

The Americas: Found, and Then Lost Again

by Jorge I. Domínguez

In February 1900, the renowned Uruguayan essayist José Enrique Rodó published his book *Ariel*, a meditation on Latin America and its relations with the United States. Rodó dedicated his book to “the youth of America,” warning them about the United States as a civilizational threat. The people of the United States, Rodó informed his readers, “would aspire to rewrite the Book of Genesis in order to figure as the protagonists on the first page.” Rodó’s principal concern about the United States went well beyond its military power—newly evident after its victory over Spain in 1898—and its dynamic economy to encompass the manifold dimensions of U.S. culture. For Rodó, the threat of U.S. hegemony over Latin America was precisely that these countries would seek to emulate the culture of the United States—and would enjoy it, endorse it, and make it their own, at high risk to their collective soul. Fifty years later, the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, one of the continent’s most influential literary figures at mid-century, lamented the evident imposition of U.S. power over the region. “Jehovah divided his universe” among the major U.S. business

JORGE I. DOMÍNGUEZ is Clarence Dillon professor of international affairs and director of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. This essay is part of a project on “Conflict or Convergence: Global Perspectives on War, Peace, and International Order” sponsored by the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies.

firms, while the United Fruit Company “reserved for itself the heartland and coasts of my country, the delectable waist of America.”

Rodó, the cultural conservative, and Neruda, the communist, agreed that Latin America shared interests threatened by the United States, but they differed on the nature of that threat. Would it be, in the words also written at mid-twentieth century by Nobel Prize-winning novelist Miguel Angel Asturias in *The Green Pope*, a threat posed by “emporialists” or by “imperialists”? Asturias positioned himself between Rodó and Neruda, conscious of the significance of ideas as a source of power. He has his U.S. protagonist say early on: “Dominate, yes, but not by force, not by force; it’s better to convince them.”

Latin America and the Caribbean enter the new millennium aware that Rodó accurately foresaw the civilizational power of the United States. Indeed, Rodó and Asturias forecast the precise mechanism of U.S. influence: The peoples of the Americas, reluctantly but increasingly, are embracing the spread of democratic and market values most closely associated with the United States. Hostility toward the United States in the 1990s may be at its lowest since the countries of the Americas became independent.

These developments represent an extraordinary transformation in the international relations of the hemisphere. As José Miguel Insulza, foreign minister of Chile, put it in March 1998 on the eve of the so-called Second Summit of the Americas:

Few times in our common history have we coincided so much on the themes that concern us all. All of the countries of the Americas seek to consolidate democracy and defend human rights; we coincide in the need to strengthen our participation in world markets through open trade and global investments; we seek to improve social equity and promote equality of opportunities as a necessary condition for the development and stability of our continent; we seek to cooperate to improve living standards and the quality of the environment in which we live; we are concerned about the destabilizing proliferation of drug trafficking that poisons so many both North and South.

That the speaker of these words belongs to the party of the late President Salvador Allende to whose overthrow in 1973 U.S. policies contributed is yet more evidence of their significance.

This wide-ranging transformation helps explain two more specific epoch-making changes in Latin America’s international relations. First, Latin American countries have not only embraced markets and closer

economic relations with the United States and within Latin America, but they have done so to the relative detriment of economic relations with Europe and Japan. Second, Latin American countries for the most part not only no longer fear U.S. military intervention, but they have demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to intervene collectively in neighboring countries to defend democracy rather than just to support favored politicians or to promote revolution or counterrevolution.

At the same time, however, some important international issues remain unaffected both by Latin America’s transformation and by the end of the Cold War in Europe. Specifically, nettlesome security disputes between some Latin American countries remain unresolved; more worrisome, the illegal trafficking of weapons, armies, goods, drugs, and people across borders has created a host of new “informal” challenges to security throughout the hemisphere. The United States, in particular, has reacted unilaterally and aggressively to this latter development.

This combination of old and new factors has in effect created and fostered a multilayered international system in Latin America. This multilayered quality (and the variation among the regions within Latin America) is at odds with the perception of a Latin American unity as represented by Rodó, Neruda, and most of the region’s politicians today. It implies that a “policy toward Latin America” is likely to be ineffective and counterproductive. Latin America is not a monolithic, unitary entity. The continent houses multiple actors—some regional, some “informal” albeit powerful, and all of them relevant.

MORE TRADE, FEWER PARTNERS

During the 1970s, any analysis of international economic relations between the United States and other countries in the Americas would almost inevitably focus on their suspicious, occasionally adversarial, and at times hostile nature.

As the century closes, however, perceptions in this realm are markedly different. Not only have the nations of the Americas mostly embraced the tenets of market economics, but their citizens have generally shed their fears about the spread of U.S. popular culture. MTV, *Titanic*, and Tommy Hilfiger sell everywhere; nations such as Mexico or Cuba that once sought to resist this onslaught have found other things to worry about. Instead, Latin American and Caribbean countries endeavor to tap into the fast-globalizing U.S. market, where salsa out-

sells ketchup in supermarkets; high-quality Chilean and Argentine wines compete with those of France, Germany, and Italy; and one of the largest networks of gasoline stations (CITGO) is owned by Venezuela's state oil company (PDVSA). In ways that Rodó did not suspect, and of which he might still disapprove, Latin America seeks to redefine, contribute to, and become part of this cosmopolitan consumer culture.

The big story of Latin American trade and investment in the 1990s is growth. One major success in the 1990s has been the intensification of commercial relations within particular subregions in the Western Hemisphere. Trade has increased dramatically between the United States and

Latin America's trade diversification toward Europe and Japan is the "dog that did not bark" from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Mexico, yes, but it has also grown within the MERCOSUR region (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay), between Chile and its neighbors, between Venezuela and Colombia, and within Central America. In fact, MERCOSUR is the fastest-growing trade bloc in the world, with trade growth of 400 percent from 1990 to 1997. And trade has expanded with most

countries, not just with those within the Western Hemisphere. Latin American-European trade relations (especially in the cases of Brazil and southernmost South America) have boomed.

But the international economic environment of Latin American and Caribbean countries in the 1990s is less polycentric than in the recent past. In the mid-1970s, for example, 36 percent of Latin American exports went to the United States; in the mid-1990s, that proportion was 46 percent. Only during World War II and the Korean War was the U.S. share of Latin American exports higher. In contrast, in the 1990s alone, the share of Latin American exports accounted for by the European Union (EU) dropped from 24 to 17 percent, while Japan's share fell from 6 to 4 percent. This outcome is contrary to the expectations of many observers who had thought in the 1970s about the prospects for Latin American trade diversification. For the most part, Latin America's trade diversification toward Europe and Japan is the "dog that did not bark" from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Preferential trade agreements within the Americas have focused the growth of Latin American trade disproportionately within the hemi-

sphere, thereby explaining the decline of relative trade shares with Europe and Japan. Moreover, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, its special arrangements with the former African, Asian, and Caribbean colonies of several of its members, and the slowdown in European economies and in Japan during much of the 1990s made it difficult to expand and deepen economic relations with Latin American countries to the extent that Latin America did with the United States.

In short, the trade story in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s features trade creation but also trade diversion—moving away from the rest of the world and concentrating disproportionately within the Americas. As the EU and MERCOSUR, in particular, negotiate over their prospective economic relations, this pattern poses a double challenge: Will the EU liberalize its trade beyond its members and their former African, Asian, and Caribbean colonies—or will it just talk about it? And will MERCOSUR risk its rapid economic integration in one more quixotic search for government-led trade diversification, hoping that a born-again EU will at last be serious about lowering its trade walls?

FROM SUBVERSION TO INTERVENTION

The subversive vocation of the continent's governments has been transformed for the first time. The underhanded machinations of Central American governments throughout their histories, the Rafael Trujillo government in the Dominican Republic from the 1930s to the 1950s, the governments of Cuba both before and after the 1959 revolution, and Argentina under Juan Perón in the 1940s and early 1950s are a thing of the past. Instead, in the 1990s, governments have invested international institutions and ad hoc coalitions of states with the normative and practical power to intervene in the domestic affairs of some countries of the hemisphere in the name of the shared political values of a democratic inter-American community.

For the Anglophone Caribbean, this international norm is but a confirmation of its longer-standing practices; in 1983, the majority of members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States willingly joined the U.S. military intervention in Grenada. Consistent with those habits, in 1998, the region's governments intervened in Guyana's domestic politics to ensure that the opposition would accept its defeat in presidential elections that had been free and fair. For Central and South America, however, this normative and institutional change constitutes a major shift.

The Latin American governments had opposed international interventions because so often they had been only unilateral U.S. actions. In contrast, in 1994, Latin American and Caribbean countries overwhelmingly supported the UN-authorized but U.S.-led intervention in Haiti. Fortunately, most international institutional interventions to defend domestic democratic institutions have not required military force; collective diplomatic efforts proved sufficient and successful in the 1990s, for example, to prevent military coups in Guatemala and Paraguay. The Organization of American States (OAS) played an important role in both instances, and Paraguay's partners in MERCOSUR were key in stopping the coup attempt there.

The end of "do-it-yourself" intervention and the birth of "do-it-ourselves" intervention promise a more stable but nonetheless highly intrusive international order. It can be sustained only if the United States remains willing to defer to the views of other governments in the Americas and to rely on international institutions and procedures to do more effectively the work that its heavy-handed past unilateralism had not. A crucial test will be whether the United States can act toward Cuba with judicious self-restraint.

TWO CONTINENTS, MANY LAYERS

These stunning changes coexist with other less happy features of the international relations of the Americas. To combine the new and old, think of the international system in the Western Hemisphere as a lush wedding cake with various layers. At a minimum, three layers can be distinguished: global, regional, and informal.

Although the United States is pertinent to all three layers, it is the main protagonist at the global layer only. At this first and most universal layer, the world looks unipolar in that only the United States can project significant military force far beyond its borders. Over the past three decades, the United States has demonstrated this capacity repeatedly in the American Mediterranean by invading the Dominican Republic (1965), Grenada (1983), Panama (1989), and Haiti (1994) and by sponsoring proxy wars against Cuba in the 1960s and against Nicaragua in the 1980s. Today, in contrast to the years of the Cold War, no Latin American or Caribbean country other than Cuba fears a U.S. invasion. The trends at this layer have confirmed both the significance of U.S. power and the rest of the hemisphere's lessened

fear of U.S. invasion. The end of the Cold War, the overwhelming turn toward constitutional government in Latin America, and the confirmation of democratic practices in the Anglophone Caribbean have eliminated reasons that contributed to past U.S. military interventions. This loss of fear of U.S. invasion, in turn, permitted the development of collective international action in the hemisphere. Most Latin American and Caribbean countries now expect threats just from the regional and informal layers.

The second layer of the international security system is regional; it features disputes and rivalries among neighboring states that have often (on average almost once a year) led to militarized interstate confrontations and, at times, to wider and larger clashes. Ecuador and

The birth of "do-it-ourselves" intervention promises a more stable but nonetheless highly intrusive international order.

Peru went to war in 1941, 1981, and 1995; they have engaged in many other militarized disputes. Similar significant concerns trouble relations between Venezuela and Colombia, Guatemala and Belize, Bolivia and Chile, and, now to a lesser degree, Honduras and El Salvador. (The last two

have agreed to abide by a judgment of the International Court of Justice at The Hague to settle the dispute that led them to war in 1969, but they have had difficulty implementing the court's ruling.) Extant territorial disputes affect an even wider number of countries in the hemisphere.

The third layer of the international security system is informal. It calls attention to the role of private armies that roam unauthorized across interstate boundaries, most often, though not exclusively, associated with drug traffickers. The greatest threats to international and domestic order exist at this level in the Andean countries, the Anglophone Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico. Only Cuba and the Southern Cone countries suffer relatively less from this threat. Meanwhile, several Anglophone Caribbean countries and Colombia are at risk of being overwhelmed by criminal forces operating at this layer.

This informal international system moves weapons from the United States toward its southern neighbors, and it transfers drugs and people from Latin America and the Caribbean to the United States. The respective governments claim that they are incapable of policing their

borders to address the concerns of their neighbors. The United States claims that weapons are commodities just like any other; far be it from the U.S. federal government to prevent the transfers of weapons to unscrupulous persons in other countries. U.S. neighbors claim that they cannot stop the northward flow of smuggled goods and people. Alas, only Fidel Castro's Cuba seems willing and able to behave as the United States wishes its allies would: Since the 1994-95 agreements with the United States, the Cuban government has kept most Cubans home and the drug traffickers at bay.

FROM PAX AMERICANA TO PAN AMERICA

This informal international system poses new challenges for the Americas that can best be addressed by cooperation through international institutions. Instead, in recent years, the United States has sought to address the international movement of drugs and people on its own: It imposes unilateral sanctions (drug "decertification," for example), the Latin American and Caribbean countries react in anger, and both sides fail to reach the goals they have set for themselves.

The only moderately promising endeavor to combat transnational crime through multilateral cooperation is the Caribbean's Regional Security System (RSS), which is nonetheless underfunded, understaffed, and underequipped. In addition to strengthening the RSS, the governments of the Americas could better cope with threats at the informal international layer by designing institutions to set collective standards and means of enforcement with regard to policies toward drug trafficking and weapons controls, preferably under OAS auspices.

Compared with their virtual absence at the informal layer, international political institutions have become much more significant since the late 1980s at the first two layers of the international system in the Americas. In the late 1980s, the United Nations especially, and the OAS to some degree, helped contain the power of U.S. intervention in Nicaragua by setting the conditions for fair, competitive elections and by obtaining the advance commitment of the Sandinista and the U.S. governments to abide by the results. In this case, international institutions were not merely an elegantly clothed instrument of U.S. power to coerce the Sandinistas to accept free elections; U.S. power itself was constrained. In the early 1990s, the UN helped bring to an end the international and civil war long

swirling within and around El Salvador; the OAS played a supportive role as well. Between the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989 and of Haiti in 1994, moreover, the United States chose to rely much more on the UN Security Council to authorize deployment of U.S. forces. Nonetheless, in the case of the U.S. intervention in Haiti, international institutions served principally as instruments of U.S. policy, not as independent constraints.

International institutions and procedures have played a much more important role at the second layer. For example, the four guarantors (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the United States) of the Rio Protocol of 1942 brought about a ceasefire and separation of forces between Peru and Ecuador in 1995. The International Court, as noted, has made an important contribution toward the eventual settlement of the territorial dispute between Honduras and El Salvador. Participation by British and Argentine peacekeeping forces in the UN mission in Cyprus fostered direct relations between the armed forces of these former belligerents from the 1982 war in the South Atlantic. The International Atomic Energy Agency played a constructive role in the steps that Brazil and Argentina took in the 1990s to end their respective nuclear-weapons programs—an accomplishment made all the more impressive in the aftermath of nuclear-weapons tests in 1998 by India and Pakistan.

THE INVISIBLE HEMISPHERE

As the millennium ended, the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean were building democratic institutions at home and contributing to more effective international institutions abroad. They were cooperating with the United States while containing its excesses more effectively. They were forging wise rules to remain free and at peace, finding that they valued the procedures of liberal democracy, the efficiency of markets, and the exuberance of U.S.-originated popular culture, and thus were sharing fundamental values with the United States as Rodó had reluctantly forecast.

Do Latin America and the Caribbean face the hell of success as the new millennium begins? In many respects, the international community no longer has reason to care much about the region. Central Americans are no longer massacring each other in civil and international wars; Europeans in the Balkans are much more likely to commit

war atrocities. Transborder international subversion has faded. Bereft of Soviet support, a graybeard Fidel Castro has donned business suits, given up cigars, and welcomed foreign investors and scantily clad tourists. Southern South America's torture pandemic of the 1970s has been relegated to the history books. Violations of human rights are markedly fewer. No military coup against a civilian president elected in free and fair competitive elections has succeeded anywhere in Latin America since 1976—the lifetime of the majority of Latin America's youthful population. The region's great depression of the 1980s has been overcome, and the growth rates of Argentina, Chile, and Mexico in the late 1990s have exceeded

those of most East Asian tigers-turned-pussycats. Latin America has become boring.

The reasons for the region's international marginalization can be found not just within Latin America. In the late 1990s, Japan and much of East Asia had become mired in a severe economic downturn; their economic relations with Latin America and the Caribbean weakened significantly. At the same time, the EU was increasingly self-absorbed, seeking enlargement to include new members from Central and Eastern Europe and at the same time deepening the EU's economic policies through much tighter monetary integration; meanwhile, the EU's walls against imports from Latin America had not been lowered appreciably. For its part, the United States had "shrunk" Latin America to mean only Mexico and Cuba. Congress defeated the "fast-track" authorization that would have expanded free trade throughout the Americas. The federal government and many state governments enacted legislation aimed against people of Latin American origin within the United States—including legal immigrants—in a style reminiscent of households calling up specialists to get rid of vermin.

At the moment of Latin America's civilizational transformation, most of the rest of the world just yawned. Latin America and the Caribbean found that they shared values with East Asia, North America, and Western Europe, but the latter regions had lost track of the first two. The future for the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean thus requires their unnoticed and unaided insertion in

Do Latin America and the Caribbean face the hell of success as the new millennium begins?

international politics and markets to advance their own goals. Their likely partners are business firms, not governments. Their best bet is to focus on expanding their international economic relations, insisting on rules to make and keep markets open to all. They stand happier than in their recent histories, but they also stand alone.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For a discussion of inter-American economic relations by authors from Latin America and the Caribbean, see Ana Julia Jatar and Sidney Weintraub, eds., *Integrating the Hemisphere: Perspectives from Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington: Inter-American Dialogue, 1997). See also Gary Hufbauer and Jeffrey Schott's *Western Hemisphere Economic Integration* (Washington: Institute for International Economics, 1994). For a more upbeat assessment of Latin American economic relations with Europe, read Susan Kaufman Purcell and Françoise Simon, eds., *Europe and Latin America in the World Economy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

The Americas in 1997: Making Cooperation Work (Washington: Inter-American Dialogue, 1997) and *The Inter-American Agenda and Multilateral Governance: The Organization of American States* (Washington: Inter-American Dialogue, 1997) consider the practice and promise of international cooperation and institutions. See also Carl Kaysen, Robert Pastor, and Laura Reed's *Collective Responses to Regional Problems: The Case of Latin America and the Caribbean* (Cambridge: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1994); Tom Farer, ed., *Beyond Sovereignty: Collectively Defending Democracy in the Americas* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Richard Feinberg's *Summitry in the Americas* (Washington: Institute for International Economics, 1997).

For analyses of aspects of the "informal" international system, see *Rethinking International Drug Control: New Directions for U.S. Policy* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997); Christopher Mitchell's *Western Hemisphere Immigration and United States Foreign Policy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); and Michael Desch, Jorge Domínguez, and Andrés Serbin's *From Pirates to Drug Lords: The Post-Cold War Caribbean Security Environment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

For overviews of the international relations of Latin America and the Caribbean, read Domínguez, ed., *International Security and Democracy: Latin America and the Caribbean in the Post-Cold War Era* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998); Alberto van Klaveren's *América Latina en el mundo* (Santiago: Editorial Los Andes, 1997); Andrés Franco's *Estados Unidos y los países andinos, 1993-1997: poder y desintegración* (Bogotá: Centro Editorial Javeriano, 1998); and Donald Schulz's *The Role of the Armed Forces in the Americas: Civil-Military Relations for the 21st Century* (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1998).

For links to relevant Web sites, as well as a comprehensive index of related articles, access www.foreignpolicy.com.