy to face a challenge in the country. Therefore, the following question arises: Where does this challenge come from?

The answer lies in operational foresight, which –whether based on projection or anticipatory studies– allows to visualize risk scenarios, threats and opportunities following a holistic analysis of the environment, which “guides the ideas about the dynamics of any current environment and also strengthens the capacity for assessment, analysis and strategic reflection.”<sup>5</sup> Once the scenario of interest has been determined, in coordination with the other domains of action of the State, it leads to a DES or commonly referred to as target. Therefore, it is from foresight that strategic planning begins.

Having established what is meant by this type of planning and its starting point, some of its central aspects, such as the decision pyramid, will be addressed. In the case of Colombia, security and defense planning focuses on three specific levels: the National Strategic (in charge of the President of the Republic, whose task is within the framework of National Security), the General Military Strategic (whose responsibility falls on the general commander of the Armed Forces, having war as its scope) and the *Operational Military Strategic* (in the hands of the commander of the Theater of Operations, to direct what in the military lexicon is called a campaign).

Returning to the question of the origin of the challenges that this structure must face, it can be said that at present, Colombia –like other countries– is experiencing complex situations of diverse nature and that are perceived as risks, threats or problems of various kinds that indirectly affect the security of the State. Among them are: guerrilla warfare, post-agreement challenges, social protest, corruption, drug production and trafficking, organized crime with its different manifestations, and border problems.

As a way of conceptualizing the most important notions dealt with in this area, a threat to security and defense is considered “when the action is

---

5 Juan Ricardo Sánchez Hurtado, *En mente de los estrategas* (Colombia: War College, 2012)

produced by a strategic entity that is capable of producing aggression.”<sup>6</sup> To elaborate on these concepts, Carlos Ojeda points out that a *risk* “is the evident probability that, under certain circumstances, national interests will be affected. Given its variability, it may increase or decrease as the environment is intentionally modified and may become a threat. Its control and management belong to the realm of national security.”<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Ojeda states that a *threat* “is the consequence of the premeditated action or intention of an adversary, perceived –given the capacity of the latter– as tending to harm one’s own interests. The mechanisms that the State gives itself to deal with it are encompassed by national security.”<sup>8</sup>

In this context, the following instruments have been established in Colombia to determine solutions at this level: (1) the preparation of a National Strategic Political Appraisal, (2) the formulation of a National Strategic Concept, derived from strategic security and defense planning, and (3) the issuance of both governmental guidelines and specific plans and programs.<sup>9</sup>

### **Structure for Defense Management: The National Security Council**

The National Security Council (NSC) is the highest political body whose purpose is “to advise the President of the Republic in decision-making regarding defense and national security, as well as in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of public policies for national security, in order to coordinate the efforts of ministries and other State entities.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the missions and challenges facing security and defense in Colombia are embodied by this entity, which is composed of: (1) the President of the Republic (who presides over it), (2) the Minister of the Interior, (3)

---

6 Ibid.

7 Carlos Ojeda Bennett, “Amenazas Multidimensionales: Una realidad en Suramérica”, in ANEPE Research Collection No. 30, *National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies* (Chile: December 2013), <https://anepe.cl/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/LIBRO-ANEPE-30.pdf>

8 Ibid.

9 Armed Forces of Colombia. “Manual de Seguridad y Defensa Nacional 3-43 (Reservado)”. (Colombia: Imprenta y publicaciones de las Fuerzas Militares, 1996), 70.

10 Republic of Colombia, “Decreto 741 de 2021”, *Administrative Department of the Civil Service* (2021), [https://funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma\\_pdf.php?i=165231](https://funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma_pdf.php?i=165231)

the Minister of Foreign Affairs, (4) the Minister of Justice and Law, (5) the Minister of National Defense, (6) the Minister of Finance and Public Credit, (7) the Director of the Administrative Department of the Presidency of the Republic, (8) the Minister Counselor for Post-Conflict, Human Rights and Security of the Administrative Department of the Presidency of the Republic, (9) the Director General of the National Intelligence Directorate, (10) the General Commander of the Armed Forces, and (11) the director of the National Police.<sup>11</sup>

While it is true that this body fulfills the vital role of advising the president, it also fulfills the task of ensuring the monitoring and compliance with the different guidelines established in the National Security and Defense Policy. This council also strengthens the mechanisms for implementation, follow-up, and evaluation in its capacity as the State's governing body to direct the National Security Strategy. Therefore, the Security and Defense System uses the NSC to execute and supervise the strategies to achieve the objectives of the nation. Through the NSC, the Colombian State can face not only the security and defense challenges, but also the risks or threats “derived from the mutation and adaptability of criminal organizations and the maintenance of conditions conducive to their multiplication and strengthening.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Security and Defense Strategy Planning**

Once the DES has been determined, the agencies responsible for planning and reporting to the NSC (considering both the capabilities and limitations of the components of national power, as well as the political will) generate a process that correlates the ends with the possible means and ways, in addition to weighing the risks, the strategy of the adversary and the effects of the change in the environment in order to establish the strategy to be used.

---

11 Republic of Colombia, Official Journal No. 47,932, (December 23, 2010), <http://svrpubindc.imprenta.gov.co/diario/index.xhtml;jsessionid=e95149a6c03900a6a6b7fb75c51>

12 Government of Colombia, “Política de Defensa y Seguridad (PDS)”, *Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Colombia* (Colombia: 2019), 23, [https://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/go/km/docs/Mindefensa/Documentos/descargas/Prensa/Documentos/politica\\_defensa\\_deguridad2019.pdf](https://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/go/km/docs/Mindefensa/Documentos/descargas/Prensa/Documentos/politica_defensa_deguridad2019.pdf)

In this sense, it is necessary to delve into the distinctive characteristics of the aforementioned elements in order to establish under what conditions they are considered by the responsible agency. In the first place, “ends” are understood as a DES or objective, which –having certain differences– comply with the general meaning of the term. An “end” must be a specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and defined within a time horizon. This is related to the achievement of an interest or the generation of a strategic effect, but not simply to the achievement of a tangible result of physical characteristics. On the one hand, an important aspect is its measurability, since it allows national planners and executors to establish to what extent the expected results have been achieved at the end of the planned actions. Due to its transcendence, this matter cannot be subject to a simple human perception. Firstly, the timeframe for achievement or time horizon is related to the concept of opportunity since strategic planning of security and defense is seen as systems within other systems and, therefore, far from a stove piped vision.

Secondly, the “means” that are considered –in Colombian doctrine– are everything tangible or intangible that the nation has at its disposal to advance towards the achievement of its national objectives, including population, infrastructure, moral, financial, and natural resources, as well as the will of the decision-maker, among others. This element must be evaluated as a whole and not in separate parts since the synergy generated by the combination of the use of the parts becomes part of the intangibles, substantially modifying the individuality of the parts. To highlight the above, reference can be made to an African proverb that says: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Thirdly, the “modes” refer to how to use the available means to achieve the DES. That is, the generation of different viable courses of action that will lead Colombia, with acceptable attrition, to a position that will allow it to generate the desired strategic effect. To this end, adequate coordination in the actions in its different fields is of great importance. As stated above,

depending on the different phases included in the designed strategy, the fields of action have a distinctive participation. The same goes for the use of power, influence, and the management of challenges.

Fourthly, for NSC planners, “risk” is calculated from the cost-benefit of actions. That is, the result toward or against something is estimated from the consideration of the possibilities of the adversary and one’s own courses of action. Of course, there is no planning without risk; the point is to know how to calculate it impartially and assess how much of it one is willing to assume. If the risk of loss is greater than that of profit, the goal is unrealistic, or the strategy designed to achieve it is not adequate.

Fifthly, with regard to the “adversary’s strategy,” it can be said that the golden dream of every strategist is to know what the opposing party wants and how it will act. However, since this is difficult to achieve, planners will have to carefully estimate what the adversary could logically do to oppose their own intentions. This is not an easy task, but it is essential to assess the risk of one’s planning and, from there, making adjustments and improvements accordingly.

Finally, the “environment” is the space that forces the strategist (in this case, the NSC) to analyze the geopolitical and geostrategic context in order to establish the challenges and opportunities that arise, as well as the possible changes that will be generated over time. For the sake of clarity, it is worth mentioning that, generally, the environment is characterized by political, economic, social, technological, legal, ecological, and security considerations. This analysis is closely related to the future studies and strategic anticipation required to face what Colombia will have to face in the short medium and long term.

### **Management of Strategic Planning of Security and Defense**

Three intrinsic and synergistic factors are considered in management of strategic planning, which is the phase that mediates between the execution

of the actions conceived in the planning and the achievement of the DES: (1) *control* (which is the action through which the priorities, coordination, design and execution are set), (2) *follow-up* (which should maintain the focus on what is to be achieved, as well as the analysis of the current panorama and the possible scenarios) and (3) *evaluation* (which is the space where results built from decision-making levels is reflected).<sup>13</sup> These factors must be related to the characteristics of the objective and the aforementioned conditions established for its achievement.

In this phase of strategic action, early correction -from the course of events- requires special attention, since these events will call into question the basic and deep considerations of the plan owing to a series of factors, such as one's own actions, those of the adversary, the effects of the environment and the reactions of the different international regimes, among others.

In this sense, it has a direct impact on bureaucratic structures and their officials, on members of the armed forces, on the population and, especially, on decision-makers at all levels. Despite having the plans to deal with the foreseen situations, these decision-makers must also be capable to overcome the crises that will arise as a result of the actions, stressing all national structures.

### **Military Considerations**

With regard to the effects that political-strategic level planning generates at the levels of defense and the Armed Forces, it can be affirmed that strategic planning allows the defense function, through the Armed Forces, to exercise the necessary contributing actions in favor of national security, reducing risks and facing threats. To this end, national security is generally associated with "any action aimed at preserving the country's institutional legal order, ensuring the free exercise of sovereignty

---

<sup>13</sup> Maria Johanna Alarcon Moreno, *Elaboración de una estrategia* (Washington D.C.: William Perry Hemispheric Center for Defense Studies, October 2019).

internally and externally, in accordance with the corresponding national and international standards in force.”<sup>14</sup>

In this sense, defense in Colombia is realized based on the aforementioned needs, making use of the distinctive capabilities of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and according to their doctrine. Therefore, the Colombian State, through the Ministry of Defense, articulates the actions of the Armed Forces under a strategic “defensive deterrence” posture. This position is expressed as the “set of measures and activities aimed at achieving and maintaining the State duly protected. In other words, defense is the means that the State uses to achieve one of its ends: security.”<sup>15</sup>

For the protection of sovereignty, territory and population, the Armed Forces structure the five mission areas which are: (1) prevent the invasion of the national territory, (2) dismantle the adversary command and control in to gain the strategic initiative, (3) dismantle adversary intelligence, (4) protect critical infrastructure to give continuity to the operation and (5) neutralize the use of air and river routes by the adversary.

Finally, it should be noted that strategic defense planning and management are primary tasks of the government. Although defense is conducted by the Armed Forces, it is directed by the president, who drives the guidelines for strategic planning of the nation’s security and defense.

## Conclusions

The action aimed at protecting Colombia against complex situations of various kinds that affect or may affect its security requires that the government structure, through the current government, be able to visualize (in the national and international environment) the risks, threats

---

14 Carlos Ojeda Bennett, “III Seminario Internacional de Fundamentos para el planteamiento de Seguridad y Defensa Nacional”, *CAEM Higher Military Studies Course and CIDENAL Integral National Defense Course* (Colombia: February 17 to 19, 2022), <https://www.kas.de/es/web/kolumbien/veranstaltungsberichte/detail/-/content/iii-seminario-internacional-de-fundamentos-para-el-planteamiento-de-seguridad-y-defensa-nacional-1>

15 Armed Forces of Colombia, “Manual de Seguridad y Defensa Nacional...”, 25.

and opportunities that will arise in the short, medium, and long term, so as to be able to face them and obtain the best returns through strategic planning. This type of planning makes sense when, on the one hand, the State has been able to capture and express the feelings of its inhabitants (while keeping due legitimacy) and, on the other, when its deep conceptions have the character of a State policy and not a government policy.

Strategic security and defense planning is part of a broader whole and is not a whole in itself since, as when certain vulnerabilities or risk enhancers must be addressed, it involves all the factors of national power under centralized direction from the highest level, and decentralized implementation in the different fields of action. Colombia is a nation proud of its past and present, as well as eager for a peaceful future that will allow it to take on its challenges with the certainty that its authorities are capable of carrying out the tasks demanded of them by its citizens.

### **About the author:**

**María Johanna Alarcón Moreno** - *Education and Doctrine Command of the Colombian National Army*

*She holds a Degree in International Relations and Political Studies from the Nueva Granada Military University. In addition, she has a master's degree in National Security and Defense from the Colombian War College. She has written several book chapters on strategy, security, and defense. She has been a member of the George C. Marshall Center European Center for Security Studies in Germany, as well as a member and adjunct professor at the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies in Washington D.C. She has completed the Comprehensive National Defense Course and the Strategic Public Security Course.*

# CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO SECURITY IN LATIN AMERICA

Latin America faces a complex economic, social, and political context with strong implications for the radicalization of society, the erosion of institutions, and the reduction of economic prospects, undermining its commitment to democracy and the rule of law. Although this phenomenon is not exclusive to Latin America, it seems that this region is experiencing the beginning of a chain of events that could negatively impact the countries that integrate it. Therefore, it is vital that all these problems be widely discussed and analyzed, in society and academia, to raise awareness, but mainly to generate ideas that contribute to decision-making at different levels of the States of the region.

ISBN: 978-612-47954-4-2



**CEEP** CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS  
ESTRATÉGICOS DEL  
EJÉRCITO DEL PERÚ



U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE  
**SSI**  
STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE