



Strategy Notebook 231-B

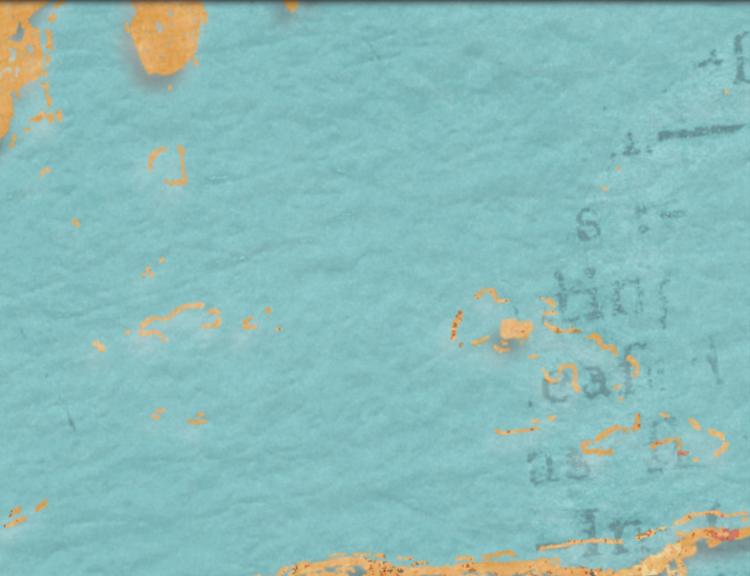
**New security and defence
challenges in Ibero-America in the
face of global changes**

Spanish
Institute for
Strategic
Studies

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Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos



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DE DEFENSA



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publicaciones.defensa.gob.es



Catálogo de Publicaciones de la Administración General del Estado
cpage.mpr.gob.es

Edita:



Paseo de la Castellana 109, 28046 Madrid

© Autores y editor, 2025

NIPO 083-25-257-X (edición impresa)
ISBN 978-84-1083-093-6 (edición impresa)

Cuadernos de Estrategia, ISSN 1697-6924 (edición impresa)
Cuadernos de Estrategia, ISSN 2952-3443 (edición en línea)

Depósito legal M 21638-2025

Fecha de edición: octubre de 2025

Maqueta e imprime: Imprenta Ministerio de Defensa

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Introduction-presentation

Gustavo Palomares

Víctor Mario Bados Nieto

Latin America is currently immersed in changes that involve transformations in the main continental dynamics and balances, not only in many of its countries, but also in the prevailing regionalism and in the different areas of integration and cooperation. The current transformation and changes in countries such as Venezuela and Argentina, the roadmap of governments such as those of Colombia and Brazil, the electoral consultations throughout this year in Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile and Honduras; all these issues may entail substantial modifications in the continental political, institutional and ideological balance, as well as a change in continental priorities, strategies and dynamics. All of these hemispheric transformations in a region that is a determining factor in the transformations of the current international order.

The Trump administration's new doctrine with Latin America —of "wall" diplomacy linked to national security objectives, with great political and strategic repercussions— as well as other new actors with great economic and investment weight —such as China— also entail significant continental changes and new balances that will gradually take shape in the region when shaping the balance between new and old objectives to respond to the new global challenges and risks within a collective commitment.

It is clear that the new sensitivities and dynamics are determining a new continental security agenda —with a strong and significant impact on current global governance— which requires the establishment of new instruments and tools within national and multilateral policies based on a renewed individual and, above all, collective commitment. This is the purpose of the reflections contained in these lines: to assess the main dynamics affecting continental security at the present time in order to take stock of the relatively failed traditional policies, the obsolete instruments that need to be replaced or reinvented, and the role that the security forces and the Armed Forces must play in the new scenarios for overcoming violence and seeking peace.

The aim of the Strategy Notebook that the interested and studious reader has in their hands is the same as the pretentious title of the book: to assess the new security and defence challenges in Latin America. And to do so from a plural and multidisciplinary perspective that knows how to combine experience in the management of government policies with the new objectives of Latin American regionalism, which urgently calls for a true collective security strategy. This has been the challenge of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE) of the Spanish Ministry of Defence and the Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado (IUGM), crystallised in this work: to bring together different authors with different sensibilities and approaches to advance one of the main challenges facing citizens and continental societies —a shared security agenda for Latin America.

This shared agenda becomes a matter of urgency because the issue that occupies first place in citizens' concerns —according to the data reflected by the Human Development Index and the Global Peace Index in recent years, but even more so in the 2024 index¹, even above other factors and perverse dynamics such as inequality, employment or corruption— is that of insecurity. A feeling that ceases to be an individual, national and regional issue and becomes a feeling shared by all Latin Americans when addressing the objective of their priorities and the threshold of their demands on state and transnational public policies.

In order to make this new agenda possible from the perspective of the current regionalism in transformation, it is necessary to

¹ *Regional Human Development Report for Latin America and the Caribbean 2023-2024*. NY, UNDP. Eds., 2024; also *Global Peace Index, 2024*. Institute for Economics and Peace. Eds., 2024.

place security—in its different approaches and from the different internal and external factors that intervene in policies— as a central point in the efforts of governments, continental organisations and integration spaces; as well as in the role to be played by other traditional actors in the region, such as the United States and also the EU; both at different times and with different impetus, taking into account the renewed role of the former in the region—as José Antonio Sanahuja recalls in his chapter— and a certain withdrawal of the latter, reflected in a more selective criterion in European projects towards the region as a whole, as Professor Palomares points out in his reflections. Not to mention the irresistible rise of China, which, little by little, is taking steps from the transcendental weight it already has in the economic, commercial and financial spheres towards areas of political cooperation in which security will sooner or later occupy a strategic place.

Recent years have shown that, as Carolina Sancho points out in her chapter, national policies and national security forces are insufficient to confront the growing levels of insecurity, especially that derived from drug trafficking and organised crime within and beyond borders. Many policies and years have been invested in the continent in the fight against drugs from a prohibitionist and repressive perspective that, based on classic assumptions, tried to influence production and the market, above all through police and judicial policy. Throughout this time, the main conclusion drawn is that the relative successes or outright failures, depending on how one wishes to present them, lie in the capacity of this “business” to adapt in all its phases in order to continue satisfying a global demand that is largely foreign to Latin America. For all these reasons, it seems inevitable to re-evaluate the policy against drugs and organised crime from new paradigms and also in search of a collective strategy from regional organisations.

Continental security and defence policy, the security forces and the Latin American armed forces, as Professor Rafael Martínez points out, must be a decisive part of this transformation in line with and parallel to the new continental and global challenges. Similarly, as Lieutenant Colonel Márquez de la Rubia notes, continental national security strategies must not only transcend the old scenarios of national interests and foreseeable risks, but must also be oriented towards this shared collective agenda in the field of security, defence and the search for peace.

As most of the studies presented in this issue agree, given the gainstislization of hemispheric problems in an imperfect multipolar system, a common defence agenda is more necessary than ever, both within and outside the prevailing regionalism, both multi- and bilaterally, which facilitates new intra-continental instruments in the fight not only against crime, drug trafficking, maritime piracy and freedom of the seas, violent cross-border gangs and organised crime, but also in the role they can play in global areas of special concern and sensitivity, such as the fight against terrorism and radicalism in all its forms. The study presented here, bravely drawn up by a heterogeneous group of writers and in the same spirit of proposal that has guided all the reflections collected here, proposes new possibilities and strategies for cooperation in this strategic area of defence, the result of external changes and transformations within the armed forces. The idea in this field of defence, as was also pointed out in security policy, is to move towards the progressive establishment of common policies.

In this new space in the search for an internationalising transformation of the Latin American armed forces, as in all of Latin America's backbone axes due to its demographic, economic and geostrategic weight, the place occupied by Brazil will be decisive in the different spheres, spaces and shared objectives. Antonio Ramalho's study points out, from Brazil's historical sensitivity to the concepts of national security, but also from the renewed revision of regionalism, especially UNASUR, the weight and influence that this country will have in the structuring of the security and defence agenda, even, it is believed, above of the new approaches and the internal political difficulties that it must manage. Brazil sees these joint security challenges as an opportunity to get closer to its neighbours through cooperation efforts that allow, on the one hand, to deepen South American integration in defence and security matters and, on the other, to articulate a common position for the region in the international arena.

This necessary collective strategy to confront the redefined Latin American security and defence agenda will combine old and new challenges, and will even change the order of shared risks, but it is clear that, in order to confront this perverse combination of old and new risks, it is necessary to establish renewed instruments with the aim of confronting dynamics that were initially a national issue and have become one of the elements of greatest continental concern.

The areas of security and defence cooperation between Latin America and the EU close the reflections in this booklet, which share a common thread: they are all the expression of transforming dynamics that explain the extent to which changes in the actors and factors require addressing the problems of continental security and the transformation of Latin American armed forces from a more integrated vision with renewed instruments based on collective work. The work you have in your hands is part of this effort and has been made possible thanks to the two institutions that promoted it, the committed work of its authors and the continuous monitoring and review work of the IEEE analyst, Colonel Márquez de la Rubia, to give continuity and coherence to the different analyses and approaches considered from an identical objective: to propose a shared agenda for this new continental era that underscores the idea of advancing in the progressive shaping of a common security and defence policy for Latin America. To the extent that this has been achieved, these authors' efforts will have been sufficiently rewarded.

March 2025

Chapter One

Trump's second term: anti-globalism, supremacism and hemispheric politics

José Antonio Sanahuja¹

Abstract

In its first few weeks, Donald Trump's second term has been characterised by radicalism and momentum and a communications strategy that puts his opponents on the defensive. His policies, based on the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, are eroding democratic, legislative and judicial checks and balances, and aim to weaken the Federal Administration. The political coalition supporting Trump includes the digital technopolies and a transformed Republican party veering to the far right.

Prioritising the immigration issue, he has adopted a series of executive orders, sometimes of dubious legality, including mass deportations and militarisation of the border. On both ideological and efficiency grounds, he has initiated the dismantling of various federal agencies.

In this context, it examines the "America First" foreign policy, which is based on the rejection of multilateralism and prioritises the use of tariffs as a coercive tool. It involves withdrawing the United States from several international agreements and adopt-

¹ This text was closed on 20 March 2025.

ing a markedly protectionist trade policy. Trump also questions the North Atlantic link, which implies a change in relations with Europe and support for Russia in the war in Ukraine. He prioritises containment of China from the Indo-Pacific, with less engagement with NATO. The chapter devotes special attention to Latin America, which he threatens with higher tariffs. With regard to Mexico, he has adopted strict immigration policies that include deportations and the militarisation of the border. In Panama, he has demanded greater control of the canal in the face of the alleged threat from China.

The chapter concludes that Trump's second term is more radical, organised and strategic than his first, with a strong questioning of the international liberal order. The US has become an erratic and unpredictable partner, making international cooperation difficult. Trump's aggressive and ideologised foreign policy amplifies the crisis of globalisation and geopolitical rivalry, making the US a difficult actor to deal with in a highly interconnected international system.

Keywords

United States, Trumpism, International relations, Geopolitics, Latin America.

Introduction: the Trump tsunami 2.0

Rather than the tidal cycle, which is sometimes used as a metaphorical image of a change of government, the beginning of Donald Trump's second presidency would evoke the image of a tsunami or a flood. Although announced, it has provoked general astonishment by its radicalism and momentum, even among a significant part of his voters. There was the precedent of Trump's first term, which also began with a wave of extreme measures, and a more organised, but also more extremist, disruptive and revanchist Trumpism was expected for the second term. After the inaugural speech, which already adopted a strong supremacist and imperial tone, executive orders, aggressive statements, provocations and threats to internal and external actors, riddled with falsehoods and misinformation, have followed in a frenzied and inconsistent manner.

This avalanche may seem chaotic, but there are method and strategy in it: that which has characterised the communication and political practice of Trumpism and the new national-populist far-right forces, which, with local traits, are a movement on the rise on a global scale. In the words of one of its ideologues, Steve Bannon, this strategy is based on overflowing the public sphere with a rapid flood of events and news, much of it knowingly false, with populist and reactionary rhetoric (Camargo, 2024: 169 and 185). As George Lakoff (2004: 50) warned, this puts his opponents on the defensive and forces them to take on conservative discursive frames, which ends up reinforcing them. In Bannon's strategy, as columnist Ezra Klein points out, the key is speed of exit:

"[...] if you overwhelm the media, if you give them too many issues to examine, all at once ... no coherent opposition can emerge. Even thinking coherently is difficult. Donald Trump's first two weeks in the White House have followed Bannon's strategy like a script. The point is the flood. The goal is overwhelm. The message was not in a single executive order or announcement. It was in the cumulative effect of it all" (Klein, 2025).

In sum, the beginning of Trump's second term in office responds to a communication strategy and the search for its performative effect in order to impose his discursive framework, neutralise the opposition and generate an image of omnipotent power for the

Administration and of an imperial power that returns to a position of primacy in international politics. But there are also several important differences with respect to his first term in office.

First, Trumpism now responds to a broad project of contestation of the liberal order in its domestic and international dimensions, and at the political, economic and socio-cultural levels. It is based on a previous, more articulated organic, ideological and programmatic work, which was systematised in the so-called Project 2025, led by the conservative *think-tank* Heritage Foundation.

Secondly, and as an expression of this project, Trump wants to remove the obstacles posed by legislation, checks and balances in the US democratic system, which in his first term hindered or prevented him from governing unhindered. In particular, he wants to avoid the legislative and judicial branches and the Federal Administration itself and its technical and civil servant staff getting in the way of his actions —what Trumpism calls the “deep state”— which insists on observance of the law and is guided by expert knowledge. Indeed, within days, under the leadership of Elon Musk, there has been a traumatic takeover of the Federal Administration involving the abrupt closure of offices and mass resignations and dismissals of technicians and civil servants.

Third, Trumpism is now based on a broad political coalition around a Republican Party that is transformed, and at times unrecognisable, from the political conservatism and economic liberalism of the *Great Old Party*. With positions that have shifted towards the extreme right, the Republicans and their political and economic allies are also part of a broad “reactionary international” that brings together a constellation of nationalist far-right forces, characterised in this paper as “neo-patriots”, with a global reach (Orellana and Michelsen, 2019; Sanahuja and López Burian, 2023). This entails a radical shift in the United State” international alignments, now guided more by ideological closeness within this reactionary international than by its traditional alliances in the North Atlantic space and the liberal internationalism on which they have been based for decades. In particular, this involves the questioning of the North Atlantic link and relations with Europe, and a rapid shift in favour of Russia in the Ukrainian war.

Fourth, new digital technopolies and a business oligarchy that sees Trumpism as an instrument to eliminate rules that limit the development of their businesses, based on new technologies or access to natural resources, in the name of privacy, individual and

collective rights, ecological transition, and rules of international law (Pistor, 2025), play a key role in the coalition that supports Trump. This is aimed in particular at the Federal Government itself. And, externally, to international or governmental standards, in particular those adopted by the European Union (EU), which through the so-called "Brussels effect" have global regulatory reach (Bradford, 2020; Applebaum, 2025).

Finally, as a general argument, the anti-globalist discourse and practices of Trumpism and the neo-patriotic far-right forces as a whole are, in terms of agency, a key causal variable in the crisis of hegemony of liberal internationalism and of a West articulated around the North Atlantic space, and of the process of power transition that characterises the contemporary international system (Sanahuja, 2017 and 2024). In doing so, the US has become one of the most active revisionist actors with respect to the liberal, "rules-based" international order.

1 Challenging the international liberal order and anti-globalism: Trump and Project 2025

Trumpism is a highly idiosyncratic socio-political movement, shaped by the historical trajectory, culture and political system of the United States. But at the same time, it is the US expression of the global rise of new far-right forces, which can be described as "neo-patriots", and responds to both causal and global factors. In particular, it responds to the socio-economic consequences of the crisis of globalisation, which has ushered in a period of interregnum and radical uncertainty that calls into question previous narratives of progress. As has been pointed out in other works, this has fuelled citizen disaffection with the liberal political and economic order and its elites, which no longer responds to expectations of well-being and shared ideas of equity, access and voice in every society ².

These new neo-patriot ultra-rightists, of which Trumpism is one of the main exponents, appear at the crossroads between ideology and the crisis of globalisation. They are therefore defined on the basis of a dual socio-political cleavage: on the one hand, the

² Extensive theorisation and analysis of this category have been developed, which can be found in Sanahuja, 2017; Sanahuja and López Burian, 2023 and 2024. See also: Sanahuja, 2024. For its Latin American expressions, see Sanahuja and López Burian, 2020.

traditional left-right axis, in which they are situated in ultra-conservative positions, and, on the other, that which defines the different positions vis-à-vis globalisation, in an axis that pits nationalism and sovereignty against cosmopolitanism and liberal internationalism. On this axis, the common characteristic of these movements is the politicisation and contestation of the liberal international order and what they call “globalism”, which these movements describe in a diffuse manner and, on occasions, with conspiratorial narratives.

In the name of the sovereignty and freedom of nations, of the “true people” or of individuals, in their libertarian version, they reject the values, norms and institutions of liberal internationalism, considered *woke* in both its national and international expression. This rejection extends to the elites and political forces that have been in charge of its governance, legitimisation and reproduction, with populist strategies and discourses. For this reason, this confrontation is often expressed in terms of “culture wars” against globalism, which they present as the anti-democratic imposition of unelected transnational elites and complicit local elites. In the face of these, they construct restrictive imaginaries of community, nation, people, culture or tradition, and in the face of immigration, of a nativist nature. Finally, these neo-patriot ultra-rightists are part of a “reactionary international” that shares arguments, discourses, formal and informal organisational networks and the common purpose of challenging the existing order.

The term “contestation”, in this context, is defined as the set of discourses and social practices that politicise, in a polarising way, and question norms, institutions and the international order in terms of their legitimacy, their origin or foundations, the actors that sustain them, or their substantive content (Zürn, 2014; Wiener, 2014 and 2017; Orchard and Wiener, 2023; Ekman and Everts, 2024).

On a global scale, at least six thematic nodes can be identified in which national and international norms and consensus intersect, which are the object of this strategy of politicisation and contestation (Sanahuja and López Burian, 2024). What has been shown so far of Trump’s second term responds, in a very visible way, to this matrix.

The first of these nodes concerns democratic values, norms and institutions and, in particular, the rule of law. Neo-patriots claim

authoritarian patterns that, in the name of nation, community or security, affect the separation of powers or guarantees of civil and political liberties. In some cases, this involves punitivist, militaristic and securitising social policies.

The second concerns rules and institutions related to international trade and investment. It involves the rejection of the external constitutionalisation of trade and investment rules with rules of international law ³/₄one of the constitutive features of globalisation³/₄ in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) or regional trade agreements. But this rejection or contestation of the (neoliberal) rules of the international economic order can lead both to protectionist policies in trade, the protection of strategic sectors from foreign investment, considered hostile, and to ultra-liberal policies of unilateral openness.

The third focuses on public goods, such as the environment or health. In the environmental field, the focus is on climate change, energy transition or the protection of biodiversity. It is based on both nationalist appeals to economic growth and libertarian perspectives centred on individual freedoms. It is associated with the rejection of expert knowledge and scientific knowledge, denounced as *woke* ideology, as shown by the covid-19 pandemic, in which confinements, the use of masks, vaccination campaigns and international cooperation in health were politicised and contested.

The fourth node brings together human rights norms, particularly on issues of gender equality and sexual diversity. The open confrontation with feminisms and the contestation of diversity and what they call "gender ideology" are tools of (re)politicisation, polarisation and "cultural battle", in spaces such as social policy, educational institutions, health and the rules of everyday coexistence.

The fifth is migration policies. With securitarian, identitarian and nativist discourses, it is presented as a threat to employment and welfare, to the community, the nation and its tradition, also questioning multiculturalism and the recognition of diversity.

The sixth concerns the international liberal order itself and the very notion of the West and its hegemonic position. The common element is the questioning of the norms and institutions of the international liberal order and liberal internationalism, in the form it takes in the post-Cold War and globalisation period. With aggressive anti-globalist rhetoric, the UN system and regional

integration and cooperation organisations, such as the EU, are contested. With a highly ideologised rhetoric it thinks of foreign policy in bilateral and transactional terms. However, among neo-patriots there are divergent positions on geopolitical alignments, between Atlanticists and Euro-Asianists, on the relationship with China, or on the invasion of Ukraine.

These six thematic nodes are comprehensively addressed in Project 2025, drawn up by the conservative *think-tank* Heritage Foundation and other organisations in the run-up to the 2024 presidential elections. Although Trump did not initially recognise it as a government programme, his actions and proposals respond faithfully to his proposals. It consists of several elements, the most relevant of which is the extensive *Mandate for Leadership* (Dans and Groves, 2024), which sets out the outlines of the “conservative” policy^¾ as the neo-patriot right wing in the United States defines itself^¾ for Trump’s return to the presidency. Much of the attention is directed at the Federal Government, public agencies and their technical and career staff, which Trumpism calls the “deep state”. Claiming that “the problem comes from within”, it points to an *establishment* that is seen as “mostly leftist”, subservient to *woke* agendas and “social engineering” (critical race theory, equality, feminism, LGTBIQ+, climate). It is seen as contrary to the national interest and defence of the United States; as independent decision-makers and, thus, as obstructing the presidential mandate. The radical and highly ideologised proposal is for an immediate and widespread purge of the civil service and foreign service by replacing these personnel with conservative *political appointees*. To this end, it is proposed to create a database ^{¾a} “conservative LinkedIn”^¾ so that any ordinary person who is loyal to the President can occupy positions in the administration (Dans and Groves, 2023: 88). This will avoid legal checks and balances on the political action of the presidency. The actions of Elon Musk and DOGE should come as no surprise, as they respond exactly to these proposals.

On economic policy, the challenge to globalisation is clear: “For several decades, *establishment* ‘elites’ have failed the citizenry by refusing to control borders, outsourcing manufacturing to China and elsewhere, spending recklessly, constantly regulating, and ultimately controlling the country from the top down rather than letting it flourish from the bottom up” (Dans and Groves, 2023: 657). However, Project 2025 recognises that in trade policy there are two visions, which clashed in Trump’s first term without a clear

strategy emerging: the contribution by Kent Lassman, President of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, advocates free trade with all nations; but the chapter written by Peter Navarro, who served as Trump's presidential adviser in his first term, expresses the more influential position for the second term: it favours protectionism, criticises offshoring, and seeks to restore manufacturing capacity, with a particular emphasis on the defence industry. He is belligerent about China's alleged espionage and industrial piracy, which allowed an "unfair, unbalanced and non-reciprocal" relationship with China, with which the US should seek economic decoupling.

As in Trump's first phase, Project 2025 calls for the withdrawal from major international treaties and informal agreements that are deemed harmful to national sovereignty and impose high costs, and for an end to "blind support for international organisations", considering the withdrawal of those that do not serve the US national interest. It questions, in particular, their promotion of "radical social policies as if they were human rights priorities", calling for a reorientation towards "promoting a healthy culture of respect for life, family and sovereignty" as "foundations of human society" and "true human rights", with an express rejection of abortion and "the limitation of human rights in the name of health" (Dan and Groves, 2023: 191).

Project 2025 subordinates foreign policy as a whole —as is also the case with trade policy— to national defence, with a markedly securitarian discourse. It defines China and its expansionist policy in Asia as the main danger, advocating a defensive strategy (*denial defence*) that makes the control or subordination of Taiwan and other countries in the region unfeasible, but with a limit: it must be "at a cost that the Americans are willing to assume". He does not take the radical position of Republican sectors — and sometimes expressed by Trump— in favour of leaving NATO, but he does propose that security in Europe and deterrence of Russia be assumed by the Europeans themselves, leaving the US nuclear umbrella, which must be modernised, as a last resort. He sees migration control as a central foreign policy issue and proposes a rigorous reassessment of "who is friend and who is foe". In addition to China, seen "more as a threat than a competitor", other countries to beat include Iran, Venezuela, Russia and North Korea. Project 2025 acknowledges that the Ukraine war and the relationship with Russia is an issue that "divides conservatives", (Dan and Groves, 2023: 181). It is a key issue for the three com-

peting foreign policy visions of Trumpism (Belin *et al.*, 2024): a) the “restrainers”, focused on the domestic agenda and with isolationist tendencies; b) the “prioritisers”, who call for a focus on Asia and confronting China; and c) the “supremacists”, who advocate a policy of global supremacy. For the first two, the priority is China. This means setting aside North Atlantic engagement and handing over Europe’s security to the Europeans, reducing aid to Ukraine and, thus, forcing a Russia-friendly peace deal. As detailed below, it is this approach that the Trump Administration has shown in February 2025, in meetings with the Europeans in the Ramstein Group or at the Munich Security Conference, where Vice President J. D. Vance delivered a highly ideologised speech in favour of the European members of the reactionary international of which Trumpism is a part (*The Economist*, 2025d; Rachman, 2025b). But all three visions are markedly unilateralist and involve a clear rejection of multilateralism and the “rules-based international order” of liberal internationalism of which the US had been a founder and champion (Walt, 2024; Cooley and Nexon, 2025). In the first few weeks of Trump’s second presidency, as will be seen in the following sections, a combination of the second and third of these positions seems to be asserting itself.

2 Government by decree and democracy in question: Trump’s domestic policy shift

In the avalanche that ushered in Trump’s second presidency, the executive orders announced at the time of his inauguration stand out for their content and the deliberate spectacular nature of their presentation, most of which are related to the key issues of the election campaign³. This is the case of immigration, an issue that Trumpism addresses in a securitarian, nationalist and identity-based way, and which particularly concerns its relationship with Latin America, the origin of a large part of the migrant population in the United States. It involves the announcement of mass deportations that could affect several million people; the end of the refugee admission programme; restrictions on visa policy, particularly against certain Muslim countries; and the attempt, contrary to the provisions of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, to put an end to *ius solis* or the right to birthright cit-

³ An annotated summary of these presidential decrees or executive orders can be found in *The Grand Continent* (2025b).

izenship in its territory. This has been justified by an implausible legal theory that categorises them as an "invasion" (Washington Office on Latin America, 2025) and the forced invocation of emergency legislation. Linked to the criminalisation of immigration, Trump also adopts an iron fist or "law and order" policy on citizen security and has reinstated the death penalty, discontinued by Biden since 2021. The presidential decrees also provide for greater control and militarisation of the southern border in the face of the arrival of migrants and drug trafficking, especially fentanyl, which are presented as an "invasion". In response to this, the deployment of the armed forces and the legal categorisation of the drug cartels, mostly Mexican, as "international terrorist organisations" were decreed through a list that was later made public.

Many of the first measures, of dubious legality or outright illegal, involve the dismantling or closure of important Federal Government agencies, some of them providers of vital services, and the dismissal or forced resignation of tens of thousands of civil servants, in some cases replaced by political appointees, on the grounds of digital modernisation, efficiency and accountability. In reality, these changes can be seen as an attempt at *weaponisation* of the state (Levitsky and Way, 2025). In other words, as a partisan instrumentalization of public administration and policies and their clientelist use against their political opponents, and to favour the business interests that have been placed at the centre of their government. The creation of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), under the direct command of the erratic businessman Elon Musk, serves these purposes. With a confusing legal status, it has taken *de facto* control of key areas for the daily functioning of the Departments of the Treasury and Education, has gained access to sensitive information of civil servants and citizens, and has adopted decisions to stop spending and close federal agencies, with the notorious case of the Agency for International Development (USAID). This usurps the powers of Congress, which has led to some court rulings limiting its actions, which the government seeks to circumvent (Jiménez, 2025b; Miller, Rogers and Murphy, 2025).

In the space of a few weeks, the contestation of the rule of law and the division of powers seems to be normalised in discourse and practice, potentially leading to a constitutional crisis (Liptak, 2025). This is testing the solidity of the guardrails of US democ-

racy, which Trumpism has already challenged with its attempt to delegitimise the presidential election and the attempted coup that the assault on the Capitol on 6 January 2021 entailed. Among his first measures, Trump has pardoned and publicly rehabilitated those responsible, presenting them as freedom fighters, when they were serious punishable offences. Restrictions on disinformation are also removed by decree, in the name of “free speech”, with a moratorium on the operation of the Chinese-owned network TikTok, which has been functional to far-right campaigns in the US and elsewhere, buying time for a possible change of ownership to US hands. Several digital technopolies have joined in this policy. This is the case of Meta, parent company of Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger Live and Threads, chaired by Mark Zuckerberg, which after Trump’s election victory decided to abolish content moderation on its platforms and networks, as did X (formerly Twitter) after its purchase by Elon Musk. In the opposite direction, it is also the case of Jeff Bezos, owner of Amazon and also of the *Washington Post*, which has censored anti-Trump content and imposed a new editorial line on the newspaper (*Financial Times*, 2025).

These actions exacerbate the trend of democratic deterioration that Trump began in his first term. In the last decade, the United States has regressed on various indicators of the quality and solidity of democracy, to the point that since 2016 it has been considered a “*flawed democracy*” according to the Economist Intelligence Unit’s classification (2024: 39). With Trump’s second term in office, as Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way (2025) have pointed out, “democracy is at its most imperilled moment of any time in US history” and there is a certain risk that its democratic system will no longer meet the established criteria of a liberal democracy: full suffrage, free and fair elections, separation and independence of powers, and guarantees for civil liberties. The result of such a drift is not necessarily a dictatorship, but a system of competitive authoritarianism in which opposition is tolerated and elections still take place, although they are neither free nor fair. Such a system, already entrenched, exists in other European countries, such as Viktor Orban’s Hungary, and also in Narendra Modi’s India, Erdogan’s Turkey, Putin’s Russia or Chavista Venezuela in Latin America, to name but a few cases (Forti, 2024: 273).

An important part of this first wave of decrees and initiatives has been aimed at dismantling the “green new deal” —which, in

reality, was never adopted— and ending the green transition policies of the so-called *bidenomics*, even by repealing its goals of electrification of the car fleet. By decree, appealing to emergency legislation, Trump declared a “national energy emergency”. He is once again resorting to a securitarian discourse, blaming the Biden Administration and its “green” policies for rising energy prices, without mentioning the legacy of years of insufficient public and private investment in this sector. These executive orders begin the elimination of environmental incentives and regulations to “free up” US energy and natural resources, with specific provisions to open protected areas of Alaska to oil and natural gas exploration and development. It also halts the disbursement of *Inflation Reduction Act* (IRA) funds adopted under Biden. In his inaugural speech, Trump summed up this policy with the expression “*drill, baby, drill*” (Jimenez, 2025b). A rapid abandonment of environmental, social and governance (ESG) commitments can be seen at the corporate level.

As with environmental policies, some of the Trump Administration's highly ideologised executive orders and early measures are framed in discourses of polarisation against the ideas and policies of the centrist consensus and liberal progressivism, which the far right calls *woke*⁴. But this is not only an ideological marker. It represents a significant erosion of civil rights and affirmative action policies to reduce inequalities and dynamics of exclusion, which received a strong boost during the Biden period as a response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Thus, the measures and bodies responsible in the Federal Government for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies, considered “radical and unnecessary”, are repealed by decree. Against what the far right misleadingly calls “gender ideology”, in his inaugural speech Trump declared: “I will end the government's policy of trying to socially impose race and gender”. But what he decreed was just the mandatory use in the Federal Government ³/₄e.g. in passports and official documents³/₄ of the categories “male and female” and sex, instead of the term gender, based on strictly biological facts, considered “natural and immutable”, as the sole criterion of identity and the basis of civil rights. In the business world, this shift is also visible even before Trump's inauguration:

⁴ This term, initially referring to anti-racist consciousness (*stay woke*), has ended up being a derogatory expression used by the far right against all progressive and “conscientious” movements and ideas.

“Companies are eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion departments, reducing their support for racially diverse charities and dropping climate change groups. They are also eliminating anything that could be perceived as *woke* from public statements, corporate documents and advertising. The election has empowered some senior executives to start speaking out in favour of conservative policies, from tax cuts to traditional gender roles” (*Financial Times*, 2025a).

Among the offshoots of this *anti-woke* agenda is the crackdown on science and expertise, which has weakened the federal agencies responsible for climate monitoring and vaccine research — one of Trump’s “two *bête noires*”— or the listing of terms that have been banned in public agency publications in the health or climate fields, or for funding in federal research agencies and programmes (Sun, Keating and Nirappil, 2025).

3 America First: foreign policy, trade and unilateralism

Donald Trump’s first presidency was already marked by a rejection of multilateralism and an aggressive trade and migration policy. This was shown by his withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the WHO, along with UNESCO and the Human Rights Council, later reversed by Biden. Trump also adopted openly protectionist policies, blocking the WTO, and initiated trade and technology wars with China and other partners. As mentioned, a feature of the radicalisation, or “Trumpisation”, of the Republican Party at this stage was the abandonment of its traditional liberal vision of trade policy. It is against this backdrop that Trump’s unique transactional foreign policy emerges. Added to this is the hardening of immigration policy, which marked relations with Mexico. He also deepened the US strategic shift towards the Indo-Pacific, initiated by Obama, to the detriment of the transatlantic link and the US commitment to NATO and security in Europe, denouncing key arms limitation and control agreements such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), which fuelled Russia’s revisionist attitude towards Ukraine and would end up being one of the arguments used by Putin to justify the invasion.

In his second term, there are elements of continuity in the rejection of multilateralism and the liberal international order, but there is also a marked hardening of foreign and trade policy. *America First* foreign policy reappears, with a brief but far-reaching executive order addressed to the Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, to

ensure that his department's actions put US interests above all other considerations. This alludes to the United States' multilateral commitments and international law, on which, already in the first decisions and announcements, there are disturbing facts that show a more aggressive policy than during his first presidency. With a discourse that combines victimhood and supremacism, arguments that ultimately invoke national security, and rhetoric that evokes the most imperialist United States, Trump and his government have launched direct threats to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of several countries or territories, particularly in the Americas, as in the case of Mexico, Panama and Greenland, an autonomous territory dependent on Denmark. Above all, he has used tariffs, trade, access to technology and visas as coercive instruments (*the weaponisation of everything*).

In the Middle East, he has openly supported Israel's far-right government, announcing that the US would "take control of Gaza" and endorsing the "ethnic cleansing" and mass deportations called for by radical Zionism, with which the Trump-supporting US religious right is increasingly converging. To this end, he has pressured African countries to accept refugees from Gaza and has openly threatened Egypt and Jordan with the withdrawal of aid if they do not accept Gazans expelled from the territory to enable Trump's peculiarly libertarian real estate plan to turn Gaza into the "riviera" of the Middle East. One of Trump's first moves was to repeal the first and only sanctions adopted by the Biden Administration against radical settlers who had perpetrated violent acts against Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. With regard to Iran, he has announced a more forceful policy, in partnership with Israel, which does not rule out the use of force in the face of its nuclear programme and the consequent risk of regional conflict, which the Biden Administration, along with the European Union, had sought to avoid.

Trump has also set out an aggressive agenda of demands on his traditional allies in Europe, whom he intends to place in a relationship of open strategic subordination. This also heralds the end of the transatlantic link as it has existed up to this point, and if anything illustrates this clearly, it is the 180-degree turn in the US position on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a turn that was already foreshadowed in the Republican Party's position during Biden's tenure. There are several key milestones in this shift, which has provoked astonishment, concern and indignation, to varying degrees, in European governments: the first is the intervention of

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth at the 12 February 2025 meeting of the Ramstein Group, which is responsible for coordinating military assistance to Ukraine. At this meeting, the first to be held under the Trump Administration, Hegseth reaffirmed that the strategic priority for the United States is the Indo-Pacific and the containment of China, and not Europe, whose security should be taken care of by the Europeans with greater military spending. In particular, in the face of a possible ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine —about which Trump and Putin were in direct dialogue at the time—, he announced his willingness to impose a costly and risky deployment in Ukraine of capable troops, “European and non-European”, without NATO cover, while ruling out European and Ukrainian consultation or participation in bilateral US-Russian peace talks (Chávez *et al.*, 2025; Foy, Miller and Schwartz, 2025; *The Economist*, 2025d).

The second milestone was the speech by Vice-President J. D. Vance on 14 February at the Munich Security Conference on the eve of the German general elections, with a strongly ideologised and identitarian speech against “Wokis” and in favour of the German and European far right (*The Great Continent*, 2025; Rizzi, 2025), in which the Trump Administration showed that its policy towards Europe was more oriented towards supporting these forces —and, thus, closer to Budapest and Moscow than to Brussels— than to other foreign policy considerations (Rachman, 2025b).

The third milestone is the White House meeting on 28 February, in which Trump and Vance tried to publicly humiliate Zelensky by letting him know that “he held no cards” and that he had to accept a Russia-friendly peace, as well as an unfavourable deal for US exploitation of minerals and rare earth elements (Vidal, 2025). Trump’s threats and pressure continued in subsequent days, with confusing reports of Elon Musk-owned Starlink terminals, a vital tool for Ukrainian military communications, being disconnected and the announcement of the suspension of US military and intelligence aid just a week after the White House collision (Politi *et al.*, 2025).

This shift has systemic implications: on the one hand, the US is in practice abandoning its North Atlantic engagement and, at the same time, seeking to establish a relationship of subordination —or open vassalage, as President Emmanuel Macron once called it (Puglierin and Shapiro, 2023; Macron, 2024)— that places Europeans in a double, interconnected dilemma: between

fragmentation and unity, and between dependence or strategic autonomy. Indeed, these developments provoked a strong European response, involving both the EU and its member states and the UK, in support of Ukraine and in favour of greater political and defence autonomy. On the other hand, with regard to the Ukrainian war, important concessions are made to Russia before even beginning an openly unequal negotiation that could lead to the imposition of an unjust peace and the *de facto* partition of Ukraine. This would also mean a weakened Europe and the threat of renewed war on its eastern flank.

America First, as indicated above, is a frontal assault on multilateralism and international norms, including the withdrawal from organisations and treaties such as the World Health Organisation and the Paris Agreement on climate change, both of which are expressly the subject of executive orders. In both cases, Trump already decided to withdraw in his first term, which was reversed in 2021 in both cases by the Biden Administration. The US has also initiated a review, through another executive order, of its membership and contributions to other international organisations. The drastic closure of USAID also means an abrupt end to a large number of programmes developed jointly or through UN programmes, funds and operational agencies, as well as to the voluntary contributions on which its functioning depended. It was also announced that cooperation on the international taxation of multinationals developed in the framework of the OECD will be terminated, and that it will be absent from the G20 meetings. One of the most relevant cases is the February 2025 executive order by which the United States, which is not a party to its statute nor admits its jurisdiction, can impose sanctions on International Criminal Court (ICC) personnel who have been involved in cases against US citizens or allied countries, such as Israel. This is not the first time, as in 2020 the Trump Administration already sanctioned the Chief Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda. This time, the order cites as a "dangerous precedent" the court's decision to issue arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant on suspicion of committing war crimes in Gaza, a territory that does fall under the ICC's jurisdiction (Roth, 2025). Trump's presidential order coincided with Netanyahu's visit to Washington and the announcement that the US would take control of Gaza. Again, the argument is that ICC actions harm US national security (Vidal and Ferrer, 2025).

Perhaps one of the most direct challenges to the multilateral order is the *America First Trade Policy*, adopted on the day of the inauguration (The White House, 2025). One of the two US presidents cited in the inaugural address was William McKinley, known as “the Napoleon of protectionism”, who, while in office, pushed through the “McKinley Tariff” in 1890, which raised the tariff —on average— to between 38 and 50 per cent on all imports. With the threat of high tariffs and the intention to use investment and technology as a coercive tool, Trump has opened new fronts in his trade wars. Far more far-reaching than those launched in his first term, they represent an intensification of economic nationalism and protectionism and a new blow to a globalisation already in crisis, with unpredictable consequences. Thus, rather than an undesired effect, uncertainty is generated as a tool of pressure.

The Trump Administration explicitly states that trade policy is a critical component of national security and considers persistent US trade deficits with its major trading partners, which Trump and his Administration misleadingly describe as “subsidies” to other countries, to be threats to national security. In its general formulation, the policy mandates a review of all trade agreements in which the United States participates, and in particular the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (T-Mec or USMCA), with a view to its planned review in 2026. However, these two countries have already been directly threatened with tariffs on several occasions to act on migration and fentanyl, illustrating Trump Administration’s use of tariffs as a coercive foreign policy tool. The presidential order also proposes creating a federal foreign revenue service and targets foreign exchange policies, looking for unfair exchange rate manipulation and misalignment practices; *de minimis* clauses, which could allow smuggling and illegal access of fentanyl; and relations with China —to which a new 10% tariff was applied, adding to those already adopted in Trump’s first term, which in many cases were maintained under Biden— and other trading partners, including their intellectual property and patent protection rules. It also calls for a review of export controls on sensitive technologies and a general assessment of the economic security of the United States and its industrial and manufacturing base, with special mention of steel and aluminium, for which a few days later a general tariff of 25% was introduced, to be applied from March 2025. Threats of tariffs also extend to the BRICS countries should they seek alternatives to the dollar’s supremacy as the international reserve currency (Williams, 2024).

Many of these measures, such as those taken in Trump's first term, fall under the national security safeguards of the WTO or T-Mec. In other cases, such as the threat of tariffs on Mexico and Canada, he has invoked the International Economic Emergency Powers Act. This presumes the existence of an extraordinary threat which, in this case, is more of a discursive device than a tangible reality. They presume an abusive use of these rules, which is difficult to challenge at the WTO, whose dispute settlement body was blocked by the first Trump Administration in 2019. However, the proposal to adopt reciprocal tariffs on all countries, launched in mid-February 2025 under the umbrella of the *America First* trade policy, has the potential to shatter the decades-long architecture of the multilateral trading system (Beattie, 2025b). Once again, on the basis of victimhood rhetoric and national security arguments, the United States intends to apply from April 2025, country by country, a tariff whose amount would be established on the basis of peculiar calculations that include, along with tariffs, non-tariff barriers, exchange rate policy, wage differentials, or "unfair, arbitrary or excessive" taxes. Trump has singled out, for example, the European value-added tax (VAT), which has no equivalent in the United States, calling it a "scam" (Jiménez, 2025c). Brazil, India, Japan, Canada, South Africa, again Mexico or Canada, and the EU could be the most affected (Williams et al., 2025b). It remains to be seen to what extent this plan is enforceable and whether it is more of a lobbying and negotiating tool. But its possible implementation would mean doing away with the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) clause and the principle of non-discrimination, which is the cornerstone of the WTO, of the multilateral trading system and, more broadly, of a rules-based international order.

Everything seems to be valid also for the defence of certain US business interests. Through an executive order that, once again, appeals to national security as the ultimate argument, Trump ordered the Department of Justice to refrain from enforcing the 1977 Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. This allows US companies to once again resort to bribing officials of other governments to obtain contracts and concessions, making them more competitive with those of other countries for access to critical raw materials or strategically important infrastructure. But this may encourage a "race to the bottom" by companies from other countries, eroding global standards in this area (Beattie, 2025a). The decision is also in breach of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) "*anti-bribery convention*". Adopted

in 1997, it has 46 party states, including the United States, among them all other members of that international organisation (Chávez and Palma, 2025).

4 Trump 2.0 and Latin America: the return of imperial rhetoric and coercion to hemispheric relations

In his inaugural address and at the press conference beforehand at Mar-a-Lago in January 2025, Trump expressly revived the doctrine of manifest destiny to ground the new role the US hopes to play in the world. This doctrine is based on exceptionalism and providentialism, to which he also alluded, which are rooted in US identity and political culture and are part of its founding narrative (Palomares and García, 2019: 22). For this reason, they have underpinned both US expansionism and imperialism in the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, as well as Wilsonian idealism and liberal internationalism in US foreign policy and hegemony. These ideas, moreover, are particularly important for understanding its hegemonic relationship with Latin America and, in a broader sense, with what the United States calls “the Western Hemisphere”, a concept that is related to these doctrines. This geopolitical concept is based on the idea that their processes of independence from the Europe placed the new American republics in “another” hemisphere politically, and not just geographically, in which the United States claims a predominant position.

Without any shame, in the inaugural address Trump defined the United States as “the greatest civilisation in history”, and expressly stated that: “America will soon be bigger, stronger and far more exceptional than ever before [...] America will reclaim its rightful place as the greatest, most powerful and respected nation on Earth, inspiring awe and admiration from around the world”. Its evident destiny is again, according to Trump, global supremacy and territorial expansion: “America will once again be seen as a growing nation, increasing its wealth and expanding its territory [...] and we will pursue our manifest destiny to the stars [...] the frontier spirit is in our hearts”. It may be a figure of speech, but in the light of subsequent threats, this expansionist must not to be taken lightly. In addition to outer space, Trump has also alluded to Canada, Greenland and Panama, in the latter two cases without ruling out the use of force. With Canada, which he called “the 51st state of the Union”, “[...] we are not going to

use military force, but we are going to use economic force" (*The Grand Continent*, 2025a: 2).

According to Stewart Patrick (2025), all this shows that Trump has a distorted view of US sovereignty and exceptionalism, which, moreover, reveals a Palingenesque conception, common on the far right (Griffin, 2007), linking Trump's presidency to an idealised past —Make *America Great Again* or MAGA— by claiming that "America's golden age begins right now". It is also a reaffirmation of American providentialism: "We are one people, one family and one glorious nation under God". Divine providence would now also extend to Trump's own election: referring to the Pennsylvania bombing, he stated that "God saved me to make America great again".

Now Trump is reviving these doctrines in a particular neo-imperial decline. On Greenland, at Mar-a-Lago, he declared: "We need Greenland for national security reasons", while questioning Denmark's claim to the territory and threatening it with tariffs (*The Grand Continent*, 2025a: 3). Subsequently, it has directly lobbied its government (Milne, Rachman and Politi, 2025) for a referendum on self-determination —to which Greenland's current home rule status entitles it— which, in the event of independence, could bring Greenland into the orbit of the United States. On the Panama Canal, in a revisionist speech, Trump vindicated the role of the United States in its construction and lamented the 1973 Torrijos-Carter Treaties, by which Panama obtained, with conditions, control and sovereignty over the waterway, claiming that they would have been violated with the supposed handover of the canal to China. "The Panama Canal is vital to our country" he said at Mar-a-Lago. In his speech he added "We have been treated very badly with this foolish gift that should never have been made, and the promise that Panama made to us has been broken [...]. And, above all, China is operating the Panama Canal. And we didn't give it to China. We gave it to Panama and we are going to get it back".

William McKinley and Theodor Roosevelt appear in his speech as the only mentions of his predecessors in office. Both were key figures in US imperialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including episodes such as the tariff laws and the annexation of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines and Hawaii, the secession of Panama and the beginning of the construction of the canal, and the war in Cuba. In the same vein, Trump decreed the change of name of the Gulf of Mexico to "*Gulf of America*", a change that

a solicitous Google Maps hastened to apply to connections made from the United States. All these elements lead Zaki Laïdi (2025) to claim that Trump is an imperial nationalist, like other American leaders of the 19th century. Gideon Rachman (2025a), on the other hand, argues that Trump's expansionist will converges with a pattern of territorial claims and the cult of the "strongman" in world politics that is also seen in Putin's Russia and Xi Jinping's China, in this case centred on Taiwan.

The importance of Latin America in *America First* foreign policy was highlighted by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, for whom this policy "means paying special attention to our own neighbourhood, the Western Hemisphere" (Rubio, 2025). To this end, Rubio defines four priorities: first, stopping immigration by outsourcing migration control and accepting the forced return of those who are deported from the United States. "Countries that cooperate with that policy with enthusiasm will be rewarded. Those that don't, the United States has already shown a willingness to use its power"" Rubio said, referring to the threats with which Colombia's resistance had been broken in previous days. The second is to contain China. According to Rubio, COVID exposed the fragility of US dependencies to distant supply chains. "Relocating our critical supply chains to the Western Hemisphere would open a path for economic growth for our neighbours and safeguard Americans' own economic security" Project 2025 has also called for productive *re-shoring or re-hemisphering* in Latin America's neighbourhood, which is functional to decoupling with China. This would also reduce migratory pressure and increase tax revenues to combat insecurity in each country. The third is to combat drug cartels, already categorised as terrorist organisations. For Latin America, Project 2025 also calls for a "local security" approach, which could be interpreted as support for the "Bukelisation" of security policies in each country. This call for security policies is particularly relevant for Mexico, considered "a national security disaster" that "has lost its functional sovereignty to the drug cartels". It proposes a "sovereign Mexico" and a "fentanyl-free" border, again pointing to the Chinese threat. The fourth priority, finally, is to confront the illegitimate regimes in Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela and their strategies ""to amplify chaos" in the region.

The disappearance of USAID, an agency under the Secretary of State, however, leaves the United States without an important foreign policy tool for the region and deprives it of a source of

funding for development, particularly for the poorest countries and for a large number of civil society organisations that support women and gender equality, defend human rights or the environment, and support the Venezuelan exodus or Nicaraguan refugees. Project 2025 had proposed a wide-ranging reform of USAID and US foreign aid, privatising part of its activities, with special reference to faith-based organisations. Above all, it proposed eliminating "globalist" and *woke* policies (gender equality, climate, IED programmes, sexual and reproductive health, abortion rights, etc.). However, it had by no means proposed their disappearance. Although Latin America and the Caribbean received only 5% of US aid, the US is the largest single donor to the region. The freezing or cessation of these transfers hits hardest, in absolute terms, El Salvador, Honduras and Haiti, and, as a proportion of total aid received, Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala and Jamaica (Mitchell and Hughes, 2025).

The tightening of immigration policy translates, first and foremost, into the threat of mass arrests and deportations, which has already begun through intimidating raids and arbitrary detentions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other law enforcement agencies at different levels of government. Depending on the scope of these measures, they could affect as many as 14 million people, or 4.2% of the estimated total US population. It is difficult for this to materialise, given the heavy weight of this population in its labour force, but even if it affects only a fraction, it will create a climate of fear and insecurity, encourage labour exploitation, and close off avenues for regularisation. It would also seriously damage the economies of Latin American countries and the families that depend on remittances from these workers. The Trump Administration has already pressured several countries—including regimes such as Venezuela's—to accept deportees.

Border control measures have meant the *de facto* suspension of the right to asylum, preventing entry into the US "under any circumstances". The restart of the *Remain in Mexico* programme and the suspension of *Humanitarian parole* or temporary protected status leave half a million people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and, above all, Venezuela, a high proportion of whom had supported Trump, vulnerable to deportation. The suspension of the 14th Amendment may result in large numbers of stateless and disenfranchised children, mostly of Latin American origin (Washington Office on Latin America, 2025).

This issue provoked the first clash between the Trump Administration and a Latin American Government, the Colombian Government. Although Colombia was already receiving flights with deportees from the United States, Colombian President Gustavo Petro refused to accept new arrivals in US military planes in conditions considered undignified. A day earlier, Brazil had issued a note protesting the same issue. Trump's response was blunt. He announced immediate tariffs of 25% on all Colombian exports, and 50% a week later, as well as travel restrictions and visa revocations for Colombian Government officials and enhanced customs inspections of Colombian citizens. It was the first announcement of the *weaponisation* of tariffs in Latin America after the start of Trump's second term. Although Petro announced reciprocal tariffs, Colombia backed down within hours, bearing in mind that the US is the main destination for its exports, accounting for 26% of the total in 2023 (Daniels *et al.*, 2025). Colombia, moreover, had no support from the region. The urgent call for a meeting of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) by President Xiomara Castro of Honduras, which holds the *pro tempore* presidency of the organisation, failed to achieve the minimum consensus needed to hold it, let alone to back Colombia. This showed once again that the region's ideological fragmentation, aggravated after the fraudulent elections in Venezuela, continues to weigh on regional cooperation and integration bodies and weakens their agency.

The second scenario of tension, clearly announced by Trump, was Panama. The importance of the canal is well known. Every year, some 30,000 ships pass through it, representing around 3% of world maritime trade, 40% of container traffic to and from the United States, and it remains a key passage for the US navy and its global projection. In reality, Trump's claims of "Chinese control" of the canal—even alleging the presence of Chinese military personnel—were unfounded: under Panamanian sovereignty, with a status of neutrality agreed in the Torrijos-Carter Treaties, it is administered by the Panama Canal Authority, an independent body. These accusations, in any case, refer to the concessions to operate the ports of Balboa, on the Pacific coast, and San Cristobal, on the Atlantic coast, to the Panama Ports Company, a subsidiary of CK Hutchinson Holdings, a private group based in Hong Kong, which manages 53 ports in 24 countries, including the United Kingdom and Germany. Granted in 1997, in 2021 they were renewed without bidding for another 21 years and, in 1999, the State Department found no evidence that through these

concessions China could be in a position to control canal operations (Roy, 2025; Davidson, 2025). On the other hand, in 2017, during Trump's first term in office and without protest on his part, Panama established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and, in line with that country's "one China" policy, ended its relations with Taiwan. Regarding the increase in passage fees —another US complaint—, these were in fact related to a severe drought that prevented the usual frequency of passage on the waterway from being maintained.

On the other hand, the United States has an ongoing dispute with Panama over migration. The "Darién Gap" on the border with Colombia has become an important passageway for migrants bound for the United States, who make the route on foot through hostile jungle territory and at the mercy of illegal groups. In 2023, a record year, the number was 523,000, and in 2024 it dropped to 302,000, as a result of the control measures agreed with the Biden Administration.

In early February 2025, Panama was precisely the destination of Marco Rubio's first foreign visit as Secretary of State, who made a demand to José Raúl Mulino's government to "reduce the Chinese presence or face action" by the United States. In the face of domestic protests, Mulino deployed strong nationalist rhetoric claiming Panamanian sovereignty over the canal and questioned these accusations, but quickly gave in to Rubio's demands. In anticipation of the visit, Mulino ordered an audit of Ports of Panama, with the predictable purpose of rescinding the concessions (Murray and Ho-him, 2025), but in the end it was unnecessary. In the face of these pressures, CK Hutchinson rushed to sell 90% of Puertos de Panamá to the US investment fund Blackrock (Platt *et al.*, 2025). Mulino also announced that Panama would not renew its participation in the BRI initiative, scheduled for 2026, and froze free trade talks with China (*The Economist*, 2025c). He also pledged to tighten immigration control, to accept deported migrants —both Panamanian and other nationalities—, to facilitate access to information on money laundering and to grant free passage to US warships, although Mulino has publicly denied the latter (Stott and Rogers, 2025; Lauria, 2025).

This securitarian approach to migration also dominated Marco Rubio's visit to El Salvador, a country in a rapid process of autocratisation legitimised by its punitivist and tough-on-crime pol-

icies. On that visit, its president, Nayib Bukele, in addition to celebrating the closure of USAID, accepted shipments of deported Salvadorans and offered the US to outsource part of its prison system, placing in Salvadoran high-security prisons “violent illegal immigrants from any country” and US citizens or legal residents in exchange for a “modest payment” for those prison services in order to “make it sustainable”. Rubio declared that this was “an extraordinary gesture never before offered by any country” (Murray, 2025). This agreement materialised in March 2025, which provoked a serious domestic crisis in the US. Despite the express prohibition of a federal judge, whose order Bukele himself ridiculed on social media, the Trump Administration sent several hundred deportees to El Salvador and Honduras. Again, a 1789 waiver law on the expulsion of enemies of the United States was forcibly invoked, alleging that they were part of El Salvador’s Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the Venezuelan criminal organisation El Tren de Aragua (Seisdedos, 2025).

The threat of 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada —10% on the latter’s energy products— was also based on the presidential powers of emergency legislation and the securitarian argument of the “invasion” of migrants and fentanyl. Announced at the same time as the additional 10% tariff on China, they could affect close to \$1 trillion in imports, mostly from Mexico, which by 2021 had overtaken China as the U’s top foreign supplier. Far more far-reaching than any other measure taken by Trump in his first term, they could induce strong inflationary pressures and a global recession that some stock market crashes as early as March 2025 may be anticipating. Sectors highly integrated in the North American regional market, such as the automotive sector, would become unviable in such a scenario. By way of reference, around 50% of the components used in the United States in this sector come from Mexico and Canada, and the three most affected companies —Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, which is part of the former Chrysler— have US capital. This risk of economic recession would weigh particularly heavily on a Latin America that has experienced a second “lost decade” in the past ten years, with growth rates lower than those recorded in the 1980s after the debt crisis, and the lowest since the Second World War (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024). This would call into question the *nearshoring* and migration pressure reduction goals that the Trump Administration itself claims to promote. The threat of a trade war against Mexico and Canada also failed to take into account that by 2023, during the Biden era, migration flows from

Mexico had declined markedly and fentanyl interdiction by both countries had increased (*The Economist*, 2025a; *Financial Times*, 2025b).

Canada responded to these threats by announcing a 25% tariff on a list of US goods worth thirty billion dollars, expandable to 125 billion dollars in three weeks. Mexico, in turn, announced unspecified tariff and non-tariff measures, while President Claudia Sheinbaum rejected Trump's claims of an "intolerable alliance" of cartels and Mexican authorities, questioned US tolerance of arms trafficking and fentanyl use, and called for dialogue rather than coercive measures. Bilateral talks between Trump and Sheinbaum, on the one hand, and Trudeau, on the other, led to a last-minute agreement with concessions by both countries on border control, such as the deployment on Mexico's northern border of ten thousand additional National Guard agents and the appointment by the Canadian Government of an anti-fentanyl "czar" to coordinate actions against the trafficking of this substance. In exchange, Trump suspended tariffs for one month (Jiménez and Camhaji, 2025). Mexico made other important subsequent concessions, such as the extradition of 29 drug traffickers wanted by the US, some of them for decades (Raziel and Ferri, 2025). This did not prevent Trump from announcing the imposition of tariffs after that deadline, but shortly afterwards he announced an exception for the automotive sector and, in the end, he put them on hold. This process, in barely a month and a half, contrasts with what happened with Panama or Colombia and shows that, in the face of Trump's pressures, concessions are inevitable, but that, where there are strong reciprocal cost interdependencies and asymmetries are not so marked, there is room to respond to Trump's policies (*The Economist*, 2025b). It would also reveal the decreasing effectiveness of the unilateral, transactional and erratic use of coercive instruments and the *weaponisation* of interdependencies *vis-à-vis* long-term solutions reached through negotiation and agreement.

The case of Venezuela may be an example of this transactional strategy and, as at other times, its importance as an oil and gas exporter seems to temper the ideological zeal with which relations with that country are approached. Like the Biden Administration, Trump has not recognised the government of Nicolás Maduro and continues to describe the elections as illegitimate. This did not prevent the visit of special envoy Richard Grenell on 31 January 2025 to meet with Maduro. He agreed to

release six Americans detained on charges of conspiracy against the regime and agreed to receive Venezuelans deported by the Venezuelan authorities without, apparently, the US agreeing to lift any of the sanctions. On the other hand, there were no meetings between Grenell and the opposition, which was treated with disdain (Carquez and Reyes, 2025). As noted above, the US now considers Venezuela a “safe country” and Trump has revoked the temporary protected status of the large Venezuelan population that had been received in the US. This decision has provoked surprise and frustration in this community, given the massive political support it had given to Trumpism. However, this understanding did not prevent Trump, weeks later, from revoking Chevron’s exemptions to the sanctions-regime applied to Venezuela, dealing a severe blow to Venezuela’s crude oil exports. This could indicate that, within the Trump Administration, there are different views on the policy to be adopted towards Venezuela.

Conclusions

The speed and intensity of change brought about by Trump’s second term, and its often contradictory and erratic nature, should not lead to the misleading conclusion that there is no strategy and project. This work has shown a more organised, reflective and strategic Trumpism than that which appeared with the first term. It is also supported, domestically, by a broader “MAGA coalition” of forces and with a greater presence of the business interests of the big tech companies. Externally, it is more closely articulated with a reactionary international of far-right forces with global reach, which explains the primacy of ideological vectors over traditional foreign policy interests. However, there are also many questions about the scope and consequences of these changes, and there are major inconsistencies and contradictions in the foreign and trade policies of *America First*. An obvious example is the announced tariff measures and the scenario of widespread uncertainty and risk of global economic recession created by *Trumponomics* in the face of its stated objectives of economic stability and growth and manufacturing *re-shoring* or *near-shoring*.

In the early 20th century, coinciding with the formulation of Roosevelt’s corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and a period of open US imperialism in the Caribbean basin, that President described his foreign policy with the phrase “speak softly, and carry a big

stick; you'll go far". Trump prefers to shout, and he certainly wields a club, though its strength and size, and the actual forcefulness of his blows are not yet clear. In Panama there has been more voice than cudgel, with a speech that appealed even to the use of force, rather than the threat of tariffs, which otherwise would have been of little relevance in a country with a service economy. The use of tariffs and other coercive, political and economic instruments as a cudgel, as shown in the cases of Colombia and Mexico, and the disappearance of carrots, as illustrated by the closure of USAID, show a sullener United States, but also a more transactional one, focused on immediate gains rather than on a long-term cooperative logic. The case of the relationship with Venezuela is, however, contradictory and reveals the contrast between ideological visions and others that are more transactional and focused on migratory objectives.

Despite these questions and dilemmas, this paper can offer a clear conclusion: Donald Trump's second presidential term, more radical, aggressive and ideological than the previous one, marks a turning point in the interregnum of the international system, characterised by the crisis of globalisation and growing geopolitical rivalry. The current Trumpism represents a new and more intense questioning of liberal democracy and economic liberalism in the United States and, in its external aspect, it aggravates the crisis of globalisation with a wave of economic nationalism and the coercive use or *weaponisation* of interdependencies. It amplifies the process of contestation of the international liberal order by a broad constellation of neo-patriot extreme right-wing forces on the rise on a global scale, with a direct attack on multilateralism and its rules and institutions. It also strains economic, political and security ties with its main partners in Europe and the Americas, in particular Mexico and Canada, with which, in addition to strong trade ties, it has to manage migration and security interdependencies related to illicit activities. This aggressive and highly ideological policy makes the United States an erratic and unpredictable partner and a difficult actor to deal with in terms of the stability, predictability, trust and cooperation it needs in a highly interconnected international system facing global risks, with governance in crisis, and in dire need of rules and certainty.

Such policies can also be counterproductive if the aim is to contain China or the BRICS. Beyond Mexico, Central America or the Caribbean basin countries, where the US has historically exerted the most pressure, it is difficult for the US to impose itself; in

South America, its coercive capacity is weakened. The export structure of this sub-region, which is more closely linked to China, reduces the room for manoeuvre of US economic coercion. What Trump is offering today is intimidation rather than cooperation; sticks rather than carrots; demands rather than support. The US does not offer a hopeful horizon for the region, centred on development or democracy, but a relationship of subordination, risk and uncertainty without the means to guarantee it. In this context, China or the EU, if they know how to take advantage of this window of opportunity, may have more space and ascendancy. In the face of US aggressiveness and unilateralism, they can present themselves as advocates of a more inclusive and rules-based multilateral order and be more reliable partners in the political and economic spheres and in global governance.

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Chapter Two

The Global Order in Transition. Where to? Implications for Latin American security and defence strategies

Antonio Jorge Ramalho

Abstract

The paper analyses how Latin America faces a profoundly changing international context marked by the erosion of the liberal order and the emergence of a multipolar world without effective governance structures. It points out that Latin American countries lack clear and adaptive security and defence strategies in the face of growing threats such as global conflicts, transnational crime, climate and technological crises. The region remains dependent on the US security umbrella which, under the Trump Administration, is weakened by a transactional and authoritarian vision of global power. It highlights the urgency of developing regional strategic autonomy, strengthening multilateralism and upgrading military capabilities without renouncing democratic and human rights values. It also emphasises the growing influence of China and Russia in the region, which further complicates the geopolitical scenario. Finally, security strategies must be anchored in ethics, international cooperation and the protection of the individual in a world that has become more volatile, unpredictable and dangerous.

Keywords

Interregnum, Strategic autonomy, Multipolarity, Global disorder, Human security.

Presentation

The contemporary international environment is marked by multiple and interrelated crises, which are occurring at an ever-increasing pace. This dynamic even calls for new concepts, such as polycrisis (Lawrence *et al.*, 2024). The Bretton Woods order, based on institutions designed to universalise neoliberal practices, is being eroded without the characteristics of the successor order in sight.

This process produces real fears, associated with military and distributive conflicts that are already producing death and destruction in the Middle East, Ukraine and Asia, and tensions in the rest of the world. With the geopolitical balance of the Cold War shattered, the illusions of stability and inclusive growth in the post-hegemonic world lost, arms races are advancing in various parts of the world as confidence in the successful defensive alliance built by the West on the basis of the shared values of the North Atlantic countries deteriorates.

Hope for a prosperous and predictable world, albeit based on rules, gave way to fear. Indeed, to many fears. To real fears are added imaginary ones; uncertainties resulting from pessimistic assumptions about the evolution of socio-political processes in a dynamic and conflictive reality. In part, the success of far-right movements in Western societies results from their understanding of this phenomenon and their ability to manipulate fears effectively through social networks, particularly in election periods (Achcar, 2021).

In this context, it is not clear what to do. Diagnoses of reality are needed in order to decide. It is tempting to simplify things on the basis of theoretical schemes that refer to a known past or project cycles to anchor expectations, establishing parameters to guide action. While comforting to the spirit and enlightening to reason, these forecasts do not alter the fact that today's world is too complex and the future is still unknown. The truth is that we do not know how the order will evolve over the next few years.

In fact, the impacts of these changes for each country are country-specific, as are their responses, conditioned by internal dynamics. The new diplomatic postures of the United States (US), for example, are felt in fundamentally different ways in Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and South America. While US bilateral relations with each country in the region now

have unique characteristics, there is a common shift in attitudes towards democratic values, as synthesised by Cohen (2025).

The region's context is defined by broader characteristics of the changing international order, especially in the field of security. Latin American governments have not yet understood these characteristics to the point of redefining their security and defence strategies. As a result, they are trying to adjust to the circumstances, responding in a tactical way to conjunctural pressures. They are still impacted, in different ways, by the presence of the US and now also China and Russia. It is unclear what to do in the event that these powers decide to resolve their differences in other territories.

Confident that major international conflicts are far away, there is an expectation of being on the sidelines of a possible world war. But the two world wars of the 20th century proved that this is an illusion. If tensions escalate, it will be impossible to avoid taking sides. That is why a world governed by the collision of the interests of great powers is of no interest. Countries will be negotiation tools, bargaining chips for each other. It is desirable to strengthen multilateralism, a barrier against external aggression and an instrument to promote peace that would generate benefits for all.

These objectives were closer a couple of decades ago. The idea of giving South America a political identity, cultivated in the scope of Unasur, is in the past. The relative consensus that Brazil managed to build in favour of the region when the US was occupied in Iraq and Afghanistan no longer seems feasible. Agreeing common policies at the regional level requires more energy, resources and clarity of purpose in polarised environments, both within a single country and between countries in the region. Meanwhile, in the current context, room for manoeuvre has shrunk; resources are scarce. Most countries do not even have the capacity to take this step. Just now, when it is most needed.

From a national security point of view, in the event of a global conflict, the countries of the region see themselves as part of the Western alliance. However, the alliance itself is unravelling, with Europe failing to respond quickly and homogeneously to the security challenges it faces. Even if the EU succeeds in heeding Von der Leyen's call (Wheaton and Barigazzi, 2025) for EU countries to jointly procure weapons by 2030, the logistical basis and doctrine needed to make weapons systems effective takes dec-

ades to structure. And, at the current rate, another Trump term will be enough to bury the Western alliance for good.

In the event of war, Latin American countries expect protection that will not be there. With rare exceptions, Venezuela at the forefront, their defence equipment is managed to NATO standards. The few indigenous military equipment innovation initiatives seek to fill niches in the Western defence industry, even if there is insufficient scale at home to justify the necessary investments. South American defence policies are inspired by those of the US. Since the 1950s, officials have been trained according to their country's doctrines, usually in cooperation with the US Armed Forces.

The need to secure strategic autonomy with an adequate logistical defence base is inconceivable, let alone the possibility of the US and NATO removing the security umbrella to which the countries of the region have become accustomed over the past seven to eight decades. This is a grave mistake, as Denmark and Ukraine have discovered over the past few weeks.

In relation to human security, priorities remain associated with the need to reduce the structural violence of unequal and unjust societies by promoting sustainable environmental, social, political and economic development. Because of the way economies have been organised around liberal principles, this is difficult, as economic flows must be free while fiscal spaces are narrow. The region continues its course of dependent development, now more pronounced, as the most valuable assets are intangible and can move quickly across borders.

In short, the interesting agenda for Latin American countries is on the table: to perpetuate the culture of peace and solutions to disputes between countries, so that regional governance mechanisms are established, and to materialise the objectives of sustainable development, with the aim of promoting human security.

What is not clear is how changes in the global order affect governments' ability to promote these goals. This will be discussed below.

With regard to the form, it seemed interesting to structure this chapter in short sections, which highlight relevant aspects of the changing order and problematise them from the point of view of Latin American countries, bearing in mind that the realities are very different depending on the sub-region and the country in

question. Latin America and the Caribbean are far from being a homogenous region.

It will begin with a brief discussion of the conceptual difficulties in understanding the dynamic changes in the contemporary international order. This will be followed by an analysis of the specific dynamics.

1 An interregnum? Conceptual complexities of changes in the contemporary international order

The liberal order established since Bretton Woods is being progressively dismantled, with no sign of how international relations will be reorganised in the future. In such transition, the idea of the Gramscian *interregnum* sheds light on the *morbid symptoms* of an order in transition (Sanahuja, 2022). The analogy is instigating and fruitful, although misleading. In Gramsci's conceptual scheme, the interregnum is merely a period between two known, conceptually defined orders. While dense and sophisticated, his worldview is teleological. While he interprets in more detail the transforming instruments of reality, his narrative already contains a prescription of the future that will occur after the transition has taken place, since it is premised on the assumption that the capitalist system will continue its evolutionary course and prevail in the ordering of reality.

What we are currently experiencing is more complex than that; it does not fit into any conceptual model. The evolution of the international order depends in part on the attitudes of both politicians in charge of governments and individuals at the head of power groups capable of interfering in the course of events. Therein lies the charm of politics. In other words, the perceptions and interests of those in a position to influence the course of events matter. Processes will follow the course of concord and peaceful settlement of disputes, or that of war, depending on the decisions of those in power.

That is why the future is uncertain. Teleological explanations, the fruit of religious beliefs or logical reasoning, are not satisfactory. It is like crossing a river without knowing how far it is to the other bank, let alone what will be there. Until recently, the water of the river was calm; now it is not. Living has become more dangerous.

Moreover, to recall the powerful metaphor of the Brazilian diplomat and writer Guimarães Rosa, it is as if there were a third bank

of the river, in an indefinite time, where the characters resignify ideas of death in order to react to the anguish of their lives. It is not known where the river will lead. It is not possible to reach that third bank. The anguish in the face of the unknown will continue to be present. Analyses may be able to reduce it, if they can identify paths to follow. And that is why we are like this.

In the realm of pragmatics, it is necessary to get used to constant, some critical —perhaps fatal— changes. To deal with uncertainty, human beings imagine possible scenarios and build strategies on the basis of the perceived reality, even if there is no consensus on the processes that govern it and on the motivations of the key actors. It is a liquid world, as Bauman put it.

Preferences are attributed to the most relevant actors in the contexts of direct interest, reflecting on the implications of their actions for the most relevant socio-political processes and on the constraints that these dynamics impose on the ability to achieve objectives on the international stage. Understanding the constitutive elements of this order in transition towards the unknown is, therefore, a condition for identifying useful security and defence strategies for Latin American countries.

Since it is not possible to know precisely what will happen in the future, it is necessary to analyse the conditions and take as few risks as possible. Precisely because reality changes rapidly, it will be necessary to be clear about the values that motivate action. Recognising and sizing up the incentive structures in a complex environment is only part of the effort to define a course of action, i.e. a responsible security and defence strategy. The other part is ethical. The values that guide action must be kept in mind: in these periods, acting requires courage in the moral realm.

It is hoped that, in sharing these ideas, they will serve to clarify the conditions under which leaders will —hopefully— make decisions that have a decisive impact on the lives of others.

In the following pages, some of the structural changes in the current order will be analysed, without prejudice to also considering its elements of continuity, which make it difficult to define.

2 Structural changes and permanence in the contemporary global order

As noted, the Western order is in decline as we see the dismantling of political structures (normative and institutional)

dedicated to protecting individuals for their intrinsic humanity (Ikenberry, 2018; Hosoya, 2019; McKeil, 2023; Mearsheimer, 2019; Steinberg, 2022). These principles are enshrined in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted to reorganise the world after the Second World War. Today, either because of the behaviour of the major powers or because of neglect of global governance structures, these values are giving rise to less tolerant and less inclusive ideas in the international order. This directly affects the international insertion of Latin American countries and, consequently, their security and defence strategies.

Not everything changes, however. Some trends are perpetuated, such as the transfer of power from states to individuals and organised groups through new information technologies. This matters for the present analysis, as this interregnum involves agents and productive structures of the information economy, in contrast to the one Gramsci had in mind, typical of the industrial economy. This is why we speak of different *transitions and morbid symptoms*, whether in terms of the timing of their outcomes, the effectively global scope of current productive dynamics, or the frequency of disruptive innovations and their impact on socio-economic and political reality.

Other elements of permanence define the security and defence priorities of the region's countries. Their relatively distant position from current international conflicts gives them time to better understand and adjust to global dynamics. Their relationship with the United States continues to be shaped above all by the issues of interest to the great power since the 1990s: drug trafficking and illegal migration. With Trump, and with the proliferation of synthetic drugs, the migration issue is taking precedence over drug trafficking, which reconfigures the US relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean.

In contrast to his first term, his core team is interested in the region and understands its processes, albeit from a biased angle. It is true that the US will be more present in Latin America, but it is unclear with what specific objectives, beyond *bullying* for short-term gains that they can present to their voters as evidence of their commitments to campaign promises.

Geopolitically, the regional context has changed dramatically in the 21st century. The permanent presence of China and Russia, interested in extending their influence beyond their own region

while challenging the US in their neighbourhood, has turned South America into a contested field (Menendez, Rubio, 2022; Faller, 2021)¹. China has long-term plans for the region and implements them discreetly and diligently. Russia took advantage of the Venezuelan situation to influence the region, thus modestly re-establishing its former status as a major global power. Both have known priorities and predictable behaviour, but each country impacts regional dynamics differently.

China, despite being the largest trading partner of most Latin American and Caribbean countries (Puty, Jia and Barros, 2020), makes long-term investments in each country, thereby securing market access, *commodity* disposal, diplomatic support and, in case of conflict, military presence in strategic spaces (Roy, 2025). China's emergence has been perceived by experienced analysts as the dawn of a 'new Cold War', perhaps because of its desire to organise a familiar interpretation of a complex world (Ferguson, 2024; Buzan, 2024).

This is not the case for the United States under Trump. While not strictly isolationist, it is clear that the American giant's new stances towards the world will lead its traditional allies to distance themselves from it, so that they will consider alliances with other great powers and seek to gain strategic autonomy. The Trump Administration's initial clashes with Mexico, Panama and Colombia have made clear what the region should expect in the coming years. However, as unpredictability is part of the current US President's method, forecasts are limited to weeks.

In the meantime, the fight against transnational organised crime remains a priority given its relevance for human security in the region. Unfortunately, existing cooperation structures have deteriorated greatly in recent years, either through negligence or deliberate neglect. The absence of effective state cooperation has favoured the diversification of criminal activities and their professionalisation, facilitating their international expansion. Combating international organised crime now requires effective international cooperation. At least the risks of war between Latin American countries remain remote despite occasional provocations from Milei's Argentina and Maduro's Venezuela.

¹ Curiously, the proposal is no longer on the page of Senator Rubio, who has become Trump's Secretary of State, perhaps because of the commitment to democracy that inspired the bill.

The following paragraphs outline some of the characteristics of the current environment.

3 How to define the new global order?

The complexity of the current international scene points to a journey into the unknown. It is no coincidence that labels such as “post-Western”, “post-modern”, “post-liberal” or simply “post-Cold War” are used to refer to the current era. There are no strong ideas that define the essence of contemporary international relations. For some, this is an era of intolerance. For others, it is a Cold War 2.0 (Schindler *et al.*, 2024). Still, others see more of the same; the recurring realist standard in international relations: ancestral forms of conflict are being restored, where political communities cohesively bound by primordial identities tend to seek primacy in their exclusive spaces. The problem is that spaces cannot be precisely demarcated once global proximity is shared (Commission on Global Governance, 1994).

In other words, a fundamental contradiction has become evident in contemporary international relations, enhanced by cyberspace: political communities are organised autonomously and relate to each other through their authorities, while political and social actors relate to each other directly. Citizens and power groups engage in permanent exchanges without a global public space having been constructed, as Habermas advocated, who considered that citizens should have the possibility to deliberate collectively on the rules and purposes of their interactions.

So-called hyper-globalisation has established channels of communication between social agents that do not fit within the rules defined for the interaction of national states. Economies and societies have become interdependent, but the structures of global governance, while inadequate in defining rules for relations between governments, do not manage to define common rules to ensure that exchanges produce more benefits than risks for humanity. The distribution of power among the powers has not been followed by a reorganisation of the political structures of global governance. The world became multipolar without multilateralism.

The multipolarisation installed in the international security scenario transforms the incentive structures for the action of states,

whose economies and societies will remain interdependent in the medium term, at the cost of vulnerabilities which, since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been trying to reduce through *nearshoring* and *friendly shoring* (Dessus, 2024).

Indeed, the pandemic and the war in Ukraine have made it clear that governments changed their equations, lowering the priority given to reducing production costs in order to prioritise the safety of their populations. Economically, resilience became as important as productive efficiency.

Resilience gains importance because there is no interdependence without shared vulnerabilities (Brunnemeier, 2021). It turns out that these processes take time and, by generating insecurities, stimulate conflicts. Seven decades have passed since global production chains began to be built, now based on networks of information, finance and transport of goods and services that have reshaped the world's geo-economy. Dismantling them without serious consequences does not happen overnight.

Moreover, there is a notable difference between the times of construction and dismantling of this global order. Over the decades, societies have adapted to new processes of exchange, reconfiguring their productive energies into global value chains. Brexit showed that some productive dynamics are so intricate that no one notices them when things are working well. When processes fail, as happened with the 2007/2008 crises and the COVID-19 pandemic, crises emerge. There are not always reasonable substitutes at hand capable of maintaining regular production while the suppliers of inputs essential to the functioning of each economy are reorganised.

In other words, the vectors of force in the contemporary international environment point in contradictory directions. Conflicting dynamics emerge between governments whose economies and societies remain interdependent. Common challenges, such as global warming and transnational organised crime, require concerted solutions in public spaces and governmental bodies that do not exist at the international level.

Indeed, since the beginning of this century, the international scene has been marked by complex and multifaceted crises, including armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, cyber threats and environmental challenges. One could highlight 9/11, followed by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; the financial crisis of 2007/2008; the Arab Spring (2011), the wars in Syria (2011), Ukraine (2014

and 2022) and Lebanon and Gaza (2006, 2022); the COVID-19 pandemic; the US-China trade war (now threatening to return); the refugee crisis in Europe; tensions in the South China Sea; global terrorist attacks.... These crises involve state and non-state actors, not always in an organised manner, and require effective and innovative solutions.

Its complexity leads authors such as Drezner (2023), Tooze (2023) and Sanahuja (2024) to characterise contemporary society as inevitably marked by "polycrisis". Sanahuja (2022) elaborates the argument on the basis of the concept of interregnum, stressing that the current order is not yet dead and there is no clarity as to what will replace it. In the meantime, it is necessary to understand and mitigate the "morbid symptoms", among which is the possibility of new technologies giving nation states control over individuals. The eventual materialisation of this process threatens the liberal order at its core.

Because reality changes rapidly and the pace of innovation continuously creates opportunities for disruptive change, it is more difficult to identify changes that tend to survive over time. Moreover, each relevant area in international relations has its own dynamics, involving different actors, but all influencing each other. The fact that it is not possible to anticipate how each area will affect the others makes the future opaque.

These processes are evolving in a tense geopolitical environment, marked by simultaneous crises and global dynamics that pose risks to humanity as a whole (Drezner, 2023).

Paradoxically, geopolitical clashes occur in an environment of deep interdependence and lack of consensus to address common problems that threaten the existence of all. In other words, in defining the new order, enemies need to cooperate to avoid harm to all, which increases the complexity of global political dynamics. And, as understandings are tacit, political compositions vary with each change of government and urgencies are imposed; the limits of the rules and institutions to be established at the global level are not systematically discussed.

Once there are no vacuums in politics, China deftly offers an alternative order to the liberal one. The Belt and Road Initiative will allow China to replace the current global arrangement with an order defined by its national interests through accession mechanisms that serve to project structural power in the global south and beyond (Schuman *et al.*, 2023).

The world became more dynamic and dangerous. A world of complexities. Overnight, relevant dynamics emerge that seem to expose humanity to existential risks. In recent decades, economies and societies have deepened their interdependence, while governance arrangements have lost legitimacy and effectiveness. The dynamics of growth and inclusion produced by interactions in a reality perceived by key actors as a positive-sum game gave way to distributional conflicts and disputes over strategic resources once these actors came to see the world as a zero-sum game.

As economies reduced their capacity for growth, societies became indebted and transferred to future generations the burden of financing material progress that, while producing welfare, generated politically unsustainable levels of inequality within societies. The paradox of globalisation that Rodrik (2011) spoke of, for whom it would not be possible to maintain economic globalisation, national sovereignty and democracy simultaneously, is increasingly true.

Either way, fiscal pressures and debt overhang are forcing governments to cut spending, while companies are pushing for subsidies and citizens are demanding social benefits. The accounts do not add up. High debts no longer leave room for *fuite en avant*, spurring irresponsible populists to promise the impossible and blame foreigners for their failures. The widespread rise of nationalist and xenophobic ideologies is no accident. Democracy is in danger; Western values are in question.

However, interconnectivity potentiates their reach, facilitating the formation of alliances between social groups that, paradoxically, defend exclusive ways of life based on different ideas of primordial values that must be preserved. In societies marked by productive dynamics typical of the information economy (and not so much of the industrial economy), the boundaries between reality and narratives are less clear. Individuals are more subject to cognitive manipulation by well-constructed and effectively disseminated narratives to mobilise political action, monetise social media interactions and achieve electoral outcomes.

In the case of the US, it is about bringing a peculiar understanding of manifest destiny into the cyber realm, through algorithms that promote biased views of libertarian principles (Venanzoni, 2025).

In this context, the progressive (now accelerated) abandonment of a more or less structured order in favour of economic development and the well-being of as many people as possible fosters conflicts. Thus, the positive-sum game with unfairly distributed outcomes became a zero-sum game between societies, to the detriment of all. In addition, the planet imposes further limits on governments in the form of extreme events associated with climate change.

Understanding this context is crucial to identifying the security and defence strategies available to Latin American countries. Before summarising the priorities of these countries in the face of changes in the contemporary global order, it is worth looking more closely at a discussion that is of particular interest to Europeans and Latin Americans, who are obliged to adapt to the new directives of US foreign policy.

4 The United States accelerates the dismantling of the contemporary global order

Two of the main features of the order built since the middle of the last century —which has brought so much prosperity, peace and stability to the world— are now being rapidly abandoned under the leadership of the United States, the country that has benefited most from that order. The accelerated pace of US foreign policy comes as a surprise to many analysts, as do the successive aggressions against its traditional allies.

The reader will recall that, in his campaign, the Republican candidate clearly expressed his intentions to engage in transactions with all countries in order to obtain immediate gains for his country. The imposition of tariffs, the reduction of international cooperation, the pressure on allies to increase military spending, the possibility of leaving NATO and the UN, among other multilateral structures... None of this is new. In part, the policies now implemented were also announced in Project 2025 (Armour, 2025).

The first characteristic is the idea that governments are responsible for protecting human beings from hunger and war, initially proposed in the *Atlantic Charter* of 1941 and reflected numerous times in UN documents, as illustrated by the Millennium Declaration (United Nations, 2000). Indeed, it was for this reason that this order was characterised as (neo)liberal, as opposed to the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, represented by

Nazi-fascism and communism. Contrary to collectivist ideologies, which privilege the community to the detriment of the individual, liberal democracies affirm the need to protect the individual from all oppression, including that of the state.

And since only power restrains power, liberal institutions establish *checks and balances* that prevent the concentration of power in the hands of an authoritarian leader. As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue, the dismantling of these institutional apparatuses is methodical and has been facilitated by new information technologies. What took Orbán decades to implement, Trump does in weeks, as he has planned his *blitzkrieg* very carefully over the last few years.

It is a process that is advancing internally in Western societies, at different paces, and internationally with the dismantling and weakening of international organisations. Perhaps the case of the World Trade Organisation, whose dispute settlement body has not been functioning since 2019, is the most illustrative example of the US-sponsored dismantling of global governance institutions, which seeks to use its greater relative power for immediate gains in bilateral negotiations.

The second characteristic of this dying order is that of an international order based on rules rather than force. The idea of self-restraint by great powers in their own spheres of influence, as well as respect for international law and recourse to institutions to resolve peacefully, has been progressively challenged by Russia and China in their respective regional settings and now aggressively rejected by the United States, whose president openly claims that there is no more ambitious nation, willing to “*consider itself a growing nation —one that increases our wealth, expands our territory, builds our cities, raises our expectations, and carries our flag into new and beautiful horizons*” (Trump, 2025).

Contrary to the expectations of those who anticipated a possible isolationism of the great Western power, “*The United States under Donald Trump is not retreating into isolationism. It is actively joining the authoritarian camp, supporting right-wing authoritarians around the world from Vladimir Putin to Viktor Orbán to Nayib Bukele to Narendra Modi*” (Fukuyama, 2025). It is, in fact, about redefining the global order in terms dictated by the short-term interests of the great powers, perceived as transactional, while reducing the importance attached to human security.

In his testimony to the Senate, Trump's Secretary of State made his bellicose disposition towards his greatest enemy and the global order clear":

"We welcomed the Chinese Communist Party into this global order. And they took advantage of all its benefits. But they ignored all its obligations and responsibilities. Instead, they have lied, cheated, hacked, and stolen their way to global superpower status, at our expense. [...] The postwar global order is not just obsolete; it is now a weapon being used against us" (Rubio, 2025).

For this reason, in his opinion, it is necessary to dismantle the existing order, the characteristics of which' in Fontaine's (2022) good synthesis:

"[...] is a rules-based order because it elevates standards above a might-makes-right doctrine. It is open because any nation-state that wishes to follow those standards can join its ranks; there are no exclusionary regional or ideological blocs. And it is liberal because it is weighted towards protection of free-market capitalism and liberal democratic political values".

This order has not only brought peace and stability at the international level, but has allowed humanity to multiply and achieve exceptional conditions of well-being over the last eighty years.

The material results are indisputable. There were about 2.5 billion human beings in 1950, with a life expectancy of 46 years. Now, the figure is 8.4 billion and the average life expectancy is 73.5 years (Galan, 2025). In this period, the percentile of the global population living below the poverty line (\$2.15/day) fell from 58.5% to 8.3% (Yonzan *et al.*, 2022). The geopolitical stability of this liberal order, based on the alliance around Western values, favoured geopolitical balance in counterpoint to the former Soviet Union, reduced conflict and increased global welfare.

But more importantly, in a sense, it has been a civilising process, with the construction of norms to regulate interdependence occurring over eight decades. Pinker (2011) highlights the reduction of violence as part of this process, highlighting among "the better angels of our nature", self-control, the use of reason, moral sense and empathy, precisely the quality that Elon Musk, in a recent interview with an *influencer*, considered "*the fundamental weakness of Western civilisation*" (Bianco and Nguyen, 2025).

The evolution of international humanitarian law, which sought to regulate the use of force in armed conflict, is perhaps the clearest record of this process. These values have shaped US foreign policy virtually since its ascension to the international stage in the late 19th century. For this reason, there were those who believed that Trump's campaign rhetoric would lead to less order-disruptive decisions.

This has not been the case. Trump's foreign policy dismantles this order in an accelerated and methodical manner, as Zakaria (2025) didactically explains. On international security, the ongoing wars in Syria and Yemen, in Ukraine and Gaza/Lebanon, on the Korean peninsula and in the South China Sea encourage bellicose discourse by great power leaders concerned that conflicts could escalate and lead to widespread war. Fear of the use of weapons of mass destruction no longer prevents leaders from talking openly about a possible third world war.

In this context, the memory of the pandemic fades, leading to the normalisation of behaviours that may engender the spread of new disease vectors, while urban and agricultural frontiers encroach on previously untouched spaces. Extreme events in various parts of the world remind us again and again that climate change needs to be mitigated, as such loss of life and infrastructure costs cannot be sustained. The progressive destruction of biomes is a reminder that the next pandemic will soon surprise humanity.

None of these existential threats can be effectively addressed without broad international cooperation. Re-establishing a legitimate global governance space must be the priority of any national security strategy. Wars, plagues and diseases preoccupy decision-makers and have a direct impact on the security of Latin American countries.

These are not the only existential risks for Latin American societies. Disparities in income and wealth within and between countries stimulate population revolts, produce significant internal displacement and encourage international migration. And it is these migrants that Europe does not want to receive and that the US expels from its territory, turning socio-political problems into security tensions, if not national defence challenges.

The hopes that inspired the creation of the seventeen sustainable development goals are today in the distant past, despite the fact that countries signed a mutual commitment to advance this

political agenda created within the framework of the liberal order. It is a process that has a direct impact on security and defence conditions in Latin America.

5 Evidence of the deterioration of the liberal order

The 2024 edition of the Global Peace Index, produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace, records 56 ongoing conflicts in the world today, the highest number since World War II. In the same year, global defence spending reached USD 2.46 trillion, 7.4% more than in 2023, which had registered 6.5% more than the previous year. This corresponds to 1.9% of global GDP, as opposed to 1.6% in 2022 (McGerty and Dewey, 2025). In response to Trump's first actions, European countries have already started to increase their budgets. The missing resources to reduce inequalities are going into military budgets.

In the view of the world's elite who gather each year in Davos to discuss responses to global challenges, other issues matter as much as the risk of armed conflict between states. The World Economic Forum's two most recent global risk reports indicate how quickly the main threats to global stability and international business can change: armed conflicts between states—which include coups, civil wars and *proxy wars*—rank first in the current year, when they were in eighth position in 2024 (WEF, 2025). But the next concerns are of a different order: extreme weather events (66%), disinformation generated by artificial intelligence (53%), political and social polarisation (46%), inflationary crises (42%) and cyber-attacks (39%). It is unclear how these dynamics influence each other, but there has been no shortage of disruptive consequences of events such as these in recent years.

These are risks associated with the malfunctioning of the international order. Blanchard (2025) highlights two critical areas in the current geopolitical landscape: international trade and migration. International trade is not functioning as it should, slowing the pace of growth and generating dysfunctions that fuel geopolitical tensions. With his tariffs, Trump is already adding dysfunctions that put the global economy itself at risk, deepening the decline in growth and stimulating *beggar-thy-neighbour* policies.

In turn, immigration poses enormous challenges, both within and between nations, with far-reaching implications for the current international scene. Added to the migration issue is the internal

displacement of large numbers of people, due both to wars and political persecution and to increasingly severe environmental disasters. In 2023, the global report on internal displacement recorded more than 75.9 million internally displaced persons in 45 countries or territories. In only three of these countries or territories was the suffering of these human beings not exacerbated by natural disasters.

The interdependence consolidated during the Cold War gave rise to a new type of society, with political and socio-economic implications that are manifested internally and internationally. For Bech (2009), this dynamic has forged an amalgamated society at risk, given the progressive inability of nation states to satisfactorily resolve the multiplying and interrelated crises, particularly as the regimes structured since Bretton Woods progressively deteriorate, making it impossible to perpetuate the neoliberal dynamic that has brought so much material progress to humanity since then. In the perception of market observers, this moment has arrived (Coggan, 2024).

Instead, no order can be established, as was seen in the inter-war period, in the twenty years of crisis that led to the Second World War Carr spoke of. On the contrary, some argue that a new Cold War has already been established between the United States and China (Sanger and Brooks, 2024; Ferguson, 2023), an argument that Tokatlian (2024) vehemently contests. Drezner (2023) and Tooze (2023), on the other hand, argue that these crises are not only successive, but interrelated. More optimistically, Smith (2022) argues that the very occurrence of crises encourages decision-makers to propose solutions, as seen in the responses to the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In short, the current order is marked by multipolarity without effective and legitimate governance, but it is not clear whether this post-hegemonic condition will allow nation states to control individuals or whether, supported by new technologies, citizens will be able to consolidate greater autonomy in relation to nation state governments, especially when one takes into account the capacity for influence of corporate controllers in the information economy.

Hence, the present can be seen as an interregnum. However, one cannot assume a teleology that points to the direction in which the international order is heading. Because reality changes rapidly and the pace of innovation creates opportunities for dis-

ruptive innovations on a continuous basis, it is more difficult to identify changes that tend to survive time. Moreover, each relevant area of international relations has its own dynamics, involving different actors, but all influencing each other. The fact that it is not possible to anticipate how each area will affect the others makes the future opaque.

This is compounded by the transition from the industrial to the information economy, which requires the generation of exponentially higher volumes of electricity. The most recent IEA report, the *World Energy Outlook 2024*, notes that “over the past decade, electricity consumption has grown at twice the rate of total energy demand, with China accounting for two-thirds of the increase in global electricity demand over the past ten years”. But China is also the country investing the most in the clean energy transition, having accounted for “60% of new renewable capacity added globally by 2023”. (International Energy Agency, 2024).

It turns out that energy generation matrices do not change quickly. Investments in energy generation take time and are the result of political decisions, which force societies to make inter-temporal decisions. In democratic systems, this is done transparently, showing that diffuse gains from clean matrices will come at the cost of localised losses for power groups committed to carbon-based generation, which are usually embedded in state institutions.

These processes open up spaces for internal dissent and international conflict, as rivals can exploit these differences of interest to reduce social cohesion in Western societies. In today’s world, national borders do not prevent information from flowing freely, fuelling disputes that can jeopardise national security and constitute threats to democracy.

From an international relations perspective, population and environmental, socio-political and economic dynamics produce security risks for states and their citizens. However, there is disagreement among scholars, and much speculation, about how these dynamics influence each other. Current conditions make it impossible to foresee how contemporary international relations will evolve in the coming years given their complexity. Few substantial phenomena can be predicted with any certainty over the coming decades.

These include the growth and ageing of the world’s population, and the consequences of climate change, especially in terms of

increased energy demand, linked to the growing relevance of the cyber environment and its influence on social, political and economic relations on a global scale.

6 What should be done in this context to adjust security and defence strategies?

The last eight decades have allowed humanity to prosper by reaping the dividends of peace. In part, this progress has been due to the liberal institutions and values that have organised international relations in this period. Western societies have benefited greatly from this condition, to the point of neglecting the need to preserve and strengthen these institutions, as if they were a permanent condition. Disruptive innovations have made it possible to universalise capitalist production, which has generated wealth for all and stimulated disruptive innovations that gave rise to the information economy.

It is a process that generates income and wealth concentration while lifting millions of people out of poverty. Once individuals have more access to information, disparities in living standards cannot be hidden from them, a phenomenon that generates feelings of injustice, which stimulates riots. Even if it generates prosperity, this is a fragile order. On the one hand, because it leaves the costs of the negative externalities of economic production, in the form of high debts and environmental destruction, to future generations. On the other hand, lacking political structures to arbitrate conflicts and placate feelings of injustice, this order brings with it the seeds of war.

It is also an order subject to disruption both by the volatility of trade and financial flows and by external shocks caused by natural phenomena and by the wide circulation of pathological agents that can provoke new pandemics. Understanding these characteristics is important for defining security strategies that allow governments to allocate resources to national defence efforts without neglecting human security. The social contracts tacitly signed in societies had in mind this normative framework that gave political communities the feeling of sharing not only values understood as universal, but also the expectation of moving in the same direction, of having a common future.

This coincidence between the values around which societies cohere and those that organised, until recently, the "global

neighbourhood" favoured dealing with international crises without allowing them to escalate into war. Especially in the more developed Western societies, this coincidence stimulated the creation of synergies between the domestic environment and the international environment that resulted in a long period of prosperity associated with feelings of security, which generated political stability and social cohesion. Thus a degree of interdependence was progressively established that inevitably brought vulnerabilities to economies and societies, leading to fear and insecurity.

As the values of the liberal order disappeared on a global scale, disparities became evident, the gap between the expectations and possibilities of progress within and between societies widened, and space was opened up for distributive conflicts and other forms of cohesion of national societies, including war, which points to the need to unite in order to face a common threat. A fertile ground for germinating hatreds, accentuating differences, stimulating conflicts, appealing to men's visceral fears and their gregarious nature. This is the current situation, with authoritarian leaderships at the head of the great powers, on the verge of conflict or of dividing up the world among themselves.

A world in which the main actors saw themselves as players in a positive-sum game framed in a long process leading to a common future has been transformed to the extent that the players, not sharing the same values, now perceive their relationships as discrete disputes in zero-sum games.

This dynamic is well known and the results of its evolution have been seen in the global conflicts of the 20th century. The risks society faces today are greater, the conflicts more complex and the time to manage them shorter. In addition to the traditional theatres of operation (land, sea and air), there are now outer space and cyberspace. We still do not know how to manage the cyber domain, which allows the coordination of efforts in all dimensions of power, and what its limits and possibilities are, especially considering the use of Artificial Intelligence. Even more seriously, not only are there weapons of mass destruction, but access to them has become easier and cheaper. This means a more precarious and volatile order. In a zero-sum environment, the security dilemma is permanently installed, with the difference that non-state power groups also have sufficient resources and capabilities to challenge nation states.

It is true that "power is still territorial: cables are buried somewhere; servers are stored on land; satellites are launched from the mainland" (Louis and Malik, 2025), but in the information economy control over what is done in geographical space is organised on the basis of intangible elements, which are transferred more quickly and easily between relevant actors. At the same time, the immediacy stimulated by the information economy and the resources it offers to organised actors in cyberspace ensure constant changes even of the relevant actors, rendering obsolete the ways of thinking about security and defence strategies in the international order in transition to the unknown.

But it is possible to point out aspects to be considered in these strategies based on what has been analysed in this text. To begin with, a sense of urgency in action must motivate governments in the region to act. The liberal order is no more. The United States has made it clear that its interests will be defined in short-term transactional terms. It is a foolish decision that will accelerate its decline as leader of the West, but there is no room for self-delusion or hope for a change of direction in the coming years.

Instead of a government committed to protecting individual rights in a democratic society, the Trump Administration has set in motion the dismantling of the state's regulatory capacities with the aim of expanding the autonomy of big businesses and organising society around authoritarian values, clear hierarchies involving well-defined and self-reinforcing social roles for men and women, parents and children, bosses and employees, politicians and citizens, whites and non-whites, believers and non-believers.

A government that perceives the international order created to project its values in the world, which gives it extraordinary structural power, as burdensome and deleterious, an instrument in the service of its enemies. If this is so, its determination to stifle the UN and NATO, if not abandon them, is a matter of time. European leaders have realised this. Governments need to recognise this shift as soon as possible and begin devising strategies to build greater degrees of autonomy and self-determination in the field of international security. Moreover, they need to recognise the need to develop their own armaments and logistical bases to ensure that they have the resources to sustain combat for a reasonable period of time in the event of war.

The review of security and defence strategies also needs to take into account China's and Russia's presence in the region. While

Russia sees its presence here as a way to regain its international prestige and its ability to make its presence felt in various parts of the world, China has a more long-term vision. The order that comes with the Belt and Road Initiative serves to reorganise global flows around its national interests, starting with access to markets and natural inputs (food, minerals, oil) and ending with its physical presence at strategic points in terms of global geopolitics. It is unclear how long the order proposed by Xi Jinping will be able to coexist with the decadent liberal order, let alone whether it will impose itself on the world, but it is certain that the values that form and constitute it, besides being authoritarian, prioritise the sense of community at the expense of individuals.

In other words, what is known as the liberal international order has functioned as a kind of infrastructure capable of projecting US values onto the world and serving as instruments of power over other states and private entities in the service of their national interests. Since Bretton Woods, this also served humanity and inspired narratives that the hegemonic order installed by Washington was benign, as it favoured global development in a peaceful environment.

Essentially, being inspired by Enlightenment values, it was an order that placed the individual at the centre of political concerns and attributed to the state the duty to protect them. Some of these values continue to exist as a global political agenda, within the framework of the seventeen goals of sustainable development. Given that this agenda has been incorporated, to some degree or another, even in culturally very diverse societies in the West, it is believed that some of this will remain when the current transition is completed.

This order created an interdependent global environment and installed existential threats that can only be successfully confronted jointly. Thus, the world faces collective action problems: enemies need to cooperate to avoid harm to all, as in zero-sum games. This condition makes the evolution of international politics even less predictable. This is true at the global level as well as in the regional context.

In the case of Latin America, there is more room for cooperation. Governments have internationally organised crime in all its dimensions as a common enemy. Conflicts of interest between states, historically rare and usually resolved through diplomatic means, are encapsulated. But the presence of the US in con-

Conflict with extra-regional powers imposes on states the need to act. Because of its relative military incapacity, this action needs to take place in a multilateral setting. Ensuring that the region remains a zone of peace and cooperation must be a permanent objective in security and defence strategies.

The combination of this action should give a higher profile to European countries, with which we share the values of appreciation for democracy and the defence of fundamental human rights.

In addition, politicians need to give meaning to their actions, through which they must protect individuals and promote the socio-economic development of their countries. The bureaucracy must fulfil its role of guaranteeing the integrity of citizens, state institutions and the fundamental values of society. These values should constitute the security and defence strategies of Latin American countries, along with the modernisation of military capabilities as a way to deter threats from abroad. In addition to clear diagnoses of the international order, awareness of the values of societies will be key to defining security and defence strategies for Latin American countries that are adjusted to changes in the global scenario in order to expand the autonomy of political communities and preserve the integrity of citizens in the face of war and famine.

Conclusions

This text has examined the changes in the current international order from the point of view of the international insertion of Latin American countries in the face of the need to adjust their security and defence strategies. In short sections, the nature of these changes has been discussed, highlighting the difficulty of interpreting their essence and, above all, their implications for regional security.

However, the awareness that we are living through a period of transition is not enough to identify what the subsequent order will be like, but the proximity to crises that could lead to global conflict points in the direction of identifying elements of permanence and transformation in the global environment. While the idea of a Gramscian interregnum, as well as that of a second Cold War, should not be dismissed, it should be borne in mind that a teleological view of the observed transformations is not appropriate, given the fact that the perceptions and actions of

decision-makers directly affect the course of events in a volatile environment such as the current one.

The liberal order is seen to be unravelling at an accelerating pace, a process driven by the United States under the Trump Administration. If it is not possible to identify the finish line, so to speak, it is safe to say that part of the values inherent in the order in place over the last eighty years tends to continue to shape the priorities of Latin American countries, particularly in terms of protecting individuals from war and economic deprivation, as well as from other forms of oppression, with the global political agenda of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a parameter.

Beyond this, the text highlights the need for governments in the region to understand that the security umbrella that protected them since the beginning of the Cold War no longer exists. While not hostile towards the region, the US is no longer willing to lead collective efforts to repel threats from foreign powers. Each of the countries of Latin America stands alone and needs to develop new security and defence strategies, based on its values, that point in the direction of mutual cooperation to deter extra-regional threats and the development of military capabilities within the framework of a sufficiently solid defence logistics base to ensure the protection of the state and its citizens.

In this context, cooperation with Europe in strengthening multilateralism and restoring an order based on rules rather than force has a special significance built on shared values.

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Chapter Three

Building a Latin American Policy against transnational organised crime (TOC)

Carolina Sancho Hirane

Abstract

The text addresses TOD in Latin American countries, contextualising the phenomenon in contemporary times and describing its trends. Subsequently, it sets out a series of premises that should be considered in the formulation of a public policy on the subject. Finally, it proposes some elements to be taken into account in the formulation of this public policy, considering, from an international perspective, relevant contributions on the issue. From a national perspective, it proposes the modernisation of the state to address TOD and suggests an integrated public policy that simultaneously considers various topics involved in the manifestation of the phenomenon from a short, medium and long term perspective.

Keywords

Transnational organised crime (TOC), Public policy, Organised crime intelligence, State modernisation, Integrated approach.

Introduction

The subject of this article is transnational organised crime (TOC) in the Americas, with particular reference to Latin America. It focuses particularly on the challenges from a public policy perspective, describing how the phenomenon manifests itself today. An understanding of these elements can guide the formulation of a policy or strategy against TOD shared by the countries of the region. This is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for reducing—and ideally eliminating—this illicit crime in its multiple manifestations, as well as for limiting its scope, which has been strengthened and expanded by globalisation, which has favoured a planetary perspective of the potential area of operations.

The text is organised along three axes. The first contextualises the phenomenon of TOD in the region. The second identifies fundamental premises to be considered for the elaboration of a policy or strategy against TOD in Latin American countries, which traditionally have not been considered or, alternatively, have been formulated in an inadequate manner. The third explains, from a public policy perspective, the essential elements to be considered so that state intervention against TOD, by means of a public policy, contributes to achieving the desired objective, taking into account respect for democratic principles.

The methodology used is based on official documents, specialised texts (books and scientific journal articles), reports from specialised bodies, interviews with experts, the author's conversations with specialists in the field and previous work by the undersigned.

1 Development

1.1 Contextualising TOD at the international and hemispheric level

The evolution of TOD in the region is associated with its international development. This can be seen in a review of international agreements on the subject and their influence on regional agreements on the matter. In addition, sub-regional multilateral bodies also contribute to the collectively declared effort to confront these illicit activities.

From a legal perspective, in relation to TOD, the transcendental step was taken in 2000 in Palermo, where the United Nations Convention against transnational organised crime and its protocols originated, which established a shared conceptualisation

of the phenomenon in which the minimum factors that must be present in its implementation were made explicit, as indicated in its definition, understanding it in terms of a:

“Structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit” (UN, 2004: 5).

From a historical perspective, it has been a primary instrument on the subject. At the hemispheric level, it has not only been constantly referenced, but the need for the countries of the American continent to sign or apply it has also been reiterated, and support has been offered for its implementation.

For example, the 2006 Hemispheric Plan of Action against Transnational Organised Crime of the Organisation of American States (OAS) states at the beginning of the document:

“The main purpose of this Hemispheric Plan of Action is to promote the implementation by OAS Member States of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Convention) and its protocols [...]” (OAS, 2006).

Another example is the Department against Transnational Organised Crime (DDOT), which is part of the OAS Secretariat for Multidimensional Security, created in 2016. Its main purpose is “technical and legislative assistance to OAS Member States to confront and respond to transnational organised crime in its various manifestations” (DDOT, n. d.). For example, by supporting “Member States that require it in accordance with mandates of the Organization, and to comply with the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its three Protocols [...]”.

Over the years, other specific international documents have complemented the Palermo Convention (2000), which have contributed to strengthening its purpose. For example, the 2003 United Nations Convention against Corruption, which aims to:

“[...] to promote and strengthen measures to prevent and combat corruption more effectively and efficiently; to promote, facilitate and support international cooperation and technical assistance in preventing and combating corruption,

including asset recovery; and to promote integrity, accountability and good governance” (UN, 2010).

The main contributions of this document include, on the one hand, the recognition that, in the framework of corruption, the criminalisation of bribery of public officials has two actors, as is made explicit in article 15:

“(a) The promise, offering or giving to a public official, directly or indirectly, of an undue advantage, for the official himself or herself or another person or entity, in order that the official act or refrain from acting in the exercise of his or her official duties; (b) The solicitation or acceptance by a public official, directly or indirectly, of an undue advantage, for himself or herself or for another person or entity, in order that the official act or refrain from acting in the exercise of his or her official duties” (UN, 2004: 18).

On the other hand, this convention creates the space to make visible the damage that corruption generates, as a factor that not only weakens the rule of law, but also harms the most vulnerable communities:

“[...] it affects the poor infinitely more by diverting development funds, undermining the ability of governments to deliver basic services, fuelling inequality and injustice, and discouraging foreign investment and aid. Corruption is a key factor in poor performance and a major obstacle to poverty alleviation and development” (UN, 2004).

The Palermo Convention has been a milestone that provides a shared starting point for the pursuit of TOD at the international level and for the development of international documents that contribute to this work.

Here, too, the regional impact of multilateral international commitments is noted in terms of reference in hemispheric documents. Thus, the Hemispheric Plan of Action against Transnational Organised Crime (OAS, 2006) urges “Member States that have not yet done so to consider signing, ratifying and/or acceding to, as appropriate, the following international agreements: [...] United Nations Convention against Corruption [...]” (OAS, 2006).

In the case of Latin American countries, this is particularly relevant and useful due to the high levels of perceived corruption. Indeed, based on the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index,

Transparency International's regional advisor for the Americas, Luciana Torchiaro, has pointed out that:

"[...] we observe this year that the region is not making progress in the fight against corruption and there is a 'de-prioritisation' of the transparency agenda in most countries. This year, the region scores 42 points out of a possible 100, on a scale of zero to 100, where 100 is perceived as very clean and zero as very corrupt, and this places us 22 points below the European Union and 3 points above the Middle East and North Africa" (Drazer, 2025).

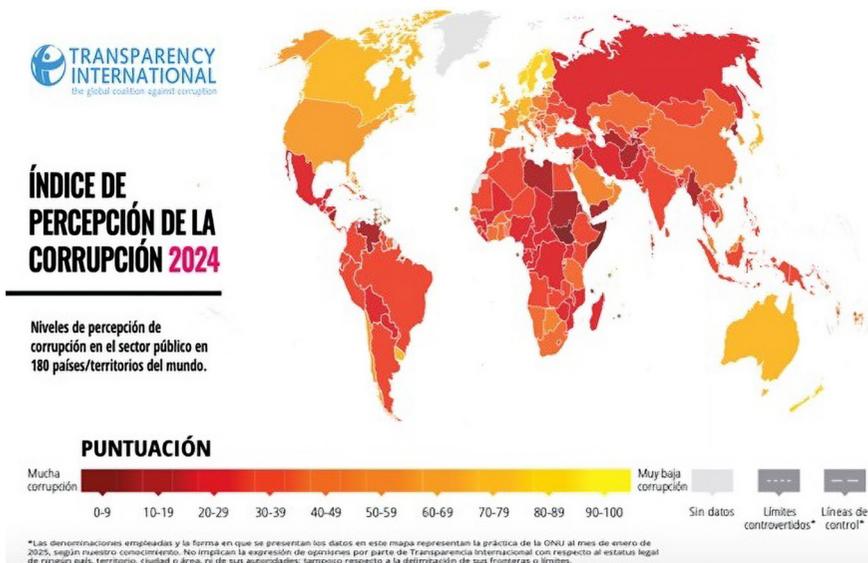


Figure 1: Corruption Perception Index (2024). Source: Corruption Perceptions Index 2024, Transparency International

Figure 1 illustrates a hemispheric picture of corruption perceptions for 2024, as measured by Transparency International.

In Torchiaro's view, Latin America stands out in terms of corruption:

"[...] Latin America's institutional weaknesses, the lack of sustained transparency over time, the lack of participation, have allowed organised crime to flourish, and this is very characteristic of the region. Today, Latin America has become an international hub for organised crime. In the region, we see drug trafficking, illegal logging, illegal mining, human

trafficking, and an infinity of crimes that feed on corruption in order to operate freely" (Drazer, 2025).

For this reason, efforts to address TOD through corruption are relevant to the international agreements reiterated at the hemispheric level and make a significant contribution to weakening these illicit activities.

The efforts made, although important, are insufficient. An indicator of this may be the high levels of violence recorded in Latin America and the Caribbean, which in the last two decades have surpassed other areas of the world —which are not at war— with "20 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, a figure that is more than three times the rate observed worldwide" (IDB, 2024: 9).

This allows us to understand that, even though at the regional level in the OAS, the Secretariat for Multidimensional Security through the DDOT contributes with:

"Technical Secretariat services to various political and specialized forums with competence in this area within the OAS and promotes cooperation projects among Member States to strengthen capacities for the investigation and prosecution of organized crime based on different thematic areas, including: Money laundering; Corruption, illicit financing and asset recovery; Confiscation, management, administration and liquidation of assets of illicit origin; Environmental crimes and protection of species; Illegal mining; Trafficking in persons; Trafficking; Illicit trafficking of migrants; Illicit trafficking of firearms, ammunition, explosives and other related materials; Illegal trade and illicit economies; Cybercrime and illicit use of Cryptocurrencies; Artificial intelligence applied against Organised Crime" (DDOT, n. d.).

All of these sub-regional bodies consider TOD as a topic of interest.

In this regard, in the framework of the Brasilia Consensus, created in 2023 with the "objective of strengthening ties between the neighbouring countries that make up South America, promoting cooperation and projecting the voice of South America in the world", the "fight against transnational organised crime", among other issues, has been considered a priority. Within the framework of Chile's *pro tempore* presidency, the first meeting that specifically addressed TOD took place at the First Meeting of

Ministers and High Authorities on Public Security and Organised Crime of the Brasilia Consensus, held in Santiago de Chile in April 2024. At that meeting, a call was made:

“[...] it is urgent [for] the authorities of all countries to coordinate our efforts to combat insecurity and organised crime, either by sharing experiences, exchanging information that allows us to stop criminals and developing a strategy, with concrete actions and joint measures, to curb organised crime in the region” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

In the second half of 2024, with Colombia holding *the pro tempore* presidency, the following were given:

“[...] the first steps to establish a network of prison authorities to strengthen the prison systems of the 12 countries, as well as a diagnosis of environmental crimes in South America that are related to criminal finances” (*Swissinfo*, 2025).

In the first half of 2025, with Ecuador holding the *pro tempore* presidency, it has been indicated that the topic of the UNTOC is a priority and that the work carried out by the previous rotating presidencies will be continued.

Based on the above, it is possible to point out that the different multilateral spaces do not overlap and can be considered as complementary instances with the possibility of reinforcing each other. Likewise, multilateral actions in the hemisphere are influenced by the evolution of international issues and agreements that take place in the United Nations. Finally, there has been an effort to generate sub-regional coordination due to the increase in TOD violence in Latin America, which has affected South American countries, such as Ecuador and Peru, in an unprecedented way. Both have had to adopt exceptional measures in the face of sudden waves of violence in major cities such as Guayaquil and Lima, respectively (International Crisis Group, 2025; Arce, 2025).

1.2 Fundamental premises for a policy or strategy against TOD in Latin America

An effective approach to TOD requires at the very least the identification of the international trends associated with the phenomenon and the particularities of the area to be intervened in order to modify the observed results in the desired direction. In this way, the broad context that affects

the particular situation of a specific area at a given time is connected.

Although it seems logical, this has not always been considered when preparing state responses, which reveals a lack of knowledge of the specificities of a particular locality and helps to explain why measures that are successful in one case may be a failure in another. For example, the recommendation to intensify arrest, prosecution and punishment policies for some crimes may fail if there is no effective state capacity to implement it. A classic example of this is the government's initial responses to violent crime-related events that shock public opinion, promising to increase arrests, sanctions and incarceration. In practice, however, the police are understaffed, the judicial system is overstaffed, the number of available officers is less than the minimum necessary, and prisons are overcrowded, putting prison control at risk.

In contrast to this "heavy-handed policy", a consistent policy is proposed which, in terms of opposition to the previous nomenclature, would be called "smart head policy", based on an understanding of the current global and local trends shaping the phenomenon and which is not only based on evidence, but also considers institutional strengths and weaknesses in dealing with TOD. The conviction is that it must be carried out within the framework of democratic political systems whose legitimacy is associated with the provision of public goods such as security and development to the entire population. Significant deficits in its realisation, reflected in a permanent decrease in its indicators, can call into question citizens' preference for democracy as a political system, which undermines its legitimacy (Malamud and Nuñez, 2024).

The development of a consistent public policy in Latin America to address TOD requires the consideration of at least some premises as basic assumptions to be taken into account in the formulation of state intervention to address the issue. The following is a proposal to promote a debate on the subject, based on existing information and available evidence, in order to prevent new public policy proposals from being based on ideas supported by emotional inspirations with little empirical support.

The following are ten premises to be considered in the formulation of a Latin American policy or strategy against TOD:

- *Premise one.* The traditional conceptualisation of TOD needs to be updated, as a descriptive approach is insufficient to understand the phenomenon that needs to be addressed, for example, from a public policy perspective.

In this sense, the relevance of a conceptualisation that takes into account the evolution of TOD is currently being considered (Albarracín 2023; Zeballos, 2024), which suggests rethinking the way in which it is understood. Considering that it has been transformed in terms of considering it also as a type of social order that in some areas is installed with the aim of imposing an organisation different from the previously established (Trejo and Ley, 2022; Felman and Luna, 2022; Guerra, 2023).

Indeed, these would be groups that through a:

"[...] a set of actions and decisions taken jointly between legally instituted authorities and a criminal organisation that exercises a broad dominion over a territory and a strong influence over local society. They are oriented towards the management of public administration with the aim of appropriating its resources under a façade of legality" (Duque, 2021: 353).

Thus, having a contemporary definition of the phenomenon has become a challenge, which is evidence of the incremental changes that are being detected in its manifestation, both in the way it acts and in the implications derived from it. An example of this is the emergence of the notion of "criminal governance" (Duque, 2021), which shows how in some instances a coordination between politicians and criminals has emerged that facilitates the achieving the objectives of each of these actors, especially when state institutions are weak.

- *Premise two.* The traditional approach to tackling TOD has significant shortcomings that are reflected in the increase of the phenomenon globally, and it is therefore necessary to review the effectiveness of the way in which the phenomenon has historically been tackled.

The Global Initiative on Organised Crime (GI-TOC), in the second global report on organised crime, published in 2023, measured fifteen offences, ten of them for the second time, which is an increase compared to the previous measurement. Figure 2 shows the values of this increase.

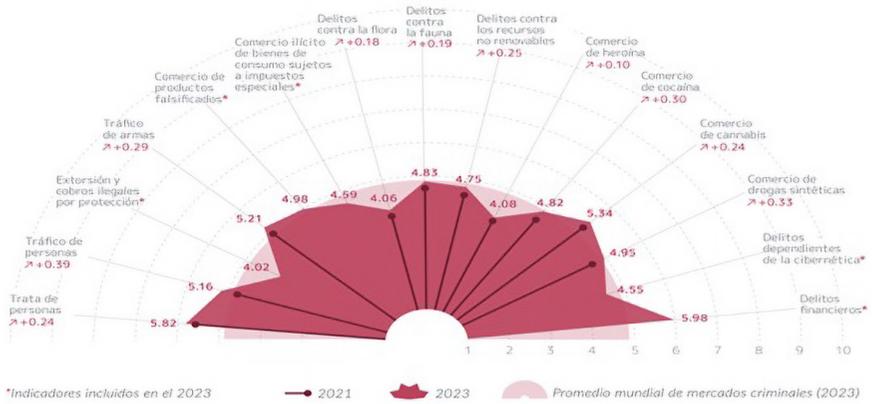


Figure 2: Criminal markets, global average 2021 vs. 2023. Source: GITOC, 2023

This measurement considered 193 countries, of which 134 show low resilience to crime, i.e. a low capacity to recover from crime. This situation affects 62% of the world’s population, as shown in Figure 3.

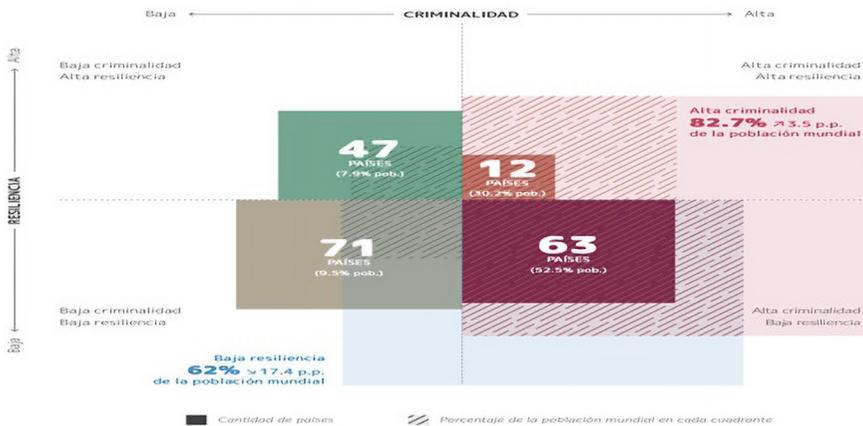


Figure 3: Vulnerability ratings. Source: GITOC, 2023

Drug trafficking, the main illicit activity developed by the DOT, does not show results that allow us to believe that it is in decline. The *World Drug Report 2024*, produced by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), shows that the consumption and production of drugs is not decreasing.

“The number of people using drugs rose to 292 million in 2022, representing a 20% increase in 10 years. Cannabis

remains the most widely used drug worldwide (228 million users), followed by opioids (60 million users), amphetamines (30 million users), cocaine (23 million users) and ecstasy (20 million users)".

According to the same report, of the 64 million people with "drug use disorders, only one in 11 receives treatment", where women are at a disadvantage. Women are less likely than men to access rehabilitation, with "only one in 18 women with drug use disorders receiving treatment compared to one in seven men" (UNODC, 2024).

- *Premise three.* Latin America and the Caribbean mirror international trends in TOD and, in some respects, are severely impacted by them, for example in the associated violence, which makes it "the most violent and insecure region in the world" (IDB, 2024: 9).

In Latin America, homicides are one of the consequences of TOD, and are caused by a variety of motives: settling of scores, hired killings, extortion, kidnapping, or crimes against private property or persons. The report *The Costs of Crime and Violence* of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) highlights that, in the "last two decades, the homicide rate in LAC has been systematically higher than in other regions of the world" (IDB, 2024: 9), which maintains a trend in LAC for 2022 of "20 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, a figure that more than triples the number of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants" (IDB, 2024: 9), resulting in a direct cost of an average of "3.44% of the GDP of the countries of the region in 2022" (IDB, 2024: 13), a measurement in which 22 countries are considered. This is equivalent to "approximately 78% of the public budget for education, twice the public budget for social assistance and 12 times the public and private spending for research and development in these countries" (IDB, 2024: 13), which is evidence of the damaging impact on society. Coinciding with the IDB report, Insight Crime's *Latin American and Caribbean Homicide Balance 2024* (2025) estimates a homicide rate of 20.2 per 100,000 inhabitants, which varies from country to country as illustrated in Figure 4 and 5.

Currently, the most violent country in the region is Ecuador, which registers one murder every hour and has a rate of 38 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants; 1,300 homicides



Figure 4: Homicide rate in Latin America in 2024. Source: Insight Crime, 2025



Figure 5: Homicide rate in Latin America in 2024. Source: Insight Crime, 2025

have been recorded in the first 50 days of the year, a figure that has increased by 40% compared to 2023, which would indicate that “Ecuador now faces a new configuration of criminal gangs, more armed, better trained and more violent than ever before” (Mella, 2025).

However, the increase in violence at the hands of the DOT is not exclusive to Ecuador; different countries identify transnational gangs whose novelty is given by their territorial control in the area where they are installed, the violence with which they act to impose themselves and their capacity to act inter-

nationally, among other factors (Manjarrés, McDermott and Newton, 2024).

- *Premise four.* An effective capacity is required to address TOD in a comprehensive manner, incorporating approaches whose relevance is only recently beginning to be understood, such as the illicit business perspective that underpins the permanence and expansion of the scope of TOD.

This perspective involves understanding at least three key ideas:

- a) "Crime is a regional rather than a national problem" (Bergman, 2023: 14), which makes it necessary to think, plan and act in a logic of international cooperation, a matter that has been difficult in the region. Recently, efforts have been made to reverse the previous passivity (Vargas, 2024; McCubin, 2025).
- b) "Both economic prosperity and lawlessness are two factors that must combine to increase crime" (Bergman, 2023: 14), low levels of institutionalism are a breeding ground for the rise of TOD, especially when there is an increase in the purchasing power of the population, if institutionalism is not strengthened in parallel, an aspect neglected in the countries of the region, in particular because of an underestimation of the levels of corruption that have been occurring within them.

The Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 warns about environmental crime in the Americas, noting that:

"Corruption in the Americas has allowed organised crime to operate with freedom of action and impunity. This facilitates environmental crimes, such as illegal logging in Ecuador (32), illegal mining in Chile (63) and Colombia (39) and wildlife trafficking in Brazil (34) [...] Practically 80% of the 1013 murders of environmental defenders committed since 2019 happened in the Americas (794), particularly in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico" (Transparency International, 2025).

- c) "Crime has become a 'profitable business' (Bergman, 2023: 14) and it is difficult to estimate its profits. However, seizures resulting from operations that disrupt the actions of the DOT allow us to approximate the magnitude of the money involved. An emblematic case occurred in Mexico, when in 2019 police arrived at the residence of business-

man ZhenLi Ye Gon and found money piled up totalling USD 207 million" (BBC, 2019).

- *Premise five.* The technological factor is increasingly incorporated in commission of offences carried out by TOD, which broadens the possibilities of its realisation and the profits it produces, so that it is a challenge for the state to detect it in a timely manner, to have the capacity to monitor it, and to prosecute and punish the use of sophisticated technologies in the commission of offences.

The Encrchat case illustrates the scale of the challenge by disrupting a group of individuals using encrypted messaging to coordinate illicit TOD.

"Since the start of the operation, 6558 arrests have been made, including 197 'high value targets'. In addition, €739.7 million in cash has been seized and €154.1 million in assets and bank accounts have been frozen. In terms of illegal drugs, 30.5 million chemical drug tablets, 103.5 tons of cocaine, 163.4 tons of cannabis and 3.3 tons of heroin have been seized" (Ficarazzi, 2023).

It is recognised that this is only the beginning, as further operations have subsequently continued to detect the use of encrypted technology for TOD. In all cases, significant sums of money and drugs have been seized (Sánchez, 2024; Viudez, 2025).

- *Premise six.* The state's effective tackling of TOD requires strengthening criminal intelligence, which is often confused with police intelligence. However, they are different but related. While the first corresponds to the intelligence function carried out by the police, the second refers to the intelligence against organised crime that is expected to be carried out by the different entities involved: customs, prisons, police, financial intelligence institutions (Sancho, 2024), which require a meeting point to integrate the information obtained, share the analyses and coordinate action with the aim of generating an overview of the phenomenon in each country and the international aspects detected that require international collaboration.
- *Premise seven.* Reducing TOD cannot be achieved by state action alone in terms of monitoring, detection, detention, prosecution and punishment. The role of civil society is key to legitimising this work and rejecting a culture that favours TOD,

for example: the purchase of stolen or counterfeit illicit goods, which can be legitimised as having an economic value, arguing the low purchasing power of the population, for which the hidden costs of this “cheap pseudo-price” are unknown; questioning the growing fashion of the so-called “narco culture”, which, through series, songs and leaders, promotes a certain style of behaviour and life, which stands out for immediate profit and pleasure, and most worryingly, the use of violence to resolve disputes, as well as a disposable vision of people’s lives, among others.

In this context, a policy against TOD must consider an ecosystem against TOD that contemplates the state as an articulator, but also civil society, the private sector, professional associations and academia must be present, in a call where the message is clear: all of them together to reduce and ideally eliminate TOD, questioning simplistic messages that are sometimes transmitted regarding violence as a mechanism to resolve conflict and murder to eliminate dissent or competition between gangs.

The UN is increasingly doing relevant work to promote the involvement of civil society in tackling TOD, particularly in illicit activities such as drug trafficking (UNODC, 2020; UNODC/INACIPE, 2020).

- *Premise eight.* Professionalise the debate on TOD, avoiding partisan politicisation, whose position can change significantly on the same issue depending on whether one is on the side of the government or the opposition.

The aim is to diagnose the situation of each country and the region in relation to TOD based on evidence. This facilitates the capacity for cross-cutting consensus, in a first stage, regarding the definition of the problem that needs to be addressed, which favours the identification of the way in which it can be tackled, so that the objectives to be achieved, the available or required capacities and the necessary resources are considered, i.e. the strategy to be developed and implemented to achieve what is proposed. A cross-party agreement in this sense, based on the evidence found, can give continuity to the policy on the issue, which would avoid radical variations in the event of a change of authority in charge or of the government due to the start of a new presidential term, an issue that has weakened the state’s action in this area.

The aim is to be able to recognise the existence of transnational criminal gangs with a presence in different countries in the region and with characteristics that distinguish them and even allow them to be classified, as a starting point for later evaluating their presence in each country in the region.

An example that helps in this regard is the research carried out by the think tank (specialised in organised crime analysis and research) Insight Crime, which in 2024 identified five main organised crime groups in the region and, with information gathered from different sources, measured them according to the following variables: "territorial dominance (40 points), criminal economies (40 points), state penetration (40 points), military capacity (40 points), structure (40 points), hierarchy (20 points) and criminal alliances (10 points)" (Manjarrés, McDermott and Newton, 2024). The following results were obtained from them and are systematised in Table 1.

Variable Group	Territorial scope	Criminal alliances	Criminal economies	Structure	State penetration	Leadership	Military capability	Total score	Ranking
Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)	40	6	22	31	30	18	31	178	1
Sinaloa Cartel	30	10	26	36	31	18	21	172	2
Tren de Aragua	27	2	32	21	40	12	15	149	3
Los Choneros	20	10	18	30	0	12	29	119	4
Los Lobos	20	8	19	18	0	8	29	102	5
Mara Salvatrucha (MS13)	2	0	2	36	0	16	8	64	6

Table 1: Comparison of the capacity of criminal groups in Latin America
Source: Insight Crime, 2024

- *Premise nine.* A body of good practices and lessons learned is needed to guide the formulation of public policies on TOD and so that it can be consulted by the countries of the region from different institutions in charge of the issue. For example, in several Latin American countries, given the novelty of certain unprecedented situations related to a sudden increase in violence associated with organised crime, constitutional states of exception that cannot become permanent have been used. Likewise, the armed forces have been involved, which has been observed to be permanent, in the absence of a plan

that establishes the criteria for the entry and exit of the armed forces in these matters.

This systematisation of good practices and lessons learned needs to be built on the experience of those with the greatest tradition in each area. In this sense, the countries of origin of criminal groups can contribute their knowledge about them. Likewise, those that show achievements in curbing TOD can share their way to achieve it. For example, Italy, which overcame a period of intense violence associated with TOD, can contribute its learning in this regard (UNODC/INACIPE, 2020).

The construction of this database is still pending, which is why it is necessary to understand the provisional nature of the knowledge under which public policies against organised crime are elaborated, bearing in mind that new information can change initial assessments, which leaves the possibility of adjustments to data that modify the initial perception.

- *Premise ten.* Tackling TOD requires synchronised intervention between the different levels of action involved in its management. This includes three distinct and related rings of action: international cooperation, inter-agency collaboration and intra-agency coordination. This is a pending challenge, as different bureaucratic interests (Metcalf, 1994), sometimes coupled with divergent partisan interests from various state agencies and strained relations between countries' authorities, can hinder the unified action required to address TOD.

This integrated action needs to start within each state institution or agency involved in the work against TOD and continue among the various state organisations that converge on this issue, and finally, at the international level, to generate a synergy that benefits all actors involved in the work against TOD.

Failures between these three rings allow us to understand how important leaders of criminal groups, after a long time at large in the region, are detected by the authorities.

1.3 Key elements for an effective public policy against TOD in continental democracies

In the hemisphere, TOD has diverse manifestations and implications that can be analysed through different perspectives. Some

countries stand out as drug producers —such as Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela and Honduras (McDermott and Dudley, 2024)— others as trafficking hotspots —for example, Ecuador, Brazil and Mexico— and still others stand out for their consumption capacity —for example, Canada and the US.

In a future perspective, the outlook is not encouraging. The report *The Fifth Wave* (Williams, 2024) projects TOD to 2040, with a pessimistic view. In his view, in 15 years' time, organised crime will be more pervasive and powerful than it is today, a consequence of a dynamic and complex combination of external pressures and opportunities, and emerging characteristics of illicit markets and criminal networks.

From a public policy approach, avoiding such a scenario, considering the current context from the TOD and some of its challenges, requires at least two initiatives involving the state (Sancho, 2024b).

The first is to strengthen international cooperation, especially where feasible, by promoting and making use of the different instances it offers. In this regard, the contribution of the UNODC, the DDOT in the OAS, COPOLAD and PACCTO in the European Union is noteworthy.

The second is to promote a modernisation of the state in the countries, aimed at dealing with this new and novel way in which TOC is organised, functions and manifests itself. This is something different from what has traditionally been detected, and state structures do not have the capacity to deal with this new scenario. This implies transforming institutions, training civil servants, updating related legislation, allocating resources and strengthening some state institutions that are challenged to face this phenomenon, always considering an integrated approach to the issue, avoiding partial and partisan perspectives based on personal agendas and sometimes influenced by corruption.

This modernisation of the state must prioritise the generation or recovery of deterrence power in relation to those who challenge the rule of law in TOD-related offences. In addition, they must develop the capacity to sanction criminal groups. This avoids what Bergman (2023: 29-30) has detected: "When deterrence is low, the business of crime tends to be concentrated in fewer hands and fighting between powerful groups could unleash violence".

Conclusions

TOD in the region reflects global trends in this topic. Their illicit activities are on the rise as a result of more clients and an increase in the profits they make. The new ways in which criminal groups manifest themselves make it necessary to review the way in which TOD is dealt with in Latin American countries from a policy perspective.

Ten premises are proposed that seek to review traditional beliefs and practices for dealing with TOD in the hemisphere. Thus, we hope to contribute to the development of updated policies that take into account some of the findings detected regarding the current way in which TOD manifests itself in the continent.

Finally, under a public policy approach, considering that the current trends will lead to a pessimistic scenario, some measures to be considered in order to reverse the trend are proposed. The key lies in the formulation of public policies in this area for the coming years, with the conviction that it is still possible to reverse the trend and achieve a significant change in the work against TOC and with the certainty that the lives of the population, institutional stability and the maintenance of democracy as the preferred political system in the region are being safeguarded.

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Chapter Four

Influence of Islamic terrorism in Ibero-America, a genuine concern? Views from Colombia

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Abstract

Radicalisation has established itself as one of the most pressing threats to humanity since ancient times and, in recent years, it has become a lethal weapon that combines the adoption of rigid positions with the emergence of disruptive technologies and hybrid strategies that facilitate the execution of terrorist acts. Ibero-America, and more particularly Colombia, has witnessed this, the entrenchment of beliefs that have found a foundation in violence as a means to achieve particular objectives that put national, regional and even global security at risk. This chapter explores the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism, its origins and its expansion in critical geopolitical spaces and scenarios such as Hispanic America and Colombia.

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Keywords

Terrorism, Radicalisation, Hispanic America, Hybridity.

Introduction

In terms of geography and culture, there is a great distance separating Ibero-America from the Middle East, the epicentre of the genesis of the radical Islamist movements that today pose a threat to international security. Perhaps this has relegated the study of Islamic terrorism as a threat to the Ibero-American space to the background. In fact, with the attacks of 11 September 2001, the intellectual appetite for the study of the phenomenon was awakened in Latin America, without it becoming a formal part of the public agenda, and it was conceived of as a threat to the region.

Trujillo Álvarez (2018: 77) already warned in his dissertation on the jihadist presence in Latin America that:

“The concept of ‘terrorism’ has been handled cautiously because of the difficulty for some to establish a clear boundary with the beloved internal conflicts or guerrilla-like outbreaks that were a common regional denominator in the 1970s and 1980s”.

Precisely not only for the region, for Colombia, Spain or Portugal, but for the whole world, the univocal meaning of the concept of terrorism has been one of the greatest challenges since the very explosion of the problem in modern times.

Added to this is the conflict in the area, where insurgent and terrorist groups have inadvertently crossed the boundaries between the tactics and strategies of guerrilla warfare and those of terrorism. This has caused public debate and political discourse to focus on the qualification of the violent acts committed without necessarily having a common understanding and a solid basis on the meaning and implications of dealing with a terrorist act.

Thus, in Ibero-America there is a historical debt to the judicious study of terrorism and, particularly, of the Islamic aspect, which gives rise to a series of debates that combine religious, cultural and historical variables that are generally unknown to citizens, public policy makers and decision makers at both ends of the world’s geography. Determining the right boundaries and connections is therefore an inescapable task at a time when factors such as technology make the influence of this form of violence even greater.

Hence, this chapter seeks to address how Islamic terrorism has expanded towards Latin America to represent a serious concern,

especially in a context such as Colombia's. In the first part of the chapter, therefore, a conceptual and theoretical approach to terrorism will be made, from its most general meaning to the Islamic aspect. Later, we will analyse the incidence of the phenomenon in Latin America, paying special attention to the catalysts, and finally, we will point out the possible links and challenges for the Colombian case with regard to organised armed groups (OAGs).

1 Notions of terrorism, Islam and radicalisation for the sake of Allah

The complex political, historical and social reality of Ibero-America embodies profound security challenges that merit a study that goes so far as to reflect on the very nature of the human being. Before the fateful events of 11 September 2001 in the United States, terrorism was already one of the main concerns of states facing threats to their integrity, cohesion and institutional stability.

Although debates about its meaning and impact took place decades earlier, it was only after 9/11 that the issue was mainstreamed and prioritised on the international security agenda. In fact, according to the Council of Europe, more than a hundred definitions of terrorism can be found, so there is no widespread and universal consensus on what is meant by terrorism.

“This lack of agreement has very concrete practical consequences: for example, the UN has been unable to adopt a convention against terrorism, despite trying to do so for more than 60 years, because its member states cannot agree on how to define the term” (Council of Europe, n. d.).

This is how the exact definition of terrorism appears as the first task that, after centuries, has not been successfully completed, which is a major challenge, since without an accepted concept, at least by the majority, the designation of terrorist will continue to be a somewhat “subjective” and deeply politicised action. In other words, as José Juan de Olloqui (2003) argues, the heroes of some are the terrorists of others; for some, an assassin may be a revolutionary or liberator, and for others, a terrorist. What is more serious: the response to this type of violence may not be adequate, beyond the debate on semantics.

While there is consensus that the objective of terrorism is political, the referred politicisation is that the discourse of leaders and pressure groups can oscillate between polarised definitions that prevent a legitimate and widespread acceptance of the qualifica-

tion of a violent act as terrorism. This then raises both political and legal issues which, while not the subject of this chapter, do expose the complexity of the terrain, even more so when variables such as religion come into play.

However, there are at least five factors that are commonly accepted. In this regard, Cynthia Combs (2022), in her work *Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, takes a useful approach, identifying the essential characteristics of a terrorist act: an act of violence, an audience, the creation of an atmosphere of fear, (innocent) victims, and political motives or goals.

This way, terrorism has become a modality of struggle for political, religious, ethnic groups and all those who, in the midst of an asymmetrical conflict², wish to strike hard blows in order to fulfil the maxim that they do not want many people to die, but many people to see. It should be made clear that the focus of the chapter on Islamic terrorism is in no way meant to consolidate a symbiosis that generates stereotypes or false labels that confuse a Muslim (the person who professes the faith of Islam) with an extremist who conceives terror and violence as a tool of choice for those who think differently.

“Terror is therefore born of an inflexible conviction in our way of life, which does not allow others to express their differences. In certain cases, this absolute conviction becomes a real passion (it is followed to the point of fanaticism) and only then can it be translated into violent actions that condone self-sacrifice and the indiscriminate killing of others” (Brand, 2005: 155).

It needs to be reiterated as much as necessary that Islam 's a religion and a political project based on the Qur'an too, which, as Aya Smittmans (2004) points out, does not have to be violent. Indeed, in her study on pan-Arabism and Islamic fundamentalism, she stresses that it was not until the 12nd and 13th centuries that jihad began to be associated with war or violence, a

² Since the end of the Cold War, most confrontations and armed conflicts have shifted from being between states or actors of equal status to focus on struggles in which the difference in the conditions of the disputing parties is clear.

“In some recent conflicts, where the weaker party sought to gain a comparative advantage over a militarily superior enemy, we witnessed the re-emergence of practices long banned in armed conflict, such as direct attacks on civilians, hostage-taking and the use of human shields, and the use of these practices as a strategy” (Geiss, 2006).

word commonly associated with terrorism today, but which in dogma refers to the struggle to lead someone in the way of Allah, or even the internal struggle to be a better Muslim (Amirian and Zein, 2009).

It was also at that time that the *hashshashin* and Shi'ite imams were emphatic in asserting that a ruler's failure to apply *Sharia* law in a Muslim-majority town warranted fighting him. In particular, the *hashshashin*, from which the "assassin" is derived, refers to a secret Muslim sect that had its stronghold high in the mountains of Persia and Syria. Its reference is of vital importance in this chapter, as it is one of the earliest manifestations of radicalisation associated with Islam.

"Based in an impenetrable Persian castle, Alamut, these agents specialised in targeted assassinations and espionage. They infiltrated the ranks of their enemies, attacked their targets, often with knives, and were willing to die for their mission. Syrian enemies called them the Hashishim" (Millan, 2018).

There is thus an explicit background to radicalisation, in this case Islamic radicalisation, which dates back centuries and accounts for the extremist strands whose study explains how violence has been adopted as a tool for organisations such as Al Qaeda, the Islamic State or Ansar Al Sharia. While psychological issues that are beyond the scope of this paper are involved, it is vital to understand that growing up in environments with structural political, economic, social and cultural characteristics leads individuals and collectives to marginalise themselves from *the esprit de corps* of the society to which they belong in order to impose their radical vision.

In modern times, one can look back to 1979, when Islamists triumphed in Iraq and promoted the spread of fundamentalism.

"Fundamentalist radicalisation sees Sharia (the Islamic legal system) as the basis for a political programme. It reacts against secularisation or the corruption of customs. It claims that violence will make it possible to remove the obstacles to the spread of Islam and defend the Muslim community" (Montero, 2023).

It was precisely towards the end of the 1970s that jihadism took hold as a definition of a holy war promoted to establish Islamist systems in Muslim-majority countries. In fact, in 1981, President

Sadat of Egypt fell into the hands of the “Islamic jihad” as a repercussion of the agreements with Israel³ (Montero, 2023). Later, the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan provided the backdrop for Islamic radicalisation to demonstrate its reach, even more so with extra-regional support that ended, after the fall of the Soviet regime, in the organisation of jihadists under the command of Osama bin Laden.

This is the genesis of “The Base”, of the much named but little known in depth Al Qaeda, that jihadist group that occupied for months the front pages of newspapers, magazines, articles and books that turned to studying who was behind the 9/11 attacks. After catapulting to world fame and with Bin Laden’s face being the most famous, which even served to stereotype Muslims, there was a wave of expansion and bifurcation of organisations that made their presence felt wherever there were power vacuums and where violence prevailed.

Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, among other countries, embodied a bloody struggle that is still ongoing and threatens to get worse. It is very likely that those who think that Bin Laden’s death marked the end of Al Qaeda are mistaken, for as Rafat Ghotme (2015: 12) states in his book on the organisation “[...] apart from dominating in the formulation and propagation of ideology, Al Qaeda Central plays a decisive strategic role in the decentralisation of the jihadist movement”.

This decentralisation will be a strategy analysed in the second part of this chapter, as we will see how this principle, together with the principle of dispersion, can lead to geographical expansion. To date, the European Union’s list of terrorists includes at least fourteen individuals and twenty-two organisations; however, mention is made above all of Al Qaeda, as the terrorist group that in modern times has led the expansion of jihadist Salafism⁴. Although the Islamic State has grown in power and

³ It should also be borne in mind that, by that time, Arab nationalisms were in crisis, and Islamist movements emerged as a possible way out to unite the countries of the region in the face of external influence (Montaner, 2021).

⁴ Jihadist Salafism is a term that emerged in the 1980s:

“[...] its central idea is the consolidation of a global caliphate through holy war or jihad (in one of its meanings), which seeks to subjugate the world to a form of Islam where the Shari’a prevails through violent methods such as terrorism. Jihadist Salafism mixes a position of returning to the ‘early days’ of the Prophet Muhammad, as a matter of purity of action, with the mission of converting the ‘infidels’ to Islam, even by force in order to establish the caliphate” (Montaner, 2021: 16).

popularity, the existence of the former is not ignored, but rather its behavioural guidelines are set as a guide for the groups that succeed in the Islamic terrorism.

Generally speaking, the notion of the “other” or of difference disappears in the face of a dynamic of radicalisation in which people live, die and kill for a truth that is considered unique, but which certainly contains political and economic motivations that go unnoticed by those on the front lines who offer their lives, or who immolate themselves to teach a lesson to the infidels around them. In the modern Western world, it seems more like fiction than reality, but this threat exists and its reach is increasingly being extended, especially by technology, a subject that will be discussed later.

The media and methodologies are increasingly frightening. It is enough to read the account of Nadia Murad (2018: 12) in her shocking book *I will be the last*, in which she recounts the drama she experienced as a sex slave of Islamic State soldiers and denounces the genocide of the Yazidi people in northern Iraq at the hands of the radicals. In her pages we read that, before the feared extermination began:

“The IS Research and Fatwa Department studied the Yazidis and concluded that, as a Kurdish-speaking group without a holy book, they were non-believers whose enslavement was a firmly established aspect of the Shari’a”.

At the same time as the publication of these studies that legitimise their violent and anti-human rights actions, they took it upon themselves to mass-produce pamphlets in which they answered frequently asked questions about the treatment of female prisoners and slaves, objectifying them and minimising them to mere property. Mention is made of this particular case, as it starkly shows how far the process of radicalisation goes and how dangerous it becomes, especially when the religious factor is involved.

“The reason is that it is such a profound motivational force that it makes a person sacrifice himself for later generations, renounce his own well-being and perform any action that he interprets as the divine will” (García, Valentín and Jiménez, 2024).

From an eisegesis of Islamic texts, Allah’s will has thus been interpreted as determining the fate of the “infidels”, of those who do not profess the same faith, an issue that is deepened by the

empowerment of groups such as IS and Al Qaeda. Various threatening actors related to this cause are listed:

“a) authorised radicalised individuals motivated by the dimension of violence that the ‘Islamic State’ has raised to its maximum power; b) cells belonging to this terrorist organisation or to others such as Al Qaeda or its affiliates or with links to members of these; c) terrorists returning from Syria and Iraq;¹⁰ d) radicals frustrated by not having been able to travel to these areas; e) Islamists released from prison in our country [Spain] and other neighbouring countries; and f) jihadists from other countries” (Alonso, 2016: 86).

In general terms, although terrorism is a threat that appeared as a means of struggle in the early days of humanity, today it is emerging as an overwhelming phenomenon, whose lack of conceptual clarity and semantic politicisation has reduced the impact of the fight against it. To this must be added certain governments’ lack of concern for thinking that it is a foreign issue, confined only to scenarios such as the Middle East, Africa or Central Asia, ignoring the fact that it is growing immeasurably and extending its roots beyond its original configuration, even to the Iberian Peninsula and further afield: to Latin America.

Despite this conceptual obfuscation, the factors commonly associated with a terrorist act are clear: a violent act, a political (and even economic) objective, the creation of an atmosphere of fear, victims and an audience. This last characteristic is connected to their purpose of impacting a large audience so that the magnitude of their power is understood from fear. In the Islamic case, its political motivation is based on the sacred texts; “there is no doubt that the Koran wants a political and Muslim regime to be established in which a morally just and egalitarian social order is guaranteed” (Aya-Smitmans, 2004: 37), which is constituted as a unique truth that must be defended with one’s life.

2 A Muslim regime for Ibero-America? The spread of Islamic terrorism

It was noted earlier that one of the great lessons that Al Qaeda has learned is that of decentralisation and dispersion, especially in areas that represent chaos and power vacuums, or that were part of its history, where fundamentalism —which not only provides a reason to live, but also to die— can be consolidated. Thus,

it is necessary to delve into the influence of Islamic terrorism in Ibero-America along two lines: the possibility of recruitment and influence in social, political and cultural environments, and the use of bases and networks for financing and expansion.

Thus, from the Iberian Peninsula to the heart of Latin America, there are now not only signs, but also hard evidence of the presence of Islamic terrorists who seek either to recover their roots and spaces that, from their conception, belong to them by antonomasia, or to destabilise the neighbouring region of their greatest imperialist enemy in the West. But, in the end, geo-strategy will be of essential importance in explaining their presence in the area.

In turn, Spain has a special status as it is close to North Africa and is the gateway to the European continent.

“In these fragile borders between one continent and the other, the transit of individuals and goods is constant, sometimes including weapons and drugs that are difficult to detect in such a porous border. The radicalisation of a significant part of the Muslim population with Spanish nationality in these localities (Ceuta and Melilla) is also growing, where numerous facilitating factors such as crime, unemployment, school absenteeism, the presence of religious figures who advocate a fundamentalist Islam and the proximity of countries in which radical Islamism continues to grow, exacerbating the worrying regional instability” (Alonso, 2016: 101).

Added to this is the clear purpose of reconquering territories that in past centuries formed part of the Muslim world, including some regions of Spain and Portugal (Cano, 2011). In terms of proximity to the Maghreb, the increase in jihadist activity in highly complex situations such as Libya, Tunisia and, to a large extent, Egypt, has a direct impact on the security of the Iberian Peninsula. The conflict in the North African region and the migratory flows and illicit economies from sub-Saharan Africa and Central Africa account for the exponential risk to which the coasts of southern Europe are exposed.

The picture is complicated by the fact that most of the structural reasons associated with radicalisation take place in neighbouring Africa. Youth unemployment of 44%, high levels of income inequality, rapid urbanisation and weaknesses in state institutions (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n. d.) come together to make most young people more vulnerable to the discourses of

radicalisation agents (who are often empathetic and charismatic) or to the influence of radical friends or family members (Reinares and García-Calvo, 2016).

In the case of Latin America, the situation is no different. Drug trafficking, human trafficking, migration due to internal conflicts, insecurity or the search for better living conditions leave thousands of citizens who have lived through histories of violence at their mercy, so that they see it as a legitimate means to achieve specific goals or objectives. In this respect, the dilemma over the connotation of the use or qualification of an act as terrorism emerges forcefully, as guerrilla wars, which are common in Central and South America, and their intrinsic connection to transnational crimes make defining the situation and addressing the challenges a major challenge.

Precisely, the exorbitant profits from the illicit business of drug trafficking and arms and human trafficking make the scenario attractive to locals and foreigners, which is why it is understood that financing is one of the central axes to achieve the mission, be it political or economic. It is therefore vital to review figures such as those cited by Trujillo (2018: 78), who indicates that, according to "French intelligence sources have calculated that the money flowing from Latin America to the Middle East is between 60 and 100 million dollars every year".

From Bolivia, Congresswoman Norma Piérola, also quoted by Trujillo, denounced that drug trafficking leaving her country was going to Venezuela to finance terrorist groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Hezbollah⁵ and Al Qaeda. She also complained of the malicious interference of Iran, as it was detected that several of its citizens had entered

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"Hezbollah is both a supporter of Lebanon and of the Shia Islamic community. Additionally, Hezbollah, the Lebanese Party of God, is one of the dominant political parties in Lebanon, as well as a social and religious movement that caters primarily (though not exclusively) to Lebanon's Shia community. Hezbollah is also the largest militia in Lebanon, the only one that maintains its weapons and renames its armed elements as an Islamic resistance in response to the terms of the Taif Agreement, which ended Lebanon's civil war and demanded the disarmament of all militias [...]" (Lopez, 2021: 4).

It is also considered a terrorist group by Israel, the United States and many other states that regard its actions as terrorist (López, 2021). Although it belongs to the opposite strand of Salafism, its means and ways have been labelled as terrorist by the West.

Venezuela and Nicaragua. In the latter country, the irregular entry of three citizens was reported (Trujillo, 2018).

However, it should be clarified that this influence does not only correspond to recent years. Precisely, the presence of Hezbollah members was first reported in November 1994⁶ on the triple border between Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil.

“Furthermore, the apparent connection between Islamic fundamentalist groups, drug trafficking, money laundering, and some mafias existing in the region, particularly in Ciudad del Este, has been pointed out, which would be the consequence of a lack of control by the Paraguayan police and corruption characteristic of some Paraguayan authorities, according to various reports by the US State Department” (Caro, 2011: '80).

Hezbollah's presence is indisputably associated with Iran's geo-strategic interests in the region⁷, which has increased its presence, especially since the strengthening of relations with Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia and, at the time, Ecuador, in order to somehow avoid isolation (Ellis, 2015) and to have alternative scenarios that are also a challenging message for the United States.

In this regard, Evan Ellis (2015) analyses not only Iran's presence as a state, but also the sub-national actors—in addition to Hezbollah—that seek to establish themselves in the region and whose motivations can be classified as follows:

- a) Gathering of resources for radicals fighting in other parts of the world, especially the Middle East and North Africa.
- b) Coordination of logistical networks to facilitate attacks in the Western Hemisphere.
- c) Cooperation between local illegal actors and radical actors who can operate in local spaces to evade controls, for example, on arms development (Ellis, 2015).

Although their religious objective is their main goal (at least in discourse), rather than generating processes of conversion by

⁶ At the time, they carried out the two largest terrorist attacks in Argentina, one against the Israeli embassy and the other against the AMIA Jewish building.

⁷ “Hezbollah is an extension of the theocratic Iranian regime; it is not simply aligned with its interests, but beyond that, it is integrated with it, consolidating itself as the main tool of non-state armed pressure for the pursuit of Iran's strategic interests” (Melamed, Niño and Gómez, 2024).

force in the Ibero-American region —and particularly in Latin America—, what the presence of Islamic terrorist groups means is that they are looking for sources of funding and strategic allies that strengthen them logistically and tactically, as they can train and develop tools that circumvent the regulations or limits they have in their places of origin.

However, beyond this, there is a latent threat of geopolitical pretensions based on a significant increase in Iran's presence in Venezuela, not only as operators in the energy sector, but also with the use of bases for training their own and Venezuelan militants, the latter being a country that could be considered an operational base, according to Colombian intelligence reports published in the international media (Gómez, 2025).

3 The Colombian scene: the perfect ingredients for the radical recipe

More than sixty years of conflict have left deep wounds that have yet to heal in Colombia's social and institutional fabric. The persistence of old armed actors, together with the proliferation of new criminal structures and new and sophisticated methodologies, continues to create a volatile context that threatens the security of the country and the region.

To be precise, the discussion on terrorism was not new for Colombia after 9/11, but rather, with assiduous concern, the news headlines taught Colombians the meaning of terrorism with explicit examples. From the war of the cartels fighting for control of the cocaine market to the infighting of the FARC-EP and many other subversive groups that —since 2016— have been called organised armed groups (GAO)⁸, the country has learned first-hand what a terrorist act is, beyond the dichotomy that has been faced over whether there is an internal armed conflict or a terrorist threat.

⁸ According to Directive 15 of 2016 of the Colombian Ministry of National Defence, groups are characterised according to particular characteristics. It is determined if it is a GAO if it is under the direction of a responsible command and has control of a portion of the territory to develop sustained and concerted military operations. Likewise, the following are concurrent elements: that it uses armed violence against the security forces, the civilian population, civilian property and other armed groups; that it has the capacity to generate armed violence at a higher level than internal tension; and that it has an organisation and a command that leads its operations.

The truth is that, as stated at the outset, terrorism has become a form of struggle for non-state actors and, in the complicated Colombian scenario, this has been no exception. Thus, a first aspect to consider is that radicalisation in Colombia has led to the taking up of arms for a political objective (Agudelo, 2023)⁹. This is relevant because, although the modes and nature of the motivations differ between Islamic fundamentalism and the GAOs in Colombia, they share a dangerous basic commonality: in both sides, violence is seen as the ideal means to achieve their goal.

However, by legitimising the actions of each, the factors mentioned with respect to financing and the generation of logistical networks gain strength, especially with the strengthening of a GAO such as the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, or the Clan del Golfo.

“The CGA is primarily engaged in transnational drug trafficking. The group controls territories and regulates or directs the coca base paste market, escorting shipments along trafficking corridors, securing access to processing laboratories, and providing storage and shipping services in coastal and border regions” (Insight Crime, 2023).

Ellis (2015) mentioned precisely how the interests of groups such as Hezbollah in Colombia and the Latin American region could be explained. Illegal structures that challenge the national *status quo*, that manage strategic routes and huge amounts of money, are special allies, not only to challenge the stability of their opponent’s neighbouring region, but also to feed their bases in Africa and Asia.

In fact, *The New York Times* recently stated that the Clan del Golfo is on the list of drug cartels that Trump intends to designate as terrorists (Osorio, 2025). This is a setback both for the total peace policy of current president Gustavo Petro—who seeks to achieve the longed-for peace through negotiations with these groups—and for the stability and security of the region, as these decisions could lead to the establishment or strengthening of alliances between fundamentalist cells and local groups to respond to a common enemy: the United States.

⁹ Despite the fact that there have been processes of forced recruitment, Agudelo (2023) states that, according to ethnomethodological approaches that have been applied to the study of the phenomenon, young people who have joined structures such as the FARC or the ELN have done so believing that it is the only way to vindicate the rights of the vulnerable population, especially the Colombian peasantry.

It is essential to take into account the edges that emerge with each connection between events and actors. Thus, it is clear that the Shiite group designated as terrorist by the United States is the one that has established a greater presence in the region and acts as a *proxy* actor for Iran, one of its sponsors (Melamed, Niño and Gómez, 2024). To this must be added the expansion of logistical and financing networks that explain their interest in the region, which is facilitated by state vacuums in the triple border of Colombia, Panama and Venezuela, as well as the use of technologies that enhance their criminal activities.

“Additionally, there is a general lack of knowledge among authorities in Latin America about the particularities of this organisation, its ideology, its *modus operandi* and the level of risk as a continental threat. This region has been much more familiar with other forms of organised crime, in which religious motivations do not play a fundamental role” (Melamed, Niño and Gómez, 2024: 147).

To be precise, between 8 and 9 January 2025, five Iranian citizens tried to enter Colombian territory with false passports, two by land through the border with Cúcuta, Norte de Santander, and the remaining three through El Dorado International Airport in the Colombian capital (Gómez, 2025). In addition to hypotheses about geopolitical intentions and sources of funding, Colombian authorities also believe that the entry of these citizens is part of training Colombian GAOs in terrorist drone attacks (*Red+noticias*, 2025).

Conclusions

The fight against terrorism did not end with the death of Osama bin Laden, just as violence in Colombia was not exterminated with the signing of the peace agreement with the extinct Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP). Threats have grown not only in size, in terms of the number of people involved, but also in sophistication, due to the means and ways provided by technology and the facilities of an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world.

Porous borders and the basis of a radicalist mentality are today consolidating as the axes of a context that challenges the security and stability not only of some countries, but also of the Ibero-American region. Regardless of the aims of each illegal group,

their means have already found a symbiosis that is impervious to the limitations of action and decision-making in the region.

It is emphasised that, at least for Latin America, fundamentalist terrorism is not common; hence, it is not considered a priority on the security agenda of the countries and the area. Added to this is the ability of fundamentalists, transnational crime actors and Colombian GAOs to adapt stealthily to an environment in which they can evade the controls and measures imposed by countries such as the United States.

Thus, the convergence between terrorist organisations, more by means than by ends, is lethal for executing actions that will not only have many people watching, but also many people dying. In addition, there are no clear and united responses to common problems, but rather isolated actions that fail to filter out the deeper structure that underpins the whole web of global terrorism.

On the contrary, problems that make the younger generation more vulnerable to the persuasion of radicalising actors persist. Youth unemployment, lack of trust in state institutions, corruption, benefits for minorities and many other factors that are capitalised on in extremists' discourses remain a palpable reality that shows no promise of abating.

This way, although armed action is desirable to contain terrorist actions and dismantle cells that are already adept at generating an atmosphere of fear and tension, it is not enough, just as it has not been enough to eliminate the most visible leaders of these organisations. The picture is so complex that we even need to start by agreeing on what qualifies as terrorism and what does not, without the involvement of politicisation or the convenience of a political or economic sector.

The development of this chapter began with a discussion of the conceptual difficulty of terrorism. It starts from the fact that there is no consensus on the fight against the phenomenon, which is rooted in the impossibility of finding legitimate common ground that harmonises legal, political, social, cultural and religious visions.

Thus, while the debate continues over what is or is not terrorism, or whether a GAO is a terrorist actor or not, concrete actions must be taken to take away militants from this type of structure, the discourse that claims that there are no non-violent ways

to claim rights must be abandoned, or better still—in an ideal, almost imaginary way out— efforts should be concentrated so that there is no room for claims, because rights would already be guaranteed.

While that idyllic scenario is taking place, it is imperative to note that Ibero-America is not only united by historical ties today, but also by threats that connect in various ways to strengthen each other. Thus, the first step must be to acknowledge the existence of genuine concerns about the influence and action of Islamic terrorism in Ibero-America.

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Chapter Five

National security and defence strategies in Ibero-America in the 21st century

Francisco Márquez de la Rubia

Abstract

This document examines the evolution of national security and defence strategies in Ibero-America in the 21st century, highlighting a conceptual shift toward «extended security» that includes non-traditional threats such as organized crime, terrorism, cybersecurity, and climate change. It explores country-specific cases—Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Peru—each of which tailors its security policy based on its political, economic, and historical context. Chile attempted to implement a multi-dimensional National Security and Defence Strategy (ENSYD), though it failed to gain parliamentary approval. Brazil emphasizes strategic autonomy, focusing on protecting the Amazon and advancing military technology. Mexico promotes a preventive, socially-focused approach to organized crime. Argentina lacks a formal national security strategy but operates through updated defense directives. Peru follows a multisectorial policy aimed at 2030 goals. The document compares these strategies with those of Spain and Portugal, noting shared elements like extended security and international cooperation, alongside key differences in military capacity, financing, and civil-military relations. In conclusion, while the region shares a trend toward modernization

and professionalization of defence policies, structural and political challenges continue to influence the effectiveness of national security strategies across Ibero-America.

Keywords

Extended security, Organised crime, Cybersecurity, National defence, International cooperation.

Introduction

Security and defence architectures in Latin America have witnessed profound transformations over the last decades, marked by the evolution of regional and global dynamics. From the Cold War to the present day, the countries of the region have redefined their strategies, structures and alliances to respond to increasingly complex and multidimensional challenges. National security, traditionally conceived from a militaristic perspective and focused on border protection, has given way to a broader approach that incorporates emerging threats such as transnational organised crime, terrorism, cyber-attacks and humanitarian crises.

These transformations have not been homogenous. Each nation has developed its own security and defence model, conditioned by historical, political, economic and social factors. While some countries have strengthened their military institutions under the umbrella of international cooperation policies, others have opted for more decentralised structures, promoting the participation of civilian forces and multilateral organisations in risk and conflict management.

Regional integration has also taken the centre stage in the design of these architectures with the creation of bodies such as Unasur and the South American Defence Council, whose aim has been to foster cooperation and mutual trust in a continent historically marked by territorial disputes and ideological differences. However, challenges remain and the effectiveness of these mechanisms continues to be debated in a context where political changes and internal crises in countries directly influence their commitment to collective security.

The following chapters will explore in detail the evolution of security and defence strategies in Latin America, analysing specific cases, recent trends and the challenges the region faces in an increasingly interconnected and unpredictable global scenario. As it is impossible, for reasons of admissible editorial space, to analyse each and every one of the countries in the area, the cases of very relevant countries (for different reasons) —which are very interesting due to their normative evolution, such as Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Peru— are dealt with in greater detail. A brief comparison is also made between the planning instruments of these countries.

It explores questions such as: is it possible to build a cohesive regional security system?; how have foreign powers influenced the configuration of these architectures?; and what is the future of defence in a world where threats come not only from conventional conflicts, but also from cyberspace and the climate crisis?

The answers to these questions will shape the security landscape in Latin America in the years to come.

1 Conceptual development

Traditionally, defence in Latin America focused on protecting the state against external threats, with a predominantly military approach that responded to the logic of the Cold War and the ideological disputes of that period. During the 1970s and 1980s, many nations in the region adopted security policies focused on combating internal enemies, with a strong repressive component, for which they found justification under the US-driven national security doctrine. This led to the involvement of the Armed Forces (FAS) in internal security matters, which gave rise to tensions in the democratic debate and accusations of serious human rights violations (Comblin, 1989: 11).

With the end of ideological conflicts and the transition to more stable democracies in the 1990s, Latin American countries began to reform their defence policies, progressively separating the roles of the armed forces and public security institutions. This change reflected the recognition of the need to limit the use of the military to external defence tasks, thus assigning internal security control to the police and other civilian agencies. However, this differentiation has been blurred in crisis contexts such as the fight against drug trafficking and transnational organised crime, where the nature of the threats transcends traditional borders and capabilities.

Today, the region has adopted a broader conception of security, known as "human security" or "extended security", which incorporates aspects such as economic, social and environmental well-being. This approach recognises that threats to stability no longer come only from traditional state actors or armed conflicts, but from multifaceted challenges such as climate change, cyber-attacks, pandemics and mass migration. This conceptual shift has influenced the creation of new security and defence architectures that integrate multiple actors, including interna-

tional agencies, ministries and civil society organisations (Rojas Aravena, 2012).

In sum, the conceptual evolution of security and defence in Latin America reflects a continuous effort to adapt to contemporary realities, where regional cooperation, the inclusion of non-traditional perspectives and the strengthening of civilian capabilities have become fundamental pillars to face the challenges of the 21st century.

2 Contemporary challenges to security and defence architectures in Latin America

Latin America is at a turning point in terms of its security and defence structures. The challenges it faces are multiple and increasingly complex, reflecting an ever changing global landscape. The interaction between state and non-state actors, the advance of illicit economies and the growing influence of extra-regional powers have complicated the ability of governments to design effective and coordinated responses.

2.1 Transnational organised crime: a war without borders

Organised crime is no longer a local threat but a transnational phenomenon that challenges the sovereign capacities of Latin American states. Networks of drug, arms and human trafficking and money laundering have permeated government structures and weakened the rule of law in several nations. With cartels operating along strategic corridors that run from the Amazon rainforest to the ports of Central America and Mexico, unilateral responses have proven insufficient (Rivera-Páez, 2020).

The need for a multilateral approach is undeniable. As Ilan Goldfajn, president of the Inter-American Development Bank, pointed out, the fight against organised crime requires strategic alliances, not only between countries in the region, but also with global actors that have the capacity to track and dismantle the illicit financial flows that feed these networks¹. However, international cooperation remains fragmented, with some nations prioritising bilateral agreements with the US, while others seek autonomy in their security policy.

¹ See: <https://aduananews.com/dieciocho-paises-de-america-latina-y-el-caribe-se-unen-en-la-alianza-para-la-seguridad-y-el-desarrollo/>

2.2 Irregular migration: between security and human rights

Migration flows have reached unprecedented levels in Latin America, driven by economic, political and humanitarian crises. Venezuela, with more than seven million citizens forcibly displaced abroad, represents the largest exodus in the region's recent history. Added to this are migratory movements from Haiti and Central America, where the combination of violence, poverty and climate change is forcing thousands to flee their homes.

State responses have oscillated between containment and integration. Some governments have sought to deter this flow by tightening border controls and adopting restrictive measures to discourage irregular migration. However, the effectiveness of these policies remains a matter of debate. While some argue that they reduce the incentive to undertake dangerous journeys, others warn that they only strengthen smuggling networks and increase migrants' vulnerabilities. At the same time, the overburdening of reception systems in countries such as Colombia, Ecuador and Peru highlights the limitations of an uncoordinated regional response.

2.3 Interference by extra-regional actors: opportunity or risk?

The strategic repositioning of powers such as China and Russia in Latin America has added a new layer of complexity to the region's security architectures. Beijing, through its ambitious infrastructure financing and investment programme, has been able to establish a foothold in key sectors such as telecommunications, energy and logistics. At the same time, its growing military cooperation with countries such as Venezuela and Argentina raises questions about regional defence autonomy²³.

In turn, Russia has strengthened its influence through arms sales and intelligence assistance agreements, challenging US hegemony in the hemisphere. This geopolitical rebalancing offers economic opportunities, but also risks, as it increases tensions in a

² See: https://www.infobae.com/venezuela/2024/06/22/crece-la-alianza-entre-venezuela-y-china-ambos-regimenes-firmaron-nuevos-acuerdos-de-cooperacion/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

³ See: <https://www.wola.org/es/analysis/ee-uu-empuja-a-su-historica-aliada-en-sudamerica-hacia-china/>

context where military alliances (formal or informal) could redefine power balances in the region.

Taken together, these challenges test Latin America's ability to build an effective and resilient security and defence architecture adapted to new global realities. The quandary between national responses and collective solutions remains the central dilemma. In a world where threats are increasingly interconnected, political fragmentation could become the region's greatest vulnerability.

3 The case of Chile. Elaboration of the (failed) national security strategy (NSS)

Chile undertook a remarkable process to develop a national security strategy, the failure of which in Parliament deserves to be analysed in order to understand the difficulties of reaching consensus on such a crucial issue. This case reflects the challenges inherent to security policymaking in a country with historical tensions and contemporary challenges.

In the lines that follow, this complex issue will be analysed by tracing the evolution of security policies over time and the main obstacles encountered in articulating an NSS, leading to an in-depth analysis of the Chilean NSS 2012-2024.

3.1 Background and evolution

During the dictatorship, defence policy was centralised in the hands of the President, which relegated the Defence Minister to a secondary role. With the return to democracy, the Ministry regained prominence, which opened the debate on the responsibilities of the Armed Forces (FAS) and the state in security matters. Compulsory military service was replaced by a professional and mixed system, and funding was established based on 10% of copper sales, earmarked exclusively for the acquisition of armaments, with no upper limit.

Since 2002, Chile published national defence books in 2002, 2007 and 2010 that, while marking strategic principles, did not constitute a comprehensive strategy. In 2013, the reform of the law on copper adjusted military funding to review cycles every four years, linking these resources to the national security strategy without addressing a broader security vision.

The country evolved from the concept of national defence to that of national security with the *National Strategy for Security and Defence* (NSSD), which adopted an “extended security” approach, including transnational threats such as terrorism, organised crime, cyber-attacks and climate change. The strategy sought to define public responsibilities under the Constitution and foster inter-agency cooperation.

In 2010, Chile created a Joint Chiefs of Staff and assigned the JEMAD the command of foreign operations. Between 2011 and 2012, an attempt was made to formulate the NSSD, initially led by the Ministry of Defence, which generated tensions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Under-Secretariat of Defence wrote the draft, which was later modified by the Presidency. In August 2012, President Sebastián Piñera presented the document to the Senate, but it was not passed due to a lack of political consensus and shortcomings in its design.

The Inter-Ministerial Security Committee, headed by the President and composed of key Ministers, was supposed to lead this process, but its role was marginal. The strategy did not include a national security law establishing clear structures and responsibilities, which limited its effectiveness. Inspired by the Spanish model, the NSSD initially proposed a National Security Advisor, which was later replaced by an inter-ministerial council. Moreover, while the Spanish strategy distinguished between risks and threats, the Chilean strategy only addressed threats, which showed a less comprehensive vision.

A more in-depth analysis of Chile’s *National Strategy for Security and Defence* (NSSD) 2012-2024⁴

Drafted during Sebastián Piñera’s Administration, the NSSD was intended to guide and coordinate national security and defence between 2012 and 2024. Its main objective was to structure an efficient security policy in the face of traditional and emerging threats by establishing strategic criteria, defence capabilities, institutions and funding.

Recognising the impact of globalisation and technological progress, the NSSD identified drug trafficking, terrorism, organised crime, cyber-attacks, irregular migration, energy vulnerability and natural resource scarcity as major challenges.

⁴ See: https://www.bcn.cl/obtienearchivo?id=repositorio%2F10221%2F15344%2F1%2FLa+National+Strategy+for+Security+and+Defence_v6.doc&utm

Its objectives were to coordinate national agencies in the country's security, as well as to express Chile's official position in the face of internal and external challenges.

The document would be reviewed every four years with a twelve-year planning horizon, guided by five guiding principles: the protection of people at its core, the relationship between security and development, complementarity between security and defence, international cooperation as a strategic necessity, and security as public policy.

The NSSD recognises that the security landscape in the 21st century was highly dynamic and marked by an unprecedented level of interconnectedness. Globalisation, technological development and the reconfiguration of the balance of power have transformed the nature of threats, requiring a more agile and coordinated response from states. In this context, the NSSD analyses two levels of security, global and regional, identifying the trends and challenges that could directly affect Chile in the medium and long term.

3.2 Global security: a changing world

The NSSD describes an international scenario characterised by growing strategic uncertainty, the result of multiple factors:

- The rise of new actors and the redefinition of global power: China's emergence as an economic superpower and its growing presence in Latin America and Russia's re-emergence on the geopolitical stage have challenged the international order led by the United States and Europe. This new power configuration generates opportunities, but also tensions and risks in terms of security and defence.
- Hybrid threats and unconventional warfare: conflict between states is no longer limited to traditional military confrontations. Threats now include cyber-attacks, disinformation, interference in democratic processes and the use of non-state actors as *proxies* in asymmetric conflicts.
- Global terrorism and violent extremism: although Latin America is not an epicentre of terrorist activity, the NSSD recognises that international extremist networks could use the region as a base for logistical and financial operations.
- Climate change and natural disasters: environmental crises have become a major security factor. Chile, with its long

coastline and high seismic vulnerability, must be prepared to respond to extreme events, ensuring resilience and international cooperation in this area.

- Dispute over natural resources: scarcity of water, strategic minerals and energy has led to inter-state conflicts in several regions. Chile, as one of the world's leading producers of lithium and copper, could be affected by these dynamics of global competition.

In this context, the NSSD underlines the importance of maintaining an active foreign policy, based on multilateralism and respect for international law, which ensures that Chile can adapt to changes in the global environment without compromising its stability and sovereignty.

3.3 Regional security: Latin America at the crossroads

At the regional level, Latin America presents a particular scenario for the NSSD, characterised by the coexistence of security cooperation and fragmentation. Although the region has maintained low levels of inter-state conflict compared to other parts of the world, it faces structural challenges that affect stability and development.

Among the most relevant aspects, the NSSD highlights: the low probability of armed conflicts between states (the region has prioritised the peaceful resolution of disputes, with a normative framework based on treaties such as the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance [TIAR] and the OAS), high levels of criminal violence (Latin America is home to some of the highest homicide rates in the world, driven by organised crime, drug trafficking and weak judicial institutions), pressure on natural resources and environmental challenges (deforestation, illegal mining and pollution of water sources have generated social tensions and local conflicts in neighbouring countries, affecting regional stability), and, finally, the relevance of Brazil and the shift in economic focus from the Atlantic to the Pacific (the growing importance of the Asia-Pacific axis has led Chile to strengthen its trade and security relations with countries such as Peru, Colombia and Mexico in an attempt to position itself strategically in the region).

In the face of these challenges, the NSSD emphasises the need to strengthen cooperation with organisations such as Unasur, the Pacific Alliance and the South American Defence Council, which

promotes a more coordinated and effective vision of regional security.

3.4 Chile's security interests in the world

Chile's security interests cannot be defined exclusively from a national perspective. The country's stability depends to a large extent on its immediate environment and its position in the international community. In this sense, the NSSD establishes a security agenda with three main geographical priority areas: Latin America, Antarctica and the Asia-Pacific region.

As a Latin American country, Chile 'as an inescapable commitment to regional stability. Latin America's security is a critical factor for national development and its fragility could directly affect internal security. In this context, the NSSD establishes the following as priority objectives: the protection of democracy and the fight against corruption; the fight against drug trafficking, organised crime and terrorism; the response to natural disasters; the protection of natural resources and the environment; keeping Latin America free of weapons of mass destruction (strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime in the region); and cooperation in infrastructure and bioceanic corridors (developing strategic projects for physical integration and regional connectivity).

In addition, Chile is firmly committed to the protection of Antarctica, not only for geopolitical reasons, but also because of its scientific and ecological relevance. The NSSD establishes a series of guidelines to ensure the country's active presence on the white continent:

- Reinforcement of control over land, sea and air operations: ensuring Chilean sovereignty in the region through monitoring and the permanent presence of scientific and military bases.
- Protection of the Antarctic ecosystem and its natural resources: strict compliance with the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection in Antarctica.
- Expansion of scientific bases and exploration in the region: promoting research in climatology, marine biology and climate change.
- Defence of the Antarctic Treaty as an instrument of international cooperation: ensuring that Antarctica remains a demilitarised zone dedicated exclusively to science and peace.

As for the Asia-Pacific area, its economic growth and geostrategic importance have made this region a key axis for Chilean security. The NSSD recognises the need to strengthen cooperation ties in the areas of maritime security and international trade (protection of key trade routes and the fight against piracy), cooperation with Australia and New Zealand in the South Pacific (development of joint initiatives in maritime security and climate change) and participation in security treaties and response to natural disasters (Chile's integration into crisis management bodies in the Pacific).

3.5 Chile and international security

Chile's security cannot be understood in isolation, but as part of an interdependent global network. In a world where threats transcend borders and where power is redistributed geopolitically, Chile's international positioning in security matters becomes a strategic priority. The NSSD reaffirms the country's commitment to multilateralism, which promotes international cooperation as a fundamental pillar to face emerging challenges.

The strengthening of multilateral organisations, especially the UN, is a key axis of Chile's foreign policy. In this regard, Chile advocates the modernisation of international structures that allow for a better response to contemporary threats, from humanitarian crises to cybersecurity and terrorism. The country has maintained an active participation in peace operations under the mandate of the United Nations, contributing military and civilian personnel to missions in Haiti, Africa and the Middle East.

In addition, the NSSD recognises the importance of strengthening strategic alliances with regional and global partners. In Latin America, Chile has promoted security cooperation through the Pacific Alliance and other multilateral fora, supporting collective defence mechanisms and institutional strengthening. At the hemispheric level, collaboration with the Organisation of American States (OAS) has been relevant in the fight against organised crime and the promotion of democracy.

Beyond the continent, Chile has diversified its security relations with powers such as the United States, the European Union and Asia-Pacific countries. In the latter case, the growing importance of the region has led Chile to participate in maritime security exercises, to cooperate with Australia and New Zealand in the

stability of the South Pacific, and to strengthen its ties with Japan and South Korea in cybersecurity and military technology.

At the global level, the country closely follows conflicts in other regions and recognises that security problems in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Indo-Pacific can have repercussions in Latin America. The NSSD emphasises the need for Chile to take a more active role in preventive diplomacy, promoting the peaceful resolution of disputes and respect for international law.

To implement an effective strategy, the NSSD proposes institutional restructuring to ensure inter-ministerial coordination, efficiency in decision-making and adaptation to new threats. The creation of an "Inter-Ministerial Security Committee", headed by the President of the Republic and composed of the Ministries of Interior, Defence, Foreign Affairs and Finance, is one of the central reforms. This body would be tasked with coordinating security and defence policies at the national level; assessing emerging threats and proposing response strategies; analysing strategic intelligence and defining priorities for action; and periodically reviewing progress and adjustments to the NSSD.

In parallel, the strategy proposes a "National Security Advisor", who would advise the government on strategic issues and coordinate the inter-ministerial committee. Their role would be similar to that of a National Security Advisor in other countries, providing continuity and technical insight into security policy formulation.

Another key element is the creation of a "Public-Private Security Working Group", which would enable cooperation between the state, the business sector and academia. Cybersecurity, critical infrastructure protection and the fight against organised crime require an integrated approach, where private sector expertise complements state capabilities.

Finally, the NSSD envisages the "Commission for Citizen Participation in National Security" with the objective of strengthening transparency and dialogue with civil society. Security must be conceived as a collective effort, in which citizens understand the strategic challenges and participate in the formulation of responses.

3.6 Defence financing and development

To ensure the financial stability of national security and defence, the NSSD sets out a financial approach based on:

- Multi-annual budget: medium and long-term financial allocations to avoid political fluctuations and ensure the continuity of strategic projects.
- Transparency and efficiency in the use of resources: implementation of audit mechanisms to ensure that defence spending responds to technical and strategic criteria.
- Investment in technology and modernisation: developing advanced capabilities in cybersecurity, satellite surveillance and integrated defence systems.

In the industrial sphere, the strategy seeks to strengthen the national defence industry by promoting public-private partnerships, encouraging collaboration with technology companies for the production of military equipment and security systems, and promoting efficient regulation of the sector, as well as the creation of regulations that allow for the sustainable and secure growth of the defence industry.

Ultimately, the NSSD highlighted the need for Chile to develop a long-term security vision, which ensures that defence capabilities evolve in response to geopolitical and technological changes.

This vision was framed with President Bachelet in the publication of the 2017 *National Defence Book*⁵.

4 Brazil: security, defence and recent developments

For observers of Brazilian foreign policy, the year 2023 will be remembered as a year of unfulfilled expectations and complex realities. Few elections in the world generated as much expectation as Brazil's in late 2022, when Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva won a return to power after a close run-off against Jair Bolsonaro. The narrow victory of 50.9% over 49.1% reflected the country's deep political polarisation and the difficult task that awaited the new government⁶. Many hoped that the transition would bring a restoration of Brazil's traditional diplomacy, marked by adherence to international law and multilateralism, and that it would represent a definitive shift away from the unilateralism, nationalist postures and environmental indifference of the previous administration.

⁵ See: <https://www.acanav.cl/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/LibroDefensa.pdf>

⁶ See: <https://issuu.com/lajornadaonline/docs/diario31102022>

However, the reality soon proved to be more nuanced. Although Lula's rhetoric is a far cry from that of his predecessor, the strategic continuities have been more evident than his supporters anticipated. His foreign policy has oscillated between reaffirmation of historical principles and pragmatic adaptation to global dynamics. A clear example has been his stance on the war in Ukraine: by avoiding a clear alignment with the West and attributing responsibility for the conflict to both Russia and Ukraine, Lula generated bewilderment among his European and US allies, who expected a more explicit condemnation of Moscow.

The relationship with the US has also reflected this ambiguity. While Bolsonaro maintained ideological affinities with Donald Trump, his ties with Washington never displaced Brazil's pragmatic cooperation with China. Lula has followed a similar line, maintaining an independent stance and rejecting external pressures. His refusal to sign the final *communiqué* of the Democracy Summit convened by Joe Biden⁷ and his preference for visiting China in the same period underlined his inclination towards multipolar diplomacy, critical of NATO's policies towards Ukraine and of US influence in Latin America. Despite these tensions, Brazil has managed to sustain a coherent international policy, based on long-term principles that transcend changes in leadership.

4.1 An evolving security doctrine

Brazil has maintained a security and defence policy structured in key documents such as the National Defence Policy (NDP)⁸ and the National Defence Strategy (NDS)⁹, updated periodically to respond to geopolitical changes. Since its introduction in 2005 and its revisions in 2012 and 2020, the NDP has outlined the country's fundamental strategic objectives, emphasising national sovereignty, territorial integrity and the protection of strategic resources, with special emphasis on the Amazon and the South Atlantic. The NDS, launched in 2008 and revised in 2012 and 2016, complements the NDP with specific measures for the development of military and technological capabilities.

⁷ See: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-61727420>

⁸ See: https://www.gov.br/defesa/pt-br/assuntos/copy_of_estado-e-defesa/pnd_end_congressonacional_22_07_2020.pdf

⁹ See: <https://www.gov.br/capes/pt-br/centrais-de-conteudo/estrategia-nacional-de-defesa-pdf>

Both documents reflect a defence vision oriented towards strategic autonomy. The NDS prioritises the modernisation of the Armed Forces, investment in the national defence industry and the reduction of dependence on foreign suppliers. Brazil has advanced in the development of its own capabilities by promoting the production of Embraer KC-390 fighter jets, nuclear-powered submarines in cooperation with France, and an expansion of its cyber-defence capabilities. The strategy also recognises new threats, such as transnational terrorism, organised crime and cybersecurity challenges.

At the international level, Brazilian military diplomacy has sought to consolidate its regional leadership and global projection. Its participation in UN peace missions, such as in Haiti and Lebanon, has reinforced its image as a responsible actor in international security. In Africa, Brazil has intensified its ties with Portuguese-speaking countries such as Angola and Mozambique by promoting cooperation in defence, technical assistance and military training.

4.2 Regional security and strategic projection

Brazil has played a central role in shaping regional security, relying on multilateralism as an instrument of stability. Organisations such as Unasur and the South American Defence Council have served as platforms for defence cooperation, although they have faced political challenges with the decline of South American integration in recent years. Despite these setbacks, Brazil continues to advocate the strengthening of regional security coordination, especially in the fight against drug and arms trafficking in the Amazon basin.

The country has also shown a firm stance in defending its interests in the South Atlantic. The region has become increasingly important due to international competition for marine and energy resources, and Brazil has reinforced its presence through a modernised naval fleet and more active patrols in its exclusive economic zones. This strategy seeks to protect Brazilian interests in a context where extra-regional actors, including China and Russia, have intensified their activity in South American waters.

At the same time, Brazil has been able to balance its cooperation with the great powers without compromising its autonomy. Although it has consolidated ties with China in trade and technology, it remains cautious in strategic initiatives such as

the expansion of the BRICS or Uruguay's attempts to negotiate trade agreements outside Mercosur. This pragmatism has allowed Brazil to preserve its room for manoeuvre in a changing global environment¹⁰.

4.3 Internal challenges and future projections

Despite the strength of its security doctrine, Brazil faces structural challenges that could limit its ability to consolidate itself as an influential global actor. Political polarisation, intensified after the 2022 elections, has eroded national cohesion and generated uncertainty in the implementation of long-term policies. Disputes between the central government and military sectors, as well as persistent corruption scandals, have weakened confidence in security and defence institutions.

Moreover, Brazil's economic dependence on commodity exports remains a structural vulnerability. Volatility in oil, soybean and iron ore prices affects the country's financial stability, restricting the capacity for investment in defence and technological innovation. Without more robust economic diversification, Brazil's room for manoeuvre on the global stage will remain limited.

Internationally, the country will have to navigate an increasingly competitive environment. The rivalry between the US and China, transformations in Latin America and the rise of new threats such as hybrid warfare and cyber-attacks demand a flexible and strategic response. Brazil's ability to maintain its autonomy and strengthen its international relations will depend on its ability to adapt to these dynamics without losing sight of its long-term goals.

In conclusion, the return of President Lula has evidenced both continuity and evolution in Brazil's security and defence policy. Although his Administration has introduced changes in rhetoric and certain strategic priorities, the basis of its foreign policy remains anchored in traditional principles of autonomy, pragmatism and multilateralism.

Brazil has managed to build a defence strategy that balances its global aspirations with its regional reality. However, the stability of this approach will depend on its ability to overcome domestic

¹⁰ See: <https://gatecenter.org/brics-ampliado-fortaleza-o-debilidad-bajo-el-liderazgo-chino/>

challenges and consolidate its regional leadership in a changing world. The central question remains whether Brazil will be able to turn its economic and geopolitical weight into real and sustained influence in the international arena.

5 Mexico and its security policies in the Sheinbaum era

Mexico has developed a *National Security Strategy*¹¹ that integrates aspects of national security and defence and responds to the complex threats the country faces. This strategy not only seeks to strengthen the state's capacities to combat crime and protect sovereignty, but also promotes a preventive approach based on addressing the structural causes of violence.

One of the fundamental pillars of this strategy is prevention through social development, recognising that violence and insecurity cannot be combated by the use of force alone, but require addressing their root causes. In this sense, the government has promoted programmes focused on employment generation, access to education and social welfare with the intention of reducing the vulnerability of certain sectors of the population to organised crime and common delinquency.

Simultaneously, it has sought to consolidate and professionalise the National Guard as a key institution for public security. Its deployment throughout the country is intended to guarantee an effective state presence in regions where criminality has eroded government authority. To this end, emphasis has been placed on training and equipping its members, as well as improving its coordination with other security forces.

Another essential aspect of this strategy is the strengthening of intelligence and investigative capacities. The creation of the National Intelligence System has improved the state's ability to detect and neutralise risks before they materialise into real threats, with a particular focus on the fight against organised crime and drug trafficking. The integration of advanced technology in surveillance, cybersecurity and data analysis has been a key component in making this work more effective.

The strategy also emphasises the need for close collaboration between the Federal Government and the states and recognises

¹¹ See: <https://www.gob.mx/presidencia/prensa/presidenta-claudia-sheinbaum-presenta-estrategia-nacional-de-seguridad>

that public security requires a coordinated effort between the different levels of governance. The decentralisation of policies and the adaptation of rational strategies to the specific needs of each region in a multilevel governance scenario have allowed for a more efficient response to the diversity of security challenges the country faces.

In the area of national defence, the Ministry of National Defence (SEDENA) has developed the National Defence Sector Programme 2024-2030, a continuation of the National Development Plan 2020¹². This programme establishes specific guidelines to increase the operability and efficiency of the Mexican Army and Air Force to ensure that their capabilities are in harmony with contemporary demands. Modernising equipment, improving the training of military personnel and optimising operational logistics have been priority areas in this effort.

These alignments reflect Mexico's comprehensive approach to security and defence that not only responds to the country's current serious challenges, but also seeks to establish solid foundations to ensure long-term stability and peace. The combination of prevention policies, institutional strengthening and inter-administration cooperation, a follow-up to the previous President's policies, aims to position Mexico on a path towards greater resilience in the face of internal and external threats to its national security, which is very important at a time when the US is pressing on common border security and drug trafficking.

6 Argentina: differentiated structures and organisation. Common challenges

Argentina does not have a "national security strategy" document. However, the country develops its defence policy through various documents and directives that establish strategic alignments in this area.

One of the main instruments is the National Defence Policy Directive (NDPD)¹³, which is updated periodically to reflect the priorities and approaches of the government on duty. For example, the 2021 NDPD addresses the diagnosis of the global and

¹² See: https://transparencia.sedena.gob.mx/pdf/Programa_Sectorial_2020-2024/PROGRAMA_SECTORIAL_2020-2024.pdf

¹³ See: <https://www.boletinoficial.gob.ar/detalleAviso/primera/246990/20210719>

regional defence scenario, defines the national defence policy and establishes guidelines for its implementation.

Furthermore, the National Defence Law¹⁴ establishes that national defence is “the integration and coordinated action of all the forces of the Nation for the solution of those conflicts that require the use of the Armed Forces, in a dissuasive or effective way, to face aggressions of external origin”. The purpose of this law is to permanently guarantee the sovereignty and independence of the Argentine nation, its territorial integrity and capacity for autonomous decision-making, as well as to protect the life and liberty of its inhabitants.

In July 2021, the Argentine Government published a new National Defence Policy Directive¹⁵, which includes a diagnosis of the global and regional defence scenario, and establishes guidelines for the implementation of the national defence policy and the corresponding military policy.

Recently, in January 2025, Argentina’s new president Javier Milei issued decrees allowing the Armed Forces to intervene in internal security matters¹⁶, a risky decision that has generated debate and concern among various sectors of society, no doubt in the shadow of painful memories of previous historical periods.

Therefore, although Argentina does not have a unified NSS, it implements its defence policy through laws, directives and programmes that, as mentioned above, establish the strategic alignments to guarantee the country’s security and defence.

In this sense, Argentina’s National Defence Policy Directive (NDPD) 2021 establishes the strategic guidelines for the country’s defence in order to adapt to the dynamics of the global and regional environment. This instrument will be analysed in greater detail below.

The directive is organised into three main chapters:

1. “Diagnosis and appreciation of the global and regional defence scenario”: this recognises a complex and

¹⁴ See: <https://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/20000-24999/20988/texact.htm>

¹⁵ See: <https://www.infobae.com/opinion/2021/08/30/directiva-de-politica-de-defensa-nacional-2021-mas-de-lo-mismo/>

¹⁶ See: <https://www.infodefensa.com/texto-diario/mostrar/5116118/milei-amplia-capacidades-accion-fuerzas-armadas-nuevo-decreto>

multipolar international configuration in which competition between powers such as the United States, China and Russia is highlighted; it emphasises the shift of global power towards the Pacific basin, so as to increase its geopolitical relevance; and, at the regional level, it reaffirms South America as a zone of peace, underlining the strategic importance of the South Atlantic and the issue of the Malvinas Islands.

2. "National defence policy: conception and strategic positioning": here the National Defence System is oriented towards a model based on the deterrence of aggression, defining defence as autonomous and cooperative; and the main mission of the military instrument is established as the protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity, including complementary missions in multilateral operations and support to the national community.
3. "Guidelines for the implementation of the national defence policy and military policy": the Ministry of Defence is instructed to formulate plans for the development of autonomous technological and military capabilities, promoting investment in the national defence industry; the need to modernise the Armed Forces, adapting them to new challenges such as cyber defence and transnational terrorism is highlighted; and an institutional culture of respect for human rights is promoted, incorporating gender perspectives and the fight against discrimination in educational and training spaces within the jurisdiction.

The NDPD 2021 emphasises the importance of regional and multilateral cooperation, and seeks to strengthen defence organisations in South America to contribute to global security based on dialogue and shared norms. It recognises the strategic relevance of the South Atlantic, as it considers its geopolitical position to be key for access to Antarctica and the maritime routes between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Finally, it underlines the need to develop capabilities in command, control, communications, computing, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4I2VR) systems, as well as in satellite systems and cyber defence.

In sum, although Argentina does not yet formally have a national security strategy, there is growing recognition of its importance in addressing current and future security and defence challenges.

7 Peru: developing security policies from a multi-sectoral perspective

Peru has developed its national security and defence policy through various strategic documents that seek to guarantee the sovereignty, territorial integrity and well-being of its population.

Passed in July 2022, the Multisectoral National Security and National Defence Policy 2030 (PNMSDN 2030)¹⁷ establishes a comprehensive framework to address security and defence threats and challenges. This document promotes coordination between different sectors of the state to address risks such as natural disasters, cyber-attacks and organised crime. The policy focuses on strengthening national capacities and fostering international cooperation to maintain peace and security in the country.

Peru's security strategy is defined as defensive-dissuasive, where military action through the Armed Forces is considered the last resort, used exclusively in defence of the country. This posture seeks to guarantee the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the state to ensure that the population enjoys the fundamental rights established in the Constitution.

In April 2024, the preparedness of the PNMSDN 2030 was assessed in the face of emerging threats such as hybrid warfare and digital transformation. This analysis highlighted the need to update security and defence policies to include measures that effectively address these new forms of conflict, ensuring an adequate response from the Peruvian State.

The PNMSDN 2030 defines three priority objectives:

1. To ensure the defence of national interests for international peace and security.
2. To guarantee the normal functioning of the country's political, legal and social institutions.
3. To achieve the necessary conditions that contribute to national security.

In order to achieve these objectives, the policy establishes fourteen so-called "public services", among which the following stand

¹⁷ See: <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/mindef/informes-publicaciones/3212559-politica-nacional-multisectorial-de-seguridad-y-defensa-nacional-al-2030>

out: education with learning oriented towards a culture of peace, security and national identity; technical assistance in technical instruments and management mechanisms in the National Defence System (SIDENA); the formulation of planning by capacities in SIDENA's component entities in the external and internal spheres; security operations and actions with the integral participation of SIDENA's components; and the strengthening of public infrastructure to be effective in the face of threats and concerns that could affect national security.

According to the *PNMSDN 2030 Evaluation Report*¹⁸ for the year 2023, significant progress has been made in the implementation of the policy. The three priority objectives achieved compliance levels above 95% of what was expected, reflecting an effective commitment of the entities involved.

However, it is recognised that there are still areas that require further attention, such as the need to strengthen the national security and defence offices (OSDNA) throughout the country and to improve the articulation between the different components of SIDENA.

An analysis conducted in April 2024 by the Centre for Strategic Studies of the Peruvian Army (CEEPP) noted the importance of the PNMSDN 2030 addressing emerging threats such as hybrid warfare and digital transformation¹⁹. The study recommended updating the policy to include measures to effectively address these new forms of conflict, so as to ensure an adequate response from the Peruvian State.

The PNMSDN 2030 represents a comprehensive effort by the Peruvian State to coordinate multisectoral actions in security and defence. While significant progress has been made in its implementation, it is essential to continue adapting the policy to contemporary challenges and to strengthen cooperation among the various entities involved to ensure the nation's security and well-being.

In short, Peru has established a national security and defence policy that seeks to adapt to current and future challenges, with

¹⁸ See: https://www.mindef.gob.pe/informacion/transparencia/INF%20EVAL%20SYE%202023%2011JUN24_2.pdf

¹⁹ See: <https://ceep.mil.pe/2024/04/04/preparacion-de-la-politica-nacional-multisectorial-de-seguridad-y-defensa-nacional-al-2030-del-peru-ante-amenazas-de-transformacion-digital-y-guerras-hibridas/>

the aim of promoting a defensive-disruptive strategy and fostering multi-sectoral collaboration to guarantee the security and well-being of its population.

8 Comparison between different defence policies

National security and defence strategies in South America present significant similarities and differences as each country faces specific challenges and responds to them according to their own geopolitical, economic and social context. The similarities and differences between Chile's National Security and Defence Strategy and the strategies of some countries, namely Brazil, Argentina, Colombia and Peru, are analysed below.

8.1 Similarities

Despite the geopolitical and military development differences between South American countries, there are several common elements in their national security and defence strategies.

8.1.1 A focus on expanded and multidimensional security

Most countries have adopted an expanded approach to security, integrating non-traditional threats such as:

- Organised crime and drug trafficking (especially in Brazil, Colombia and Peru).
- Cybersecurity and critical infrastructure protection.
- Illegal migration and humanitarian crises (notable in Chile and Colombia due to Venezuelan migration).
- Natural disasters and climate change (key for Chile, Peru and Brazil).

8.1.2 International cooperation

South American countries emphasise regional security and defence cooperation:

- Chile, Argentina and Brazil participate in UN peacekeeping missions.
- Colombia maintains close military cooperation with the US and NATO (as a global partner).

- The Union of South American Nations (Unasur), through its South American Defence Council, seeks to strengthen defence integration.

Chile and Argentina highlight their commitment to Antarctica, while Brazil and Colombia emphasise their presence in the Amazon as a strategic priority.

8.1.3 Defence of sovereignty and territoriality

All countries cite the protection of national territory as their primary defence mission. However:

- Chile and Argentina reinforce surveillance of maritime and Antarctic space.
- Brazil prioritises the protection of the Amazon and natural resources.
- Colombia and Peru focus their strategy on fighting insurgencies and drug trafficking.

8.1.4 Focus on modernisation and military capabilities

Countries such as Brazil, Chile and Colombia have adopted a strategic capabilities-based planning model, similar to NATO's approach, which ensures that their Armed Forces are adaptable, multi-role and interoperable.

Chile stands out for its focus on joint Armed Forces capabilities, something that Brazil also promotes with its national defence strategy (END).

8.2 Differences

Despite similarities, there are notable differences in the orientation and priorities of defence strategies in South America.

8.2.1 Differences in threat perception

South American countries do not face the same threats and, therefore, their strategies vary in emphasis:

- Chile and Argentina place more emphasis on threats such as natural disasters, energy crises and cybersecurity.

- Colombia and Peru prioritise the fight against drug trafficking, terrorism and insurgent groups (such as the ELN and the remnants of Sendero Luminoso).
- Brazil emphasises the defence of the Amazon and natural resources, as well as projecting its strength globally.
- Venezuela views security from a “defence of sovereignty against external threats” perspective (in particular from the US), with a highly centralised and politicised military structure.

Chile has a more pragmatic view of security, focused on regional stability and international cooperation, while other countries such as Venezuela and Bolivia politicise defence more.

8.2.2 Differences in financing

- Brazil has the highest defence budget in South America and is developing a defence industry with advanced capabilities (such as Embraer and the nuclear submarine in cooperation with France).
- Chile finances its defence with a multi-year, transparent system based on strategic capabilities.
- Colombia has depended for decades on US support in the fight against drug trafficking and terrorism.
- Argentina and Peru have had recurrent funding difficulties, with periods of military obsolescence due to lack of investment.

8.2.3 Differences in civil-military relations

- Chile and Argentina have made progress in separating politics from the Armed Forces, which promotes democratic institutionality. Chile has managed to consolidate a professional and technical defence model.
- Colombia has a close relationship between internal security and military forces due to the ongoing conflict with insurgent groups.
- Venezuela and Bolivia have politicised their Armed Forces and subordinated them to the ideological line of their governments.

With regard to security and defence policy planning, most countries share similarities such as the emphasis on multidimensional

security, military modernisation and international cooperation. However, there are also key differences:

1. While Chile has a technical and stable financial approach based on multi-annual planning, other countries such as Argentina and Peru have had military funding difficulties.
2. Colombia and Peru focus on organised crime and drug trafficking, while Chile prioritises cybersecurity, international cooperation and natural disasters.
3. Chile and Argentina maintain professional and apolitical armies, unlike Venezuela or Bolivia, where politics has a strong influence on defence.
4. Brazil seeks to be a regional power, while Chile emphasises regional cooperation and stability.

In general, Chile's strategy is one of the most technical, well-planned and oriented towards international security and conflict prevention, which differs from countries that face more imminent internal threats, such as Colombia, or those that politicise their defence, such as Venezuela.

9 Comparative analysis of national security and defence strategies in Ibero-America (South America, Spain, Portugal)

The institutionalisation and regulation of security and defence in Ibero-America varies widely depending on perceived threats, military capabilities, integration with international organisations and the strategic priorities of each country.

The following is a comparative analysis of the security and defence strategies of the main countries in the region, highlighting similarities and differences in key aspects.

For an effective comparison, the following variables are analysed for each document:

1. Overall strategic approach (extended security vs. traditional security).
2. Main identified threats (drug trafficking, terrorism, cybersecurity, natural disasters, etc.).
3. Defence financing structure (transparency, budgetary stability).

4. Relations with international organisations (NATO, UN, Unasur, CELAC, etc.).
5. Defence industry and military capabilities (external dependence vs. self-sufficiency).
6. Role of the Armed Forces in domestic politics (autonomy vs. government influence).
7. Participation in international peace and security operations.

Country	Strategic approach	Main threats	Funding	International relations	Defence industry	Military role in politics	International operations
Spain	Extended security	Terrorism, cybersecurity, organised crime, natural disasters	Stable budget, part of NATO	NATO, EU, UN	Advanced industry (Navantia, Airbus)	Total apoliticisation	High participation in NATO and UN
Portugal	Extended security	Cybersecurity, transnational crime, maritime threats	Moderate, within NATO	NATO, EU, UN	Moderate, cooperation-focused	Total apoliticisation	Participation in NATO and UN missions
Brazil	Extended security with a focus on sovereignty and natural resources	Amazonia, organised crime, drug trafficking, illegal mining	High budget, investments in modernisation	BRICS, UN, Mercosur, Unasur	Developed industry (Embraer, nuclear submarine)	Independent of the government but with political influence	UN Peace Missions and Leadership in Latin America
Argentina	Extended security but limited capabilities	Drug trafficking, cybersecurity, natural disasters	Low funding, recurrent crises	UN, Mercosur, CELAC	Weakened industry, lack of investment	Separation from politics since 1983	UN Peacekeeping missions, but with less operational capacity
Chile	Extended security and military modernisation	Cybersecurity, natural disasters, transnational crime	Stable and multiannual funding	UN, APEC, Mercosur	Growing industry, with emphasis on public-private partnerships	Apolitical and professionalised	UN Missions and cooperation with the US and the EU
Colombia	Internal security focused on organised crime	Drug trafficking, terrorism, insurgencies, transnational crime	Dependence on the US and international cooperation	NATO (global partner), USA, UN	Emerging industry, with foreign cooperation	Army with a strong internal role due to the armed conflict	UN missions, but prioritises internal security
Mexico	Internal security with a strong military role	Drug trafficking, organised crime, domestic terrorism	Variable, with militarisation of public security	UN, CELAC, APEC, USA	Foreign purchasing clerk	Army with strong influence on internal security	Limited participation in peace missions
Venezuela	Traditional security with a focus on "defence of sovereignty".	External threats (US), drug trafficking, domestic crisis	Opaque, the economic crisis affects the sector	Russia, China, CELAC	Industry in decline, dependent on Russian and Chinese imports	Extreme politicisation of the Armed Forces	Low international participation

Table 1. Comparison by country

9.1 Similarities in security and defence strategies in Ibero-America

Despite the diversity of political, economic and social contexts that characterise the countries of Ibero-America, there are several aspects in which their security and defence strategies converge. The similarities observed respond both to common challenges in the region and to the influence of global security trends that have led these countries to adopt increasingly com-

prehensive and multidimensional approaches. In general, security is no longer conceived solely in terms of traditional military defence, but rather, it incorporates a broader range of threats, risks and challenges, requiring more flexible planning and greater cooperation between different state and international actors.

One of the most relevant commonalities is the adoption of the *extended security approach*, which has progressively replaced the classic vision of national defence focused on inter-state conflicts. Today, the security strategies of the countries in the region include a variety of unconventional risks and challenges, such as organised crime, terrorism, cybersecurity and natural disasters. Spain and Portugal have placed particular emphasis on protection against terrorism and cyber-attacks, aligning themselves with NATO and EU strategic priorities. In Latin America, drug trafficking and transnational crime have come to occupy a central place in security policies, especially in countries such as Colombia and Mexico, where the violence linked to these phenomena has been a constant threat to internal stability. Chile and Brazil have also incorporated cybersecurity and critical infrastructure protection into their defence strategies in recognition of the growing impact of digital technologies on national security.

Another element shared by most Ibero-American countries is *international cooperation in security and defence*. In Europe, Spain and Portugal are active participants in NATO initiatives, which has allowed them to strengthen their military capabilities and maintain operational integration with their allies. In Latin America, although there is no defence bloc with the same solidity, several countries have prioritised cooperation with international organisations. Brazil has led UN peace missions and promoted regional integration in forums such as Unasur and Mercosur. Chile has established cooperation agreements with countries such as the United States, the European Union and Australia, thereby consolidating its insertion in the international defence system. Colombia has gone a step further by becoming the only Latin American country with *NATO global partner* status, which has given it access to training, technology and cooperation with NATO member countries. Even Argentina, despite its budgetary constraints, has maintained participation in UN peacekeeping missions. Although some countries such as Mexico have been more reticent in their involvement in global security, the general trend in the region has been to strengthen cooperation with international actors.

The protection of *sovereignty and territorial integrity* is another common priority in the defence policies of the countries of the region. Generally speaking, all Ibero-American nations have designed their Armed Forces to guarantee the protection of their borders and their maritime and air space. In South America, Chile and Argentina have paid special attention to the surveillance of the Antarctic region, while Brazil has focused its efforts on protecting the Amazon, given its wealth of natural resources and geopolitical importance. Spain and Portugal, in turn, have reinforced their patrolling capabilities in the Mediterranean and Atlantic to protect their territorial waters and maritime trade routes. Although the likelihood of armed conflict between countries in the region is low, the defence of sovereignty remains the fundamental mission for all Ibero-American military forces.

Another aspect on which the countries of the region agree is the importance given to the *modernisation and development of military capabilities*. Although the level of investment varies from country to country, the general trend has been towards a more flexible, interoperable and technologically advanced military structure. Brazil has led the way in this respect with the development of a nuclear submarine and its aeronautical industry via the Embraer, while Spain has consolidated its defence industry with companies such as Navantia and Airbus. Chile has opted for a stable, multi-year funding system to guarantee the sustained modernisation of its Armed Forces. In the case of Colombia and Mexico, modernisation has been more focused on improving the internal response capacity to organised crime, with the acquisition of surveillance technologies, drones and intelligence equipment. Although some countries, such as Argentina and Venezuela, have experienced difficulties in upgrading their military equipment due to economic constraints, the general consensus in the region is that the Armed Forces must adapt to new security dynamics and modernise to respond more effectively to the challenges of the 21st century.

Finally, a common feature in most countries in the region is the consolidation of a *defence model based on professionalisation and separation from politics*. Spain and Portugal have maintained this principle for decades, with Armed Forces fully subordinated to civilian power. In Latin America, Chile and Argentina have managed to maintain a strict separation between politics and the Military since the return to democracy to ensure that the Armed Forces focus only on defence work and never on political partici-

pation. Brazil, although with some worrying exceptions in recent years, has also maintained institutional autonomy in its military apparatus. In contrast, some countries such as Venezuela have followed a different path, with extreme politicisation of the Armed Forces, which has led to tensions in their role within the system of government.

In short, it is possible to find common patterns that reflect the evolution of security in the region. The adoption of a *multidimensional security* vision, the growing importance of *international cooperation*, the modernisation of *military capabilities* and the professionalisation of the *Armed Forces* are trends shared by most of the countries analysed. These elements have allowed Ibero-America to advance in the construction of defence strategies that are better adapted to contemporary challenges, ensuring that its Armed Forces are more efficient, coordinated and prepared to face both traditional and emerging threats in an increasingly interconnected world.

9.2 Differences in Ibero-American security and defence strategies

Despite the general trend in the region towards extended security and the adoption of more comprehensive defence models, there are substantial differences among Ibero-American countries in the way they plan, finance and execute their security and defence strategies. These differences arise from a variety of factors, such as perceived risks, access to financial resources, the historical relationship between the Armed Forces and politics, as well as each country's level of integration into the international defence system.

One of the starkest contrasts is found in the structure of defence funding and military capabilities in each country. Spain and Brazil stand out as the countries with the highest budgets, which has allowed them to develop advanced military industries and maintain modern Armed Forces with the capacity for regional and global projection. Spain, thanks to its integration into NATO and the European Union, has managed to build a highly sophisticated defence system with access to state-of-the-art technologies and solid strategic planning. Brazil, on the other hand, has opted for a strategy of defence autonomy, investing in the development of its own military industry, with ambitious projects such as the manufacture of a nuclear submarine and Embraer's expansion in the aerospace sector. In the rest of South America, however, the situ-

ation is different. While Chile has established a stable, multi-year financial model that has allowed it to maintain a well-equipped and modern military force, Argentina and Peru have suffered periods of budget cuts that have significantly affected their operational capabilities. In the case of Venezuela, the economic crisis has eroded its defence capabilities, making it dependent on arms imports/aid from Russia and China and unable to develop a sustainable defence industry of its own.

Another differentiating factor is the relationship between the Armed Forces and the government, which varies considerably among countries in the region. Spain, Portugal, Chile and Argentina have consolidated defence models in which the Armed Forces operate with institutional autonomy and are completely detached from politics. In these countries, the Military plays an exclusively professional role, subordinate to civilian power, which has allowed for stability in the governance of security and defence. In contrast, in Brazil, although the Armed Forces are not directly involved in government policy, they have maintained a notable influence on national security and certain strategic decisions of the state. In Colombia and Mexico, the situation is even more complex, as the Armed Forces have acquired a preponderant role in internal security due to the fight against drug trafficking and organised crime. In these countries, public security has been militarised, which has generated debates about the risks to human rights and democratic governance. At the opposite end, Venezuela represents the most politicised case in the region, where the Armed Forces have been completely co-opted by the regime and function as a fundamental pillar of political power, which distances them from the model of a professional and autonomous defence.

In terms of participation in international operations, the differences are also significant. Spain and Portugal, as NATO members, play an active role in peace and collective security missions, collaborating in operations in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Brazil, despite not being a NATO member, has sought to position itself as a relevant actor in international stability by leading, for example, the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti and participating in other multilateral initiatives. Chile and Argentina, with more limited resources, have also contributed to UN missions, albeit with less prominence and more restricted capabilities. In contrast, Colombia and Mexico have participated to a lesser extent in peace missions, as their efforts have focused on internal secu-

urity and the fight against organised crime. Finally, Venezuela has opted for isolation in terms of international military cooperation, limiting its participation in regional defence organisations and prioritising bilateral relations with allies such as Russia and China.

Differences in strategic priorities and perceived threats are another distinctive element in the region. While Spain and Portugal consider terrorism, cybersecurity and hybrid threats as their main challenges, Latin American countries have adopted more diverse approaches according to their particular context. Brazil has placed a strong emphasis on protecting the Amazon and its natural resources, while Chile has developed a strategy focused on maritime security, regional stability and cybersecurity. Colombia and Mexico have based their strategies on the fight against drug trafficking, organised crime and armed insurgencies, which has conditioned the deployment of their security forces and has determined a defence structure highly oriented towards the control of internal order. Venezuela, on the other hand, has built its security narrative around the idea of a permanent external threat, especially from the US, which has led to an emphasis on the defence of the regime rather than the effective protection of the population against real challenges.

The differences between Ibero-American countries in security and defence reflect the diversity of political, economic and social realities that coexist in the region. While some countries have advanced towards professionalised defence models, with strategies based on international cooperation and technological modernisation, others have faced limitations in funding, politicisation of their military forces and internal challenges that have conditioned their approach to security. These differences will continue to shape the development of defence strategies in the coming years, in a context in which emerging global threats —such as cybersecurity, climate change and transnational crime— will require more integrated and adaptive responses.

Conclusions

Comparative analysis of security and defence strategies in the main Ibero-American countries reveals a diversity of approaches determined by their geopolitical, historical and economic contexts. Despite a general trend towards extended security, where traditional threats such as inter-state conflicts have given way to transnational phenomena such as organised crime, cybersecurity

and terrorism, each nation's approach to security varies significantly according to its needs and capabilities.

1. In Spain and Portugal, security and defence are highly integrated within the framework of NATO and the European Union, giving them access to advanced technologies, international cooperation and long-term strategic planning. Spain, in particular, has developed a strong defence industry with companies such as Navantia and Airbus, and is actively involved in peace and security missions in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Portugal, although with a smaller budget, follows a similar model and contributes regularly to NATO missions. In these countries, national security is framed in a multilateralist vision in which defence is conceived as a collective commitment within strategic alliances. Moreover, their Armed Forces are fully professional and apolitical, which guarantees their institutional stability and alignment with the democratic state.
2. Brazil, on the other hand, adopts a security and defence strategy with a strong orientation towards the protection of its sovereignty and natural resources, especially the Amazon. Unlike Spain and Portugal, Brazil seeks to consolidate itself as an autonomous actor in defence matters, avoiding complete dependence on alliances such as NATO and promoting its military industry, with projects such as the development of a nuclear submarine and Embraer's expansion in the aeronautics sector. However, this autonomy does not imply isolation, as the country participates in UN peace missions and in cooperation forums such as Unasur and Mercosur. The Brazilian Armed Forces' relationship with the government has historically been complex, with a more active presence in politics compared to Spain or Portugal, although without reaching the extreme politicisation seen in countries such as Venezuela.
3. Chile has developed one of the most technical, transparent and financially stable defence strategies in the region. Unlike Argentina or Peru, which have experienced fluctuations in the funding of their military forces, Chile maintains a multi-year budget that allows for sustained modernisation of its capabilities. Its strategic focus is based on international cooperation, especially in the South Pacific and Latin America, where it actively participates in joint exercises and peace missions. Despite not being a member of NATO, Chile has

established close relations with Western actors, including the US and the EU, which has allowed it access to high-quality technology and training. Its Armed Forces have maintained a strict separation from politics since the return to democracy in 1990, so they have established themselves as a highly professionalised institution.

4. Argentina, in contrast, faces significant challenges in modernising its defence due to economic and political constraints. While extended security is part of its strategy, with an emphasis on drug trafficking and cybersecurity, lack of investment has affected its operational capacity. International cooperation remains a pillar of its defence policy, with participation in UN peacekeeping missions, albeit with limited capabilities. Since the return to democracy in 1983, Argentina has maintained a clear separation between the Armed Forces and politics to avoid military influence in government decision-making, which has contributed to the consolidation of its democracy.
5. Colombia and Mexico share a fundamental characteristic in their defence strategies: the predominant role of their Armed Forces in internal security, especially in the fight against drug trafficking and organised crime. In Colombia, the presence of illegal armed groups such as the ELN and remnants of the FARC has forced the country to maintain a highly militarised security structure, with strategic cooperation with the US and a special status as a NATO global partner. Mexico, while not facing insurgencies in the same way as Colombia, has increasingly relied on the Armed Forces to combat drug violence, which has led to debates over the militarisation of public security. In both countries, internal security remains the main priority, which has limited their international projection in terms of peace missions or participation in multilateral defence organisations.
6. Venezuela represents an atypical case in the region, with a security strategy based on a vision of "defence of sovereignty" against supposed external threats, especially from the US. Unlike other countries, where the Armed Forces operate under a scheme of institutional autonomy, in Venezuela they have been highly politicised, and are therefore directly aligned with the government in power. This has led to a deterioration of its military capabilities, exacerbated by the economic crisis and dependence on arms from Russia

and China. Unlike Brazil, which seeks autonomy with its own military industry, Venezuela has become an importer of military technology without developing an independent industrial capacity. Its participation in international security organisations is minimal and its alignment with actors such as Russia and China has distanced it from Latin American defence cooperation forums.

7. In general terms, the security and defence landscape in Ibero-America is heterogeneous. Spain and Portugal lead in international integration, modernisation and institutional stability within NATO and the EU. Brazil follows a strategy of regional autonomy, with a focus on the defence of the Amazon and the development of its military industry. Chile, with stable financial planning and a policy of international cooperation, is a benchmark for security and technical defence in Latin America. Colombia and Mexico have adopted militarised internal security models due to the threat of organised crime, while Argentina faces difficulties in modernising its defence due to economic constraints. Venezuela, at the other end, has politicised its defence apparatus and suffered a collapse in its operational capacity.
8. Going forward, security and defence strategies in Ibero-America will largely depend on countries' ability to adapt to new threats such as cybersecurity, climate change and transnational crime. While nations such as Spain, Portugal, Brazil and Chile have made progress in modernising and professionalising their Armed Forces, other countries still face challenges in terms of funding, governance and political stability. International cooperation will continue to be a key factor for the region's security, whether through alliances with NATO, the UN or bilateral agreements between neighbouring countries.

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Chapter Six

The Armed Forces in Latin America in the face of new security and defence challenges

Rafael Martínez

Abstract

From the end of the dictatorships to the present day, there has been considerable institutional evolution of the Armed Forces, which, to a greater or lesser extent, has generalised civilian supremacy in the institutional structure of defence and has almost eradicated military justice understood as a privilege for the uniformed, although there are still reforms to be undertaken. It has also integrated women, albeit still in meagre percentages, and has explored strategic planning, consolidating itself as a model in the most democratically developed countries.

Moreover, no war risks are foreseen on the immediate or remote horizon in Latin America. This leads to debates on whether or not it is necessary to maintain the defence machine, whether or not to continue allocating resources to a risk —war— that is unlikely, and also on what they should be devoted to in the event they are maintained. Up to four positions can be found: (i) abolitionists, who take advantage of the situation to call for the eradication of armies; (ii) normative or essentialists, who remain attached to the tradition of Prussian functions and do not want to know about any other possibility; (iii) the adaptive, who, while respecting

the essential functions —deterrence and defence—, consider it feasible to update their roles; and, finally, (iv) the pragmatists, who choose to assign them missions of all kinds and conditions —including those far removed from the Military— as the needs of the state arise.

The latter option, which is the predominant one, has given rise to a global process of militarisation in the region that is not without risk. In the worst-case scenarios (Venezuela, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador...), we could witness a return to militarism, which never comes alone, but is accompanied by the loss of democracy.

Keywords

Latin America, Militarisation, Militarism, Wildcard administration, Armed Forces.

Introduction

It is nothing new to note that the so-called third wave of democratisation was particularly intense throughout Latin America (Huntington, 1991). In the 1980s, most of the region moved from models of military dictatorship towards fragile democracies, at first; but then, for the most part —this was never the case in Cuba or Haiti— and not without problems, they have been consolidating, although not without deficits. This has not prevented some countries from experiencing temporary episodes of democratic regression over the last forty years —Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Peru— or some of them from entering autocratic phases —Nicaragua and Venezuela. However, the overall balance is truly positive. In fact, two thirds of the population perceive that democracy, although it may have problems, is the best system of government known (Graph 1).

One of the main impacts of this democratisation process, as occurred in Spain with the transition to democracy, was having to tackle the democratisation and modernisation of its Armed Forces (hereinafter, FAS). The starting point was a political actor that dominated power and exercised severe control over the population and had to end up with a military administration, devoid of any hint of political power and capable of working at the service

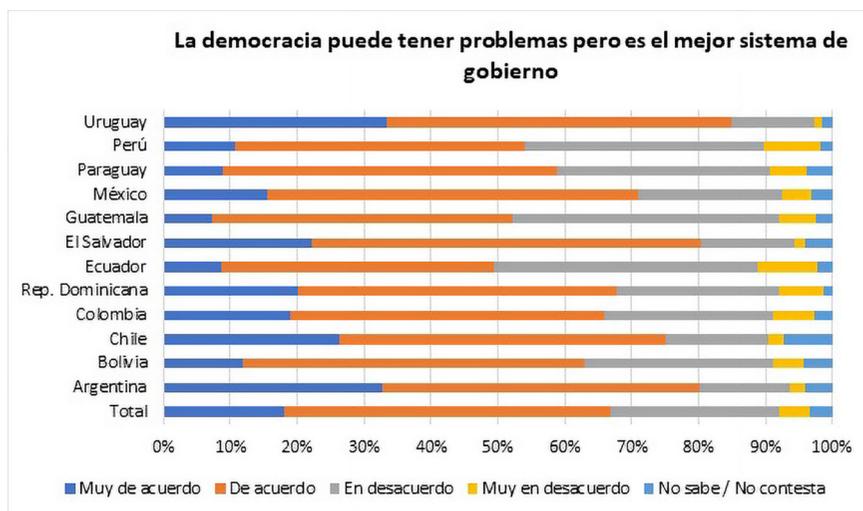


Figure 1. Agreement and disagreement with “Churchillian” democracy.
Source: Latinobarómetro, 2023

of any political colouring of government. The journey was not easy —it required achieving civilian supremacy, neutrality, *civilisation* and civic culture (Martínez, 2013)— and there were many changes, as will be seen, in most of the region. There is still a long way to go in the process of modernising the Armed Forces, and dynamics that could end up being a step backwards can be seen on the horizon.

When referring to democratic FAS, we are talking about administrations that, in defence against attacks that seek to endanger the very existence of the State, have the use of force of arms; hence, in order to avoid a terrible return to the dictatorial past, they must have a limited margin of manoeuvre and, therefore, a strong political control (Huntington, 1957) that guarantees civilian supremacy (Agüero, 1995). As Feaver (2017: 326) warned, “the original central question of civil-military relations studies is how to make the military an effective defender of the state without being a threat to the domestic political order”. But this is not its only peculiarity. In addition to the unquestionable risks that weapons entail, there are two handicaps: (i) the weaponry and all the instruments that the Armed Forces need are expensive and (ii) the best news is that they become moth-eaten without having to use them. This, moreover, makes them live in the anxiety of overcoming triage in the face of other preemptory needs; a struggle in which, unless there is open conflict, they tend to lose. In any case, it is usually forgotten that security is not an end in itself, but a means by which other goals can be achieved and other activities enjoyed. “Those who would give up essential freedom to buy a little temporary security deserve neither freedom nor security”¹. In other words, contrary to what is often argued (Díez-Picazo, 2005), security only has its *raison d’être* in the defence of rights (Martínez, 2015). On the other hand, when a country is involved in a war, the first thing to suffer are its rights and well-being, and until security is restored, it is difficult for them to be fully enjoyed again.

However, there is no risk of war on the immediate, or even remote, horizon in Latin America. This leads to debates on whether or not it is necessary to maintain the defence machin-

¹ “Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety”. Phrase included in the letter written by Franklin in 1755, presumably on behalf of the Pennsylvania Assembly, and addressed to the colonial governor (Wittes, 2011).

ery, whether or not to continue allocating resources to a risk —war— that is unlikely, and also on what they should be devoted to if they are maintained. Up to four positions can be found: (i) the abolitionists, who take advantage of the situation to call for the eradication of armies; (ii) the normative or essentialists, who remain attached to the tradition of Prussian functions and do not want to know about any other possibility; (iii) the adaptive, who, while respecting the essential functions —deterrence and defence— consider it feasible to update their roles. In this dynamic of constant updating and modernisation, the logic of three “r”s (Martínez, 2020) is imposed, according to which the Armed Forces, in order to survive the changing reality without losing focus on their defensive role, must redefine their missions, resize and, finally, reconvert the presumably surplus part into the assets of other agencies. In other words, the future of armies does not lie in large human contingents, but in small armies with high technology and mobility (Dandeker, 2000). Finally, (iv) the pragmatists, who consider that, given that reforming and modernising the Armed Forces may be a political trap where we know how it all begins —but not how it ends— and that keeping them idle is an unaffordable luxury, it is much simpler, and no one is uncomfortable, to assign them missions of all kinds and conditions —even very non-military ones— as state needs arise (Martínez and Bueno, 2025).

In trying to disentangle the specific missions and operations that the FAS can and should perform, Pion-Berlin and Arceneaux (2000) developed a taxonomy based on two variables: scope and location (Figure 2). In their view, the core missions of FAS would be outreach-restrictive and growth towards outreach-expansive would be acceptable. However, they pointed out that internal missions were expanding in both scopes, a fact they were not too concerned about as long as the Military, in the area of governance, remained only the executors of decisions and, under no circumstances, the decision-makers. In turn, Dandeker (2000), in analysing the redefinition of missions abroad, warned that the FAS are already in charge of guaranteeing the protection and security of the territory, even in the absence of threats, and that they could expand by assuming two new roles: a) securing against external threats to the state and its allies and b) contributing to broader security interests, such as the maintenance of international peace and stability.

		Mission/operation focus	
		<i>Restrictive</i>	<i>Expansive</i>
Location of the mission or operation	<i>External</i>	National defence, international peacekeeping operations	Humanitarian aid abroad and election observation
	<i>Internal</i>	Counter-insurgency, arms production	Border control, security Crime control, anti-subversion, civilian action, disaster relief

Figure 2. Missions and operations. Scope and location. Source: Pion-Berlin and Arceneaux (2000: 418).

On the other hand, internal security missions, especially in Latin America, continue to grow, comprising operations against drug trafficking, combating common and organised crime, counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, public order and stability of public spaces (Pion-Berlin *et al.*, 2010). The sum of all this shows the four types of missions currently carried out by the FAS: defence, internal security, natural disasters and social programmes (Pion-Berlin, 2016).

In short, all administrations have a constant need to modernise and often to reinvent themselves; after all, the two greatest fears of any bureaucracy are falling into obsolescence or sterility. What has been identified elsewhere (Martínez 2020a) with the metaphors of the *lamplighter* —being prepared and equipped for a function that will never be performed again— or the *lift operator* —developing a sterile training and function. The problem is that this drive for modernisation activates two myths that cannot withstand empirical falsification. The myths of effectiveness —the Military can do everything and do it well— and of efficiency —any function attributed to the Military will be economically impeccable, more profitable for the treasury. This, according to Martínez (2020b), can lead to roles, also metaphorical but perverse, of *veterinarians* —professional intrusion; military acting as firemen, policemen, etc.—, *scarecrows* —in charge of functions that no one is prepared to undertake in which the military can put little more than good will, since they openly exceed their capabilities and preparation— and *scribes* —so many improper missions make them outdated in terms of equipment, training and doctrine for the real role they should occupy, defence— (Martínez and Bueno, 2025).

Thus, Latin America is a geographical space in which the main threats to governments do not come from other states, but are linked to transnational organised crime, the climate crisis and natural disasters, cybercrime, uncontrolled migration and public health, to cite a few examples. This reality, in which crime and citizen insecurity play a leading role (Donadio, 2013; RESDAL, 2016), is the main argument justifying a redefinition of the functional roles to be assumed by the military, which is redirecting them towards public security missions.

But the Military is not only shifting towards public security. Troops are also taking on tasks focused on the country's development —understood as the extension of basic services—, as well as disaster management —an event that generates great destruction or damage— and calamities —tragedy or misfortune that affects many people. All of these trends, far from a redefinition of roles, entail the risk of militarisation, by which it is understood, as Martínez and Bueno (2025: 5) argue, “militarisation not as the existence of a political military power, but as the normalisation of the use of the FAS for services outside the military roles considered as traditional”.

It is obvious that climate change and the natural disasters associated with it are a serious problem the region faces. Not surprisingly, the World Economic Forum's Global Risk Perceptions

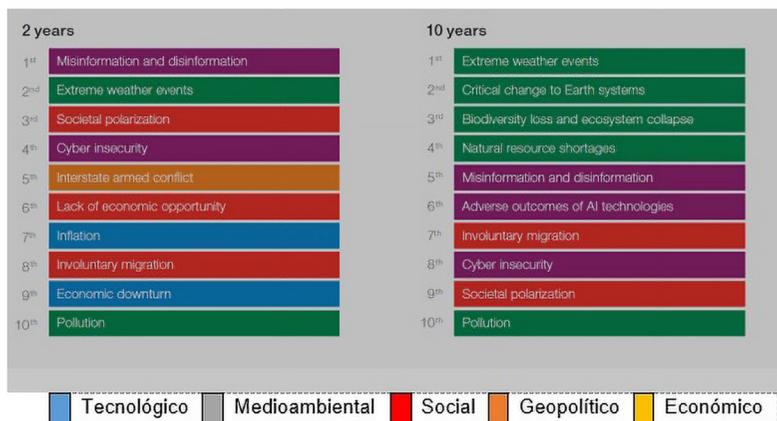


Gráfico 3. Los diez riesgos globales más severos a nivel global en dos y diez años. Fuente: Datos de la Global Risk Perception Survey realizada por el World Economic Forum (2024).

Figure 3. The ten most severe global risks globally in two and ten years.
 Source: Data from the Global Risk Perception Survey conducted by the World Economic Forum (2024)

Survey, conducted among academics, business people, governments, civil society and opinion leaders between September and October 2023, shows that, over the next ten years, five of the top ten risks humanity faces will be environmental (Figure 3).

Similarly, the World Risk Index² shows how, in 2014, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua are among the fifteen countries in the world with the highest risk index, and, in 2023, Mexico, Colombia and Peru are also among the fifteen with the highest vulnerability and exposure. A glance at Table 1 shows two further evidences: (i) the high level of exposure and final risk that, in general terms, exists in the region, and (ii) the intensification of risk that has been generated in the region in just a decade.

However, even if all these emergencies exist in the region — something that is indisputable—, attributing the integral management of these problems to the Armed Forces, as has been noted, does not seem the best redefinition. In fact, it is about militarising emergencies, development and public security, and it means that the Military's training, equipment and doctrine for its deterrence and defence tasks suffer and may, in all likelihood, erode its effectiveness. At the same time, the training, equipment and doctrine that one accumulates as a military officer, which is useful in an emergency, is not optimal for civilian protection, nor is it optimal for policing or social

² This index, which is developed from Germany by Alliance Development Works together with the UN and Ruhr University, is the result of multiplying the vulnerability index (the measurement of vulnerability comprises the components of susceptibility, lack of coping capacity and lack of adaptive capacity, and relates to social, physical, economic and environmental factors that make people or systems susceptible to the impacts of natural hazards) by the exposure index (the measurement of exposure refers to the entities —population, conditions of built-up areas, infrastructure components, environmental area— that are exposed to the impacts of one or more natural hazards - earthquakes, cyclones, droughts, floods and sea level rise). The index also uses in its configuration: a/ susceptibility, which refers to the probability of suffering damage, loss and disruption in the event of an extreme event or natural hazard —susceptibility, therefore, describes the structural characteristics and framework conditions of a society—; b/ lack of coping capacities, which encompass measures and skills that are immediately available to reduce damages and losses in order to minimize the negative impacts of natural hazards and climate change through direct action and available resources; and c/ lack of adaptive capacities, which focuses on measures, structural changes and strategies that address and seek to address the negative impacts of natural hazards and climate change in the future and in the long term.

Countries	World Risk Index		Exhibition		Vulnerability		Susceptibility		Lack of coping skills		Lack of adaptive capacity	
	2014	2023	2014	2023	2014	2023	2014	2023	2014	2023	2014	2023
Argentina	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Belize	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Bolivia	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Brazil	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Chile	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Colombia	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Costa Rica	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Dominican Republic	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Ecuador	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
El Salvador	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Guatemala	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Honduras	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Jamaica	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Mexico	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Nicaragua	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Panama	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Paraguay	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Peru	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Uruguay	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Venezuela	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light

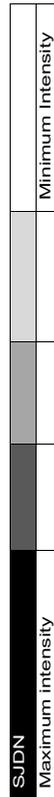


Table 1. World Risk Index and its constituent variables in Latin America (2014-2023). Source: Martínez et al. (2024)

work. States should make efforts to articulate the administrative agencies necessary for the threats they possess, and this may entail resizing the volume of troops and reconverting parts of their armies into those other specialised administrations that they do require. But this Pandora's box will surely be one that few will want to open.

In any case, it is worth taking stock of how armies in Latin America have been modernised during this period. To this end, we will review, mainly through data from *RESDAL's Comparative Atlas of Defence 2024*, the evolution of the number of troops, the role of women in the Armed Forces, the state of military justice, the institutional development model built for the management of defence, the articulation and evolution of defence white papers and the functions performed, with special emphasis on their involvement in peace operations under a United Nations mandate. All of this will make it possible to assess the reality of defence policy in the region in order to analyse the risks involved in the dynamics of militarisation and, finally, to conclude on how the Armed Forces have evolved in the forty years since the beginning of the transitions and what challenges they face in the third decade of this century, decade that will probably be marked by Donald Trump's second term as US President and the hatchet with which he has entered the international political system.

1 What reality are we moving in?

As has just been explained, Latin America, in terms of national security, moves in a scenario of improbability of armed conflicts between states, but of pressing urgencies in terms of public insecurity and the sustained growth of natural emergencies. Similarly, the UNDP's (2004) three-word definition of the region a couple of decades ago —"democracy, inequality and poverty"— still seems to be valid, which is in line with the aforementioned developmental urgencies.

The profuse —in some countries even major— dedication of the FAS to these roles or functions that should be auxiliary has also been explained —as they support the real person in charge and are, therefore, secondary to military duties. In other words, the FAS in Latin America perform many missions far removed from their inherent defensive and deterrent role.

Countries	Start of transition
Argentina	1983
Bolivia	1982
Brazil	1985
Colombia	1958
Chile	1988
Ecuador	1979
El Salvador	1992
Guatemala	1985
Honduras	1980
Mexico	1977
Nicaragua	1990(1)
Paraguay	1989
Peru	1980
Dominican R.	1978
Uruguay	1980

Table 2. Year of the beginning of the transition to democracy. (1) In 2007, Daniel Ortega won back the presidency and, since then, has established a series of legal and institutional reforms that began the autocratic drift that today makes Nicaragua a non-democratic country. Source: author's making

While this reality is indisputable, it is also indisputable that forty years have passed since the beginning of the transitions in the region (Table 2). These processes of democratic transformation called for major efforts to reform and modernise armies with the aim of abandoning political power and transforming themselves into military administration (Martínez, 2013). According to Pion-Berlin and Martínez (2017), in order to combine democratic interaction between the military, politicians and civilians, these changes required action in the field of political power, reforming defence institutions, adopting new legislation to regulate the military, increasing social knowledge about security and defence, increasing convergence between society and its military, and increasing the effectiveness of the military in its work (Figure 4).

Based on this theoretical framework, there are more than thirty variables that should be measured in order to determine the degree of evolution of the reforms undertaken by this army with military power that is moving towards democracy and consolidating it to become a military administration. There would cer-

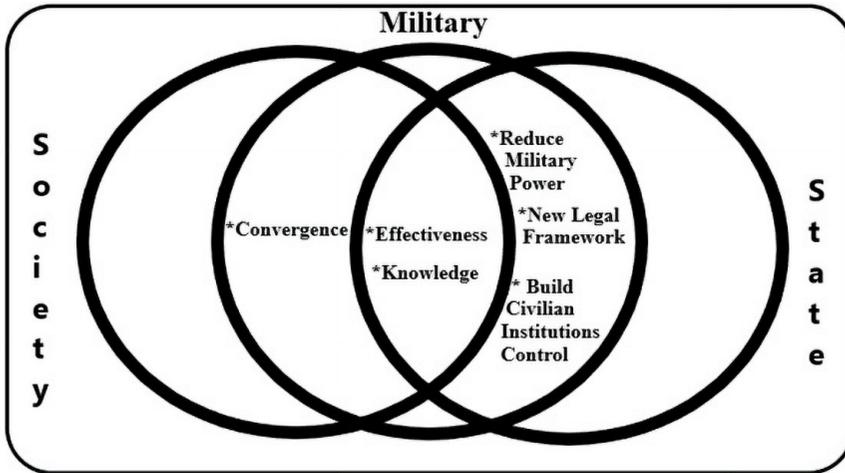


Figure 4: Spheres of interaction between the Military, politicians and society in the construction of democratic civil-military relations. Source: reworked by Martínez and Nino (2023) from the graph initially elaborated by Pion-Berlin and Martínez (2017)

tainly not be enough space in this paper to address them, so we have chosen to measure and explain the current state of seven of them, which will provide a sample of the state of four of the six dimensions of analysis and a fairly reliable picture of the evolutionary reality of the Armed Forces throughout the region.

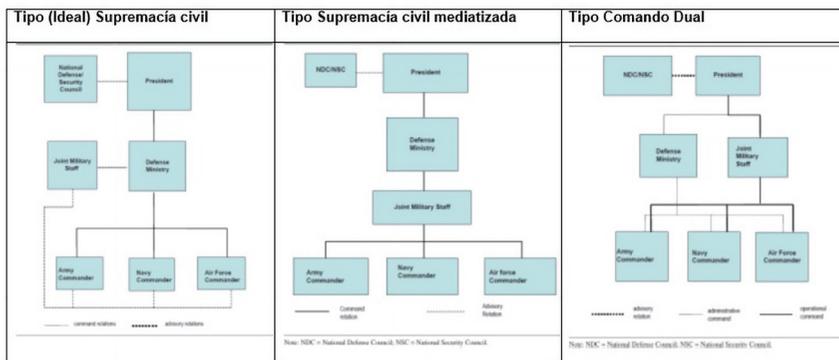
Thus, we will analyse the construction of the civilian network of institutions for the management and control of defence, the model of military justice, social confidence in the Armed Forces, the role of women in the Military, the volume of troops, the type of functions performed and the existence of defence white papers. All of this without forgetting the overall assessment of the democratic progress made in the political system as a whole, as made explicit by different democracy measurement indicators.

1.1 Institutional development model

In the early years of transition to democracy in all the region's former military dictatorships, one of the first challenges was to build an institutional defence system capable of sustaining the necessary civilian supremacy acquired through civilian control. Armies had come from governing themselves, through their General Staffs, and assuming that they would now be led by a democratically elected civilian government was not easy. Hence,

one of the first demands to articulate and facilitate this supremacy was the creation of a Ministry of Defence, i.e. an institutional tool to: (a) increase civilian presence in key defence institutions, (b) empower Ministries of Defence themselves, (c) reduce the Military's vertical authority along the chain of command, and (d) unify civilian power while fragmenting military power (Pion-Berlin, 2009).

The simple integration of the three armies —land, sea and air— under a single command structure, defence, was in itself a transgression of the customs and manners developed during the dictatorships, but creating an institutional structure with a civilian at the head —located between the presidency of the republic and the three armies— and leaving him in charge of them, far from political power and as mere advisors to the Minister, was at times chimerical. So much so that, initially, many countries were unable to articulate this ideal model of institutional framework (Graph 5) and many others, forty years after the beginning of the transitions, have not managed to reverse it either.



Graph 5. Models of organisation of the institutional defence system Source: author's making based on Pion-Berlin models (2009).

This deficit in civilian supremacy presents two models for the institutional structure of the framework that determines defence policies: Military and armaments. On the one hand, there is a model in which civilian supremacy exists —albeit diminished— because, although it is true that the three armies and their Boards of Chiefs of Staff are subordinate to the political bodies — the presidency and the Ministry—, it is also true that neither the

President nor the Minister have direct command over the armies, given that the Board of Chiefs is located between the latter and the political power, which acts as an institutional buffer. On the other hand, there are countries that have evolved very little and have a dual command model in which the Minister only governs administrative matters, and operational matters are managed by the Board of Chiefs, which directs the armies and connects directly with the country's presidency, leaving the Ministry on the margins of operations.

Today, only Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay have been able to articulate these hierarchical-institutional structures that guarantee civilian supremacy with little room for fissures (Table 3). Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have articulated this mediated model in which the Military is subordinate to political power, but the latter does not act directly over the armies, relying instead on the Board of Chiefs of Staff as a parapet body. In any case, the situation is worse in Bolivia, Paraguay and the Dominican Republic, where the institutional defence system is articulated with a dual command structure in which the Minister is in charge of administrative command and the military operational chain of command is carried out by the Board of Chiefs, which has a direct link to the presidency of the republic, so that the Defence Minister and their Ministry remain a minor institution.

Countries	Civilian supremacy	Mediated civilian supremacy	Dual Command
Argentina	✓		
Bolivia			✓
Brazil	✓		
Colombia		✓	
Chile	✓		
Ecuador	(1)		
El Salvador		✓	
Guatemala		✓	
Honduras		✓	
Mexico	- (2)	-	-
Nicaragua			
Paraguay			✓

Countries	Civilian supremacy	Mediated civilian supremacy	Dual Command
Peru	✓		
Dominican R.			✓
Uruguay	✓		

Table 3. Organisational model of the defence structure. (1) In the structure, the Minister of Defence apparently exercises direct command over the three army corps, but the head of the Joint Command does not advise the Minister, but directly the President. (2) Mexico does not have a Ministry of Defence. Instead, there are two ministries: the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of the Navy. Source: author's making based on RESDAL data (2024)

1.2 Military justice

One of the most serious aspects of the repression to which the population is subjected during the dictatorships is that of being judged, with little or no procedural scrupulousness, by military tribunals. Besides being an element of repression, these judicial courts become a protective shield for the militia, who see in them an instrument of impunity that avoids contact with the judiciary and places them before the lax and corporate judgement of their colleagues. How far it has evolved from this perverse reality is a crucial question in the civil-military relations (CMR) of any political system that aspires to be democratic. Whether military criminal courts are military, civilian or mixed courts, whether they have the power to try only military or also civilians, and what kind of facts are reviewed by these criminal courts —any kind of crime or only military crimes— are at the epicentre of military justice codes. It will also provide insight into how and by whom military personnel are tried for violations of fundamental rights (Pion-Berlin and Martínez, 2017).

A review of Table 4 shows a first encouraging reality. Only one country maintains a military criminal justice system in which the courts are made up exclusively of military personnel: Bolivia³. Although it is also true that no country, except Argentina and Ecuador —which completely abolished military jurisdiction— has opted for the Military to be judged only by civilian judges, so they have opted for mixed tribunals.

³ Although not addressed in this paper, Cuba would be another example of a country that has military justice tribunals composed only of military personnel.

Countries	Types of adjudicating court ⁽¹⁾			Who is on trial?				
	M	X	C	Soldier	Retired soldier	Other security forces	FAS Civilians	Non-defence civilians
Argentina ⁽²⁾								
Bolivia	X			X	X	X	X	X
Brazil		X		X	X	X	X	X
Colombia		X		X		X	X	
Chile		X		X	X	X	X	
Ecuador ⁽³⁾								
El Salvador		X		X				
Guatemala		X		X	X	X	X	
Honduras		X		X				
Mexico		X		X				
Nicaragua		X		X				
Paraguay		X		X				
Peru		X		X		X		
Dominican R.		X		X				
Uruguay		X		X	X			

Table 4. Models of military justice in Latin America. (1) Three possible models are understood: M=only military personnel make up the courts; C=only civilians make up the courts, and X=the composition of the courts is mixed. (2) Military jurisdiction was repealed by Law 26.3904. (3) The Constitution repealed military jurisdiction. Source: author's making based on data from RESDAL (2024).

If one considers who is tried in military courts, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay and the Dominican Republic only deal with crimes committed by active military personnel. Peru uses military criminal courts to prosecute crimes committed by police forces as well. Uruguay can also hear cases against retired military personnel. This is also the case in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Guatemala, countries that even try civilians working in the defence sector in these courts. But undoubtedly, the situation with the least democratising progress is that of Bolivia and Brazil, which understand that civilians outside the defence sector can commit crimes that can be tried exclusively by military criminal courts; in the Bolivian case, moreover, these courts are made up only of military judges.

1.3 Social assessment

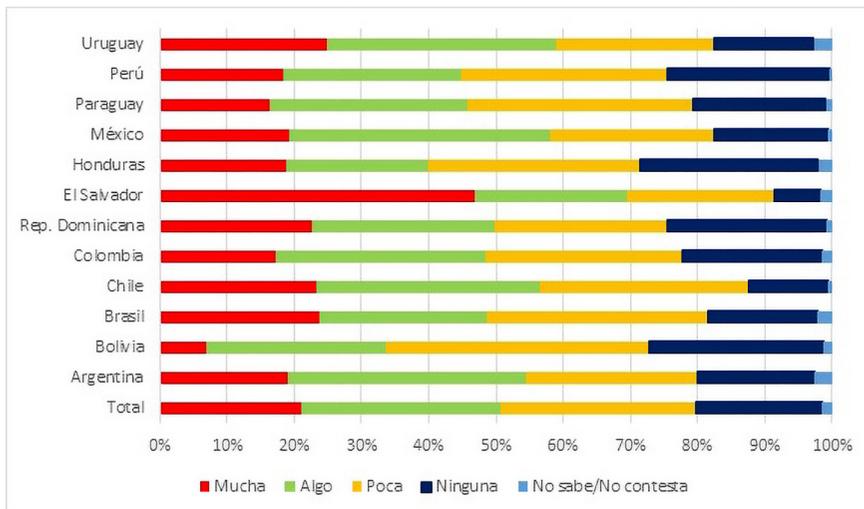
CMRs cannot be understood as a space of exclusive confrontation between political and military elites, but rather as a system

consisting of three actors: politicians, the Military and society (Feaver and Seeler, 2009; Pion-Berlin and Martínez, 2017). It is the interactions between the latter two that lead to the terrain of convergence.

To converge is to come closer, to have points of contact and to share certain visions. Any administration must, while performing its responsibilities, try to satisfy the desires of its society, and the distance in the perception of problems, in the ranking of concerns and in the predominant values through which to confront day-to-day activity does not help this purpose at all. This is why we speak of the legitimacy of action when the work of governments and their administrations attempts to solve a society's main problems by means of the predominant values in that society. It goes without saying that the Military Administration cannot escape this requirement. This implies that it will be a problem if the FAS are distant from their social fabric in terms of extraction, ideas and values; a bad symptom for the CMR and, perhaps, for democratic consolidation. Convergence cannot mean the loss of essential functional autonomy, but in no way can it be argued that the need to maintain internal integration is detrimental to external integration. It is undoubtedly a difficult balance, but not an impossible one (Pion-Berlin and Martínez, 2017).

Thus, the convergence of the FAS with their society is not only the approximation in values —the *civilianisation* of which Janowitz (1960) spoke, as opposed to the professionalism of Huntington (1957), as a reality that would facilitate control— but also, with this dimension, all those aspects that can bring the two worlds closer together or that can push them apart must be addressed. A good administration is one that is close to its society, its concerns, its problems, its values and its reality. Therefore, it will be necessary to compare civilian consideration of the Military and its activity in order to gauge its distance or proximity.

In this sense, the analysis of trust in the Armed Forces, according to data from the latest *Latinobarómetro 2023* (Graph 6), shows four political systems with distrust towards their Military. Two with a very marked intensity —Honduras and Bolivia— and two others, Peru and Paraguay, where distrust is in the majority, but not so intense. The Dominican Republic, Colombia and Brazil have populations divided in half in terms of trust and distrust, while Uruguay, Mexico, Chile and Argentina, and above all, El Salvador, have a solid relationship of trust.



Graph 6 Confidence in the Armed Forces. Source: Latinobarómetro (2023)

The efforts made in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, where, during the military dictatorships, there were many human rights violations, especially in the first two, are remarkable, as today confidence in the Military is strong and growing.

The case of El Salvador is worth mentioning, where confidence in the Armed Forces stems from the public security and gang repression policies implemented by President Bukele, in which the Salvadoran Armed Forces have taken on a leading role. It is possible to debate the wisdom of the policies applied, and even question their democratic nature, but what is undeniable is that the population approves of them and this has led to almost three quarters of the population trusting the FAS.

1.4 The role of women

This inevitably means that there is a pressing need to recruit soldiers to feed the Armed Forces, and linked to this need is the issue of non-traditional recruits such as women, something which, in the 21st century, should not be the subject of the slightest controversy due to the obvious inequality and injustice revealed by the refusal to admit them. However, the weight of cultural tradition is the most serious impediment to the acceptance of their integration, which is why

resolutions such as UN Resolution 1325 (2000) have been so welcome⁴.

Leaving aside the need to recruit women because of the general decline in the birth rate, and also ignoring the undeniable right to equality without discrimination on grounds of sex—issues which, especially the second, would settle the question—, the controversy lies in the consideration of their ability. The two opposing views are expressed by US Army Colonel Ramsey (1991: 23): —“We are willing and able to participate in the defence of our country, but we leave the more physical aspects of direct offensive combat to the men, who have the physical and emotional capacity required to carry it out”— and that which points out that women, like men in any profession or job, should be able to exercise freedom of choice on equal terms in order to be able to pursue a vocation without hindrance. The solution to the debate, which is not the subject of this paper, is probably to distinguish between two types of roles in leadership: operational and managerial. Women are physically and psychologically able to do both, but while the latter is not a problem, the operational side is hampered by cultural heritage and the infrastructure of the facilities. Both obstacles are only a matter of time and money and, therefore, easy to overcome (Pion-Berlin and Martinez, 2017).

Focusing on the object of study, women account for an average of 13% of the military contingent in the region (Table 5). Only Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Nicaragua and Uruguay show values above 20%, although none of them reach the 25% figure. On the other hand, if we look at the percentage of military women deployed in UN peace operations, the average for the region shows that 27% of troops deployed abroad under the UN flag are women, with cases such as Colombia and the Dominican Republic accounting for half or more of the contingent. However, as will be seen below, the total number of military personnel on peace missions is miniscule—with the exception of Uruguay— compared to the total number of its armies.

⁴ Resolution 1325 (2000), adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting on 31 October 2000, which urges all member states to increase the representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

Countries	% of women in the total number of FAS personnel	% of women in total personnel deployed in peace operations
Argentina	20,2	14
Bolivia	11,0	23
Brazil	22,1	18
Colombia	3,17	60
Chile	21,5	42
Ecuador	4,9	30
El Salvador	11,7	10
Guatemala	15,7	11
Honduras	7,9	39
Mexico	12,5	40
Nicaragua	20,6	-
Paraguay	9,6	19
Peru	10,5	16
Dominican R.	17,4	50
Uruguay	21,6	6

Table 5. Percentage of women in the country’s Armed Forces. (1) In green, those countries with compulsory military service for men. Source: author’s making based on data from RESDAL (2024).

On the other hand, in none of the eight countries where military service is compulsory has it been made compulsory for women. Therefore, women’s actions within the Armed Forces are always voluntary and they are generally relegated to administrative, logistical, legal and health roles. In fact, in few countries can they play combat roles (Brazil, Colombia, Chile, El Salvador and Bolivia).

1.5 Troops

President G. Washington is credited with saying: “I prefer a good army to a big one”. However, there has always been a tendency to field large numbers of infantry, which is a reflection of a country’s deterrent power. Today, though, relying on large numbers of troops is probably not an optimal strategy for two reasons. First, after World War I, entrenched, hand-to-hand combat on the battlefield is a thing of the past. This need for large numbers of men has gradually given way to a technology that today no longer even needs aircrew mem-

bers in an aircraft. Only the survival of conscription continued to maintain high human contingents in armies, but both the increase in conscientious objection and the disappearance of compulsory conscription itself have led democratic armies to smaller realities. Moreover, the emergence of new transnational threats operating under the parameters of asymmetric warfare has inexorably redirected the future of armies towards much more technified, smaller and more manageable models. Effectiveness today is measured in deployment time, in accurate action on specific targets and in the lowest possible number of own and civilian casualties. Second, when an army is designed to control its own population, when the enemy is at home, governments increase the size of their FAS in order to increase control over their citizens. For this reason, in countries that have experienced military dictatorship, a reduction in the number of troops is also perceived as a symptom of democratisation.

The network of security and defence experts in Latin America (RESDAL), in its different atlases, usually uses the number of military personnel per 10,000 inhabitants as an indicator to assess the presence of military personnel in relation to the size of the population. The percentage of military personnel in the population can also be used. However, the first indicator requires the use of large numbers (hundreds or thousands), while the second requires working with several decimal places and values that are usually less than one. That is why it is preferable to use the Population-Military Balance (PMB) index⁵. Low values of the index —below 2.5— indicate high military density, and the higher the figure, the lower the proportion of military in the total population (Pion-Berlin and Martínez, 2017).

The latest RESDAL (2024) provides another perspective with which to visualise military density, which is to specify the number of military personnel per 100km², given the large territorial size of many countries in the region. These two indicators, together with the total number of troops, are the three figures that can be compared in Table 6.

⁵ This index is derived by dividing the population by the number of military personnel, which tells us how many civilians there are for every military personnel. This figure is divided by 100 to give us figures ranging from one —indicating a high military density— to ten —representing very small armies.

Countries	Total troops⁽¹⁾	Troops per 100km²	BMP index⁽²⁾
Argentina	88.090	3	5,31
Bolivia	15.368	1	7,57
Brazil	344.103	4	6,29
Colombia	267.709	23	1,95
Chile	67.146	9	2,92
Ecuador	40.519	16	4,49
El Salvador	24.023	114	2,65
Guatemala	19.276	12	9,39
Honduras	19.786	14	5,35
Mexico	259.813	13	4,94
Nicaragua	14.496	11	4,86
Paraguay	17.267	4	3,97
Peru	78.296	6	4,39
Dominican R.	57.629	120	1,68
Uruguay	22.822	13	1,50

Table 6. Members of the armed forces in 2024. (1) In green, countries with compulsory military service. (2) Population-Military Balance, index created by Pion-Berlin and Martínez (2017: 304). Source: author's making based on RESDAL data (2024).

Although, in absolute terms, the Brazilian army is by far the largest in the region, with more than 300,000 members, the two indicators explained above show that, in terms of territorial and population density, it is not one of the oversized armies. In this sense, the Dominican Republic, along with Colombia, have the highest ratio of troops per 100 square kilometres and, together with Uruguay and Colombia, the lowest PMB index, which means a higher ratio of military personnel to population size.

Looking at the historical record since 1997 (Figure 7), Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Nicaragua have two small armies relative to their population sizes. Argentina adopted a drastic reduction at the beginning of its transition. In contrast, in the case of Nicaragua, the evolution towards a reduction in troop numbers has been a gradual process over the last 25 years. Mexico, on the other hand, experienced an increase in troop numbers between 2007 and 2019 that was closely linked to its performance in the fight against drug trafficking. A similar explanation is offered by El Salvador, which, after a few years of constant reduction of troops,

began an increase in the second decade of the 21st century that has brought it back to where it started.

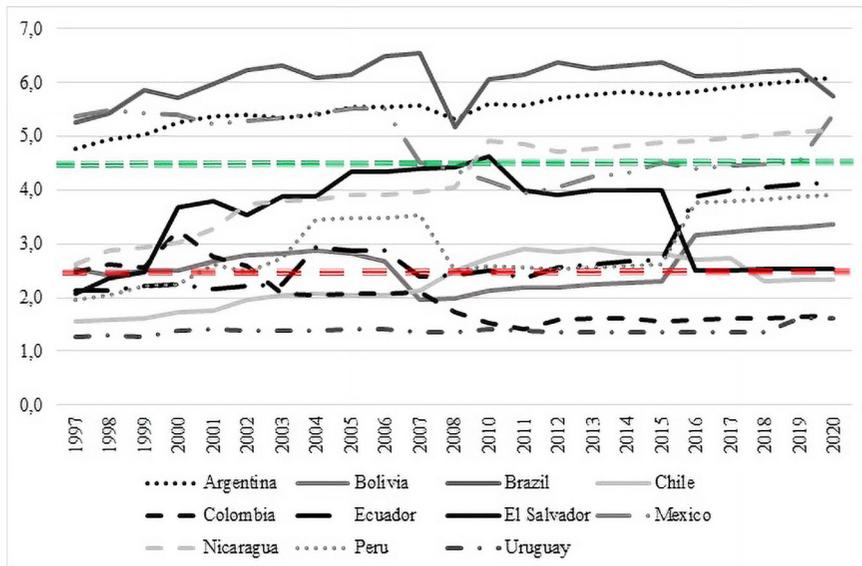


Figure 7. Population-Military Balance Index (1997-2020). Source: Jenne and Martínez (2022: 74), modified by the author

Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia have shown a tendency to reduce the number of military personnel over the last five years, but they are still far from a PMB of 4.5 —the green line—, which, according to Pion-Berlin and Martínez (2017), marks the beginning of democratic consolidation of this aspect linked to the effectiveness of CMR. In turn, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay have a PMB of less than 2.5 (red line), which speaks of a high number of troops considering the absence of ongoing and looming military conflicts.

1.6 Purposes

The end of the Cold War has marked a turning point in FAS missions. Threats have changed substantially, and this has been compounded by the communications revolution and the emergence of a host of technological advances. Largely as a result of this, the FAS are ceasing to be an exclusive element of national security and becoming an instrument of state foreign policy. Hence, as indicated above, Pion-Berlin and Arceneaux (2000) made it explicit that the FAS's external role should be redefined

in an expansive manner (see Figure 2). However, in this new scenario, many policy-makers in developing countries have seen the FAS as a highly trained and qualified tool to fill gaps in the state's management capacity in other spheres (Benitez Manaut, 2005). This implies assuming a role at home that, far from being restrictive in scope, can also be expansive.

Thus, the nature of the missions they can perform is one of the controversies of the present day. As an administration, the FAS have as their main functions those determined by the Constitution and the laws regulating national security or defence. These roles, from which missions they will later carry out derive, are the defence of the territory —its integrity— and of those who live in it —citizens. To this they often add formulas such as the defence of sovereignty or the defence of the constitutional or institutional order, which, rather than a specific role, is a reminder that insurrectionary means are not a valid path for the militia and that one of their missions in defence of the state is not to support *coups d'état*, but to prevent them and, if necessary, to stop them.

Along with these main roles —defence and deterrence—, the existence of auxiliary roles must be noted, i.e. collaborative and secondary at the same time. Collaborative because these are missions in which the Armed Forces will come to the aid of the state; secondary because they are not inherent to their activity, but are foreign to the defining role —deterrence and defence— of the Military Administration. That is to say, their preparation, equipment and doctrine, but, on the other hand, in the absence of better resources, the logistical capabilities and territorial distribution of armies may make them necessary. When the state's means to resolve the situation are overwhelmed, inadequate or non-existent, another resource can —and should— be activated, which, although not the competent one in that area, can cooperate with a certain degree of effectiveness (Pion-Berlin and Martínez, 2017). The reality is that virtually all countries have integrated domestic order, national development and disaster and calamity response into their body of law (Table 7). Although in the legal sphere they are listed as support functions, therefore auxiliary, it is common practice that, in anticipation of these three tasks, the FAS also equip, train and indoctrinate themselves in the performance of these activities as pre-eminent functions of the Military Administration of their respective countries.

Countries	National defence	Constitutional order	Government stability	Internal order	National development	Elections	Disasters	Peace operations	Transnational crime	Critical infrastructures
Argentina ⁽¹⁾	x			x			x	x		
Brazil	x	x		x	x		x	x		
Bolivia	x	x	x	x	x		x			
Colombia	x	x		x	x		x	x		
Chile	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x
Cuba ⁽¹⁾	x			x	x		x			
Ecuador	x	x		x	x		x	x		
El Salvador	x			x	x		x			
Guatemala	x			x			x			
Haiti	x			x	x		x			
Honduras	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Mexico	x	x		x	x		x			
Nicaragua	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		
Paraguay	x	x	x	x			x	x		
Peru	x			x	x	x	x	x		
Dominican R.	x	x		x	x		x		x	
Uruguay ⁽¹⁾	x			x	x		x	x		
Venezuela	x			x	x		x			

Table 7. Military roles in constitutional texts and other legislation in Latin America. (1) No role listed in the constitutional text; X = role listed in the constitutional text; x = role listed in other legislation. Roles of an auxiliary nature are highlighted in grey; "in support of/to..." . Source: Martínez and Bueno (2025)

As a matter of principle, the expansion of the Military into areas that are not natural to it is a bad way to go. This author agrees with Serra (2002) when he understands that functions referring to social and economic development programmes actually take the activity away from where it belongs: the civilian public sector or the private sector. Likewise, the attribution of business management makes no sense, since it has nothing to do with the strict nature of their missions and confers on them a public relevance that escapes their condition of administration and brings them closer to the condition of an institution.

With respect to public security missions, this author is opposed to their widespread use. Violence, organised crime and citizen insecurity are on the agenda of Latin American countries as one of the main problems and, given the overflow of police resources to meet the challenge, the conviction is spreading that the Military must be in charge. It is assumed that this may be the case in exceptional cases, but this author does not agree that this short-term solution should become final, as it places society at considerable risk in terms of democratic governance (UNDP, 2013; Jenne and Martínez, 2022; Martínez and Bueno, 2024a; 2024b; 2025). Unfortunately, the response is much more conjunctural. Everyday life is faced without questioning tomorrow, and here the FAS are a tool that is used without considering the consequences (Martínez, 2022a).

Militarising internal security or securitising the social agenda can be nonsense. "The emergence of military dictatorships in the Southern Cone of Latin America shows that internal military missions produce pathologies in civil-military relations" (Desch, 1996: 19). Action must, therefore, be exceptional; an emergency. Political authorities must establish plans for when the mission begins and ends, and it should only take place in the absence of civilian experts who can deal with it (Goodman, 1996; Martínez, 2022b). The crucial question is how these missions can be activated without disrupting CMRs or breaking down civilian control. As Pion-Berlin (2004) pointed out, they must be politically mandated, exceptional and time-limited tasks, which implies that there are no state agents capable of carrying them out, or that those that exist are unable to cope; that, while the Military carries them out, the government will prepare resources that can take them on, and that as soon as the latter are trained, the former will cease the activity.

1.6.1 Participation in peace operations

Given that there are no active military conflicts in which the troops of the region's countries are participating, a valid indicator to gauge whether Latin America's Armed Forces are focusing on their external location with an expansive scope or on the internal dimension with a restrictive or even expansive scope is to assess their participation in peace and stabilisation missions under the UN flag.

In this sense, Table 8 presents up to thirteen missions in which troops from the countries of the region are participating; the average number of missions in which each country participates is five, although some countries are present in eight missions at the same time. However, everything changes in significance and the apparent involvement becomes almost testimonial when one looks at the actual number of military personnel deployed on missions; around two thousand members between all the countries and missions. However, in addition to being scarce, involvement is very unequal. Thus, in five cases, the percentage of the total number of troops that all the region's Armed Forces devote to missions does not reach 1%, and, in four cases, the percentage of military personnel participating in international missions is above 10% of the total number of the region's forces in UN missions: Argentina (14.2%), Guatemala (10.82%), Peru (12.3%) and Uruguay (49.47%). In short, one country — Uruguay— accounts for half of the troops that all the countries in the region assign to missions, and Argentina, Guatemala and Peru for two fifths; the rest, taken together, account for little more than 10%.

It seems obvious that it is not an expansive scope in the external location that occupies the region's FAS. The usual performance, as had already been noted, is taking place in the domestic arena, a field supposedly reserved exclusively for the security forces. This functional expansion does not take the form of an auxiliary activity at specific moments when the security forces are overwhelmed, but rather, in countries with high crime rates, it has led the FAS to act in securing and stabilising public spaces, but also in the fight against drug trafficking, organised crime and even common crime, or to carry out counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism missions (Pion-Berlin *et al.*, 2010).

Countries	No. of troops	% share LA	MINURSO	MINUSCA	MINUSMA	UNVMC	UNMISS	UNISFA	UNMOGIP	MONUSCO	UNMHA	UNDOF	UNTSO	UNFICYP	UNIFIL
Argentina	287	14.20	X	X		X			X			X	X		X
Bolivia	26	1.29		X		X	X			X					
Brazil	71	3.50	X	X		X	X			X	X			X	X
Colombia	5	0.20	X	X											X
Chile	12	0.60				X							X	X	
Ecuador	10	0.50	X	X			X	X							
El Salvador	60	3.00	X		X		X	X							X
Guatemala	218	10.82		X		X	X	X		X	X				X
Honduras	18	0.89	X			X									
Mexico	20	1.00	X	X		X			X						
Nicaragua	0	0.00													
Paraguay	18	2.00		X		X	X			X					
Peru	248	12.30		X		X	X	X		X					X
Dominican R.	10	0.50				X									
Uruguay ⁽¹⁾	997	49.47		X		X		X	X	X		X			X

Table 8. Participation in peace operations 2024. MINURSO (Western Sahara); MINUSCA (Central African Republic); MINUSMA (Mali); UNVMC (Colombia); UNMISS (South Sudan); UNISFA (Abyei); UNMOGIP (India and Pakistan); MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of Congo); UNMHA (Yemen); UNDOF (Golan); UNTSO (Middle East); UNFICYP (Cyprus); UNIFIL (Lebanon).
Source: author's making based on RESDAL data (2024).

1.7 Defence white papers and security strategies

In a militarist logic, the Armed Forces are the vanguard of national modernisation and they decide what to do and how much to spend on defence. It is even acceptable that this is not planned, but that it is the military elites who decide according to the circumstances they perceive. However, in a liberal democratic logic, the state is subordinate to its society and acts for its benefit and, preferably, according to the political agenda it generates. Hence, the evolutionary process of public policy involves four phases: the construction of the problem and its integration into the agenda, the study of the problem in order to formulate alternatives to confront it and select which one to use, the implementation of that policy and, finally, the evaluation of what has been done in order to modify the policy, if necessary, until the issue is resolved. Therefore, in terms of national security, it will be necessary to focus on the threats and the agents that generate hostility because they will be, to a large extent, the creators of the needs that will enter the political agenda. Once there, it will be up to the executive and legislative branches of government to study this scenario, determine which values and interests are to be protected, define priorities and allocate available resources, and determine who is responsible for monitoring them. Finally, they will also be responsible of assessing what has been achieved, what challenges remain and, if necessary, determining what changes are needed to achieve success. In short, national security requires strategic planning and evaluation. National security strategies, defence white papers and government directives on military action are some of the essential tools for building a public defence policy in which the missions carried out by the Armed Forces are not the result of improvisation, but a response to a prior analysis that does not guarantee effectiveness, but is essential for it. No policy can be improvised, but even less so defence.

The Organisation of American States placed special emphasis on all the countries of the organisation having defence white papers as the first link in a chain that would lead to the strategic design and planning of this policy (OAS, 2002). The first impulse was intended to serve as a spur and model for the future. However, as Table 8 shows, there are seven countries that have only taken on this challenge on one occasion and two that have only done so a couple of times, and only five countries have a defence white paper that is less than ten years old: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic.

Countries	Defence White Paper	National Defence Strategy ⁽¹⁾	V-Dem, Liberal Democracy Index ⁽²⁾	Fragile State Index 2020 ⁽³⁾	Democracy Index 2020 ⁽⁴⁾	Support for democracy ⁽⁵⁾ (%)	Support for non-democratic governments ⁽⁶⁾ (%)
Argentina	1999, 2010, 2015, 2023	2009, 2014, 2018, 2021	Electoral democracy (0.69)	Stable (44.2)	Flawed democracy (6.62)	75	35
Bolivia	2004		Electoral democracy (0.35)	Warning (69.5)	Hybrid regime (4.20)	47	52
Brazil	1996, 2005, 2012, 2016, 2020, 2024	2008, 2012, 2016, 2020, 2024	Electoral democracy (0.69)	Warning (70.3)	Flawed democracy (6.68)	45	54
Colombia	2003, 2015, 2019		Electoral democracy (0.56)	Warning (75.6)	Flawed democracy (6.55)	48	52
Chile	1997, 2002, 2010, 2017	2020	Liberal Democracy (0.79)	Stable (41.1)	Flawed democracy (7.98)	61	40
Ecuador	2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2018, 2022		Electoral democracy (0.47)	Warning (68.0)	Hybrid regime (5.41)	40	61
El Salvador	1998, 2004		Electoral autocracy (0.11)	Warning (68.7)	Hybrid regime (4.71)	47	62
Guatemala	2003		Electoral democracy (0.31)	Warning (74.9)	Hybrid regime (4.47)	35	67
Honduras	2005		Electoral democracy (0.39)	Warning (78.1)	Hybrid regime (4.98)	36	61
Mexico	2004		Electoral democracy (0.30)	Warning (69.0)	Hybrid regime (5.14)	49	57
Nicaragua	2004		Electoral autocracy (0.03)	Warning (76.7)	Authoritarian (2.26)	48*	58*
Paraguay	1999, 2013		Electoral democracy (0.43)	Warning (61.5)	Flawed democracy (6.00)	43	70
Peru	2005		Electoral democracy (0.58)	Warning (72.0)	Hybrid regime (5.81)	44	52
Dominican R.	2022		Electoral democracy (0.44)	Warning (60.2)	Flawed democracy (6.44)	55	60
Uruguay	1999, 2005, 2014		Liberal Democracy (0.77)	Stable (33.7)	Full democracy (8.66)	70	37

Values indicating a strong democratic culture

Values indicating a weak democratic culture

Table 9. White Papers and Democratic Culture in Latin America 2024. (1) Defence directives (policies) with strategic content have also been considered as national security strategy; **(2)** Varieties of Democracy Institute, University of Gothenburg. Scores from 0 (minimum) and 1 (maximum). *Democracy Report 2024*. **(3)** Fragile State Index (2024), The Fund for Peace. Scores from 0 (very sustainable) to 120 (high alert). **(4)** Democracy Index (2023), The Economist Intelligence Unit. Scores from 0 (authoritarian) to 10 (full democracy); **(5)** Latinobarómetro 2024. Agreement with the statement: "Democracy is preferable to any other form of government"; **(6)** Latinobarómetro 2024. Agreement with the statement: "I would not mind if a non-democratic government came to power if it solves the problems"; **(7)** Latinobarómetro 2024. * As we did not participate in the 2023 survey, data are provided for the 2020 survey. *Source:* author's making based on RESDAL data (2024).

In order to check whether or not delving into strategic design has anything to do with the country's democratic intensity, Table 9 attempts to compare the democratic quality data of various reputable indices (V-Dem, *The Economist*, Fragile States) and the assessment of democracy using Latinobarómetro data, with the existence or not of defence white papers and national defence strategies, or defence directives with a diagnosis of the situation and strategic content. The result of this comparison shows that Ecuador is the exception that proves the rule, as it is the only country that, despite having at least three indicators of democratic weakness, maintains an intense production of defence white papers as a strategic document. In all the other analysed political systems, democratic bonanza corresponds to at least three strategic documents, the last of which is at most ten years old. Thus, Argentina, but above all Chile and Uruguay, are countries where this confluence is perfect. The cases of Brazil and Colombia speak of democracies that show some serious caveats in some of the indicators used, although over time they have integrated strategic planning into defence policy with absolute naturalness.

At the other end, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua score poorly on three or more indices measuring democratic quality and, at the same time, do not handle strategic approaches to defence as a matter of course, but only responded on one occasion to the OAS's call and little else. Bolivia and Mexico are also countries with little intensity in the strategic definition of defence and show compromised values of democratic quality in at least two indices.

2 The risks of militarisation

Two clear ideas emerge from all that has been shown so far: (i) in general, in the region there are still areas in which to modernise the Armed Forces in their necessary progress towards democratic consolidation; (ii) the absence of military threats has not led to a strategic debate that considers the possibility of resizing and an expansive redefinition of defence policy towards the outside world, but rather it has maintained the structures and, through pragmatism, has reconverted the armies not into a military administration, but rather into an administration as a catch-all.

This ties in with two of the main fears of any administration: obsolescence and uselessness. The most serious mistake that

can be made in the face of these fears is to opt for intrusiveness —taking on tasks that clearly correspond to other agencies— or daring —taking on functions for which one is not prepared under the myth of efficiency— and, as a result, becoming inoperative —because, by turning to outside missions, modernisation in the main roles is neglected and, when one tries to take them up again, all equipment and material is out of date—; what Martínez and Bueno (2025) have called the perverse roles of veterinarian, scarecrow and scribe.

The normative analysis of the functions of the Armed Forces that has just been carried out shows that the legal coverage for those missions that can be integrated into the auxiliary role exists. But just by looking at Tables 10, 11 and 12 it can be seen that, faced with the improbable existence of war threats and the panic of falling into uselessness, instead of opting for the logic of the three “r”s, the postulates of the pragmatic currents have been assumed, which has meant intrusiveness, daring and functional neglect. This constant abandonment of the defensive-deterrent role and the focus on public security missions, economic-social development and emergencies and calamities —all of them support missions that can be integrated into the auxiliary role, but which have now become the main ones— has opened the way to militarisation (Hochmüller *et al.*, 2024).

Countries	Concrete actions
Argentina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Repatriation of nationals from Israel after Hamas attack on 7 October 2023 -Socio-health campaign in river areas of Chaco and Paraná for hard-to-reach populations -Support to the impenetrable Chaqueño community -Delivery of firewood in Neuquén to people without gas or means of wood collection -Construction of wells in water-scarce areas -Summer supply campaign at Antarctic bases
Bolivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Support to drought-affected communities through drilling and rehabilitation of wells -Water and food distribution -Sewerage and road reconstruction -Health Sentinel Programme to train military personnel in key health and prevention skills
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Calha Norte programme to provide resources to municipalities —424— of difficult access -Rondon project to promote the integration of deprived communities -Transport of organs and tissues -Reception operation for Venezuelan immigrants -Operation Estiagem to mitigate the drought

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Countries	Concrete actions
Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Medical and humanitarian assistance -Environmental management -Heart of Friendship Plan to improve vulnerable areas near airbases
Chile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Military Labour Corps for construction sites (roads, bridges, housing, etc.) -Distribution of food, water and charcoal kits after flooding or fire -Veterinary care in Quilpué after the fire in Valparaíso -Drinking water distribution after fires
Ecuador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Support for the Galapagos population (food, medicines, etc.) -Support to Petroecuador for the protection of the national hydrocarbon system -Agency support for renewable and non-renewable energies
El Salvador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Dengue fever spraying campaigns -Deployment of collective transport
Guatemala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Vaccination campaigns -Transportation of desks and educational furniture and refurbishment of schools -Rehabilitation of the road network -Automation and de-cluttering -Reforestation -Protection of aquatic areas
Honduras	ND
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Dengue spraying -Health system support -Support for infrastructure development
Nicaragua	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Coffee harvest protection and security plan -Protection of natural resources -Ecological Battalion for action in Bosawás and Indio Maíz Reserve -Literacy -Vaccination -Road construction and repair
Paraguay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Infrastructure development support -Campaign against dengue, yellow fever, chikungunya and Zika fever -Aeromedical evacuations -Ñepohano operations to provide food kits and medical care to the population -Drinking water distribution
Peru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Humanitarian aid due to rainfall -PAIS project to bring government services closer to rural areas -Costa Solidaria campaign to provide medical care to the vulnerable population of Nazca -Peru Se Abriga campaign. Zero cold to protect the vulnerable population of the metropolitan area -Multi-sectoral civic campaign in Huancavelica, one, Manitea and Yunguyo

Countries	Concrete actions
R. Dominicana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Control of the fuel distribution and marketing process -ReVERDEcer, a programme to protect natural resources and promote environmental development -Protecting Our Future project (collection of recyclable waste on beaches, coasts and green areas) -Dengue campaign
Uruguay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Health system support -Drought-related drinking water distribution -Cleaning of watercourses -Polar cold operations to provide shelter and food to vulnerable populations -Dengue spraying -Support to the education system (food kits, provision of supplies, refurbishment and improvement of facilities, etc.)

Table 10. Military development missions in Latin America. ND = Data not available. Source: Martínez and Bueno (2025)

Countries	Concrete actions
Argentina	-(1)
Bolivia	-Management of the fight against smuggling
Brazil	-Border protection: Agate operations (Uiara, Northern Border, Joint Southern, Western)
Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Seizure of war material -Border control -Explosives neutralisation -Combating drug trafficking -Ayacucho Plan for guaranteeing the security of the population and national reconciliation
Chile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Patrolling in communities after the impact of an emergency or natural disaster -Security in South Macrozone due to state of emergency
Ecuador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Confiscation of weapons -Prison perimeter security -Seizure of drugs -Actions against illegal logging
El Salvador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Permanent patrolling in rural areas -Territorial control plan to reduce criminality -Perimeter and interior security in prisons -Control of border crossings -Vulcan Security Task Force in the capital city -Naval Task Force Trident (drug trafficking, immigration, piracy, smuggling) -Patrols in at-risk schools
Guatemala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inter-institutional operations (with National Civil Police, combating tax fraud, etc.) to guarantee the security of the population -Fight against drug trafficking -Control of border areas

Countries	Concrete actions
Honduras	-Security plan Anti-Crime Solution (drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, organised crime) -Military law and order police
Mexico	-Operation Lifesaver: patrolling in areas of high tourist traffic -Protection of strategic facilities -Confiscation of weapons and narcotic drugs -Fumigation of plantations -Apprehension of persons
Nicaragua	-Permanent security plan in the countryside -State Border Protection Plan -Fight against drug trafficking and organised crime
Paraguay	-Fight against drug trafficking (Operation Basalt, Operation Sovereign North) -Prison security plan -Security for foreign dignitaries on official trips -Security support to Banco Nacional de Fomento
Peru	ND
R. Dominicana	-Security and patrolling operations -Specialised port, land border, airport, tourism and Metro security corps
Uruguay	-Border patrolling -Perimeter surveillance of prisons -Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT) -Critical infrastructure protection -K9 Group for search and detection of explosives

Table 11. Internal military missions in Latin America. (1) President Milei signed Decrees 1107 and 1112 on 17 and 18 December 2024, enabling the military to intervene in internal security. ND = No data. Source: Martínez and Bueno (2025)

Countries	Concrete actions
Argentina	-Construction of bridges in flooded areas -Firefighting in national parks, wetlands, Cordoba and Paraná Delta -Flood support -Support on roads due to heavy snowfall -Containment of oil spills to water
Bolivia	-Comprehensive flood assistance in 104 municipalities
Brazil	-Operation Tacuarí as a consequence of flooding -Operation Pipa in the face of drought -Operation São Sebastião for municipalities with heavy rains -Security at the football World Cup and Madonna's concert at Copacabana beach
Colombia	-Water shortages -Forest fire -Gale -Flooding -Land mass movements -Sudden rise -Torrential floods -Bridge excavation

Countries	Concrete actions
Chile	-Frontal flooding system -Forest fire brigades -Attention in cyclones or severe storms -Specialised medical care station for major emergencies -Search and rescue in emergencies or shipwrecks -Debris removal and road clearing
Ecuador	-ZEUS Plan -National ENSO Plan to deal with El Niño -Medical evacuations -Delivery of humanitarian kits
El Salvador	ND
Guatemala	-Flood support -Forest fire support
Honduras	ND
Mexico	-DNIII-E disaster relief plan for the population -Marine Plan
Nicaragua	-Earthquake plan -Forest fire plan -Winter plan against flooding and overflowing of rivers and sliding or collapsing of slopes
Paraguay	-Forest fire mitigation -Flood support -Establishment of environmental protection areas -Ñagareko Plan for food assistance to vulnerable persons
Peru	Army multi-role brigade for search, rescue, evacuation, fire, hazardous material handling and humanitarian assistance. -VRAEM Special Command (Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro River Valley)
Dominican R.	-Lightning Plan for natural disasters -Neptune Plan for telluric movements of earthquakes and tsunamis -Forest fire support
Uruguay	-Flood support -Fire extinguishing -Search and rescue operations

Table 12. Military missions in disasters and calamities in Latin America. ND = Data not available. Source: Martínez and Bueno (2025)

The questions to be asked are: what does this militarisation entail? and why, even when the risks of both perverse roles and militarisation are well known, is it chosen? This raises four possible justifications that do not help the process of democratic consolidation of the Military Administration (Martínez and Bueno, 2024a and 2024b).

Firstly, militarisation could be an indicator of militarism, either because the transition was never completed —as is the case

of Guatemala— or because, although the democratic transition began, there is an involution that places militarism back —as is the case of Brazil under President Jair Bolsonaro or Nicaragua after the return of the autocrat Ortega. In these realities, militarism has never completely disappeared because those in power have been reverentially afraid of the adverse reaction of the military elites and have preferred not to open the “hornet’s nest” of military reforms, which is why they hide behind a reformist immobilism or, at most, cosmetic reforms; opting, as a lesser evil, to assign them all imaginable missions in order to, at least, amortise expenditure.

Militarisation, especially in development and emergencies, can also threaten a process of image-cleansing in order to achieve greater social acceptance. As is the case in Mexico, this constant dedication to social relief missions tends to generate very positive social perceptions towards its executors. Even if a ruler believes that the absence of risks of a defensive nature makes it advisable to abolish armies because their function is no longer useful to society, he could achieve a covert abolition through this process of denaturalising their original function.

The third explanation does not speak of fears and misgivings, but of pure and simple pragmatism. Political decision-makers see no need to dismantle an existing good administration. An administration that, although it will not defend, can provide all kinds of useful services. In their imagination, with these non-defence missions, the Military have to provide cohesion, society appreciates it, and they solve problems for them. Therefore, if everyone wins, where is the problem? In their eyes, this choice for the catch-all administration offers only advantages. But Jenne and Martinez (2022) warn of the dangers of such a dynamic: (i) it undermines legal certainty, (ii) it implies a failure of military reform and modernisation, (iii) it implies serious difficulties in civilian capacity building, and (iv) the abuse of the catch-all administration is consistent with an undemocratic political culture. Even one staunch defender of pragmatism such as Pion-Berlin (2016) proposes limits to this profusion of activities in order to avoid falling into the dynamics of militarism: (i) never in densely populated areas, (ii) never facing social programmes, (iii) never if the mission requires training and material that is foreign to them, and (iv) never if they have to act as police officers.

Fourthly and finally, militarisation in the face of the unsuccessful police fight against criminal organisations aims to increase

the use of force. This would undoubtedly be the case with Salvadoran President Bukele and his calls for an iron fist against gang members. In fact, he has always referred to “being at war” against them. Armies are used in public security because the criminal organisations’ capacity for force exceeds that of the police, and the state needs to be able to respond with greater intensity of force if it is to have any chance of discouraging these cartels.

Conclusion

From the end of the dictatorships to the present day, there has been considerable institutional evolution, which, with greater or lesser intensity, has generalised civilian supremacy in the institutional structure of defence; it has almost eradicated military justice, understood as a privilege for the uniformed, although there are still reforms to be undertaken; it has integrated women, although still in meagre percentages, and has explored strategic planning, so that it has been consolidated as a model in the countries with the greatest democratic development.

Considering the modernising dynamics of the logic of the three “r”s, there has been a resizing —armies have shrunk— and a redefinition, but, instead of opting for the expansion of the external aspect and technological innovation, it was decided to turn the internal sphere into its own role in an expansive manner and to transform the usual auxiliary missions into main roles (public security, national development and catastrophes and calamities). The reconversion, except in the case of Mexico with the creation of the National Guard —although they are still considered Armed Forces—, has been irremediably postponed.

All of this has given rise to a global process of militarisation in the region that can be understood from a pragmatic point of view, although it is not without risks. In any case, it would lead to an irremediable process of distortion of the Armed Forces that could lead them to the perverse functional role of the *notary* in their Prussian functions and to permanently install them in the functional intrusiveness of the role of *veterinarian*. In the worst-case scenarios (Venezuela, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, etc.), they could be showing us a return to militarism, which never comes alone, but is always accompanied by the loss of democracy.

Once the threats each country faces have been analysed and studied, and the model of FAS needed has been determined, depending on these and the role that is to be attributed to them as a foreign policy tool, it would be desirable to undertake the modernising processes necessary to achieve this. At the same time, the reform and modernisation of many police forces and the creation of powerful state agencies for the fight against the harmful effects of climate change and for certain pressing areas of national development should be tackled. This could undoubtedly start with the conversion of army corps that are superfluous to the required FAS model, but which would be excellent public servants in these areas of development, policing and emergency management. This would allow the country to face its security and defence challenges with guarantees without neglecting its social needs; it would put the Armed Forces in their rightful place, as they would abandon the position of a catch-all administration; and it would undoubtedly improve the quality of democracy.

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Chapter Seven

Latin America in a changing international system: geostrategic implications for the US and the EU¹

Gustavo Palomares

Abstract

This paper analyses the strategic role of Latin America (LA) in the context of a changing international system marked by rivalry between global powers and the weakening of the liberal order. It describes a Latin American regionalism in redefinition, influenced by domestic political changes, the reconfiguration of international alliances and the growing prominence of actors such as China. The Trump Administration adopts a more aggressive hemispheric security policy that includes the militarisation of the fight against drug trafficking and a redefinition of LA's role in US national security. On the other hand, the EU is trying to regain influence in the region through agreements such as the one signed with Mercosur, although it has lost ground to China. Despite these efforts, LA continues to have a marginal presence in European strategic frameworks such as strategic autonomy and the strategic compass. It concludes by highlighting the need for a profound redefinition of Latin America's role

¹ This article is part of the IEEE Strategy Paper entitled *Latin America in International Regime Change: Hemispheric Security and Defence* which is *In Press*. © Gustavo Palomares Lerma - IEEE 2025. All rights reserved.

in Western geo-strategy in a context of increasing competition and global disorder.

Keywords

Regionalism, Geostrategy, Strategic autonomy, China, Trump.

Introduction: regionalism in the making

The significant transformations in Latin America, particularly over the past year —especially in the past few months—, both with changes of government and new internal political balances and with new agreements and modifications within the different integration spaces, will be defined over the coming months and will affect the structure, balance and dynamics of a regionalism that is currently in the process of being defined.

The current transformation and changes in countries such as Venezuela and Argentina, the roadmap of governments such as those of Colombia and Brazil, and the electoral consultations throughout this year in Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile and Honduras; all of these issues may entail substantial modifications in the continental political, institutional and ideological balance, as well as a change in continental priorities, strategies and dynamics. All of these hemispheric transformations in a region that is a determining factor in the transformations of the current international order.

The Trump Administration's new doctrine with Latin America, "wall" diplomacy linked to national security objectives, with great political and strategic repercussions, as well as other new actors with great economic and investment weight, such as China, also entail significant continental changes and new balances that will gradually take shape in the region when shaping the balance between new and old objectives to respond to the new global challenges and risks within a collective commitment.

The year 2025 will define some of these new processes and balances that will affect the geometry and structure of the continent's internal and international political, economic and commercial dynamics, but also the weight of other new actors entering the region with force, such as China and other Asian partners, as well as the response of other historical actors, such as the United States and the European Union, to these new realities.

In all likelihood, in the light of these transformative processes, these past months are witnessing a closing of the internal cycle and the definition of a new type of "regionalism" that is difficult to describe at this point in time, which entails a new definition of the historical internal continental balance and also of the existing balance between the different active and determining international actors in Latin America; all of this within the current academic

internationalist discussion on the lack of order and the variable structure in the international system.

It is interesting to note how it is likely that for the past few months —from 2022 and 2023, with the arrival of Petro and Lula—, we are witnessing another transformative step in the current phase that different considerations have defined as “post-liberal” regionalism, in some cases, or “post-hegemonic” in others². Overcoming this historical period, which was characterised by the emergence of initiatives such as ALBA and the South American Union of Nations (Unasur), based on different assumptions and visions of regional integration from the “open” neoliberal period³.

The dynamics of change signalled in this new “regionalism” in the making, especially the new strategic configuration of the United States in the continent.

The conclusion of this free trade agreement between Mercosur and the EU in December last year, after almost twenty years, will bring about a change in global relations by incorporating this bloc of countries —the most important for the EU’s continental economic and trade interests— into the set of European preferences already enjoyed by Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. For the EU, the conclusion of negotiations was a fundamental condition for carrying out the “Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2023 for regional cooperation between the European Union and Latin America under the Development Cooperation Instrument” and one of the central points of its external action in the 2020-2030 Agenda⁴.

² For an approach to the different perspectives of continental integration, as well as “regionalism” and its different interpretations and phases in Latin America, see: Palomares Lerma, G. (2009). *Las relaciones internacionales en el siglo XXI*. Madrid, TECNOS (chapters ix and x); Palomares Lerma, G. (2015). Concepts and theories of integration. In: Arenal, C. del and Sanahuja, J. A. (coords.). *Theories of International Relations*. Madrid, TECNOS. pp. 329-357.

³ In this regard, see: Cienfuegos, M. and Sanahuja, J. A. (coords.) (2010). *A region under construction. UNASUR and integration in South America*. Barcelona, CIDOB; Altmann Borbón, J. (ed.) (2011). *Latin America and the Caribbean: ALBA: A new form of regional integration?* Buenos Aires, Teseo/FLACSO.

⁴ For the “Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2023 for regional cooperation between the European Union and Latin America under the EU Development Cooperation Instrument”, see: http://eeas.europa.eu/lac/docs/141105-visibility-event_es.pdf. On the EU agenda: Reflection Group on the 2020-2030 horizon of the European Council and External Action, see: Palomares, G. and Arteaga, F. (2022). La UE y su acción exterior: agenda 2020-2030. *Política Exterior*. 136, pp. 90-103.

1 Latin America in the current global disorder

The concern throughout Latin America about the arrival of Trump (Palomares, 2025) goes right to the heart of the current global debate on the end of the old international order and the reasonable doubts, at this crucial moment of open conflicts immersed in an inevitable configuration of European collective security — derived from the peace agreement for Ukraine under negotiation between the US and Russia—, about the United States' capacity to adapt under the new administration. Will the prevailing liberal order be able to survive —asks Joseph Nye (2024 and 2017)— in the face of this irremissible trend towards *chaos* in which Trump's United States cannot, and has no ambition to, bring order across the board and the only order it proposes is a unilaterally imposed order outside of historical geo-strategic balances, as is the case in Europe and Latin America? It seems clear that a confrontation between populism and globalisation is taking place in all global spaces (Palomares, 2025: 7; Russell Mead, 2017)⁵.

In the open debate, there is agreement on the lack of regulatory elements within a recomposing international system, described by some authors as in "frank deterioration and in a chaotic situation", which must once again organise itself into "regional spheres of influence"⁶ in which Latin America occupies a prominent place.

Far from wanting to fit into a Western-led international order in progressive global retreat, Russian and Chinese leaders considered it necessary to initiate a process of progressive replacement of the current international order and the liberal pact that maintains it. From this point of view, Western democracies that are considered inevitable, but in progressive decline (according to them), are an existential threat to their regimes and their ambitions for the future⁷. Faced with this new reality, Western

⁵ "Populism vs. Globalization. The 2024 presidential election was marked by populist surge in the United States, Europe, AL, and elsewhere marks the beginning of the end of the contemporary era globalization and that turbulence may follow in its wake, as happened after the end of an earlier period of globalization a century ago [...]"

⁶ Henry Kissinger's (2014) analysis of the new global dynamics and interdependence of a chaotic international system that needs to be reorganized within a kind of "global regionalism" in which the United States —even the new Trump Administration— is obliged to find compromises is interesting.

⁷ This Sino-Russian alliance's vision of the necessary replacement of the Western order (before the conflict in Ukraine) is available in: Kaczmarek, M. (2016). *Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order*. Routledge; for the present moment, see: Dripke, A., Nguyen, H. and Qaiser, J. (2024) *When China and Russia*

countries did not realise the depth of this disagreement, which has resulted in the search for Chinese leadership on the global agenda⁸, including in regions where the weight of the United States is historically undisputed, as is the case in Latin America. In the past ten years, trade in goods between China and LAC has almost doubled, from \$260 billion in 2013 to \$495 billion in 2022. China is the second largest trading partner for Latin America —above the EU— and the largest for South America, in particular for Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay. Between 2023 and 2024, China added free trade agreements with Ecuador and Nicaragua to the three already existing in the region (Chile, Peru and Costa Rica) (Latin American and Caribbean Economic System, 2024).

Faced with this situation of the recomposition of the global order, there are many reflections that miss the organising elements of the Westphalian order and the “Congress of Vienna” in order to propose the need for actors willing to defend the global *status quo* within a mainly regional vision. In all these cases, the question that must be asked at the present time is about the “piece” that Latin America will occupy in the disordered “puzzle” that is the current international system.

Some positions, including that of Dominique Moisi (2014 and 2024), point out that it is not necessary to seek inspiration in a new Vienna conference like that of 1815 to ensure the need for new regulatory balances through concrete agreements between different interlocutors, depending on the region or conflict in question. It may be with China, as Kissinger (2014) pointed out a few years ago, even with Latin America, where they are now competitors, or in other scenarios and regions, for example, in triangulation with China, India or the EU, according to other approaches, and with Russia, in scenarios where negoti-

join forces: The Challenge for the Free World. Diplomatic Council. For more on the temporary alliance of convenience vis-à-vis the West, see: Kirchberger, S., Sinjen, S. and Wörmer, N. (2024). *Russia-China Relations: Emerging Alliance or Eternal Rivals?*, Springer. On the search for an alternative international order led by China and what the US and the West should learn, see: Economy, E. (2024). China's Alternative Order And What America Should Learn From It. *Foreign Affairs*. May-Jun; Medeiros, E. S. (2024). The Delusion of Peak China America Can't Wish Away Its Toughest Challenge *Foreign Affairs*. May-Jun. Some reflections on China's stakes in Ukraine, including on its future dominance, can be found in: Fix, L. and Kimmage, M. (2023). How China Could Save Putin's War in Ukraine. The Logic-and Consequences-of Chinese Military Support for Russia. *Foreign Affairs*. April.

⁸ The new “Cold War”, different from the previous one, the determined desire for Chinese leadership and its effect on the global agenda (Nye, 2023).

ations have already taken place and are inevitable, such as in Syria. In this new era, it seems inescapable that the ally in one region may be the enemy or the actor to be contained in another. In such a way that China, an economic and commercial rival in Latin America, is at the same time a political and strategic ally of the first order in the US encirclement of the Maduro regime in Venezuela; in such a way that China and Russia can be both allies and enemies at the same time, depending on the situation. What seems certain in the current situation is that this new international architecture will require a great deal of restraint and a good political and diplomatic *dribbling* that does not withstand simplistic or ready-made solutions, and for which it is not yet known whether Trump, his Secretary Marc Rubio and the group of recycled generals are prepared.

Following another line of thought referring to the application of mathematical models to international relations, which is so much in vogue, some approaches interpret Trump's arrival as another chaotic element of the system in which Latin America, due to its proximity and shared spaces of integration, may suffer —as Mexico is already doing with the wall *policy*— very complicated situations. To the point of applying the theory of “creative chaos” of quantum physics to the current disorder of the international system (Palomares Lerma, 2016 and 2017), according to which an “attractor”, as a set in which all nearby trajectories converge (call it the United States), can make the unpredictable dynamic present in a space —which could be Latin America— tend towards order even if they are disturbed. In this kind of situations, the only creative possibility capable of overcoming the permanent instability of the system comes from chaos and from that international “attractor” that could be the United States and its specific balances through a new strategy of bilateral frameworks that could partly supplant the isolationist temptation in this frank withdrawal of Trump from the incipient multilateralism of the Obama and Biden Administrations with Latin America.

The threat of US-withdrawal from the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement with Mexico and Canada coincides with significant advances in the continental multilateral framework, especially in the Pacific axis, and with internal changes that are being consolidated in countries such as Argentina and Brazil. Regional confrontations due to Venezuela's authoritarian drift; the upcoming elections in Chile, Honduras, Mexico and Colombia, as well as doubts regarding Cuba's new role

in its continental relations following the change in Washington's stance, may entail substantial changes in the continental political, institutional and ideological balance in which the new US Administration plays a decisive role in accelerating some processes or paralysing others.

All these significant transformations in Latin America, both with changes of government and new internal political balances, as well as new agreements and modifications within the different integration spaces, will be defined over the coming months and will affect the structure, balance and dynamics of regionalism, which is currently being defined. Trump Administration's new continental policy is currently being defined —following the slow and partly improvised pace of the new administration—, but it will condition these new processes and balances that will affect the geometry and structure of the internal and international political, economic and commercial dynamics of the continent. It will also affect the weight of other new actors entering the region with force, such as China and other Asian partners, as well as the response of other historical actors such as the European Union, to these new realities.

It can be said that Trump's arrival has produced a clash between two processes in Latin America: what could be called the *wall policy* syndrome —because of Trump's promise to finish it on the border with Mexico— and, on the other hand and in parallel, extending it via diplomatic relations to "certifications" in the fight against drugs and regional immigration control, renouncing US leadership in continental, economic, commercial, political and military integration that other Democratic and Republican administrations sought with doctrines such as the Alliance for Progress, the Initiative of the Americas (1990), the Caribbean Basin Initiative and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (1994-2005), not to mention the so-called "Kerry doctrine" (2013) during the Obama Administration (Best *et al.*, 2024). All of this entails a new definition of the historical internal continental balance and also of the existing balance between the different determining actors in Latin America, especially the new role of the United States. This would fall within the current internationalist academic discussion regarding the lack of order and variable structure in the international system, and whether Trump's United States will be sufficiently willing and able to manage this new global responsibility.

2 Trump's hemispheric security and defence policy: LA as a target

Certain analyses pointed to the need to prepare for the very foreseeable scenario of Trump's return, marked in the first term by his separation (Palomares Lerma and García Cantalapiedra, 2019; McKeever and Davies, 2019), but which, in accordance with his electoral programme, could play a very active role with significant actions—in congruence with his presidential electoral programme—in which Latin America occupies a prominent place (Flechas, 2024; Gerbaud and Harrison, 2024).

Trump's hemispheric security policy as the centre of his new projection in the continent, from reflections such as those of Brian Winter (2024) or Will Freeman (2024), may represent the rupture of a historical "*Benign Neglect*" of US policy towards Latin America, according to which there has been a historical neglect by the United States with a lack of strategy on fundamental issues such as drug trafficking, migratory pressures or the strengthening of armed groups associated with drug trafficking.

Concerns about border issues, China's expansion and the advance of authoritarianism in several Latin American countries are at the heart of the concerns of Trump and his team, in which the weight of his Secretary of State plays a prominent role, as a Cuban American with a good knowledge of the region and a solid background in international hemispheric issues. His first visit to Central America as one of the first gestures in his region denotes what appears to be a change of course to curb China's weight in the region and an anti-American sentiment in the continent, which goes beyond countries historically at odds with Washington—such as Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba and Bolivia—and extends to ideologically distant governments such as the current ones in Colombia, Brazil, Uruguay and Chile.

Everything seems to indicate that the new Republican Administration seems to have learned from some of the mistakes made by Trump in his first term that determined an unbridgeable continental distance, including: the delay in appointing ambassadors in Latin America; his unilateral exit from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and the freezing of all multilateral frameworks of relations, especially NAFTA and FTAA, and the lack of progress on key issues such as migration and asylum agreements with neighbours, not to mention the "wall policy" with Mexico or the return to the historic policy of sanctions against Cuba.

Moreover, his Administration failed to solve the Venezuelan crisis, but rather facilitated the entrenchment of Nicolás Maduro and his authoritarian drift. Under the Biden Administration, some of these policies were reversed or modified: some sanctions were lifted, border issues were renegotiated and, finally, punitive measures against Venezuela were reinstated after the failure of the Barbados Agreement.

In the short period of time since President Donald J. Trump's inauguration, the administration has launched a multi-pronged campaign to secure the US-Mexico border, placing cartels, transnational criminal organisations and illegal immigration as one of its core targets.

The Executive Order *Designating Cartels And Other Organizations As Foreign Terrorist Organizations And Specially Designated Global Terrorists*⁹ marks a shift in national security priorities by designating cartels as terrorist threats and opening up the possibility of using specific troops to carry out this work. The legal procedure for implementing this executive order is an extension of some of the patriot laws¹⁰ adopted after the attacks of 11 September 2001, raising the risk level of cartels and organisations so designated to the same level as ISIS or Al Qaeda. This makes it easier to deploy troops to block or eliminate illegal cross-border crossings and even to carry out operations that may involve incursions outside sovereign territory in pursuit of these objectives.

Attorney General Pam Bondi's subsequent Justice Department memorandum implemented this change, directing prosecutors to bring terrorism charges under title 18 of the US Criminal Code, section 2339B, alongside traditional drug trafficking and racketeering offences. By streamlining prosecutions (suspending

⁹ See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/designating-cartels-and-other-organizations-as-foreign-terrorist-organizations-and-specially-designated-global-terrorists/>

¹⁰ The legal basis for the executive order is as follows: *Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)*, 8 USC 1101 *et seq.* and the *International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)*, 50 USC 1701 *et seq.*, "[...] it is hereby ordered: Section 1. Purpose". This order creates a process by which certain international cartels (the Cartels) and other organisations will be designated as foreign terrorist organisations, pursuant to section 219 of the *Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA)* (8 USC 1189), or as specially designated global terrorists, pursuant to the *United States Environmental and Economic Protection Act (IEEPA)* (50 USC 1702) and Executive Order 13224 of 23 September 2001 (*Blocking Property and Prohibiting Transactions with Persons Who Commit, Threaten to Commit, or Support Terrorism*), as amended.

Homeland Security Division approvals and expediting terrorism-related warrants), the Justice Department has empowered law enforcement to act swiftly against cartel leaders, with penalties that now include life imprisonment or the death penalty¹¹.

This legal reform complements a broader strategic shift that significantly affects the current administration's forthcoming national security strategy, which seeks a unified approach that concentrates all national security resources in this direction and places Latin America, and thus hemispheric security, at the centre of US security and defence policy.

In the same vein, the Department of Defence has responded to this policy shift with unprecedented measures in recent years by declaring a national emergency on the southern border, which allowed for the deployment of an additional 1500 active-duty troops, bringing the total to 4000, in addition to the 2500 reservists already in place. In early March, the Pentagon even deployed a 4,400-strong Stryker brigade combat team and a 650-strong general support aviation battalion, bringing Title 10 forces to approximately 9,000. Equipped with Stryker vehicles and Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters, these units enhance Customs and Border Protection's detection, logistics and air support.

The current US administration's strategy in this line is to put pressure on the Mexican Government and other nations in the region, such as Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, to deal more directly with the problem of transnational crime. According to the US Southern Command, the lawlessness and violence originating in this area has taken on a global dimension due to the diverse operations of criminal groups. The firepower of these organisations has allowed them to develop armed units to deploy asymmetric warfare tactics, using everything from drones to narco-submarines. This perspective is not exclusive to the United States; allied countries such as the United Kingdom and even those in the EU —as will be

¹¹ The *Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act* of 1996 gave the Secretary of State the authority to designate foreign terrorist organisations whose terrorist activity threatens the security of US citizens or the national defence, foreign relations or economic interests of the United States. See: Pub. L. 104-132, § 302, 110 Stat. 1214, 1248. and also section 219 of the *Immigration and Nationality Act* (8 USC § 1189). The anti-terrorism law also created 18 USC § 2339B, which makes it unlawful within the United States, or for any person subject to the jurisdiction of the United States anywhere, to knowingly provide material support to a foreign terrorist organisation that has been designated by the Secretary of State. See: Pub. L. 104-132, § 303, 110 Stat. 1214, 1250.

seen below— agree with this analysis, as they have pointed out in recent official visits to Latin America and the Caribbean.

For the United States, today's international cartels pose a threat to its national security that goes beyond the traditional organised crime problem. This is due to the convergence between these criminal groups and a variety of external actors ranging from foreign terrorist organisations to hostile governments. When cartels are labelled as terrorist organisations, the message is blunt: the Trump Administration is looking for all the tools it needs to regain influence and act decisively.

The policy towards Latin America in Trump's second term in office is very reminiscent of the Bush Administration's strategy since 1989 and the early 2000s —under President Clinton— of fighting drug trafficking and illegal civilian and military organisations associated with major military and economic programmes headed by real "czars" of the US administration appointed for this purpose. During this period, in the face of the daily collapse of the idea of communist expansion, a process of change began to take place in the conceptualisation of US foreign, security and defence policy in the continent, replacing the concept of "containing communist expansion" with the concept of seeking "more ethical and politically more democratic social models" (Palomares Lerma, 2000) —if we follow the order of institutional discourse—, which was nothing more than the fight against drug trafficking, armed groups and, above all, the mechanism for putting pressure on the governments most critical of Washington with the formula of "certification" (Vélez Quero, 2003)¹².

However, this policy of associating the hemisphere with the first objectives of Bush Administration's new national security strategy in the fight against drugs and irregular groups was carried out in parallel to active US diplomacy in the continent, which

¹² On the mechanisms of unilateral "certification" of Latin American governments in their fight against drugs and criminal groups by the United States, to which all aid to these countries is conditional, there is a large bibliography, and several doctoral studies have been written, among which the following are noteworthy: Kaldor, M. (2001). *Las nuevas guerras*. Barcelona, Tusquets Editores; Castillo, F. (2000). *Los jinetes de la cocaína*, Bogotá, Editorial Documentos Periodísticos; Freeman, L. (2008). La política antidrogas en la relación México-Estados Unidos. *Foreign Affairs en Español*. For more specific bibliography for Colombia, see: Tokatlian, J. G. (1997). Conditionality and certification. The case of Colombia. *Nueva Sociedad*. 148, pp. 98-107; Youngers, C. A. and Rosin, E. (2004). *Drugs and democracy in Latin America. The impact of US policy*. Editorial Biblos.

was described by many media as the most important cooperation between the United States and Latin America since the Kennedy era: projects such as the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), the implementation of the Brady Plan on the thorny issue of the progressive cancellation of the foreign debt of the most indebted countries, the successive Summits of the Americas and support for the internal transformations of the Organisation of American States (OAS). In the strictly North American sphere, the negotiations between the United States, Canada and Mexico for the establishment of a Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the three countries, which took place in the last few months of the Republican Administration and was ratified in the first days of the Clinton Administration (Palomares Lerma, 2000), should also be highlighted.

3 The EU and its strategic partnership with LA in the face of the China push

The objective of collective security in Europe and Latin America is clear, as is the weight of both regions in global security. Numerous forms and manifestations —old and new— constitute the most direct threat to the security of European and Latin American citizens and to international peace and prosperity. Global and regional strategic competition, widespread instability and recurrent crises define a broader security environment where intra-regional cooperation is essential in the face of the declared ambitions of actors such as China and Russia, which add tension and coercive policies in different scenarios. Not to mention new asymmetric threats, hybrid warfare, as well as the malicious use of new emerging and disruptive technologies.

One of the clearest consequences of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is the severe economic changes and losses in several regions of the world. The European Union faced, first and foremost, an unprecedented rise in energy prices. This was due to the Russian Federation taking the place of Europe's main supplier of gas, oil and coal and they instrumentalised it accordingly. European leaders see the reduction of their dependence on Russian energy imports as a means to diversify supplies, improve energy efficiency and accelerate the use of renewable sources. In light of this, strengthening cooperation with Latin America looks very promising, as the region is extremely rich in copper, lithium, zinc, nickel, iron, manganese, gold, silver and

rare earths —resources that are essential for the EU-led energy transition.

In July 2023, after an eight-year pause, the III EU-CELAC Summit was held in Brussels under the Spanish Presidency. The main topics of the summit were: European investments in Latin America and the Caribbean, the development of trade and economic cooperation, Russia's war against Ukraine, the problems of climate change, the digital transition, the political crisis in Venezuela, the Falkland Islands issue, the situation in Haiti and the end of the US trade and economic embargo against Cuba. During the meeting, the EU announced the launch of the Global Gateway investment programme for Latin America and the Caribbean and pledged to invest €45 billion in a series of projects in the region until 2027, which will be directed in four main directions: a just green transition, inclusive digital transformation, human development and resilience to health and vaccines¹³.

This effort to relaunch relations with the region will culminate in the signing of the agreement with Mercosur in December 2024, after twenty-five years of negotiations. This association agreement promotes the creation of a free trade area between two of the world's most important trading blocs, as well as including explicit commitments to environmental protection, democracy, human rights and cooperation in areas such as education and technological development. The treaty aims to create an integrated market of 31 countries and more than 700 million people, or around 20% of the world economy. The agreement would increase trade flows between the EU and Mercosur countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) by 37%. It is the larg-

¹³ The main results of the EU-CELAC summit in Brussels were the following: adoption of the roadmap between the EU and CELAC for 2023-2025, where it was noted that the next IV EU-CELAC Summit should take place in Latin America; the conclusion of an agreement on clean and renewable energy with Argentina (Memorandum of Energy Cooperation) and Uruguay (Memorandum of Understanding, which lays the basis for future investments in renewable energy and hydrogen energy in particular); the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding with Ecuador, El Salvador and Honduras, which lays the basis for bilateral political dialogue through "regular consultations"; the signing with Chile of a Memorandum of Understanding to deepen cooperation in the field of raw material supply chains needed for clean energy and the digital transition for both partners; the release of EUR 10 million to address the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Haiti; the EIB lent EUR 300 million to Banco Santander Brazil for solar energy investments, and also climate action projects in Chile for more than EUR 300 million. The summit declaration is available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/65925/st12000-es23.pdf>

est free trade agreement in the EU and is expected to increase the EU's GDP by 0.1% and Mercosur's by 3%¹⁴.

However, the entry into force of the agreement is contingent on ratification, which can be a relatively slow process. In the EU, the trade agreement must be ratified by the Council and the European Parliament, while the political dialogue and cooperation aspects require the approval of all 27 states. In addition, a minimum of four countries representing at least 35% of the population could block the agreement, but so far the opposition of France, Austria and Poland is not enough. In Mercosur, on the other hand, each country must ratify the agreement and it can enter into force bilaterally even if the rest of the member states have not ratified it (Sanahuja and Rodríguez, 2024)¹⁵.

Despite major efforts in the last three years to invigorate the strategic partnership with the Latin American region, the EU has lost significant economic, commercial and strategic weight in the region. The EU has ceased to be the region's second partner and has given way to China as the true new strategic partner in LA when it comes to diversifying its dependence on the United States. In the region's foreign trade matrix, there has been a significant increase in the presence of China, both as a destination for exports and as a source of imports. This change is widespread, but is much more drastic in South America. In this sub-region, in 2000, China was the fourteenth largest export destination and the sixth largest import source. For some years now, it has been in first place on both indicators. Drastic changes can also be seen in all other cases since China is now the fourth destination for exports from Mexico and Central America, and in the case of the Caribbean, the jump was from fifty-fourth to

¹⁴ For the contents and main components of the Mercosur Agreement, see: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/es/ip_24_6244/IP_24_6244_ES.pdf. For the signature of the agreement, see the "Declaration by President Von der Leyen on the occasion of the Mercosur Leaders' Meeting", Montevideo, 6 December 2024, at the following link: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/es/state-ment_24_6261/STATE_MENT_24_6261_EN.pdf. Also in European Commission, Directorate-General for Trade: "EU-Mercosur Civil Society Dialogue", Brussels, 10 December 2024: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-meetings-civilsociety/eu-mercrosur-civil-society-dialogue-2024-12-10_en.

¹⁵ On the final entry into force: Ambassador Paolo Berizzi, head of the EU Delegation in Uruguay, see: "I am moderately optimistic' that the EU-Mercosur agreement will overcome the obstacles and enter into force", interview by Guillermo Draper, *Semanario Búsqueda*, Montevideo, Year LII, n.º 2306, 12-18 December 2024, pp. 47-46.

eleventh place. In terms of imports, China is now not only the first origin for South America, but also the second for Mexico and Central America. Given the high weighting of Brazil and the rest of South America in the regional figures, this is what leads to China now being the region's second largest trading partner and South America's first.

Due to China's position in Latin America over the last ten years, trade in goods between China and LAC has almost doubled, from USD 260 billion in 2013 to USD 495 billion in 2022. China is the second largest trading partner for Latin America —above the EU— and the largest for South America, in particular for Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay. Between 2023 and 2024, China added free trade agreements with Ecuador and Nicaragua to the three existing ones in the region (Chile, Peru and Costa Rica)¹⁶.

But there are not only economic and trade advantages; the relationship with China has allowed Latin America to diversify its strategic relations and boost its integration into the global economy. The opening of new markets and the diversification of exports have helped to reduce dependence on traditional markets and strengthen the region's competitiveness in the international arena, with a view to this partnership gradually helping to overcome the low participation of LAC countries in international value chains in terms of technological content and innovation (Latin American and Caribbean Economic System, 2023). Another significant advantage is the attraction of Chinese investment to the region. China has increased its presence in LAC through direct investments in key sectors such as energy, infrastructure, agriculture, technology and telecommunications. These investments have generated employment, technology and knowledge transfer, as well as infrastructure development, which has contributed to the sustainable development of the region, and whose short and medium-term impact is linked to the fact that China has signed treaties with twenty-one countries in the region for the Belt and Road Initiative, which will have a positive impact on increasing bi-continental trade, as it facilitates logistical and commercial connectivity from Latin America to Asian markets, thus expanding distribution channels for its products globally.

¹⁶ China's growing weight in Latin America 2023-2024 can be found in *The Relationship between Latin America and the Caribbean and China: Notes for a Development Agenda*, by the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA), 2024.

4 Latin America in the EU's security and defence strategy (LA in the Open Strategic Autonomy and in the strategic compass)

The objective of collective security in Europe and Latin America is clear, as is the weight of both regions in global security. Numerous forms and manifestations —old and new— constitute the most direct threat to the security of European and Latin American citizens and to international peace and prosperity. Global and regional strategic competition, widespread instability and recurrent crises define a broader security environment in which intra-regional cooperation is essential in the face of the declared ambitions of actors such as China and Russia, which add tension and coercive policies in different scenarios. Not to mention new asymmetric threats, hybrid warfare, as well as the malicious use of new emerging and disruptive technologies.

Putin's military occupation of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 triggered the most serious crisis in Europe since the Second World War and, at the same time, had significant consequences in Latin America, as it disrupted the post-Cold War international order in such a way that there is a broad consensus among specialists that we are living through the pivotal moment of an attempt to transform the pre-existing order, a more plausible expression of an "international regime" change. The Russian aggression has highlighted the need for a transformation of the methods of collective security and deterrence in the European and Latin American scenario, and has made clear the need for a new reordering of transatlantic security and of internal cooperation itself, especially between European and American allies within an inevitable new architecture of the Western alliance¹⁷ and, therefore, of the historical cooperation in the strategic partnership between the EU and Latin America.

A year before its presidency, Spain had already opened the way to issues related to transatlantic collaboration with Latin America. Thus, during the meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council on 18 July 2022, it was agreed to strengthen transatlantic relations in order to make a qualitative leap in relations between the EU and the countries of the region. Later, in Buenos Aires in

¹⁷ In this sense, points 6, 7, 8 and 9 of the Final Declaration of the NATO Summit in Washington on 10 July 2024 clarify the essential changes.

October 2022, the EU-CELAC Foreign Ministers' meeting renewed the political dialogue between the two regions and marked the beginning of preparations for the EU-CELAC summit in 2023. The achievement of this meeting was the adoption of the so-called road map, which outlined the bi-regional agenda, where it was intended to make a leap in the bi-regional partnership in the areas of security and defence in the face of shared global risks. At the XXVIII Ibero-American Conference in March 2023, which would initiate a regular and intensified political dialogue between the region and European institutions aimed at jointly resolving all global challenges.

It is also worth highlighting the place that the Latin American vector has occupied in the programmatic documents of the countries that have presided over the EU Council since the beginning of 2022, referring to this geostrategic partnership in relation to global security. The joint programme of the France-Czech Republic-Sweden troika of Presidents (from 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2023) stated that it would support dialogue at the highest level with Latin America, but without going into details that would involve new instruments of geostrategic partnership. In the programme put forward by France, which chaired the EU Council in the first half of 2022, Latin America is not included in any of its programmes or documents; on the contrary, Africa in its different areas —mainly North and Central— and the Indo-Pacific region, among other regions of the global South, are present. In the Czech Republic's programme in the second half of 2022, the traditional objectives of developing reciprocal trade, protecting human rights and strengthening democracy and the rule of law were reintroduced, but without any reference to cooperation in areas of interregional hemispheric cooperation on security and defence issues. It was only during Sweden's presidency of the European Council in the first half of 2023 that it raised the need to strengthen transatlantic cooperation with Latin America as well. In all of these cases, no instruments or concrete objectives in this area were outlined for the EU-CELAC meeting.

Given this situation of transformation of the methods of collective security and deterrence in the European and Latin American scenario, it is inevitable to consolidate the areas shared by both partners in order to strengthen the foundations of the inter-regional strategic agreement and place it as one of the active motors within the Open Strategic Autonomy established by the European

Union. If this “strategic autonomy” can be defined as “the process for the EU to equip itself with the necessary means to achieve previously identified foreign policy objectives, cooperating with its partners or acting alone if necessary”, Latin America must occupy a prominent place within the sectoral advances in the EU’s external action, whether in trade, energy, health or security and defence, which will increase the power not only of the EU, but also of its Latin American partner (Morillas, 2023; Freudenstein, 2022; Tocci, 2021)¹⁸.

As in the EU’s Open Strategic Self-Government, there is no reference to the potential of the strategic partnership with Latin America. In the case of the strategic compass, which is an action plan to establish a *common strategic vision and concrete objectives* to strengthen the EU’s security and defence policy between now and 2030, the reference to Latin America is limited to a brief paragraph referring to shared historical and cultural ties, as well as multilateralism based on common principles and values. In terms of risks, the socio-economic imbalances that the pandemic has brought to light and which, in some cases, threaten political stability, are highlighted. In the same vein, it mentions the concern generated by Central American fragility and the continuing crisis in Venezuela, which contributes to regional division and migratory pressure, fueling the challenges posed by organised crime and the dangers for efforts to achieve peace in Colombia¹⁹.

¹⁸ On the projection of strategic autonomy to partner regions of the Union, see: Arteaga, F. *et al.* (2021). European strategic autonomy and Spain’s interests [online]. *Real Instituto Elcano*. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/autonomia-estrategica-europea-e-intereses-de-espana/>; Barbé, E. and Morillas, P. (2019). The EU global strategy: the dynamics of a more politicized and politically integrated foreign policy. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*. 32(6), pp. 753-770; Grevi, G. (2020). Fostering Europe’s Strategic Autonomy. A question of purpose and action [online]. *European Policy Centre*. [Accessed: 2025]. Available from: https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2020/Final_Paper_Purpose_and_Action_Layout_JF_II_1_.pdf

¹⁹ Specifically, the following is noted:

“Finally, with Latin America we share deep historical and cultural ties, as well as a commitment to multilateralism based on common fundamental principles and values. Nevertheless, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fore socio-economic imbalances in a number of Latin American countries and, in some cases, threatened political stability. A fragile Central America and a persistent crisis in Venezuela contribute to regional divisions and strong migratory pressures, fuelling further drug related organised crime challenges and endangering peace efforts in Colombia’ (EEAS, 2021: 6).

5 The new strategic concept (2022) of the Atlantic Alliance and Latin America

Following the publication in 2022 of NATO's strategic concept²⁰ and the NATO Vilnius Summit in 2023²¹, it seems imperative to set out the main short- and long-term challenges for the Transatlantic Alliance and the EU and prioritise them in a five- to ten-year timeframe. This requires providing a cohesive strategic framework capable of establishing basic guiding principles and a vision for the future of European security, and also offering concrete recommendations that the United States, the European Union (EU) and NATO should implement in the short and medium term in order to achieve an overall long-term joint strategic vision, where Latin America takes a central place, in line with its respective positions with the United States and the European Union (Buchanan, 2022)²².

In this new strategic framework, NATO's interaction with its southern neighbours is based on the Allies' traditional conviction that their security is closely linked to that of North Africa, the Middle East, the Sahel and other regions such as Latin America. Thirty years after the San José Dialogue with Central America and the creation of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, as well as two decades after the launch of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, the EU and the Alliance's cooperation and proximity to these regions has the potential to grow fur-

²⁰ See: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf

²¹ For the full text of the Vilnius Summit Declaration, see: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm

²² On this new prospective strategic and deterrent vision based on the new strategic concept, see: Alberque, W. (2022). The new NATO Strategic Concept and the end of arms control [online]. *International Institute for Strategic Studies*. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2022/06/the-new-nato-strategic-concept-and-the-end-of-arms-control>; The Alphen Group. (2022). *The TAG NATO Shadow Strategic Concept 2022: Preserving Peace, Protecting People. A Report for the Secretary General on the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept* [online]. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: <https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/TAG%20-%20NATO%20Strategic%20Concept%20-%20NONPRINT.pdf>; Becker, J., Duda, M. and Lute, D. (2022). From context to concept: "History and strategic environment for NATO's 2022 strategic concept" [online]. *Defence Studies*. 22(3), pp. 489-497. [Accessed: 2025]. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14702436.2022.2082959>

ther through new approaches, new avenues and outreach to other regions²³.

It is clear that this new strategic concept approved at the Madrid Summit in 2022 has meant a significant gesture of openness by the Alliance and the European pillar within it in the search for security in other strategic scenarios of the so-called global South, in particular the regions of the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel, some of which are very directly related to transcendental points of the EU Agenda and, therefore, of the European pillar in that organisation. In contrast, there is no reference to cooperation in the area of security and defence with Latin America, even though some countries —above all Spain and Portugal— have cooperation relations with the region at their core, and the EU as a whole has a strategic partnership agreement with Latin America. In conclusion: the Alliance's stated objectives in this direction with regard to Latin America and the Global South as a whole are clearly insufficient²⁴.

6 Latin America and the Global South in the transatlantic relationship and in Western strategy

The distance, if not outright rejection, of countries in the Global South and parts of Latin America from the Alliance and the so-called "Western cause" in the current conflict in Ukraine seems clear, including some of the world's largest democracies: Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and South Africa. In many of these countries, the costs of the war, especially their effect on food supplies, are keenly felt, while its outbreak is attributed to Putin's search for a new just balance in the face of continued pressure from NATO and its Central European allies.

Behind this distance from the Ukraine cause and Western positions is the perception of double standards in the West. Decision-

²³ In the same vein, there is the *Final Report. Independent Expert Group in Support of NATO's Comprehensive In-depth Reflection Process on the Southern Neighbourhood* (May, 2024), available at: <https://media.realinstitutoelcano.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/informe-final-grupo-de-expertos-independientes-otan-vecindad-meridional.pdf>.

²⁴ In the same vein, one can find the *Final Report. Independent Expert Group in Support of NATO's Comprehensive In-depth Reflection Process on the Southern Neighbourhood* (May, 2024), available at: <https://media.realinstitutoelcano.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/informe-final-grupo-de-expertos-independientes-otan-vecindad-meridional.pdf>.

makers in the Global South and in many Latin American countries have a double standard when it comes to criticism of Russia's seemingly discreet human rights violations, as opposed to the fierce rejection—in this situation—of Western commercial, reconstruction and arms trafficking interests. Attitudes towards NATO countries and the West in general are characterised to varying degrees by disappointment, scepticism or outright hostility.

These attitudes are due, among other things, to the legacy of former colonial powers in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Kuzio, 2023); the failed wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and the aftermath of the:

“Global War on Terrorism; the inadequate response to climate change, especially in meeting climate finance commitments under the Paris Agreement; the weak response to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of vaccine delivery; the lack of urgency and generosity in debt relief, as well as ‘rich country protectionism’”.

In addition to these reasons, the Global South is under-represented in international organisations, especially in the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The global south's dissatisfaction with the West creates fertile ground for the Chinese and Russian ambitions that increasingly occupy more and more space in these regions and, especially, the former in Latin America. Both China and Russia are explicitly designing the media space to show that the West and its values are in decline: they highlight Western failure and hypocrisy, especially in terms of human rights violations, and link them to local grievances. In this sense, China and Russia are playing a longer-term and more complex game in the Global South and throughout Latin America than the West is used to playing ²⁵.

²⁵ On China and Russia's use of the Global South, see: Baev, P. K. *et al.* (2023). *Russia End State: China and the Global South*. George C. Marshall. European Center for Security Studies. Strategic Competition Seminar Series; Ishikawa, Y. (2024). Russia woos Global South in push for new world order. Gambit to curb Western influence hinges on outcome of Ukraine war. *Nikkei Asia*. Also interesting is the European Parliament's report on Russia's presence in Africa *Russia in Africa: An atlas* (2024), available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757654/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)757654_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757654/EPRS_BRI(2024)757654_EN.pdf). In the same vein, another notable work is Sabanadze, N. (2024). *Russia is using the Soviet playbook in the Global South to challenge the West - and it is working* [online]. Chatham House. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/05/russia-using-soviet-playbook-global-south-challenge-west-and-it-working>

Conclusions

The current transformation and changes in countries such as Venezuela and Argentina, the roadmap of governments such as those of Colombia and Brazil, and the electoral consultations throughout this year in Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile and Honduras may entail substantial modifications in the continental political, institutional and ideological balance, as well as a change in continental priorities, strategies and dynamics. All of these hemispheric transformations in a region that is a determining factor in the transformations of the current international order.

The Trump Administration's new doctrine with Latin America, "wall" diplomacy linked to national security objectives —with great political and strategic repercussions—, as well as other new actors with great economic and investment weight, such as China, also entail significant continental changes and new balances that will gradually take shape in the region when it comes to outlining the balance between new and old objectives in order to respond to new global challenges and risks within a collective commitment.

The threat of US withdrawal from the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement with Mexico and Canada coincides with significant advances in the continental multilateral framework, especially in the Pacific axis, and with internal changes that are being consolidated in countries such as Argentina and Brazil. Regional confrontations due to Venezuela's authoritarian drift, the upcoming electoral consultations in Chile, Honduras, Mexico and Colombia, as well as doubts regarding Cuba's new role in its continental relations after the change in Washington's position, may entail substantial changes in the continental political, institutional and ideological balance, where the new US administration plays a decisive role in accelerating some processes or paralysing others. It can be said that Trump's arrival has produced a clash between two processes in Latin America: what could be called the *wall policy* syndrome —due to Trump's promise to shield hemispheric relations— and, on the other hand, in parallel, extending it via diplomatic relations to "certifications" in the fight against drugs and regional immigration control. A renewed US role in its relations and dealings with Latin America —reminiscent of previous historical periods— that directly associates the continent with its national security policy and its comprehensive hemispheric relations.

The EU's efforts over the last three years to strengthen its strategic partnership with Latin America, whose greatest exponent is the signing —after twenty-five years— of the agreement with Mercosur, cannot hide the fact that the EU has lost significant economic, commercial and strategic weight in the region. The EU is no longer the region's second largest economic and trade partner, and has given way to China as LA's true new strategic ally when it comes to diversifying its dependence on the United States.

The conflict in Ukraine is leading to a transformation of the methods of collective security and deterrence in the European and Latin American scenario. It is inevitable to consolidate the areas shared by both partners in order to strengthen the foundations of the inter-regional strategic agreement and place it as one of the active motors within the Open Strategic Autonomy established by the European Union. Latin America should occupy a prominent place, which it does not currently occupy —neither in this strategic autonomy nor within the sectoral advances in the EU's external action—, be it in trade, energy, health or security and defence matters, which will increase the power not only of the EU, but also of its Latin American partner. In line with this irrelevance, there is also no reference to the potential of the strategic alliance with Latin America. In the case of the strategic compass, which is an action plan to establish a common strategic vision and concrete objectives to strengthen the EU's security and defence policy between now and 2030, the reference to Latin America is limited to a brief paragraph referring to shared historical and cultural ties, as well as multilateralism based on common principles and values.

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