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Americas

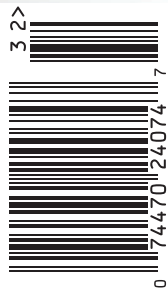
QUARTERLY

WHAT LULA MEANS FOR LATIN AMERICA

by **Oliver Stuenkel**

PLUS

AN INTERVIEW WITH
FOREIGN MINISTER MAURO VIEIRA



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A World of Possibilities

Lula's charisma and global profile could benefit all of the Americas, but domestic troubles may derail his plans.




LOVE HIM OR NOT, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's return is a watershed moment not just for Brazil, but Latin America as a whole.

The 77-year-old is “the region’s only diplomatic heavy hitter and the most globally visible Latin American leader of his generation,” writes Oliver Stuenkel in this issue’s cover story. With that in mind, Stuenkel assesses what Lula might mean for a variety of regional and global priorities: Management of the Amazon, navigating the U.S.-China rivalry, opportunities for more trade and investment within Latin America itself, and more.

The possibilities are tantalizing. With Latin America’s economies stagnant since the commodities boom ended a decade ago, and many democracies struggling with internal divisions, the region has lost much of the diplomatic clout attained in the glory days of the 2000s, when Lula was last in office. Having a more prominent seat at the global table could help raise Latin America’s profile among investors and move the ball forward on climate, food security and green energy. Lula’s early visits to Washington, Beijing, and regional capitals have made his ambitions clear.

But as Stuenkel notes, 2023 is not 2003. Memories of Brazil’s last run at regional primacy are mixed; everyone in Latin America remembers the Odebrecht scandals. Even some fans doubt how much bandwidth Lula will have given deep domestic problems at home, including polarization and a slow economy. Rather than going for glory (and a potential Nobel Prize) by trying to mediate a peace deal in Ukraine, Lula might get more results by helping broker a return to democracy in Venezuela or Nicaragua.

Lula’s legendary charm, and underestimated knowledge of policy, are welcome assets for Brazil and the region. If deployed the right way, and perhaps a bit closer to home, the face of Latin America’s golden decade could help usher in a new era of relevance and growth. 

Lula and Latin America

Expectations for the Brazilian president's third term extend far beyond the country's borders. Other Latin American governments are watching to see what Brazil's foreign policies mean for climate change, trade and more.

Our special report on Lula's impact starts on page 18.

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Oliver Stuenkel

Stuenkel is a contributing columnist for *AQ* and teaches international relations at the Getulio Vargas Foundation in São Paulo. He is the author of *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order* (2015) and *Post-Western World: How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order* (2016).



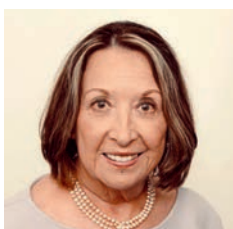
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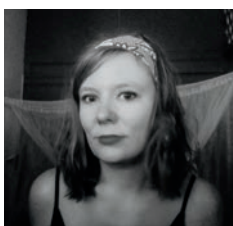
John Otis

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Anita Pouchard Serra

Pouchard Serra is a French-Argentine photojournalist based in Buenos Aires. Her work has appeared in Bloomberg, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Le Monde*, *TIME*, *Revista Anfibia* and elsewhere.

Tell us what you think. Please send letters to Brian@as-coa.org



The leading Uruguayan daily newspaper, *El País*, features AQ's special report on the country's significance as Latin America's imperfect success story.



Paula Garda

@paulagarda

OECD economist from 🇺🇸 living in 🇫🇷 and many ties in 🇮🇹, working on Latin American countries. Views are my own. Rt != endorsement.

Interesting read the special report on 🇺🇸 @AmerQuarterly "It's far from perfect. But Latin America's strongest democracy offers many lessons, including the value of a strong social safety net..."



americasquarterly.org

What Uruguay Can Teach Us



Oscar N. Ventura 🌻

@ONVentura

Publico opiniones sobre la realidad uruguaya y (a veces) sobre ciencia. No discuto. Quien quiera puede discrepar. Quien insulta es bloqueado.

Un artículo (al igual que los que acompañan el número) muy equilibrado y bien a la "uruguaya".



Brian Winter 🐦 @BrazilBrian · Jan 31

The new issue of @AmerQuarterly explores how #Uruguay became arguably Latin America's greatest success story. No, it's not perfect — but it looks pretty good right now.

I visited in November & came away with 4 main reasons why. A 🇺🇸

[Show this thread](#)



Geoff Ramsey

@GRamsey_LatAm

Latin American politics, human rights, and security analyst. Senior Fellow on #Venezuela and #Colombia at @ACLatAm

Glad to see @AmerQuarterly focus on #Uruguay. When I lived there one of the things that impressed me was how accessible its democracy is.

There is literally a three-digit hotline (142, if I recall correctly) you can dial on any phone to connect directly with the parliament.



Brian Winter

@BrazilBrian · Jan 31

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I visited in November & came away with 4 main reasons why. A

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Mateo Castaño Sierra

@matecastano

Aprendiz de mucho, maestro de nada. Me reservo el derecho a cambiar de opinión. Colombiano feliz

Que excelente historia la del éxito de Uruguay. Una historia de moderación, predictibilidad y crecimiento sostenido pero paulatino.

Pareciera casi que entre + aburrido es la política y los políticos de una sociedad, mejor suelen vivir esas sociedades. Por una Latam más uruguaya.



Brian Winter

@BrazilBrian · Jan 31

The new issue of @AmerQuarterly explores how #Uruguay became arguably Latin America's greatest success story. No, it's not perfect — but it looks pretty good right now.

I visited in November & came away with 4 main reasons why. A

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Dan Restrepo

@dan_restrepo @MarkFeierstein and @JuanCru56225365 w an important read on #Venezuela -- A Bipartisan U.S. Approach On Venezuela Is Possible—and Necessary

Fadrique Iglesias OLY

@fadriquei Buen fotorreportaje de @juanpdazaphoto @AmerQuarterly @ASCOA sobre la efervescencia cultural de Bogotá y sus distritos creativos en El Bronx, Chapinero, La Macarena y San Felipe. [La primera foto contiene un mural del pintor boliviano Mamani Mamani]

Julieta Nassau

@julinassau · Dice @valevasquez13 sobre Nicaragua: "Esto muestra que el régimen es más débil de lo que parece. Aun así, no significa que Ortega y Murillo harán elecciones libres y justas, pero puede obligar indirectamente al régimen a pausar sus tácticas represivas"

Amb Antonio Garza

@aogarza @AmerQuarterly - How the internet and the government conspired to drown out public discourse at just the moment Mexican democracy truly needs it.

Maria de los Angeles Fernández Ramil

@Mangeles_HM · La deriva iliberal que vive #Bolivia lleva legítimamente a preguntarse si el país altiplánico no terminará siendo como #Nicaragua.

Moisés Naím

@MoisesNaim "Latin America, Alone in a Distracted World" a very interesting overview of the region's challenges by the lucid and well-informed @MauricioCard

Carl Moses

@CarlMoses60 Can a Pipeline Fix #Argentina's Economy—and Sway the Election? President Fernández and Finance Minister Massa are hoping #VacaMuerta will help the country export its way out of stagnation—starting before this year's presidential election.

Orlando J. Pérez

@Perezloj #Bukele becoming a "role model" for some in Latin America. The one thing that might be hard to mimic is Bukele's popularity which gives him significant policy freedom. Oppositions are also stronger elsewhere. But troubling trend!

El Salvador's 40,000-inmate Center for the Confinement of Terrorism, considered to be the largest prison in the Americas, opened in February, as part of President Nayib Bukele's controversial crackdown on crime. Bukele declared a state of emergency in March 2022, and by February 2023 the police had arrested over 60,000 people. While several regional leaders have praised Bukele's policy, many others have raised the alarm on the violation of human rights and the erosion of the country's democracy. PHOTO BY HANDOUT/PRESIDENCIA EL SALVADOR VIA GETTY





AQ**THE BIG
PICTURE**

Young people gather to play at an open-air chess club in El Alto, Bolivia's second-largest city. Bookstore owner Don Juan Copa started the street program after getting alarmed by the amount of time local youth were spending on their phones and the internet. Copa introduces them to chess and even builds the boards himself.

PHOTO BY AIZAR RALDES/AFP VIA GETTY







Túnel Guillermo Gaviria Echeverri

Colombia's six-mile Guillermo Gaviria Echeverri Tunnel, also known as the Toyo Tunnel, will become Latin America's longest tunnel, and one of the world's 20 largest. The tunnel will facilitate access to mountainous communities in Antioquia department, as part of a 25-mile road that includes seven other tunnels.

PHOTO BY EDINSON IVAN ARROYO MORA/BLOOMBERG

AQ

THE BIG
PICTURE





THE BIG
PICTURE

Farmer Javier Sánchez checks his corn plants in Argentina's Santa Fe province on March 12. A heatwave and the worst drought in 60 years have affected over half the country's landmass. Argentina is the world's third-largest corn exporter and is a key global supplier of soy, wheat and beef.

PHOTO BY SEBASTIAN LOPEZ BRACH/GETTY







AS HEARD ON THE AMERICAS QUARTERLY PODCAST

Experts and policymakers join AQ's Editor-in-Chief Brian Winter to discuss the issues currently shaping Latin American politics, economics and culture.



"I think the best way to understand organized crime in Latin America is to recognize that it was built off the back of the cocaine business. Latin America is producing more cocaine than ever before, and this has a knock-on effect not just through the Andes, but throughout Latin America."

—Jeremy McDermott, co-director and co-founder of InSight Crime, a think tank and media organization focused on organized crime and citizen security in the Americas



"The biggest challenge for the Lula administration in the Amazon is sitting down with all the stakeholders who are already in that region. If we are going to address these problems [deforestation and crime in the Amazon], the government has to broker these conversations."

—Ilona Szabó, co-founder of Instituto Igarapé



"If I were to lay out what the Biden doctrine is for the Americas, if there is such a thing, it is that the region's democratic self-determination and development are fundamentally in the national security interest of the United States. In practice, what that has meant is that if a leader is elected and governs democratically, we will find a way to work with them."

—Juan S. Gonzalez, senior director for the Western Hemisphere at the National Security Council

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Gerardo Armanet

Co-founder of the Tallwood firm

Chilean architects Juan José Ugarte and Gerardo Armanet, co-founders of the Tallwood firm, designed a 12-story wood building that will be the first of its kind in Chile. Armanet talked to AQ about their project, Edificio Tamango.

by Emilie Sweigart

AQ: Why choose wood to develop a high-rise?

GA: Wood is the only structural material that is renewable, insulates well, and also captures carbon. Prefabrication is becoming more and more important — we build before building. With wood, prefabricating is easier and a very quiet and clean process, and you don't put a lot of dust in the atmosphere. There are about 60 or so hybrid wood buildings around the world that are higher than eight stories. Tamango will be the first in Chile.

I want to highlight the work of Juan Acevedo K., the lead engineer on this project. We'll use concrete in the basement and the first two floors. After that, we will assemble the wooden structure of apartments from the third to the 12th floor in three months. The idea is to open in 2024.



Chile's first wooden high-rise is slated to be ready by 2024.

AQ: How do wooden buildings withstand earthquakes and fires?

GA: We are starting to take advantage of the very good qualities that wood has for earthquakes. It's much lighter than other materials. We have very strict earthquake and fire protection regulations in Chile. If you build over five floors, the structure has to withstand 120 minutes of fire — this applies to any material. We work with local and international fire experts and engineers, and we cover structures with fire-resistant boards, among other strategies.

AQ: What are your firm's other upcoming projects?

GA: We are advocating for using wood in subsidized housing. This is the most important thing that we are doing at our office — we are working on two projects with six floors each that hopefully could start this year. We really hope that it becomes more popular, because in Chile we have a big housing deficit. It is a very big challenge and we are putting a lot of energy into this. **AQ**

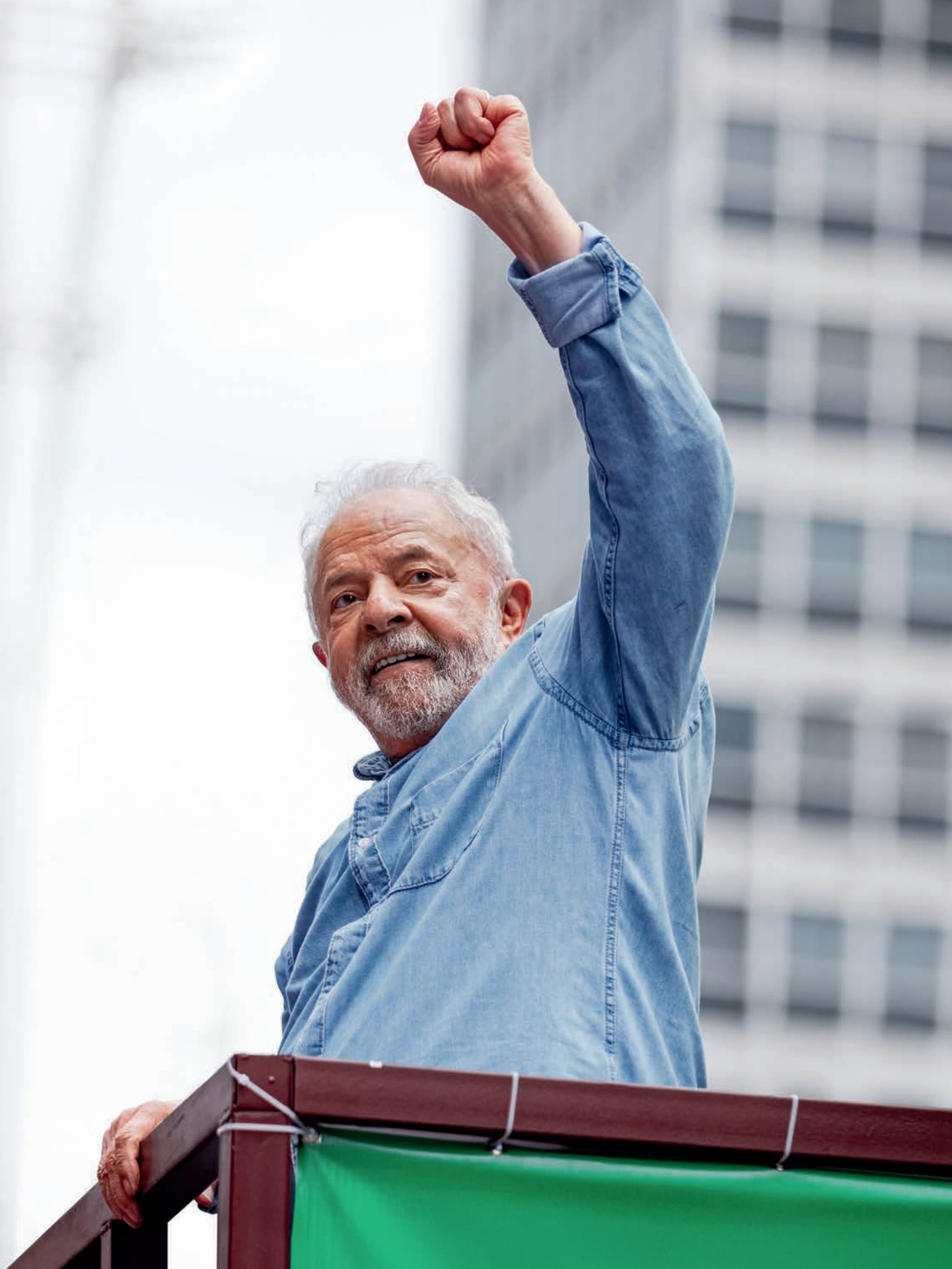
Sweigart is an editor at AQ

THIS INTERVIEW HAS BEEN EDITED FOR CLARITY AND LENGTH

WHAT LULA MEANS FOR LATIN AMERICA

A diplomatic heavy hitter is back at the helm of Latin America's largest country. But exercising regional leadership may prove harder than Lula and others believe.

by Oliver Stuenkel



WHAT LULA MEANS FOR LATIN AMERICA



SÃO PAULO — “Brazil is back,” President-elect Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva told a roaring crowd at the climate summit COP27 in Egypt in November last year.

Indeed, during his first few months in office, Lula met or spoke to numerous leaders from across the world and announced intercontinental trips for practically every upcoming month, signaling that he would seek to significantly increase Brazil’s diplomatic footprint and re-engage on a host of issues ranging from the fight against deforestation and climate change to strengthening multilateralism. Brazil’s rediscovered global activism goes beyond presidential diplomacy. Cabinet members are zig-zagging the globe, seeking to present the new Brazil. Environment Minister Marina Silva has readily embraced climate diplomacy, spoke at the World Economic Forum in Davos and recently met U.S. climate envoy John Kerry, while Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira carried the message that Brazil sought to play a greater role at the recent Munich Security Conference and the Raisina Dialogue in Delhi.

Yet the question remains: What does Lula’s return really mean for Latin America and questions like regional trade integration, the region’s relationships with the United States and China, investment flows, and Latin America’s overall role in the world? At first sight, nowhere is the change of guard in Brasília bound to have a greater impact than in Brazil’s neighborhood, a region that has been adrift for years, without a leader willing or capable of setting the agenda of the regional debate, articulating a vision or claiming a regional leadership role.

There are numerous reasons that suggest Brazil’s new president may be uniquely well-placed to take the reins and exercise regional leadership and have a tangible impact on Latin American affairs. First of all, in a region where all democratically elected lead-

ers are relatively inexperienced first-term presidents, a reflection of the profound anti-incumbency wave that has reliably thrown out the governing party over the past years, Lula stands out. Having governed Latin America’s largest country from 2003 to 2010, he is the region’s only diplomatic heavy hitter and the most globally visible Latin American political leader of his generation.

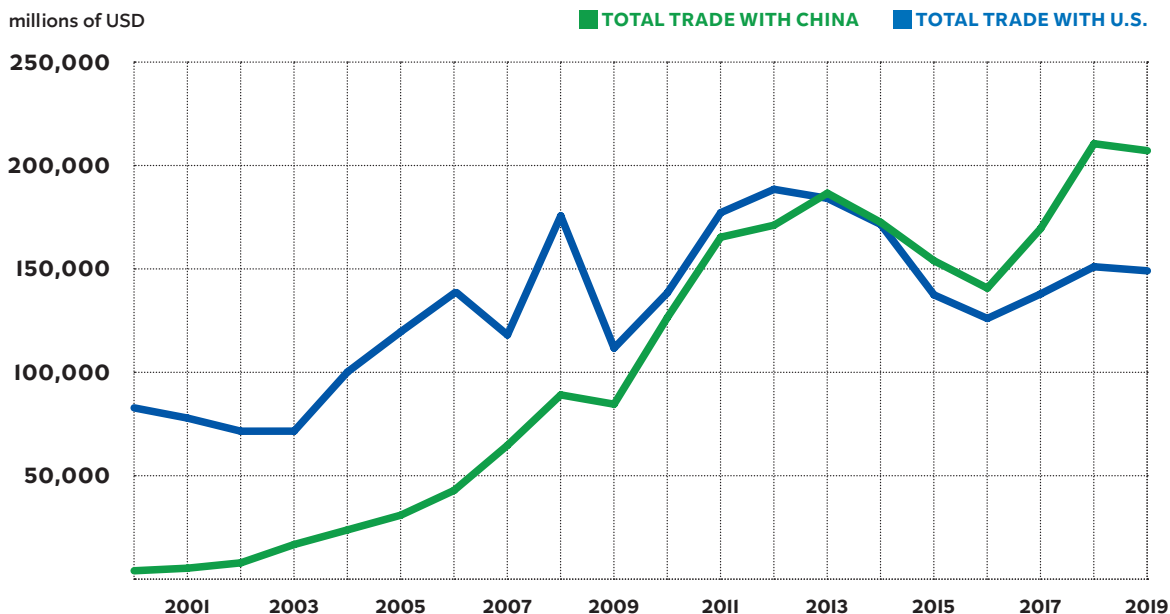
Secondly, the president seems genuinely interested in seeking closer ties to Brazil’s Latin American neighbors. Lula’s decision to skip the World Economic Forum in Davos and travel to Buenos Aires instead to join the summit for the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) was rich in symbolism. It reflected a palpable commitment to overcoming the deep divisions that had emerged over the past years, as former President Jair Bolsonaro had made little effort to hide his dislike of the emerging wave of leftist leaders. Bolsonaro’s non-existent personal relationship with his Argentine counterpart — the two barely ever spoke — produced the worst crisis in bilateral ties between South America’s largest countries since the 1980s.

Lula enjoys another advantage: His return to power coincides with what several analysts have dubbed the “second pink tide” of left-wing leaders across Latin America, a region where meaningful progress in deepening cooperation has historically depended on ideological alignment. With virtually all major Latin American countries led by leftists, Brazil’s new president seems to have, at first sight, a rare window of opportunity to not only reestablish a dialogue, but also make bolder moves to help the region overcome its numerous challenges.

Furthermore, in an increasingly turbulent world shaped by the return of great power politics, Brazil remains far from all major geopolitical flashpoints. Latin America is today the region with one of the low-

The growth of South America's trade with China

Since 2013, China has surpassed the U.S. in total trade with the region.



Source: World Integrated Trade Solution

Note: Data covers Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela

est risks of interstate war or large-scale geopolitical tensions, making it attractive for investors who seek to protect their portfolios from potential geopolitical shocks. In addition, shifting global supply chains and Washington's attempts to reduce its economic dependence on China represent a historic opportunity for Brazil, and Latin America as a whole, to attract U.S. investments, while retaining its attractiveness for investors from elsewhere.

Provided that Brazil manages to significantly reduce the rate of deforestation — which is admittedly an “if” — Lula will possess ample space to project Brazil as part of the solution, rather than part of the problem, to one of the world's most pressing challenges. Lula's diplomatic influence could easily increase in other areas, too, helping Brazil regain the global stature it achieved in the late 2000s. Finally, Brazil remains one of the few countries in the world that seems, at least in principle, capable of walking

the talk of non-alignment: No other country is both a BRICS and a G20 member, while also taking significant steps towards joining the OECD. While the Brazilian government's ambition to play a mediating role in the Ukraine war seems unrealistic, it does provide the Lula government with a seat at many different tables.

KEY CHALLENGES

YET WHILE LULA'S BRAZIL no doubt enjoys diplomatic advantages that provide him with an opening in Latin America, the country also faces a number of significant obstacles to playing a more visible international role.

Five issues stand out.

First of all, just like many other Latin American countries, Brazil's domestic politics remain fragile and extremely polarized following the 2022 election, the closest in the nation's modern democratic history. Economic growth projections for 2023 are dis-



mal and range from 0.2% to 1.2% — nowhere near the figures needed to assure political stability. Lula's decision to criticize Central Bank governor Roberto Campos Neto for keeping interest rates excessively high reflects the government's expectation that patience among numerous voters is likely to run out well before the economy will recover, requiring a scapegoat and a narrative that someone other than Lula is to be blamed for what almost inevitably looks like a lackluster economic performance during the president's first year in office.

While predicting political upheaval is difficult, it seems likely that Lula's approval ratings will fall toward the end of the year, particularly if the outlook for 2024 remains pessimistic — the IMF currently predicts a meager 1.5% growth for Brazil in the coming year. GDP per capita in 2022 is practically the same as in 2011, which makes the past 10 years far worse than the “lost decade” of the 1980s. While even solid economic growth cannot guarantee political stabil-

ity — as the wave of protests in 2019 in Chile and the current political crisis in Peru show — the absence of it significantly elevates the risk of domestic instability, which generally makes an ambitious foreign policy more difficult. Lula's promise that “Brazil is back” on the global stage is only sustainable in the medium term if the government succeeds in pulling the country out of its decade-long economic stagnation, which forced all Brazilian presidents since 2013 to face the specter of impeachment. The strength of the opposition also explains why Lula is very unlikely to move forward with a more modern approach to fighting drug trafficking, as seen in Uruguay, which has legalized cannabis and now legally exports the product to the United States. Conservative state governors will assure that Brazil's heavy-handed approach will continue, assuring a large prison population, a boon to cartels that need to constantly recruit vulnerable youth. Contrary to Uruguay or, more recently Colombia, Brazil is unlikely to be on the forefront of the de-



bate about rethinking the war on drugs.

Secondly, while the new pink tide no doubt facilitated Lula's quest to normalize its relationship with other Latin American leaders — which he has already largely achieved since returning to office — the differences among leftist leaders and their views about Latin American affairs are profound. While leaders like Nicaragua's Ortega and Venezuela's Maduro are social conservatives with messianic tendencies and authoritarian records, Chile's Gabriel Boric is a European-style social democrat and progressive, a difference that has predictably led to tensions between Santiago, Managua and Caracas. It would be difficult to imagine Boric and Mexico's López Obrador, for example, agreeing on much regarding regional integration, no matter what kind of narrative Lula seeks to promote. The duration of the second pink tide, moreover, is set to be far shorter than that of the 2000s. Indeed, chances are that by the end of 2023, a center-right or far-right government will come to power

in Argentina, potentially limiting the space for deepening bilateral ties.

Third, while the Brazilian government would never explicitly claim to be a regional leader, there is no doubt that part of its claim to have a seat at the table of the powerful — be it at the BRICS, G20 or the UN Security Council, where the country continues to seek permanent representation — is its capacity to represent its region. Yet interestingly enough, while Brazil's more assertive role is almost unanimously welcomed around the world, its leadership ambitions often receive a far cooler reception in Latin America. While the majority of governments in Latin America are happy to see the back of Bolsonaro, many remember Lula's regional policy back in the 2000s as somewhat grating. Others complained that back then, both Lula and his roving foreign minister Celso Amorim felt more at ease on the global stage than when trying to address regional issues, such as the years-long spat between Uruguay and Argentina over a paper mill

LET'S GET TOGETHER

What Latin American leaders are saying about greater intraregional integration



AMLO

"You (Biden) have the key to open and improve the relations between all countries in the Americas. And there isn't a better way to guarantee a prosperous, just and peaceful future for our peoples."



BUKELE

"Although for now it sounds like a utopia, common sense should point to the unification of Central America in a single country."



PETRO

"We talk about unity but we don't do enough to achieve it. This has to change. We need to move from rhetoric to reality."



BORIC

"It is necessary and important for Latin America to regain its voice on the global stage, which we have lost for too long."

LACALLE POU

"Isn't it time to open up these relations and for CELAC to promote a free trade zone ... from Mexico to the south of South America?"

FERNÁNDEZ

"We believe it is through more regional integration, not less, that we will be better positioned to produce, trade and compete."





Truth be told, regional disintegration has been the most dominant economic trend in Latin America over the last decade.

that began in 2005, when Brazil had a notably standoffish posture. Former Colombian officials who dealt with the Lula government in the 2000s do little to hide their criticism of Brazil's refusal to play a more supportive role in Colombia's fight against the FARC insurgency — for example by keeping FARC fighters from using Brazilian territory to evade Colombian soldiers. In Central America and the Caribbean, Brazil's influence is so limited that its capacity to take a leading role in addressing the region's main challenges — such as organized crime and migration — is low.

Fourth, the space for broader change or deeper regional integration remains far more limited than when Lula was first president. Truth be told, regional disintegration has been the most dominant economic trend in Latin America over the past decade. The decline of manufacturing, the growing lack of economic complementarity, the rise of China, and Latin America's growing dependence on commodity exports explain why regional trade is far less important today than in the past. In 2021, intraregional exports amounted to only 13% of Latin American countries' total exports, down from over 20% in the late 2000s. Uruguay's growing impatience with Mercosur and Montevideo's willingness to negotiate a trade deal with China are a reflection of this structural trend Lula will be unable to alter. While Brazil's large construction firms in the 2000s actively called for more regional integration — eyeing large-scale public contracts in countries like Venezuela and Peru — nowadays the captains of Brazil's economy, particularly in agribusiness, are less interested in the matter.

This shift became particularly evident in the after-

math of Bolsonaro's victory in 2018, when the incoming Economy Minister Paulo Guedes, in an interview, spoke disparagingly about Mercosur and characterized it as dispensable. Twenty years earlier, such a comment would have caused alarm among Brazilian CEOs, but this time, the loudest criticism came from retired 1990s-era diplomats without political power. In a difficult political environment where picking the right battles is crucial, Lula may think twice before tackling an issue that seems to be losing political relevance in Brazil's domestic debate. At no stage over the past decades was Latin America less economically relevant to Brazil than it is today, and if current global trends are any indicator, Brazil's dependence on economic partners outside of Latin America will only increase. This trend will be aggravated by the long-term (and probably irreversible) trend of deindustrialization in Brazil, which makes the region — which bought many value-added goods from Brazil — less relevant.

Fifth, the number of political crises across Latin America continues to make something as simple as a regional summit with all heads of state difficult to accomplish, as the recent summit of the CELAC in Buenos Aires revealed. Three heads of state overseeing systematic human rights abuses in their respective countries — Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro, El Salvador's Nayib Bukele and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega — did not bother to show up. Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, host of the previous CELAC summit, also decided against traveling to Argentina.

Compared to the emergence of a remarkable normative framework across Latin America to safeguard



Lula is constrained by the leftist wing of his party that so emphatically sides with the governments of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela

democracy in the 1990s and early 2000s — such as the Inter-American Democratic Charter, signed in 2001 — nowadays few presidents in the region are willing to criticize other governments' domestic violations unless it helps them mobilize their supporters at home. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, the region recorded the biggest democratic recession of any region over the past 20 years. One of the root causes is no doubt that numerous Latin American economies have been lagging behind emerging markets elsewhere for years. Several key economic indicators such as poverty levels and inequality are now worse than a decade ago, leading to a reversal of expectations generated during the commodity boom and elevating the risk for political upheaval.

In addition to large-scale protests and severe political instability in Peru, a political crisis has gripped neighboring Ecuador. Haiti seems unlikely to emerge from non-stop political turmoil, and repression in non-democratic regimes in Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua shows no sign of abating. Given such a convoluted set of problems, Lula's capacity to exercise regional leadership is set to be limited. To make matters worse, Lula is constrained by the leftist wing of his party that so emphatically sides with the governments of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela that Brazilian diplomacy has, out of fear of confronting the Workers' Party's most loyal followers, opted to take a back seat in the debate about the crises in the three countries. That is hardly an encouraging sign for those who expected Lula to become an agenda setter in regional affairs.

LULA'S FOREIGN POLICY LEGACY

NONE OF THIS MEANS that Lula's return will be of little consequence to Latin America — quite the opposite. Irrespective of whether one agrees with the Brazilian president's foreign policy views, there is no doubt that Latin America's visibility in geopolitical debates is set to increase markedly over the years to come. In some cases, this is welcome news: Without Latin America at the table, the global debate about how to combat deforestation and climate change cannot advance.

Yet international observers tend to overlook the formidable challenges Lula faces both internally and in the region: severe polarization, low economic growth and the specter of falling approval ratings are set to limit the time and energy the president can dedicate to regional integration.

In addition, with Brazil's movers and shakers increasingly disinterested in regional affairs, and a government aware that it must pick its battles wisely, the foreign policy legacy of Lula's third term is likely to be less about Latin America and more about general re-engagement after the Bolsonaro years. That means, specifically, a possible ratification of the trade deal with the European Union, a possible trade deal with China, and the emergence of Brazil as a global climate superpower — but perhaps not a return to the heady talk of a more unified, ascendant Latin America. **AQ**

Stuenkel is a contributing columnist for Americas Quarterly and teaches international relations at the Getulio Vargas Foundation.

THE “LULA DOCTRINE”

An exclusive interview with Brazil's foreign minister on relationships with China and the U.S., the need for multilateral reform, and more.

by Brian Winter

B **RASÍLIA** — If Brazil's foreign policy seemed familiar during President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's initial months in office, that was by design. Many of the ideas and even personnel were the same as in his 2003–10 presidency.

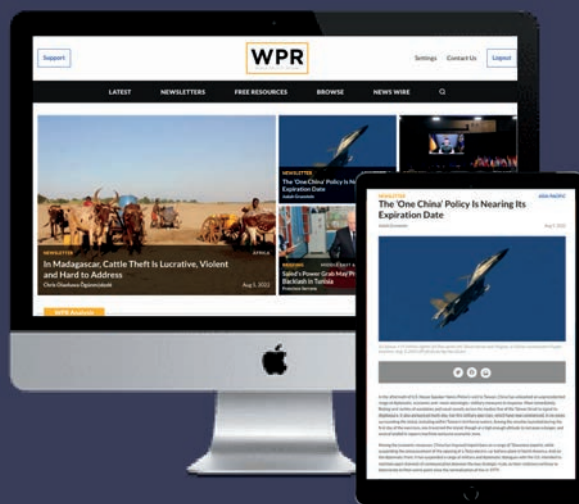
But the rise of China, the war in Ukraine and the weakening of multilateral institutions like the United Nations mean there will inevitably be important changes in how Brazil conducts itself abroad, Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira says in this sweeping interview with *AQ*.

“Twenty years ago, China's growth was visible, but now it is a superpower, without a doubt,” Vieira said. “In less than 20 years, China has become Brazil's main trading partner — and not just Brazil, but many Latin American countries. So that changed the scenario a lot, and geopolitics have changed.”

This interview took place in Portuguese via Zoom on March 13. It has been translated to English and lightly edited for clarity and content.



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*"An incisive mix of
substantive policy
analysis and politically
relevant commentary."*

—Stephen Feldstein, former deputy
assistant secretary of state for
human rights



<https://wpr.pub/aq>



Vieira was also foreign minister from 2015-16 under President Dilma Rousseff.

Brian Winter: This may be a very American question, but here in the United States, we always talk about presidents' doctrines — the Biden doctrine, the Bush doctrine. Is there a Lula doctrine?

Minister Mauro Vieira: I'd say the Lula doctrine is one of restoring Brazil's image and its relationships — not just with our Latin American neighbors, but also restoring Brazil's presence in the world, on all the different kinds of world stages, be they bilateral or multilateral. In the past four years, Brazil halted its diplomatic tradition of being a country that is open to all interlocutors, regardless of their ideological positions, and of maintaining contact, and negotiating and talking. I think that if there is a doctrine, that is it.

President Lula gave me very specific instructions. He gave a very powerful, very important speech during the Sharm el-Sheikh Climate Change Conference, where he said that "Brazil is back." After he appointed me and after he took office, he said repeatedly that this is what matters most, that it should be known that Brazil is back to its diplomatic tradition. He told me to rebuild all the bridges and all channels of communication that had been destroyed.

BW: The world has changed a lot in the past 20 years since Lula's first term. What are the most important differences between his foreign policy then and now?

MV: At the time, his foreign policy was referred to as *ativa e altiva* (active and assertive). That's a phrase coined by the former Foreign Minister Celso Amorim, for whom I worked as chief of staff, and who represented very well this style of foreign policy in the first eight Lula years.

Of course, the world has changed a lot, in all ways, including media — information travels much more quickly — and geopolitics have also changed. Twenty years ago, China's growth was visible, but now it is a superpower, without a doubt. In less than 20 years, China has become Brazil's main trading partner — and not just Brazil, but many Latin American countries. So that changed the scenario a lot, and geopolitics have changed.

Now we have a war going on in Europe. And I think that global governance has also changed, because multilateral organizations, whether political or com-

mercial, are very weakened, and they have lost their ability to act. From a commercial point of view, the World Trade Organization is paralyzed; it has lost relevance. And, at the same time, the situation of the United Nations is also worrying because we are witnessing the paralysis of its main body aimed at maintaining peace and security, which is the Security Council. The Security Council, with its 1945 format, is no longer reflected in today's reality. And we are facing a major crisis in which its mechanisms, methods and composition do not allow the United Nations to play the fundamental role it should have — as Brazil's argues it should, and as it did in the past.

Today there is a certain paralysis, to the detriment of world peace, to the detriment of better governance. So I think those are the big changes. And that's where Brazil and President Lula's foreign policy want to be active again, in promoting a discussion on global governance as well.

BW: The world has changed a lot. Brazil has also changed, especially in the last four years, as you mentioned. How do you see the efforts to restore Brazilian democracy following the events of recent months, especially the January 8 attacks in Brasília? And these episodes, which represented an authoritarian risk for the country, similar to what we face here in the United States, do they have any point of intersection with Brazilian foreign policy? Or are they separate themes?

MV: Look, the issue of democracy in Brazil ... I think that since 1964, when there was a break in the democratic order, which took 21 years [for democracy to be restored] ... I think that with the restoration of democracy in Brazil and with the promulgation of the [1988] Constitution, we launched a young democracy, but a solid one, with solid instruments, dictated by the Constitution.

The events of January 8 were the result of clashes that have taken place in Brazilian society in recent years, since 2016, with the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and then, in 2018, with the election of the last government, which represented a huge shift to the right. That changed Brazil's position in terms of foreign policy, but it also changed domestic policies, emboldening a group that felt privileged and

“It should be known that Brazil is back to its diplomatic tradition.”

encouraged to even finance the events of January 8. I was in Brasília, and it was an unexpected and surprising event — to see that number of people, about 4,000 people, arriving at the Praça dos Três Poderes [where the judicial, legislative and executive branches are located] and destroying the buildings. ... It is an unbelievable thing, which received not only ideological and political encouragement, but also important financial support from various sectors.

This comes from a part of Brazilian society that is not democratic and does not appreciate democratic values. There is no doubt that there was an election, that President Lula won.

So, now it's a matter of investigating and clarifying what happened, who inspired this, who committed these highly illegal acts that could have really compromised Brazilian democracy. But I think society and the established authorities reacted quickly and everything was brought under control. On Sunday [when the attack happened], already at the beginning of the evening, everything was under control and many had been arrested. And that's that, in short.

BW: And does this have any impact on Brazil's foreign policy? For example, were the similarities between the risks faced by Brazil and the United States a fundamental part of President Lula's [February 10] visit with President Biden in Washington?

MV: Undoubtedly, these are national issues, but also with repercussions on foreign policy. That night I received maybe 15 phone calls from foreign ministers from other countries, in which they expressed solidarity and support for Brazil and for Brazilian democratic institutions. Presidents Biden and Lula discussed the subject, referencing events in each country, and they made public comments on the need to strengthen democracies around the world.

I think that big countries like the United States,

Brazil and others, can play an important role in the dissemination of democratic values and in reinforcing the importance of maintaining democracy and highlighting the gains of democracy. In the case of Brazil, it was thanks to the restoration of democracy since the promulgation of the Constitution of 1988 that we've had progressive governments, such as that of President Lula, which created conditions for economic growth and which benefited the population, lifting millions of people out of poverty, creating housing for people in need, health care systems and everything else.

This only happens in a democracy. Hence the importance of defending democracy, and any initiative to defend democracy internationally is very valid, because this way countries can develop and grow.

BW: Does the relative silence of the Lula government about dictatorships in Latin America, such as Nicaragua and Venezuela, in any way contradict this appreciation for democracy?

MV: No, because there is no silence.

The first time that there has been some movement on Nicaragua in the international scene inside a multilateral organization was in Geneva, at the Human Rights Council. *[Editor's note: On March 9, 54 countries including the United States, Chile, Peru and Colombia signed a statement urging the Ortega government to "release all political prisoners" and condemning the regime's recent decision to revoke the citizenship of more than 300 Nicaraguans.]* Brazil did not support [the statement], on the contrary. We wanted to make a separate statement, independent of that made by that group of nations. Because we wanted to make clear our position that there need to be changes, there need to be adjustments. Brazil wanted to first appeal to the multilateral mechanisms that are there and then discuss and exhaust all options before any other

stronger measure, such as, for example, the adoption of sanctions, an element that was suggested throughout the debates.

That was the element that made us publish a separate declaration, referring to the need for dialogue with the [Ortega] government and relevant actors from Nicaraguan society. Unilateral sanctions, a measure many countries adopt, are illegal for Brazil. We can only apply sanctions that have been approved by the Security Council of the United Nations. So we could not, in principle, support a statement that didn't make a reference to dialogue as a first step. And as it was the first opportunity [to debate this subject] in a multilateral forum, which is an institution that has the mechanisms to correct these points, and this was the first time that this discussion took place since President Lula took office, two and a half months ago, we wanted to make our position very clear.

BW: Does Brazil and the president have a role in possible peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia?

MV: Look, President Lula has said this countless times. ... There is a lot of talk about Lula's proposal. ... He didn't make a concrete proposal, with goals to follow to reach peace. What he said is that he keeps hearing about war, about large amounts of resources being allocated for the purchase of arms, about destruction and death, and he doesn't hear about peace. What he wants and what he has done is to call for us to start discussing, in some way, peace.

This is what is important, in the face of all the victims, all the destruction wreaked in the country. He also condemned the invasion of Ukraine, and commented on the worldwide effects of inflation, a threat to food security, the risk of this war lasting for many years, or even getting out of control, in a world where weapons are increasingly destructive and more lethal. So, it is with all this concern that he has made and will continue to make calls for a sit-down, because we are absolutely convinced that it is not in the interest of either party to continue with this sad and deplorable war, without at least trying to find a negotiated solution.

Brazil is a pacifist country ... that's our diplomatic DNA. That's what the president wants to tell the world.

BW: Many countries, especially in the global south, are adopting the idea, or the doctrine, of "active non-alignment" as a strategy for dealing with the growing competition between the United States and China. Ambassador Amorim, whom you mentioned, even wrote a chapter for a recent book on this idea. Does this concept basically summarize the Brazilian position on this issue?

MV: Yes, we don't have an automatic alignment to either side. We have, on the contrary, excellent relations with the United States — in fact, next year we will celebrate 200 years of diplomatic relations with ambassadors in each country. And we also have important relations with China. What guides us is the national interest within a framework of multilateralism, of international law. Automatic alignments do not bring positive results and results that are beneficial to the national interest. There can be losses when there is an automatic and unjustifiable alignment. In fact, as there was during the last four years.

BW: There is a lot of talk about Latin American integration right now. There is ideological alignment between many governments in the region, but there is skepticism among some as to whether these ideas will translate into practical decisions, aside from meetings and the existence of blocs like CELAC and Unasur. Is there a concrete, practical agenda when it comes to regional integration? And what are the most important opportunities?

MV: There is no doubt that integration is a serious goal. In fact, Latin American integration is even in the Brazilian Constitution. And there are concrete examples, very concrete ones. The president visited Argentina and Uruguay. I just came back from Paraguay. President Lula will soon have a meeting with the president of Paraguay. These are the original partners of Mercosur. In these three cases, very specific measures and projects were agreed upon, pertaining to physical integration, for example, which is fundamental. We'll soon announce them.

And these are projects that will benefit the road and rail infrastructure and river navigation in these countries, which will also have an immediate impact on trade: It lowers costs, it provides more security. It's not just rhetoric. These are not projects that are starting now. We're finalizing them, we put the final touches



Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira, left, met with his U.S. counterpart Antony Blinken, right, on February 10.

on them, and they are going to be implemented soon. And there are many others that could come.

CELAC is a place, it is a stage for discussions that can lead to concrete things. In addition, President Lula wants to review and update Unasur, which was indeed, differently from CELAC, a strong body, with concrete integration initiatives in many areas and which unfortunately was abandoned, but which we want to adapt and update, because it is also not the same world anymore. Mercosur integration translated to exponential growth in trade between our countries. Today we have important and significant trade for our economies, and without Mercosur, without an integration project, that would not happen.

BW: I mentioned this ideological alignment. Most governments, especially in South America, are left-wing, for all their differences. But it is possible that we will see a change of government in Argentina this year, for example. Is this ideological

alignment important for Latin American relations, or is its importance overestimated?

MV: Look, the important thing is the national interest — and above all, the decisions of each country regarding integration with its neighbors. We cannot, under any circumstances, stop talking to any country, even more so to those with which we share a border. You know very well, as a Brazilianist, that we share 10 large borders with countries in the region. We cannot stop talking because this or that government has this or that ideological orientation. This is something that will not happen during President Lula's government and that did not exist in Brazilian diplomatic tradition. We will always talk to everyone. Regardless of ideological orientation. The national interest is above any difference of political position. So that's what I can say, that's what's relevant, that's what counts. AQ

Winter is the editor-in-chief of Americas Quarterly and a longtime analyst of Brazil.



Foreign Policy Snapshot



Amid growing tensions between the world's largest superpowers, much of Latin America has taken an independent approach to foreign relations. Countries are increasingly following a path that Chilean scholars Carlos Fortin, Jorge Heine and Carlos Ominami titled the "active non-alignment option." Regional integration is a top concern for some leaders, while others are seeking engagement far beyond the Western Hemisphere. Meanwhile, policy choices have to contend with domestic infrastructure challenges and a global concern with the impacts of climate change.

In this snapshot, AQ tracks priorities in external relations in eight countries, including positions on Venezuela, the U.S. and China, and provides key indicators related to trade, climate and infrastructure.



*by Emilie Sweigart
with reporting by Alonso Velásquez*



FOREIGN POLICY SNAPSHOT

ARGENTINA



Alberto Fernández
IN OFFICE SINCE 2019

Argentina's most strategic regional relationship is with its top trading partner, Brazil. President Alberto Fernández, whose term ends in December, has prioritized strong ties with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Argentina's policy towards Venezuela has shifted in recent years, as former President Mauricio Macri (2015–19) recognized Juan Guaidó as president rather than Nicolás Maduro. Fernández reestablished full diplomatic ties and called on the region to support negotiations between the Venezuelan government and the opposition. Argentina has maintained a cordial relationship with the U.S. while deepening ties with China, joining the Belt and Road Initiative in 2022. Recent Chinese economic activity includes railways, lithium mining and the automotive sector.

TRADE

PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR REGIONAL
INTEGRATION

73%

SOURCE: IDB (2020)

TRADE AS % GDP

33%

SOURCE: World Bank (2021)



NUMBER OF TRADE
AGREEMENTS
IN FORCE

SOURCE: WTO (2023)

SHARE OF TOTAL
GLOBAL TRADE IN
MERCHANDISE

0.35%

SOURCE: UNCTAD (2021)

TOP THREE EXPORT
DESTINATIONS



**BRAZIL,
CHINA,
U.S.**

SOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)

MAIN EXPORTS



**SOYBEANS &
BYPRODUCTS,
CORN,
DELIVERY
TRUCKS**

SOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)

MEMBERSHIP IN MULTILATERAL GROUPS

MERCOSUR, G20

CLIMATE

PER CAPITA
CARBON
DIOXIDE
EMISSIONS
(TONS)

4.12

SOURCE: Our
World In Data
(2021)

MAIN SECTOR FOR
GHG EMISSIONS

AGRICULTURE



SOURCE: Our World
In Data (2019)

INFRASTRUCTURE



NUMBER
OF PORT
TERMINALS

142

SOURCE: ECLAC
(2019)



NUMBER OF
AIRPORTS

916

SOURCE: CIA
World Factbook
(2021)



LENGTH OF
RAILWAY
NETWORK (KM)

17,866

SOURCE:
International Union
of Railways (2020–1)



BRAZIL



Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

IN OFFICE SINCE 2023,
PREVIOUS TERMS 2003-10

After a period of relative isolation during the Jair Bolsonaro presidency, Brazil resumed active global engagement on a variety of fronts. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva seeks to strengthen the BRICS bloc and has proposed to form a group with India, China and Indonesia to try to mediate peace talks between Russia and Ukraine. The president hopes to finalize the EU-Mercosur trade deal and told his Uruguayan counterpart the bloc could also discuss an agreement with China, Brazil's top trading partner. Lula sought to expand the Brazil-China bilateral relationship and signaled his commitment to strong U.S. ties during a February meeting with President Joe Biden. After diplomatic ties were severed in 2020, Brazil is restoring diplomatic relations with Venezuela.

TRADE

PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR REGIONAL
INTEGRATION

64%

SOURCE: IDB (2020)



NUMBER OF TRADE
AGREEMENTS
IN FORCE

SOURCE: WTO (2023)

TOP THREE EXPORT
DESTINATIONS



CHINA, U.S.,
ARGENTINA

SOURCE: Observatory
of Economic
Complexity (2020)

TRADE AS % GDP

39%

SOURCE: World Bank (2021)

SHARE OF TOTAL
GLOBAL TRADE IN
MERCHANDISE

1.26%

SOURCE: UNCTAD (2021)

MAIN EXPORTS



SOYBEANS,
IRON ORE,
CRUDE
PETROLEUM

SOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)

MEMBERSHIP IN MULTILATERAL GROUPS

MERCOSUR, BRICS, G20,
AMAZON COOPERATION TREATY
ORGANIZATION (ACTO)

CLIMATE

PER CAPITA
CARBON
DIOXIDE
EMISSIONS
(TONS)

2.28

SOURCE:
Our World
In Data (2021)

MAIN SECTOR FOR
GHG EMISSIONS

AGRICULTURE



SOURCE: Our World
In Data (2019)

INFRASTRUCTURE



NUMBER
OF PORT
TERMINALS

306

SOURCE: ECLAC
(2019)



NUMBER OF
AIRPORTS

4,093

SOURCE: CIA
World Factbook
(2021)



LENGTH OF
RAILWAY
NETWORK (KM)

30,621

SOURCE:
International Union
of Railways (2020-I)



FOREIGN POLICY SNAPSHOT

CHILE

**Gabriel Boric**

IN OFFICE SINCE 2022

Chile retains a high level of regional and global engagement, particularly with the Asia-Pacific region, formally joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) this February. China is easily Chile's top trading partner, and their diplomatic relations remain strong. President Gabriel Boric committed to reinforce bilateral ties during a meeting with Xi Jinping at last November's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. He has maintained Chile's close relationship with the U.S. (Chileans are the only Latin Americans that do not need a visa to visit the country.) A leftist progressive, Boric has denounced human rights abuses in Nicaragua and Venezuela, but stated that Venezuela's return to multilateral organizations is necessary to help resolve the country's crisis.

TRADE

PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR REGIONAL
INTEGRATION

63%

SOURCE: IDB (2020)

TRADE AS % GDP

64%

SOURCE: World Bank (2021)

31

NUMBER OF TRADE
AGREEMENTS
IN FORCE

SOURCE: WTO (2023)

SHARE OF TOTAL
GLOBAL TRADE IN
MERCHANDISE

0.42%

SOURCE: UNCTAD (2021)

TOP THREE EXPORT
DESTINATIONSCHINA, U.S.,
JAPANSOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)

MAIN EXPORTS

COPPER ORE
AND REFINED
COPPER, FISH
FILLETS,
WOODPULPSOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)

MEMBERSHIP IN MULTILATERAL GROUPS

PACIFIC ALLIANCE,
APEC, CPTPP, OECD

CLIMATE

PER CAPITA
CARBON
DIOXIDE
EMISSIONS
(TONS)

4.38

SOURCE: Our
World In Data
(2021)MAIN SECTOR FOR
GHG EMISSIONSELECTRICITY
AND HEATSOURCE: Our World
In Data (2019)

INFRASTRUCTURE

NUMBER
OF PORT
TERMINALS

97

SOURCE: ECLAC
(2019)NUMBER OF
AIRPORTS

481

SOURCE: CIA
World Factbook
(2021)LENGTH OF
RAILWAY
NETWORK (KM)

2,396

SOURCE:
International Union
of Railways (2020-1)



FOREIGN POLICY SNAPSHOT

COLOMBIA



Gustavo Petro
IN OFFICE SINCE 2022

Colombia's foreign relations have been shaped by security and migration dynamics, although there has been significant change under Gustavo Petro, the country's first leftist president of the modern era. The U.S. is a longstanding ally, but the security-based relationship is shifting given Petro's criticism of the war on drugs and his attempt to forge "total peace" with armed groups. Approximately 2.5 million Venezuelans live in Colombia. Petro restored diplomatic relations with Venezuela, reopened the borders and signed a deal to boost trade. With Brazil's Lula, Petro discussed a potential pact to protect the Amazon. Sino-Colombian relations expanded during Iván Duque's term (2018-22), and may deepen under Petro, including a presidential visit to China.

TRADE

PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR REGIONAL
INTEGRATION

72%

SOURCE: IDB (2020)

TRADE AS % GDP

41%

SOURCE: World Bank (2021)

SHARE OF TOTAL
GLOBAL TRADE IN
MERCHANDISE

0.18%

SOURCE: UNCTAD (2021)

14 NUMBER OF TRADE
AGREEMENTS
IN FORCE

SOURCE: WTO (2023)

TOP THREE EXPORT
DESTINATIONSU.S., CHINA,
ECUADORSOURCE: Observatory
of Economic
Complexity (2020)

MAIN EXPORTS

CRUDE
PETROLEUM,
COAL
BRIQUETTES,
COFFEESOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)

MEMBERSHIP IN MULTILATERAL GROUPS

PACIFIC ALLIANCE, COMUNIDAD
ANDINA, OECD, AMAZON COOPERA-
TION TREATY ORGANIZATION (ACTO)

CLIMATE

PER CAPITA
CARBON
DIOXIDE
EMISSIONS
(TONS)

1.78

SOURCE: Our
World In Data
(2021)MAIN SECTOR FOR
GHG EMISSIONSLAND-USE
CHANGE AND
FORESTRYSOURCE: Our World
In Data (2019)

INFRASTRUCTURE

NUMBER
OF PORT
TERMINALS

88

SOURCE: ECLAC
(2019)NUMBER OF
AIRPORTS

836

SOURCE: CIA
World Factbook
(2021)LENGTH OF
RAILWAY
NETWORK (KM)

1,267

SOURCE:
International Union
of Railways (2020-1)



FOREIGN POLICY SNAPSHOT

EL SALVADOR

**Nayib Bukele**

IN OFFICE SINCE 2019

El Salvador has had an outsized influence in the region in recent years. President Nayib Bukele's *mano dura* security approach has won him admiration across much of Latin America, despite concerns over human rights abuses, leading to coordination on anti-gang strategies with other countries. Washington has registered increasing concern over democratic backsliding and corruption, and remittances from the large Salvadoran diaspora in the U.S. accounted for 25% of El Salvador's GDP in 2021. The country does not recognize Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, and the countries expelled each other's diplomats in 2019. El Salvador switched its diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 2018, joining the Belt and Road Initiative. Bukele has deepened the relationship and is pursuing a bilateral free trade agreement.

TRADE

PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR REGIONAL
INTEGRATION

84%

SOURCE: IDB (2020)

TRADE AS % GDP

84%

SOURCE: World Bank (2021)

13 NUMBER OF TRADE
AGREEMENTS
IN FORCE

SOURCE: WTO (2023)

SHARE OF TOTAL
GLOBAL TRADE IN
MERCHANDISE

0.03%

SOURCE: UNCTAD (2021)

MAIN EXPORTS

TOP THREE EXPORT
DESTINATIONSU.S.,
GUATEMALA,
HONDURASSOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)KNIT
T-SHIRTS &
SWEATERS,
ELECTRICAL
CAPACITORS,
RAW SUGARSOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)

MEMBERSHIP IN MULTILATERAL GROUPS

SICA (SISTEMA DE LA INTEGRACIÓN
CENTROAMERICANA)

CLIMATE

PER CAPITA
CARBON
DIOXIDE
EMISSIONS
(TONS)

1.14

SOURCE: Our
World In Data
(2021)MAIN SECTOR FOR
GHG EMISSIONS

TRANSPORT

SOURCE: Our World
In Data (2019)

INFRASTRUCTURE

NUMBER
OF PORT
TERMINALS

4

SOURCE: ECLAC
(2019)NUMBER OF
AIRPORTS

68

SOURCE: CIA
World Factbook
(2021)LENGTH OF
RAILWAY
NETWORK (KM)

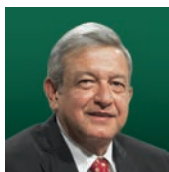
0

SOURCE:
International Union
of Railways (2020-I)



FOREIGN POLICY SNAPSHOT

MEXICO



**Andrés
Manuel López
Obrador**
IN OFFICE SINCE 2018

Mexico's foreign policy has been marked by migration and trade, although both have been shaken by politics in recent years. Approximately 80% of Mexican exports head to the U.S., and the countries' supply chains are deeply integrated, although tensions have often flared, with the U.S. criticizing growing state control over Mexico's energy sector. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has sought to change U.S. policy towards Cuba and Venezuela and has asked for more cooperation with Central America to stem the flow of migrants. López Obrador openly criticized the arrest of Peru's former President Pedro Castillo, which led the Peruvian government to recall its ambassador in Mexico and expel the Mexican ambassador from Lima. Mexico hosted talks between the Maduro government and the Venezuelan opposition and offered asylum to exiled Nicaraguans, but avoided denouncing the Ortega regime. Nearshoring has led to a recent surge in Chinese investment in Mexico's northern manufacturing zones.

TRADE

PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR REGIONAL
INTEGRATION

68%

SOURCE: IDB (2020)

TRADE AS % GDP

84%

SOURCE: World Bank (2021)

23 NUMBER OF TRADE
AGREEMENTS
IN FORCE

SOURCE: WTO (2023)

SHARE OF TOTAL
GLOBAL TRADE IN
MERCHANDISE

2.22%

SOURCE: UNCTAD (2021)

TOP THREE EXPORT
DESTINATIONSU.S.,
CHINA,
CANADASOURCE: Observatory
of Economic
Complexity (2020)

MAIN EXPORTS

CARS,
COMPUTERS,
MOTOR
VEHICLE
PARTS AND
ACCESSORIESSOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)

MEMBERSHIP IN MULTILATERAL GROUPS

PACIFIC ALLIANCE, APEC,
USMCA, CPTPP, G20, OECD

CLIMATE

PER CAPITA
CARBON
DIOXIDE
EMISSIONS
(TONS)

3.21

SOURCE: Our
World In Data
(2021)MAIN SECTOR FOR
GHG EMISSIONSELECTRICITY
AND HEATSOURCE: Our World
In Data (2019)

INFRASTRUCTURE

NUMBER
OF PORT
TERMINALS

171

SOURCE: ECLAC
(2019)NUMBER OF
AIRPORTS

1,714

SOURCE: CIA
World Factbook
(2021)LENGTH OF
RAILWAY
NETWORK (KM)

26,704

SOURCE:
International Union
of Railways (2020-I)



FOREIGN POLICY SNAPSHOT

PANAMA

**Laurentino Cortizo**

IN OFFICE SINCE 2019

The Panama Canal plays a key role in global trade, and activity from foreign countries in the Canal Zone has been an important factor in the country's foreign policy. About 140 large multinationals are headquartered in Panama due to incentives. In May 2022, President Laurentino Cortizo described the U.S. as Panama's most strategic partner, but noted that China was the second main user of the canal. The Canal Zone has seen an increase in Chinese infrastructure projects in recent years, and Cortizo has pledged to restart long-stalled negotiations with China over a free trade agreement. The president opposed the U.S. decision to exclude Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua from the 2022 Summit of the Americas, and supports dialogue between Maduro's government and the Venezuelan opposition.

TRADE

PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR REGIONAL
INTEGRATION

69%

SOURCE: IDB (2020)

TRADE AS % GDP

93%

SOURCE: World Bank (2021)

SHARE OF TOTAL
GLOBAL TRADE IN
MERCHANDISE

0.06%

SOURCE: UNCTAD (2021)

18

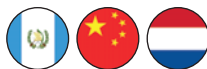
NUMBER OF TRADE
AGREEMENTS
IN FORCE

SOURCE: WTO (2023)

MAIN EXPORTS



**COPPER
ORE,
BANANAS,
PACKAGED
MEDICAMENTS**

SOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)TOP THREE EXPORT
DESTINATIONS

**GUATEMALA,
CHINA,
NETHERLANDS**

SOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)

MEMBERSHIP IN MULTILATERAL GROUPS

**SICA (SISTEMA DE LA INTEGRACIÓN
CENTROAMERICANA)**

CLIMATE

PER CAPITA
CARBON
DIOXIDE
EMISSIONS
(TONS)

2.99

SOURCE: Our
World In Data
(2021)MAIN SECTOR FOR
GHG EMISSIONSAVIATION AND
SHIPPINGSOURCE: Our World
In Data (2019)

INFRASTRUCTURE

NUMBER
OF PORT
TERMINALS

48

SOURCE: ECLAC
(2019)NUMBER OF
AIRPORTS

117

SOURCE: CIA
World Factbook
(2021)LENGTH OF
RAILWAY
NETWORK (KM)

77

SOURCE:
International Union
of Railways (2020-I)



FOREIGN POLICY SNAPSHOT

URUGUAY



**Luis
Lacalle Pou**
IN OFFICE SINCE 2020

Uruguay has expanded its foreign policy focus beyond Mercosur and the U.S. to seek more engagement with the Asia-Pacific region. In 2022, President Luis Lacalle Pou said that “The United States government is not looking to the south. This is a problem for us.” Uruguay has requested to join the CPTPP and is in talks with China, its main trading partner, over a bilateral free trade agreement. Fellow Mercosur members expressed concern, due to the bloc’s rule on jointly negotiating trade agreements. Lacalle Pou has criticized the inclusion of nations that “do not respect democracy or human rights” in the regional group CELAC. He has described Venezuela as a dictatorship, but appointed a Uruguayan ambassador to Venezuela after a seven-year gap.

TRADE

**PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR REGIONAL
INTEGRATION**

89%

SOURCE: IDB (2020)

TRADE AS % GDP

57%

SOURCE: World Bank (2021)

8

**NUMBER OF TRADE
AGREEMENTS
IN FORCE**

SOURCE: WTO (2023)

**SHARE OF TOTAL
GLOBAL TRADE IN
MERCHANDISE**

0.04%

SOURCE: UNCTAD (2021)

**TOP THREE EXPORT
DESTINATIONS**



**CHINA,
BRAZIL,
U.S.**

SOURCE: Observatory
of Economic
Complexity (2020)

MAIN EXPORTS



**FROZEN
BOVINE
MEAT,
WOODPULP,
RICE**

SOURCE: Observatory of
Economic Complexity (2020)

MEMBERSHIP IN MULTILATERAL GROUPS

MERCOSUR

CLIMATE

**PER CAPITA
CARBON
DIOXIDE
EMISSIONS
(TONS)**

1.97

SOURCE: Our
World In Data
(2021)

**MAIN SECTOR FOR
GHG EMISSIONS**

AGRICULTURE



SOURCE: Our World
In Data (2019)

INFRASTRUCTURE



**NUMBER
OF PORT
TERMINALS**

21

SOURCE: ECLAC
(2019)



**NUMBER OF
AIRPORTS**

133

SOURCE: CIA
World Factbook
(2021)



**LENGTH OF
RAILWAY
NETWORK (KM)**

1,498

SOURCE:
International Union
of Railways (2020-1)



FOREIGN POLICY SNAPSHOT

OVERVIEW

INDICATOR	ARGENTINA	BRAZIL	CHILE	COLOMBIA	EL SALVADOR	MEXICO	PANAMA	URUGUAY
TRADE								
Public support for regional integration	73%	64%	63%	72%	84%	68%	69%	89%
Trade as % GDP	33%	39%	64%	41%	84%	84%	93%	57%
Number of trade agreements in force	8	9	31	14	13	23	18	8
Share of total global trade in merchandise	0.35%	1.26%	0.42%	0.18%	0.03%	2.22%	0.06%	0.04%
Main exports	Soybeans and byproducts, corn, delivery trucks	Soybeans, iron ore, crude petroleum	Copper ore and refined copper, fish fillets, woodpulp	Crude petroleum, coal briquettes, coffee	Knit T-shirts and sweaters, electrical capacitors, raw sugar	Cars, computers, motor vehicle parts and accessories	Copper ore, bananas, packaged medicaments	Frozen bovine meat, woodpulp, rice
Top three export destinations	Brazil, China, U.S.	China, U.S., Argentina	China, U.S., Japan	U.S., China, Ecuador	U.S., Guatemala, Honduras	U.S., China, Canada	Guatemala, China, Netherlands	China, Brazil, U.S.
Membership in multilateral groups	MERCOSUR, G20	MERCOSUR, BRICS, G20, Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO)	Pacific Alliance, APEC, CPTPP, OECD	Pacific Alliance, Comunidad Andina, OECD, Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO)	SICA (Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana)	Pacific Alliance, APEC, USMCA, CPTPP, G20, OECD	SICA (Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana)	MERCOSUR
CLIMATE								
Per capita carbon dioxide emissions (tons)	4.12	2.28	4.38	1.78	1.14	3.21	2.99	1.97
Main sector for GHG emissions	Agriculture	Agriculture	Electricity and heat	Land-use change and forestry	Transport	Electricity and heat	Aviation and shipping	Agriculture
INFRASTRUCTURE								
Number of port terminals	142	306	97	88	4	171	48	21
Number of airports	916	4,093	481	836	68	1,714	117	133
Estimated length of railway network (km)	17,866	30,621	2,396	1,267	0	26,704	77	1,498



Mexico's Missing Presence on the World Stage

López Obrador's insular foreign policy at the helm of the region's second-largest economy is a tale of missed opportunities.

by Olga Pellicer

MEXICO CITY — President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's six-year term will come to an end in 2024. Whoever takes his place will face a range of foreign policy challenges shaped in large part by his reluctance to dwell on foreign relations.

Famously focused on domestic issues, López Obrador has traveled only to the U.S., Central America and Cuba as president, eschewing state visits to the rest of the globe. Mexico may have had a unique opportunity to step up as an international leader as former President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil withdrew his country from the regional and world stage. But it seems that no one in López Obrador's inner circle was interested.

Mexico's most important foreign relationships under the current administration — after the U.S., undoubtedly its most important partner — have been with countries in Central America. This is not, however, a result of sustained, innovative diplomacy. On the contrary, López Obrador endeavored to reinvigo-

rate these relationships — long undervalued in Mexico — mainly to cooperate with the U.S. on reducing migration.

Even this blinkered attention, though, has been more meaningful than that afforded to South America, limited largely to López Obrador's dreamy rhetoric on the Bolivarian fantasy of deep Latin American integration. Sometimes, he talks about building a union like the European Union. At other times, he calls for the integration of the entire hemisphere with the U.S. and Canada. But, unsurprisingly, the content of such proposals has been unfocused and contradictory.

The weakness of Mexico's relationship with the rest of Latin America comes into sharp relief in the lack of support its proposals receive in regional forums. At the Inter-American Development Bank, Mexico's candidate to lead the bank after the departure of Mauricio Claver-Carone received minimal backing — a result due in part to Mexico's clumsy handling of its nomination. Meanwhile, at the Organization of Amer-



Famously focused on domestic issues, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has traveled only to the U.S., Central America and Cuba as president.

Even Mexico's relationship with the U.S., replete with opportunity, is beset by conflict.

ican States (OAS), Mexico remains quite alone in its efforts to replace Secretary General Luis Almagro and even more so in its aim, never well articulated, to dissolve the institution entirely.

The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) is the only regional forum in which Mexico has managed to show some leadership, first to ensure that the forum wouldn't perish, and then to orchestrate significant collaboration in response to the pandemic. López Obrador has failed, however, to make Mexico more internationally relevant through this forum, a key part of his plan to sap the influence of the OAS.

Even so, observers are quick to speculate that the return of left-wing Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as president of Brazil will result in reinvigorated political and economic ties with Mexico. But conditions are simply not right for meaningful progress on this front. First, the two leaders are on different political schedules. Lula is just beginning his term, while López Obrador is nearing the end of his presidency and is therefore turning his attention even more fully to domestic politics.

Second, their personalities are markedly different. Lula has always searched out the international spotlight and opportunities for global leadership, and Brazil's geopolitics facilitate both. It shares borders with 10 nations and has staked out a prominent role among large developing countries, most notably through the BRICS framework. Finally, Brazil's most important economic relationship is with China, not the U.S. Indeed, Brazil's political elites, some very close to Lula, seem to share the conviction that "Mexico is part of the north."

Greater collaboration between Mexico and Brazil would be a welcome change and would strengthen the position of Latin America on the world stage. But, given Mexico's track record of insularity under López

Obrador, this goal — like so many others — will remain an admirable idea whose time has not yet come.

Even Mexico's relationship with the U.S., replete with opportunity, is beset by conflict. Sometimes that conflict is avoidable, such as when López Obrador chose last year not to attend the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles over the Biden administration's refusal to invite leaders from Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Now, sadly, this year's cartel murder and kidnapping of U.S. citizens in Matamoros and the ongoing crisis of fentanyl overdose deaths in the U.S. are dominating discussions about the U.S.-Mexico relationship, even on the heels of Tesla's announcement that it would build a gigantic factory in Monterrey. Such tensions have always existed, but the relationship is especially fraught as the 2024 elections in both countries near; it is increasingly caught up in domestic partisan disputes on both sides of the border.

In the U.S., President Biden knows that any apparent failure to stem irregular immigration could cost his party the White House. Meanwhile, in Mexico, López Obrador stands ever ready to play on nationalist sentiment by accusing U.S. media, legislators and agencies of imperious interventionism, especially given recent calls by some of those legislators for U.S. military action against the cartels.

Given the political primacy in the U.S. of these kinds of issues, it is extremely unlikely that the Biden administration — or any other — will weigh in meaningfully on López Obrador's controversial reforms of Mexico's elections authority that undermine its independence. It is far more likely that the U.S. will look the other way, prioritizing other issues; after all, the history of U.S. action to support democracy in Latin America is largely a sad saga of failure. Opponents of the reforms should not cling to the hope that the U.S. — or the international community more



A billboard in Monterrey, Nuevo León, welcomes American electric carmaker Tesla.

broadly — will be able to blunt them.

The U.S. is, however, eager to engage on the much-heralded process of nearshoring to Mexico. The opportunities provided by China's faltering role in U.S. and European supply chains are enormous, and it would be a grave error for Mexico not to do everything possible to capitalize on them. And yet, Mexico has failed to take certain basic steps that would encourage potential benefits to materialize. For example, it still lacks an industrial policy and legal framework to clarify its new goals and provide certainty to potential new investors. This is especially important given that Mexico's deficient communications, energy and water infrastructure, along with rampant insecurity, also pose serious impediments.

The best chance for meaningful, creative and ef-

fective dialogue remains the creation of a binational technical commission staffed with experts and technocrats. The commission could craft proposals for feasible, cooperation-oriented action to manage urgent problems like drug trafficking, migration and arms trafficking from the U.S. to Mexico.

But such a commission has yet to materialize, like so many other obvious opportunities. For now, far from a leader on the international stage, Mexico will remain a cautionary tale of how an insular foreign policy results in untapped potential. **AQ**

Pellicer is a political analyst, professor and former Mexican diplomat. She currently teaches at the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM) and is a columnist for Proceso magazine.

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Seizing the Opportunity

President Lula is in a unique position to lead the region towards an integrated, and productive, future.

by Susan Segal

LATIN AMERICA HAS A UNIQUE opportunity to integrate and grow its economy — an opportunity that requires focus and leadership. As an elder statesman, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva could provide some of that leadership.

Over the last 30 years we have lived in a world which benefited enormously from globalization. Multiple trade agreements were signed among varying countries to facilitate trade and investment, and the world benefited from this thru lower prices. China emerged as a major buyer of commodities and long-term investor around the world, including Latin America. But most of the trade and investment agreements made by countries in the region were basically bilateral and not focused on more integration across the Hemisphere. This has left huge space for China to grow its presence throughout South America, while trade between Latin American countries remains very low.

Governments around the region still compete for investment in their own countries as opposed to envisioning a broader, regional trade and investment strategy. This is understandable, since all countries need growth, investment and quality jobs. However, the result is that Latin America's commerce continued to decline as a percent of global trade.

Now, just the magnitude of the supply chain opportunity could change that. As we think about building a secure supply chain, we should think about including the entire Hemisphere. Brazil could play a huge part, if not lead this discussion which involves most of Latin America, particularly countries with existing free trade agreements with the U.S.

Seizing this opportunity would require changes, including tariff structures. But wouldn't it be worth it? The result would be a stronger, more integrated and secure South America, which, with North America, could enshrine our Hemisphere as the most powerful and productive in the world.

So here is the opportunity for President Lula. He could lead Brazil, Latin America and the Hemisphere to that end. **AQ**



Susan Segal is the CEO of Americas Society/Council of the Americas

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Mexico Has a Path to Meet Its Climate Pledges

Fulfilling the country's commitments to reduce emissions will be a critical task for the next administration.

by Luisa Palacios and Diego Rivera Rivota

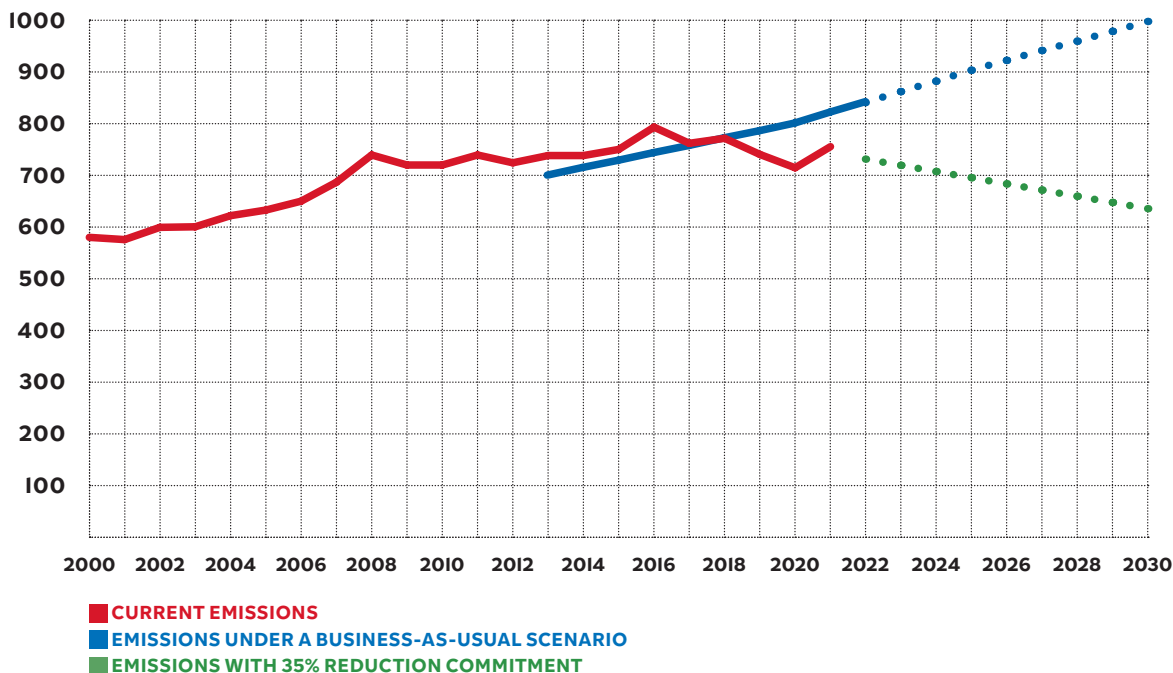
NEXT YEAR, Mexicans will choose a successor to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador for the 2024–30 presidential term, or *sexenio*. This will not be an ordinary *sexenio*: At stake is whether Mexico will be able to deliver on the country's climate pledge of a 35% emissions reduction by 2030 under its Paris Accord commitment.

Whether Mexico, the world's 14th largest economy, achieves its climate commitments is of relevance not only for the next president's international and domestic credibility and the country's future competitiveness. It is also of global relevance. Mexico is the 12th largest crude oil exporter (the second largest crude exporter to the U.S.), and among greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters it sits at number 14. And in terms of methane, believed to be significantly more damaging to the atmosphere than carbon dioxide, it is among the 10 largest emitters in the world. Despite Mexico's global relevance, it is the only G-20 country that has yet to pledge a net-zero emissions goal, something that more than 130 countries have already committed to.

Last November, Mexico submitted a revised National Determined Contribution (NDC) — which are the plans presented by each country as part of their Paris Accord climate commitments — pledging to reduce its emissions by 35% in 2030. It will be up to the next administration to deliver a plan on how to bring emissions down and prepare the country for an era of extreme weather events.

Mexico's Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Reduction Goals

Metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent



Source: Authors based on Instituto Nacional de Ecología y Cambio Climático, IMF and Mexico's NDC submitted in 2022

While a 35% emissions reduction might sound like an untenable goal to reach in six years, in reality this number is closer to 20%. Mexico's target was in reference to a business-as-usual scenario which assumes a 25% increase in emissions by 2030 compared to 2019. The good news for Mexico — and the world — is that such an aggressive emissions trajectory is not likely to materialize. The IMF estimates that under a business-as-usual scenario that takes into account the current emissions trajectory and policy landscape, the increase would be closer to 7% between 2020 and 2030.

However, even this more attainable target will not be met without a plan. To put things into perspective, Mexico's GHG emissions fell by only about 3% in 2020, despite the economy shrinking 8% in a pandemic-related recession — a testament to the emissions of legacy infrastructure and economic processes. The challenge for Mexico in the next *sexenio* is to achieve its pledged reductions by tapping into the significant opportunities that the energy transition could repre-

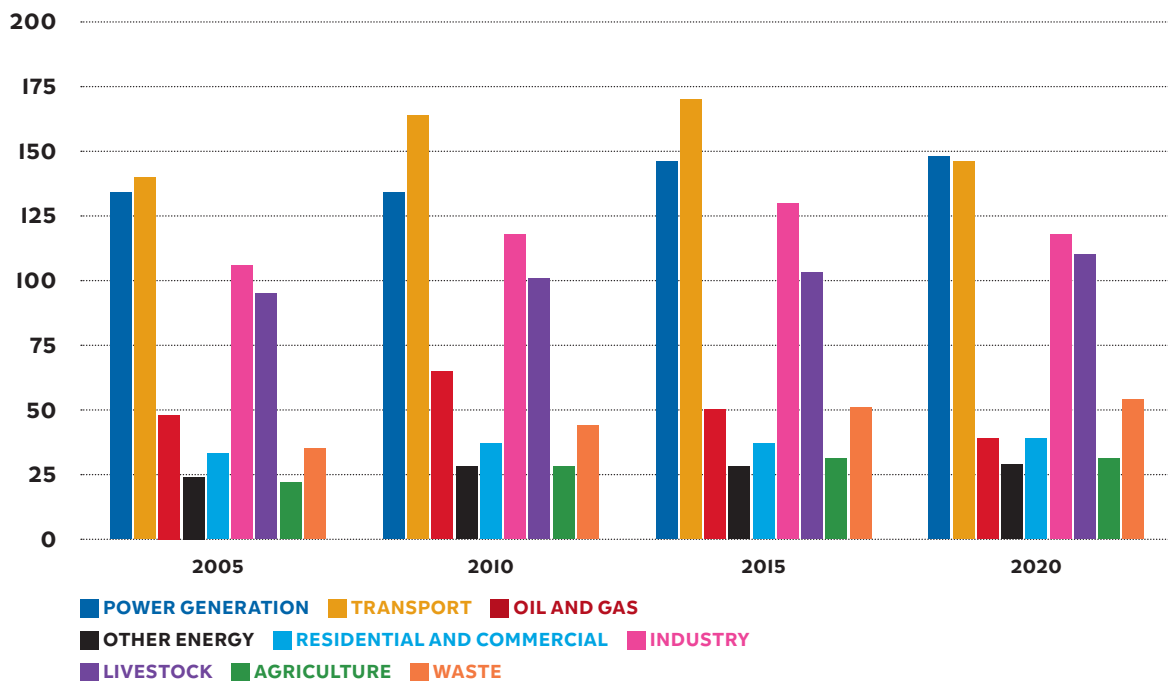
sent, in terms of investments and growth, to reduce the costs of such transformation.

Mexico has many things going for it. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and U.S. economic tensions with China represent a significant opportunity for near- and friendshoring. In addition, the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act, which unleashes about \$400 billion in climate-related funding, could open up significant investment opportunities for Mexico to become part of new clean energy supply chains. Yet, government action is key to unleashing this kind of opportunity.

Mexico's current NDC places reforestation and better land use at the center of how the country plans to meet its emissions pledges. Indeed, a responsible approach to biodiversity is essential and needs to be a critical part of the equation. But it will be difficult for Mexico to meet its climate targets without also addressing the current emissions of the power, transportation and oil and gas sectors, which represent the bulk of Mexico's emissions, and are key for Mexi-

Mexico's Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Sector

Metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent



Source: Instituto Nacional de Ecología y Cambio Climático

co's future economic competitiveness. This approach is in line with other studies and proposals, including from Mexico's National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change (INECC) and the NGO Iniciativa Climática de México (ICM).

On transportation, which is the second largest source of emissions in Mexico, some policy action and a growing fleet of more fuel-efficient vehicles resulted in a 10% emission reduction from this sector in the last decade. That underscores the power of policy and technology in helping to reduce emissions. What makes transportation particularly relevant in Mexico's case is that more than a third of the country's total exports are linked to the automobile industry. This industry is undergoing a significant transformation with the expansion of electric vehicles. Tesla's recent announcement of a new factory in the state of Nuevo León is big news for a country that needs to make sure it is part of the industry's future. Other companies have also announced plans for

EV production in Mexico. The requirements of these companies for clean energy in their operations are only going to increase.

Power sector: Bridging the gap between pledges and action

UNLIKE MANY SOUTH AMERICAN COUNTRIES where renewables account for 60% or more of the electricity mix, in Mexico the share of non-fossil fuel power generation is about 28%, according to the Latin American Energy Organization (OLADE). This puts Mexico behind its USMCA trading partners Canada — where non-fossil fuels represent more than 80% of the country's electricity — and the U.S., where renewables are 20% of the power mix, but, adding nuclear, the share of non-fossil fuels is already at 40%.

Mexico's power sector is the main source of the country's GHG emissions, and emissions have grown



A Pemex facility in San Luis Potosí state

rapidly. The increase would have been even steeper had it not been for the electricity auctions held under the previous administration, which resulted in about 9 GW of solar and wind capacity added in the last five years. Solar and wind-based electricity now account for about 12% of Mexico's generation, compared to only 3% in 2017. This also contributed to a 50% reduction of coal-based power generation and, to a lesser extent, of oil-based generation compared to 2017.

Unfortunately, this process came to a halt under the current administration, leading many analysts and international agencies to voice their disappointment and concern. As a result, Mexico will likely miss one of the key goals embedded in its energy transition law of achieving 35% of clean power generation by 2024.

However, the new NDC submitted by the current administration continues to uphold clean energy ambitions, as seen in the goal of adding 40 GW

of non-fossil power capacity, up from almost 30 GW currently, by 2030. Embracing this ambitious target is a step in the right direction for Mexico to capitalize on its abundant renewable energy resources. But the next government's to-do list will also include the goal of finding a mechanism to deploy the level of investment needed to reach these non-fossil power targets. While state-owned electricity company CFE's recent move into renewables is welcomed, a handful of solar energy projects to be built by CFE will not be enough. According to ICM's analysis, to meet its climate commitments, Mexico will need to add, before 2030, the equivalent of three to four times the clean electricity projects added in the last five years. No government or state-owned company has the balance sheet to do this alone.

The outlook for meaningful growth of renewables in the country is highly uncertain without an effective partnership with the private sector. Clean energy

In a world of net-zero pledges, Pemex's sub-par environmental performance will only compound its credit challenges.

auctions have proven to be a successful mechanism in Latin America and in Mexico for deployment of renewables into the power grid, but the Mexican government canceled the last one in 2019.

Oil and gas sector: Start with Pemex's methane emissions

TACKLING GHG EMISSIONS from the oil and gas sector is going to be challenging everywhere in the world. But in Mexico's case, lack of progress on emissions reduction in this sector could have very negative financial implications for Pemex, the national oil company, and thus for the government. Mexico's revised NDC has a goal of reducing GHG emissions by 14% in the oil and gas sector by 2030. The next administration will also be on the hook for delivering on this pledge.


One of the most urgent issues is methane emissions. According to official data, the amount of methane that is either vented or flared rose by 150% between 2019 and 2021 and is equivalent to 10% of the country's total domestic gas production. Had Mexico developed the infrastructure to capture these methane emissions it could have saved \$1 billion by avoiding about 8% of the gas it imported from the U.S. Talk about an effective energy security measure!

A sign that the Mexican government understands the global relevance of curbing methane emissions is its membership in the Global Methane Pledge (GMP), a global effort to collectively reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030. Recent announcements about a collaboration between Pemex and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to provide technical capacity to tackle methane emissions are encouraging.

In a world of net-zero pledges, Pemex's sub-par environmental performance will only compound its credit challenges, already problematic

given its debt overhang and financial woes. Thus, tackling Pemex's environmental performance is becoming particularly relevant if the state-owned oil company wants to maintain access to the financial sector. In this respect, the Foreign Affairs Ministry's announcement last year of a \$2 billion investment plan to reduce Pemex's methane venting and flaring is encouraging, although there are no further details. However, for all of this to go beyond announcements, government action is crucial.

Many companies have pledged to become net-zero by 2050, including some based in Mexico. Access to finance is likely to become increasingly selective according to the credibility of climate credentials. Therefore, among the next government's urgent to-do-list goals will be the decarbonization of its own power and oil state-owned companies. Given CFE's and Pemex's quasi-monopolistic position, reducing emissions in the power and oil and gas sectors depends on it. And without progress in these two sectors, it is going to be very difficult for Mexico's next president to reduce emissions, let alone deliver on the current climate pledges by 2030.

The good news is that Mexico is particularly well-placed to capitalize on the many opportunities that the energy transition represents. It will be up to the next government to make sure it does. 

Palacios is a senior research scholar at the Center on Global Energy Policy and adjunct professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. She is a member of AQ's editorial board.

Rivera Rivota is a research associate at the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. He is a member of the Mexican Council on Foreign Relations (COMEXI).

Defense Minister Iván Velásquez faces a complex security landscape in Colombia.





THE AQ PROFILE

Colombia's Unlikely Defense Minister

In his latest post, Iván Velásquez is challenging criminal groups—and the military tasked with confronting them.

by John Otis

BOGOTÁ — As an anti-corruption crusader, Iván Velásquez faced down drug lord Pablo Escobar, exposed ties between Colombian politicians and death squads, and was declared persona non grata in Guatemala after helping to put that country's president behind bars. But his current assignment as Colombia's defense minister may prove his most challenging post.

Velásquez accepted the job, which involves managing the 481,000-member armed forces and national police, even though he had no experience in security matters; he was better known for denouncing human rights violations, including cases involving the Colombian military. His appointment last August dismayed an officer corps already alarmed by the 2022 election of President Gustavo Petro, a former left-wing guerrilla. Then, just days into the job, Velásquez launched a massive reorganization that led to the ouster of more than 50 generals and admirals.

"It would be hard to think of a defense minister who would be more offensive to many elements within Colombia's military" than Velásquez, said Jeremy McDermott, co-director of Insight Crime, a think tank that researches organized crime in Latin America. "This was an earthquake for the security forces."

Amid the aftershocks, Velásquez must address Colombia's complex and shifting security landscape.

On the positive side, Colombia's homicide rate has decreased slightly and there has been a notable lack of scandals involving the police and military under Velásquez, said Jorge Restrepo of the Bogotá-based Resource Center for Conflict Analysis. That has been a welcome change in a country where security forces have been repeatedly accused of illegally killing civilians, corruption and the use of excessive force, including at 2021 protests against Petro's predecessor, Iván Duque. The purge of the officer corps, Restrepo added, cashiered many who opposed the Petro government's peace initiatives.

"It brought a breath of fresh air into the armed forces," Restrepo said. "The new military hierarchy is committed to human rights."

Yet there is more to the story, especially outside Bogotá. Despite a historic 2016 peace accord that demobilized the FARC, Colombia's largest guerrilla group, an array of smaller rebel factions and drug trafficking and crime groups continue to sow terror in large patches of the countryside home to 7 million people, or about 15% of Colombia's population. These groups have no real ambitions to seize power and mainly fight among themselves over territory. But they are killing and kidnapping civilians, extorting businesses and forcibly recruiting young people. Critics say Velásquez's decisions have stripped the security forces of some of their most experienced leaders.

"To me, it seems like a very dangerous situation to have a new defense minister without any knowledge of security issues who then gets rid of most of the military's installed capacity to fight criminal groups," said Daniel Mejía, a former government security secretary for Bogotá, Colombia's capital.

Ceasefire confusion

COMPLICATING MATTERS FURTHER is President Petro's reluctance to use military force as he attempts to negotiate ceasefires with Marxist rebels, like the National Liberation Army (ELN), and criminal groups such as the Gulf Clan. This is central to his signature policy of *paz total*, or "total peace," which aims to immediately reduce homicides, torture and disappearances and, eventually, end armed conflict in Colombia.

But the policy has also been perceived as confusing. In some cases, troops have been told to cease "offensive operations" against these groups but to combat the cocaine trafficking and other crimes they carry out. This has left the armed forces unsure of the rules of engagement and hesitant to act, said Humberto de la Calle, a Colombian senator who was chief negotiator of the 2016 peace treaty with the FARC. Velásquez, he said, has further muddied the waters with "abstract" speeches.

"The armed forces are trained to obey orders, but

Critics say Velásquez's decisions have stripped the security forces of some of their most experienced leaders.

Velásquez has failed to provide total clarity about their mission,” de la Calle said.

A prime example of the confusion came on March 2 when 5,000 armed protesters, whom local officials claim were infiltrated by guerrillas, took over an oil pumping station in southern Colombia to demand better roads and government services. They quickly overwhelmed anti-riot police, who do not carry firearms, killed one of them and kidnapped 78 others. Over their mobile phones, some of the officers pleaded for help, but the government refused to dispatch troops. Instead, Velásquez helped win the release of the officers through a day of negotiations. As he shook hands with the newly freed men, Velásquez said, “We managed to keep in check a very complex situation involving people who could have caused a lot more violence.”

But rather than applauding Velásquez for avoiding a bloodbath, some Colombians saw the episode as a sign of weakness. Meanwhile, videos of the kidnappers herding humiliated police officers into cattle trucks recalled the late 1990s and early 2000s, when rebels routinely captured police and army troops and had the upper hand in the war. In an editorial, the Bogotá newspaper *El Espectador* blasted the Petro government for applying “lots of carrot and very little stick” in the standoff and noted that “since Iván Velásquez arrived at the Defense Ministry, the news has been macabre.”

A spokeswoman for Velásquez said he was too busy to speak with *AQ* for this story. But at a recent news conference in Bogotá, he ticked off a list of ongoing military operations and bristled at suggestions the police and army were hunkered down in their barracks.

“We are not just sitting around with our arms crossed,” said Velásquez, looking somber in wire-rim glasses and a dark suit.

Decades of public service

INDEED, VELÁSQUEZ, 67, has always been a workaholic and a deeply committed public servant.

He grew up in Medellín, studied law, and, as Colombia's dual guerrilla and drug wars raged in the 1980s, focused on human rights cases. In 1991 he was appointed inspector general — the government's internal affairs chief — for Antioquia department, a dangerous job as many state offices had been infiltrated by the Medellín Cartel. At one point, an envoy for Pablo Escobar offered Velásquez a suitcase full of cash to back off on his investigations. He rejected the bribe, but, fearing for his life, sought out the imprisoned drug lord to explain why. A sweaty Escobar, who was playing soccer on the prison grounds, halted the game to meet with Velásquez.

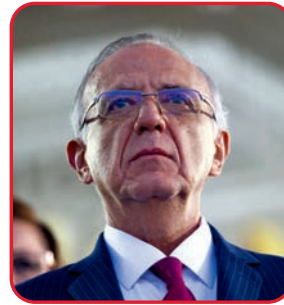
“I thanked him but told him I don't accept gifts,” Velásquez told the Bogotá magazine *Bocas* in an interview last year.

As an assistant justice on Colombia's Supreme Court in the early 2000s, Velásquez investigated a wide-ranging conspiracy in which Colombian politicians were financing right-wing paramilitaries who then intimidated voters into supporting them during elections. The probe led to more than 60 convictions and caught the attention of the United Nations. In 2013, Velásquez was selected to head the U.N. International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala. Known as CICIG, it was formed in 2006 to help solidify Guatemala's democratic institutions as criminal

TIMELINE

Iván Velásquez

BORN 1955 IN
MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA



1991-94

Served as inspector general of his home department of Antioquia, the center of Pablo Escobar's criminal empire and a base for guerrilla and paramilitary groups. Led investigations into major abuses as violence in the region flared. Helped found the department's Permanent Office of Human Rights and the Inter-Institutional Human Rights Committee of government officials, NGOs and Catholic Church groups.

2000-06

Named assistant justice on the Colombian Supreme Court.

2013

Appointed head of the UN-backed International Commission Against Corruption and Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) that supported local law enforcement in high-profile investigations.



2019

Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales—under investigation by the CICIG for alleged campaign finance violations—banned Velásquez from Guatemala and declined to renew the commission's mandate. (Morales denies wrongdoing and was never convicted.)

JAN 2023

Guatemala's Public Prosecutor's Office announced an investigation into Velásquez for alleged irregularities during his time at CICIG. Many international observers described the move as part of a years-long drive by Guatemalan officials to weaken CICIG and its legacy.

1990

1992

1993

1995

1996

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2014

2016

2017

2018

2020

2021

1997-99

Led Medellín's regional Public Prosecutor's Office and investigated paramilitary violence, including several massacres. Exposed money laundering networks and links between paramilitary groups and political figures.

2006-12

Led a special commission that revealed ties between paramilitary groups and members of Congress. More than 50 members of Congress were later convicted on related charges. The commission also revealed that around 130 members of Congress had ties to drug trafficking groups. During this period, a Colombian intelligence agency illegally surveilled Velásquez, for which several officials were later jailed.

2015-19

CICIG and Guatemalan prosecutors exposed a customs fraud ring stealing tens of millions of dollars. Then-President Otto Pérez Molina was forced to resign and subsequently jailed for alleged involvement. CICIG-supported investigations implicated dozens of high-profile politicians, business leaders and public figures in corruption and organized crime.

2022

Appointed Colombia's defense minister by President Gustavo Petro. Responsibilities include overseeing negotiations with—and military operations against—the ELN, FARC splinter groups and other armed actors.



rings were infiltrating the country's political system. As usual, Velásquez was all in.

"He slept in the same dark bunker where he worked, 24/7, and he could not step outside of his offices without a heavy armed guard," wrote Maria McFarland Sánchez-Moreno in *There Are No Dead Here*, a book that details Velásquez's work in Colombia and Guatemala.

In its most sensational case, the commission helped Guatemala's judiciary with an investigation that led to the 2015 resignation of then-President Otto Pérez Molina, who was later convicted on corruption charges. Thousands marched in the streets to support the commission's work while graffiti in Guatemala City proclaimed: "I love CICIG" and "Thank you, Iván!"

"In the past decade, Guatemala has become a place where once-untouchable, powerful elites have learned to fear criminal prosecution," Velásquez wrote in a 2019 op-ed in the *Washington Post*.

Critics, however, say Velásquez overreached by targeting the family of President Jimmy Morales, sworn-in shortly after Pérez Molina resigned, over comparatively minor corruption allegations. An enraged Morales, himself under investigation for illicit campaign financing, declared Velásquez persona non grata and, in 2019, forced the CICIG to shut down.

Velásquez's reform agenda

BACK IN COLOMBIA, after Petro squeaked out a victory in the 2022 presidential election, Velásquez seemed like a natural for justice minister. But Colombian presidents often put political heavyweights in charge of defense, and Velásquez was a highly respected figure both at home and abroad. His selection also signaled that the new president would have zero tolerance for abusive behavior by the police and military, said Adam Isaacson, a Colombia expert at the Washington Office on Latin America.

A clean-up job was in order following multiple scandals, ranging from police killings of protesters to corruption allegations to army officers illegally spying on politicians and journalists. A report last year by Colombia's Caracol TV found that 39 of the army's 56 generals were under investigation by

the Attorney General's office. Most of them have now been cashiered.

Velásquez also wants to eliminate Colombia's obligatory draft and overhaul the military contracting system, long a source of graft. His most ambitious plan is to separate the police from the Defense Ministry to turn a highly militarized force that spent decades battling guerrillas and drug traffickers into an organization focused on protecting citizens and dealing with protesters.

However, none of these reforms is likely to garner much support if security in the countryside continues to deteriorate. Efforts to reach ceasefires with the ELN are floundering. In March, reacting to a military offensive against illegal gold mining, the Gulf Clan — Colombia's largest crime organization — attacked police stations, blocked highways and paralyzed commerce in parts of Antioquia and Córdoba departments. In a February survey by the Inva-met polling agency, Petro's job-approval rating had dropped to 40% as pressure mounted for his government to adopt a harder line.

"Today, no armed group in Colombia feels a threat of such magnitude from the military or police that it would be inclined to offer real concessions," says a new report from the International Crisis Group. "The Petro government urgently needs to complement its plans for dialogue with a more rigorous security approach."

Velásquez suggests this could backfire and referred to his successful efforts to free the 78 policemen abducted at the oil station. Had he sent in the troops, there would have been a shootout. Then, instead of calling him out for going soft on criminals, he said, critics would accuse him of provoking a massacre. Speaking to Medellín's *El Colombiano* newspaper, he said, "We must figure out ways to exercise authority while also respecting human lives."

For Colombia's defense minister, finding that formula remains a work in progress. **AQ**

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Otis is an author and journalist based in Colombia. Previously the South America bureau chief for the Houston Chronicle, Otis' work has been featured in NPR, Time, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal.



PHOTO ESSAY

# LITHIUM'S HIDDEN FRONTIER

*In the Argentine province of Catamarca, rural and Indigenous communities are grappling with the changes wrought by multi-billion-dollar projects extracting lithium from its salt flats.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANITA POUCHARD SERRA





**H**IGH IN THE ANDES MOUNTAINS, and across the Atacama Desert, is the area dubbed the Lithium Triangle: the mineral-rich regions of Argentina, Bolivia and Chile, home to about half of the world's known reserves of lithium. While extraction in Bolivia and Chile is led by state-owned companies, Argentina's regulatory environment allows for full foreign ownership of investments in the sector. Argentina has attracted \$5 billion in investments just since 2020. But extracting the mineral that is fueling the world's transition away from fossil fuels has its own impact on the environment. Residents of communities that surround large projects are concerned about their livelihoods — and the safety of water sources and the local ecosystem.



Cacique Roman Guitan is the leader of Atacameños del Altiplano, a community living in the Salar del Hombre Muerto in Antofagasta de la Sierra. Their homes face the Fenix project, owned by U.S.-based Livent. Residents fear the expansion of the project will affect the communities' farming-based livelihood and sacred places.

The Salar del Hombre Muerto ("Dead Man's salt flat") got its name from Guitan's great-grandfather, who found and buried the remains of an unknown man. The family has since buried other ancestors next to the original grave.









Activists visit fellow residents of Fiambalá, a Catamarca town of 8,000 people, inviting them to attend a public meeting about the Tres Quebradas lithium project, developed by China's Zijin Mining subsidiary Liex. Locals are concerned about the new development's use of local water sources.



A mural in the center of Fiambalá with a call to defend water sources.





The owners of the Tres Quebradas project located in Fiambalá boast that it will extract some of the world's highest-grade lithium. Catamarca's Governor Raúl Jalil expects the project will create jobs in the region. The Argentine government projects lithium exports will double to \$4 billion by 2024.





A sign invites tourists and visitors to take care of the natural environment in the Salar del Hombre Muerto. Below: detail of the salt flat of Tres Quebradas, where the Zijin subsidiary Liex's project takes place. There are currently six lithium exploration projects under development in Argentina.

A brine evaporation pool at Liex's Tres Quebradas lithium mine project near Fiambalá.









ONE YEAR LATER



# A Key Migration Initiative Moves Ahead—Slowly

**A year after AQ's report on the Summit of the Americas, an agreement on migration initiatives risks missing a chance for true regional cooperation.**

*by Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian*

**O**N THE SIDELINES OF the Summit of the Americas last June, 20 countries signed the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, agreeing to increase coordination and cooperation on migration and forced displacement of people. The need is clear: A staggering 26% of the world's migrants — more than 73.5 million people according to the 2022 World Migration Report — lived in the Americas by the end of 2020. That equals 7% of the region's population. Having generated an umbrella space for regional coordination on this issue is indeed an important contribution of this accord, as well as the establishment of a base line from which to assess country and regional pledges around four key pillars: first, stability and assistance to countries of origin, transit and destination; second, the provision of legal pathways; third, promoting humane migration management, with a focus on security challenges; and finally, providing and coordinating emergency humanitarian response.

So, one year later, where are we in the implementation of this declaration?

Some initial commitments along the four pillars have advanced, including, for example, the amnesty implemented in Belize for irregular migrants and asylum seekers, and the regularization of processes for Venezuelan mi-

As of March 1, there have been three follow-up meetings and 11 working groups were formed. Countries divided the leadership to work on specific topics such as support for receiving communities, temporary protection and regularization, and international financing to receiving countries, among others.


## The process and the parties

While the declaration establishes a new framework from existing efforts, it is also not clear whether the accord builds upon cooperation already occurring such as the Regional Conference on Migration (CRM), the South American Conference on Migration (CSM) and the Quito Process to address the Venezuelan migration crisis, among others. The connection between the umbrella provided by the LA Declaration, and those efforts already underway should be explained and the value added explicitly shared.

## Accountability through time

## Defining a role for multilateral partners and other actors

The situation on the ground continues to challenge countries and to put migrants and displaced people in vulnerable situations. Occurrences of humanitarian emergencies are seen throughout the region from the Atacama Desert to the Rio Grande, while in the Darien Gap, one of the most dangerous migratory routes in the region, the number of migrants increases year after year. Panamanian authorities reported that irregular crossings into Panama in 2022 reached a record 250,000, nearly doubling from the previous year.

The conversation on a hemispheric approach to continue solidifying the principle of shared responsibility, with the idea that no country alone assumes the cost of receiving and integrating migrants and refugees, must continue to be prioritized. Human mobility continues to increase; it is thus essential for policymakers to respond with efficient policies in a framework of truly hemispheric cooperation as rapidly as people move throughout the region. 

*Muñoz-Pogossian is the director of the Department of Social Inclusion at the Organization of American States. She has written extensively on migration and democracy in Latin America and is a founding member and coordinator of Red de Politólogas No Sin Mujeres. Opinions are personal. They do not represent those of the Organization of American States (OAS).*



# Why Did Costa Rica Really Abolish Its Military?

**Politics, not pacifism, led the country  
to eliminate its armed forces in a  
decision that still resonates today.**

*by Cristina Eguizábal*

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Troops commanded by Costa Rica's government prepare to face José Figueres Ferrer's National Liberation Army in April 1948. After defeating the government forces, Figueres would make the momentous decision to abolish the country's military.

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**S**AN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA — As in the rest of the Americas, Costa Rica's armed forces played an important role in building its state infrastructure and creating a sense of nationhood. From defeating an 1857 pirate invasion led by William Walker, to what would be the country's last military coup in 1917, the military was front and center in the country's political life. So that made it all the more momentous when on December 1, 1948, the then-leader of the governing junta, José Figueres Ferrer, issued a declaration abolishing the armed forces.

Within a year, the decision had been codified in the country's constitution.

In a region characterized by the political prominence of its militaries even today, it is natural to ask: How did this happen? Looking back at the chain of events that led to Figueres' decision, one thing is clear: A key motive was not lofty pacifist principle, but rather taking advantage of a weakened military in order to eliminate it as a potential political rival.

The beginning of the end of Costa Rica's armed forces can be traced back to a 1917 coup d'état by General Brigadier Federico Tinoco. Refused recognition by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, Tinoco's regime languished in international isolation, while his repressive policies were extremely unpopular among all sectors of Costa Rican society, including the powerful coffee exporters. Within two years, the dictator had lost support from economic elites and even the army itself. After Tinoco's brother, the war minister, was assassinated in 1919, he fled the country.

The resulting political consensus among the ruling elite was to sideline the army and strengthen civilian control over the military. Gradually, the army's budget was reduced. As defense expenses dwindled, public education and police budgets increased. From 1920 to 1948, Costa Ricans elected seven civilian presidents, and though voting was a male prerogative, all in all, elections were reasonably free and fair.

But between 1940 and 1948, the country experienced intense political polarization. The social re-

forms of Christian democratic President Rafael Calderón Guardia — backed by a coalition ranging from the Catholic hierarchy to communists — drew ferocious opposition from commodity exporters, the business community and anticommunist activists, who began taking up arms.

Calderón lost reelection in February 1948, but had Congress annul the result — at which point a group of young intellectuals, supported by a sector of the ruling elite, formed a rebel army and marched on the capital, demanding that the outcome of the popular vote be respected. Their National Liberation Army, under the leadership of José Figueres Ferrer — a coffee grower of Spanish origin — defeated the badly organized and poorly equipped governmental armed forces, which had been defunded since the demise of the last military coup.

As leader of the resulting junta, in a surprise move, Figueres consolidated Calderón's progressive social reforms — even going further, nationalizing banks and insurance companies, introducing suffrage for women and full citizenship for Costa Ricans of African descent. And — he disbanded the defeated armed forces, as well as his own troops, in order to guarantee civilian rule in the future. Not only was Figueres shielding future civilian governments from potential threats, he was also freeing up resources for public education and health care.

After Figueres' junta handed power to elected officials, he would serve as president twice: in 1953–57 and in 1970–74. His experiment with abolishing the armed forces has lasted seven decades.

## Geopolitics helped

**T**HE COUNTRY'S DOMESTIC political dynamics from 1920 onwards were crucial in the abolition of the armed forces in Costa Rica. But it is also important to consider other factors, of an international and geopolitical nature.

The international system was changing dramatically after the Allied victory in World War II. Pro-





José Figueres Ferrer surrounded by supporters at the Bellavista fortress in San José. The fortress was the site of Figueres' symbolic declaration abolishing the army in 1948.

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A former combatant in Costa Rica's civil war looks on at this image of Figueres on display in Cartago, Costa Rica, in December 2020.

moted by Washington, a rules-based international order was taking shape. On April 25, 1945, 50 governments met in San Francisco and started drafting the UN Charter. According to its Charter, the organization's purpose is to maintain peace and security, protect human rights, deliver humanitarian aid, promote sustainable development, and uphold international law. At its creation, the UN had 51 member states representing most of the world's sovereign states at the time — and 20 were Latin American. Today it includes 193 members, 31 from the Americas.

And some of the first international organizations of the new world order led by Washington were born in the Western Hemisphere. The Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, also known as the Rio

Treaty or TIAR by its Spanish acronym, was signed in 1947, the first of the mutual security agreements created during the postwar era — though it soon became a Cold War instrument invoked mainly against perceived communist menaces. The Organization of American States (OAS) was established a year later in Bogotá, with the purpose of increasing cooperation among the American states and strengthening their territorial integrity.

The Costa Rican elites counted on these mechanisms to ensure their security vis-à-vis their neighbors, in particular their northern neighbor, Nicaragua. As a matter of fact, the OAS has been called to mediate between the two countries in 1949, 1955 and during the Central American conflicts of the 1980s.

## Six sovereign states in the Americas have chosen to follow the Costa Rican example.

For the small Central American and Caribbean countries on the United States' periphery, the most important threat to their national security had traditionally been Washington's policies and armed interventions. Historically, this has not been an idle threat. During the first half of the 20th century, the U.S. temporarily occupied many of them militarily. But having a powerful military is of little use in this regard: The power asymmetry is so overwhelming between the U.S. and the Caribbean Basin small states that military resistance would be futile. Costa Rica was not occupied, but neighboring Nicaragua and Honduras endured foreign troops on their soil and intervention in their customs offices. In Panama, the U.S. manned the canal until 1999 and administered a small colony in the Canal Zone until 1979.

The international organizations created after World War II fulfill two roles. They increase the costs of military interventions by great powers, but do not deter these interventions altogether. However, they also serve as collective security mechanisms for small and medium-sized states. In the Americas, they do not impede Washington's direct or indirect interventions in Central America and the Caribbean — but the collective security mechanism did serve its purpose.

## Not unarmed

**I**NSTEAD OF A STANDING ARMY, Costa Rica's civilian authorities created three corps: a civil guard, a rural guard and a short-lived military police that was later subsumed into the police force. In 1996, following an important security reform, the civil and rural guards were reorganized under the public security ministry into three commands: land, sea and air. The Costa Rican public security forces are responsible for assuring border security, combating narcotrafficking and organized crime and fighting crime in general.

It's also worth noting the 1949 Constitution bans

the existence of a permanent force but does not preclude the formation of temporary military forces. The Costa Rican Congress, following a national emergency declaration, could authorize the recruitment and training of a temporary force in case of imminent danger.

What's been the regional legacy of Costa Rica's shedding of its military? As of today, six sovereign states in the Americas have chosen to follow the Costa Rican example: Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Haiti and Panama. The first four are members of the Caribbean Regional Security System, which works closely with the U.S. Southern Command. Haiti and Panama, in contrast, have small paramilitary forces.

Other parts of the region have been moving in the opposite direction. In Mexico, for example, the reach of the armed forces has lately expanded to include many domestic roles, from tourism to policing and infrastructure projects. In Brazil, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is seeking to deal with the fallout from the greatly expanded military presence in civilian government under his predecessor.

In these countries, the greatest threat isn't the armed forces themselves but rather the worry that civilian control over them could be slipping. And there's an irony for politicians like Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador: By increasing the armed forces' participation in civilian affairs, they put in danger their own control over the military.

Of course, it's no accident that the countries that have shed their militaries are all small countries. But even if countries like Mexico and Brazil can't aspire to emulate Costa Rica in the short term, they can learn from other aspects of Costa Rica's history — especially in how it demonstrates the importance of civilian control of the military. **AQ**

*Eguizábal is a political scientist and professor at the University of Costa Rica*





Chilean singer Gepe (*Music*, p. 88) performs in Guadalajara, Mexico in October 2022.

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# Books

## Nonfiction

**A new book looks at a famous Brazilian explorer and general who left a complex legacy in the Amazon.**

**Reviewed by Amanda Audi**

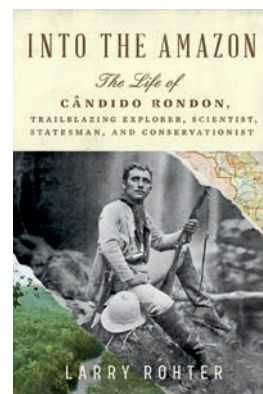
**I**N 1914, THEODORE ROOSEVELT EMBARKED ON a dangerous journey into the heart of the Amazon rainforest, following the mysterious River of Doubt. Across the two-month-long trip, the former U.S. president injured his foot in the river, lost 60 pounds, and nearly died — surviving only thanks to the efforts of a five-foot-tall Brazilian man, who came from a poor and partly Indigenous background.

This was Cândido Rondon: two-star general, explorer, scientist, conservationist and anthropologist. Born in a small city in Brazil's Mato Grosso state and orphaned at the age of two, Rondon managed to win a place at the military academy in Rio de Janeiro, where he soon stood out on account of his excellent grades.

Rondon is also the subject of *Into the Amazon*, a new biography by journalist Larry Rohter, former Brazil correspondent for *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*. Following Rondon's long public career — stretching from the end of the Brazilian monarchy, in 1889, to his death in 1958 — Rohter's account is highly complimentary, praising Rondon's statesmanship and describing him as the “greatest tropical explorer in history.”

It's true that today's Brazil bears the stamp of Rondon's considerable influence. As army engineer, Rondon laid 1,200 miles of telegraph wires through inhospitable terrain, discovered and cataloged unknown species and was the first to contact isolated Indigenous communities. Thanks to Rondon's efforts, what was previously only known through cartographic projections and fantastic tales assumed real form. And in a country where Native peoples are often treated as an obstacle to development, this general was one of the first to advocate for their rights.

But despite Rohter's meticulous research, which makes use of both U.S. and Brazilian archives as well as Rondon's own diaries, his book has little



***Into The Amazon:  
The Life of Cândido  
Rondon, Trailblazing  
Explorer, Scientist,  
Statesman, and  
Conservationist***

By Larry Rohter

W. W. Norton

Hardcover

480 pages


to say about what Indigenous communities thought of his work — nor about Rondon’s own doubts, toward the end of his life, over whether leaving tribes in isolation might have been better than forcing a contact.

Still, it’s undeniable that Rondon laid the foundation for the protected Indigenous territories that now make up 14% of the country’s landmass and have become an established, if imperfect, barrier against deforestation, mining and criminal activity that affects Indigenous groups.

To read *Into the Amazon* as a Brazilian is a strange exercise in seeing how the same problems regarding Indigenous people and the Amazon have endured through the generations, in some ways with few changes. Rondon’s ideas form a sharp contrast with the brutal realities Indigenous people have experienced since the outset of Portuguese colonization — including recently, under the Jair Bolsonaro government, which often turned a blind eye to illegal exploitation of Indigenous lands. In January, evidence of a crisis of malnutrition and disease among

the Indigenous Yanomami caused widespread indignation and spurred an investigation, as photos of skeletal and sick Yanomami people circulated widely in Brazil and around the world.

Despite playing a bit part in the military coup that toppled Brazil’s monarchy and installed a republic, Rondon was, later on, a strong proponent of keeping the military out of politics. In his last interview, in the 1950s, he said, “The army should be the great mute” — another contrast with the present day, which has seen the resurgence of the military’s role in politics under Bolsonaro.

Upon taking office in January, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has sought to contain the damage in the Amazon, rushing support to starving Indigenous groups and creating the first Indigenous Peoples’ Ministry. But as the new minister of Indigenous peoples, Sônia Guajajara, recently said: “It won’t be easy to overcome 522 years [since colonization] in four.” 

Audi is a reporter for The Brazilian Report

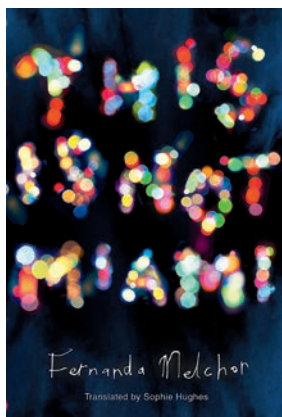
## Crónica

**In the title story of Fernanda Melchor’s collection, *This Is Not Miami*, a quiet night at the docks of the Mexican port of Veracruz takes a dramatic turn.**

**Reviewed by Daniel Rey**

**W**HEN PACO ARRIVES AT THE WATERFRONT for his shift, his supervisor tells him to expect an uneventful evening. He and his co-workers are enduring the cold January wind, talking about “women, football, strategies to win the lottery, politics, religion, and back to women again,” when Paco sees nine spectral figures running towards him. Barefoot, “young, skinny yet strong, sinewy,” they stank of diesel and salt water, and are “soaked to the bone, with their arms and legs covered in welts that looked like whip marks.”

The men are migrants from the Dominican Republic. They had bribed the crew of a lumber vessel to let them hide in the hold until the ship reached Florida. They had been told that Miami was the fourth stop, but the ship made an additional layover, and they got out too early. “Please, tell us we’re in Miami,” a Dominican begged Paco, who laughed nervously. “Miami? You’re kidding. You’re in Veracruz!”



### ***This Is Not Miami***

By Fernanda Melchor

Translated by

Sophie Hughes

New Directions

Paperback

160 pages




Melchor, who was born in Veracruz in 1982, is best known for her novels *Hurricane Season* (2020) and *Paradaís* (2022) which, in expansive prose and with a dose of dark humor, chronicle the chaos and violence of the region. Similar concerns dominate this collection, which was mostly written in the 2000s, and has just been translated by Sophie Hughes. The pieces consist of *relatos* (stories) and *crónicas*, the Latin American literary genre that Melchor defines as “a hybrid form at once informative and interpretive.” In the introduction, Melchor writes that although her stories are based on real events, the stories can’t make “journalistic claims” — because, to protect her sources, she doesn’t include verifiable facts. Together, they form a portrait of Veracruz at the end of the 20th century and the start of a new millennium.

Nestled at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, Veracruz is the gateway to the country’s offshore oil. The city is Mexico’s principal port — dominated by the automobile industry and, more importantly for Melchor’s stories, by drugs. The impact of narcotics smuggling and President Felipe Calderón’s war on drugs (2006–12) is evident throughout the collection. The police engage in “a witch hunt to increase the numbers of detentions,” a lawyer tells Melchor, so that Calderón can justify his “little war, his so-called struggle against the narcos.”

Melchor often writes with a deep sense of place and character. The houses in the city’s historic center are “a rubble-filled ruin, a haunt for drunkards, mangy cats and specters who languish among the

trash and overgrown weeds.” A woman fond of the chandeliers and velvet chairs of Veracruz’s most expensive nightclub complains that “there’s nowhere to go out because of the constant shootouts,” that the city is “turning into one of those horrible places up on the border.”

Veracruz is one of the most dangerous places in Latin America to be a journalist or a member of the judiciary — a reality conveyed, in grisly detail, in Melchor’s writing. In one story, the Zetas Cartel dismember a victim, cutting off her legs at the thighs and her arms at the torso. The press, possibly with the help of a relation, identify the corpse as belonging to a federal lawyer who had been kidnapped. But when her parents open the coffin at the wake, they find the wrong body.

Melchor writes unjudgementally and with great respect for her interlocutors. Even when her narratives are fragmentary or end abruptly, she teases out the diversity of life in Veracruz — from the mysterious, and the ordinary, to the gruesome. In the introduction she writes that “a city cannot tell its own story.” Luckily, for that we have Melchor. 

Rey is a British-Colombian writer based in New York. He has published at UK-based publications, including *Prospect*, *the Spectator*, *Literary Review*, *History Today*, *the Financial Times* and *the New Statesman*. Rey won the runner-up award in the 2017 *Bodley Head* and *Financial Times* essay prize.

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# Film

## Drama

**A debut film dramatizes environmental crisis in Bolivia's altiplano—and the intergenerational heartbreak of an endangered way of life.**

**Reviewed by Ena Alvarado**



### Utama

Directed by  
Alejandro Loayza Grisi  
Screenplay by  
Alejandro Loayza Grisi  
Distributed by Alma Films  
Starring José Calcina,  
Luisa Quispe and  
Santos Choque  
Bolivia  
AQ Rating: ★★★ (3/5)

**S**OME PLACES ON EARTH SEEM BARELY FIT FOR HUMAN LIFE. The opening scene of Alejandro Loayza Grisi's debut feature, *Utama*, puts on display one such region: the Andean altiplano, which, despite its forbiddingly cold and arid terrain, was once home to the Inca Empire. Today, more than 2 million people in Latin America, mostly of Indigenous descent, live in the highlands. Through its patient observation of the region's most vulnerable inhabitants, Loayza Grisi's film stunningly captures the limits of human endurance in the face of forces outside of one's control.

*Utama* means "our home" in Aymara. The film's protagonists, Virginio and Sisi, a Quechua elderly couple, share an isolated but quiet life. Their demanding routines mark the rhythm of each day. Virginio grazes his small herd of llamas, while Sisi takes care of household chores and, most importantly, brings water from the nearest village. There is little to no room for variation — until a prolonged drought begins to threaten their austere self-sufficiency.

Dry spells are nothing new for highland residents. But as weeks turn into months without rain, Virginio and Sisi's small Indigenous community begins to lose hope. The villagers sacrifice a llama to the rain gods, and a group of men embarks on a challenging mountain trek in search of water. Both efforts are in vain. As desperation mounts, Virginio and Sisi's grandson, Clever, arrives from La Paz. Clever makes a strong case for the city and its better services in his attempt to persuade his grandparents to leave their lifelong home behind.

The tensions at the heart of Loayza Grisi's *Utama* are simultaneously Bolivian and universal. On one hand, pressure to abandon the western highlands, where most of the country's Indigenous population once lived, has been intense for decades. Since 1960, Bolivia's urban population has almost doubled, from 37% to 70%. Today, the dominant trend



Loayza Grisi's film documents not only an endangered way of life but also the spectacular landscape that nurtures it.

in the country continues to be “one of migration from west to east” — from the highlands to the lowlands of the Santa Cruz department, as journalist Thomas Graham recently observed in these pages.

But beyond Bolivian geopolitics, *Utama* invokes a timeless intergenerational dilemma. Virginio wishes to preserve his way of life — one rooted in centuries of Quechua tradition. His stubbornness reflects the very human desire to honor and protect cultural customs and values. This explains, for example, why he insists on speaking to Clever in his native tongue, even though his grandson can only understand Spanish. To know your own children will be unable to make sense of the building blocks of your everyday life is painful. This process, which affects every aging generation to varying degrees, is one of loss and heartbreak.

Before Ernesto Guevara became *el Che*, he undertook a now-legendary expedition throughout Latin

America, immortalized in his posthumously published memoir, *The Motorcycle Diaries*. It remains telling that his “first objective was to visit the Bolivian highlands, where he hoped to become familiar with the hardships experienced” by Indigenous people. If one were to retrace his steps in the near future, it is likely there would be less and less to witness. Nearly a year after *Utama*'s release, real-life Indigenous communities in the region are praying for rain and trying to survive. Loayza Grisi's film documents not only an endangered way of life but also the spectacular landscape that nurtures it, with each shot — from lunar-like sunsets over the cracked earth to thin, meandering rivers reflecting the pale blue sky — serving as a small testament to the sublime. AQ

Alvarado is a writer and former assistant editor at The Atlantic



# Music

## AQ's Spring Playlist

**Alternating between acoustic and electronic sounds, this roundup of new releases features desert-inspired guitars from Ecuador, folk wisdom from Chile and eerie Argentine soundscapes.**

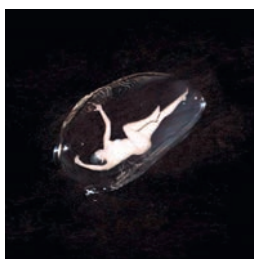
**by Sebastián Zubieta**



**El bueno y el malo**

by Los Hermanos  
Gutiérrez

The music of the Ecuadorian-Swiss duo **Los Hermanos Gutiérrez** would not be out of place in a spaghetti western — and indeed, their twangy guitars recall the film soundtracks of the great Ennio Morricone. The pair's latest album, *El bueno y el malo*, nods to the 1966 classic *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, with its famous score by Morricone. "Pueblo Man," a meditatively nostalgic track, rests — like all their compositions — on the subtle interplay of their two guitars, with the occasional addition of a percussion or string instrument. The effect leaves plenty of room for listeners to place themselves within the vast landscape opened up by the music.



**Ololiuqui**

by Kaleema

Argentine producer and multi-instrumentalist **Kaleema** (*née* Heidi Lewandowski) is part of Buenos Aires' exploding electronic music scene. Her discreetly pulsating tracks, frequently highlighting a single sound, like the *kalimba* in the song "Ololiuqui," create hypnotic support for her voice. The *kalimba*, also called the *mbira*, is a traditional African instrument that became popular in the West in the late 1950s, consisting of a board with metal tines that the musician plucks. This song, an ode to the morning glory (*ololiuqui* is the flower's Nahuatl name), is, in the artist's words, the "sonic equivalent of a springtime stroll along a river." Kaleema dedicates it to "a crystal river that runs continually and includes all of creation." Over the *kalimba* and electronic sounds, the voice alternates with string instruments, which eventually claim the spotlight as the piece gently flows away.



### Folclor imaginario

by Gepe

Over a decades-long career, Grammy-nominated Chilean singer-songwriter **Gepe** has become an established artist in the region's music scene. His songs span styles and moods — from releases that draw from the indie rock sound or from electronic music, to collaborations with the raucous Banda Conmoción. But he has never strayed too far from his country's folk music, and he dedicated 2018's *Folclor imaginario*, an album and documentary film, to the traditional songs compiled by musicologist Margot Loyola, who was also his teacher. Loyola, who died in 2015, worked on the popular music traditions of Chile and the Southern Cone, compiling hundreds of songs. Her labor has been essential to the knowledge and preservation of a rich repertoire. This follow-up live version of *Folclor imaginario* features Gepe's soulful rendition of “Hasta cuándo vida mía,” a long-ing jewel of traditional music and poetry delivered in restrained and luminous fashion by an ensemble of bass, guitars and harp.



### Nação

by Livia Netrovski

*Nação*, the latest release from Brazilian singer **Livia Netrovski** with pianist Henrique Eisenmann, sets off on a whirlwind tour through Brazil's varied regions and sounds. The album includes traditional songs and original compositions, as well as performances of classics by Tom Jobim and Milton Nascimento. Throughout, the duo's considerable virtuosity and musical curiosity take center stage, as in “História difícil,” a humorous samba in the vein of Brazilian icons of satirical songwriting like Luiz Tatit or José Miguel Wisnik. After an opening cry of “*Inconstitucionalissimamente!*” (very unconstitutionally), Netrovski dives into a rapid-fire burst of quasi-philosophical chatter before bringing the whole declaration to a rousing, “unconstitutional” end. Both musicians are unflappably polished and graceful in their delivery of an arrangement that navigates daring changes in harmony and register and a flurry of words, producing a vertiginous song that uses a traditional popular format to deliver unusually literary content. **AQ**

Zubieta is music director at Americas Society

# Visual Arts

## Art

**A Peruvian artist's ghostly landscapes raise questions about who gets to claim authority in mapping the natural world.**

**by Rachel Remick**



**Elena Damiani**

*Fading Fields*

Peruvian artist

IN ELENA DAMIANI'S *FADING FIELD N.10*, the jagged rocks of a cliff-side rise through a foreground filled with clouds. Where is this image drawn from? Look at it quickly and you might mistake it for a real mountainside. But in fact, the work splices together six pictures of different mountains across the U.S. and Latin America — from Mount St. Helens and Yosemite National Park in the U.S., to the El Sangay and El Cotopaxi volcanos in Ecuador. Together, they create a kind of nonplace, a fictional landscape assembled from real historical images.

This work, like others in the Peruvian artist's *Fading Fields* series, is printed on silk chiffon and installed in a freestanding wooden frame. The result is a ghostly, almost transparent, image embedded in a spare frame that creates a sense of a doorway into an imagined world. At the right angle, a moonscape of mountains and smoke seems to jump off the silk print, but as soon as you move around the piece, the illusion is lost, and the fabric image, frame and backdrop appear as separate entities.

The way Damiani's landscapes seem fractured — whole from one perspective, broken into constituent pieces from another — isn't accidental: It's meant to demonstrate how supposedly "definitive" ways of mapping the world are inevitably subjective, even paradoxical.

Damiani's decision to source her images from institutions like the U.S. Geological Service (USGS) seems likewise intentional. Steeped in traditions of empire and exploration, many of these photos were taken in remote parts of Latin America by photographers hired by the U.S.





*Fading field N.10* (2016)  
splices together pictures  
of six mountains across the  
U.S. and Latin America.



*Fading field N.12* (2018) on view in Rome.

government, as part of a project to scientifically document the natural world. They're meant to be authoritative — replacing earlier methods of cartography and draftsmanship. They weren't supposed to just conjure an idea of the territory, they were supposed to map the territory, and were widely used because of the idea they could provide a more accurate representation of the landscape than previously possible.

In *Fading Fields*, Damiani shows the limitations of this accuracy. A USGS photographer might capture an image of a remote area of Ecuador — but the meaning of that image is inevitably limited by the time, place and perspective of the photographer. Landscape photography might seem neutral, even apolitical, but there are always social relationships and power dynamics behind the scenes. It's hardly a stretch to imagine incongruities between a U.S. scientist's interpretation of the landscape of Ecuador's El Sangay, and the point of view of those who live in the surrounding valleys.

The way Damiani turns these archival images upside down, as she mixes and matches them, serves

to shake loose the notion of their supposedly definitive nature. Her works speak, too, to larger questions about who gets to write the historical record, who has the authority to create maps — and the inevitably subjective nature of representing territory. The *Fading Fields* series reminds us that the idea of a merely “accurate” representation of landscape is a fiction.

There's a historical dimension involved, too: Many of the images Damiani uses are decades old, a few taken almost a century ago. And far from being eternal, the landscapes they show have changed, sometimes drastically in the interim, remade by landslides or other forces. Across Damiani's work, these ghostly crags and mountainsides that no longer exist point to a fundamental paradox of history: the impossibility of recreating a past that can never be known again. **AQ**

Remick is assistant curator of art at Americas Society and organized the installation of Damiani's *Zenith* (2022), now on view at Americas Society in New York.





*Fading field N.12.* This artwork incorporates photographs from the Sangay volcano in Ecuador, as well as Mount St. Helens and Lassen Peak in the U.S.



# LATIN AMERICA AT A GLANCE

INCLUDES DATA PROVIDED BY

**Bloomberg**

Several Latin American countries have recently pushed through or are seeking major tax reforms, including Mexico, Colombia, Brazil and Chile. The region's average tax-to-GDP ratio is 21.9%, well below the OECD average of 33.5%.



ARGENTINA



BRAZIL



CHILE



COLOMBIA



DOMINICAN  
REPUBLIC



ECUADOR



GUATEMALA



MEXICO



PERU



VENEZUELA

## GDP GROWTH

|                  | ARGENTINA | BRAZIL | CHILE | COLOMBIA | DOMINICAN<br>REPUBLIC | ECUADOR | GUATEMALA | MEXICO | PERU | VENEZUELA |
|------------------|-----------|--------|-------|----------|-----------------------|---------|-----------|--------|------|-----------|
| 2023 (projected) | -0.2%     | 0.8%   | -0.9% | 1.1%     | 3.9%                  | 2.3%    | 3.4%      | 1.4%   | 2.1% | 5.7%      |
| 2024 (projected) | 1.0%      | 1.7%   | 2.1%  | 2.2%     | 4.6%                  | 2.0%    | 3.5%      | 1.8%   | 2.6% | 5.2%      |
| 2025 (projected) | 2.0%      | 1.8%   | 2.7%  | 3.0%     | N/A                   | N/A     | 3.6%      | 2.2%   | 2.8% | N/A       |

PROJECTIONS CURRENT AS OF MARCH 2023

## ECONOMIC INDICATORS

|                                            |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |        |
|--------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|--------|
| 2023 Inflation (projected)                 | 95.8% | 5.3%  | 8.0%  | 10.2% | 5.2%  | 2.6%  | N/A  | 5.9%  | 5.9%  | 105.6% |
| 2023 Unemployment rate (projected)         | 8.0%  | 9.3%  | 8.5%  | 11.5% | N/A   | 5.5%  | 4.0% | 3.6%  | 7.6%  | N/A    |
| 2023 Govt. deficit as % of GDP (projected) | -4.0% | -7.7% | -2.8% | -4.0% | -3.5% | -1.7% | N/A  | -4.1% | -2.4% | -4.0%  |

PROJECTIONS CURRENT AS OF MARCH 2023

## TAXATION

|                                           |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| Total tax revenues as share of GDP (2020) | 29.4% | 31.6% | 19.3% | 18.7% | 12.6% | 19.1% | 12.4% | 17.9% | 15.2% | N/A |
| % change from 2019                        | 1.2%  | -0.9% | -1.6% | -1.0% | -1.0% | -0.9% | -0.6% | 1.6%  | -1.4% | N/A |

## PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL RATINGS

| President |                   |                           |               |               |               |                 |                      |                             |               |                |
|-----------|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
|           | Alberto Fernández | Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva | Gabriel Boric | Gustavo Petro | Luis Abinader | Guillermo Lasso | Alejandro Giammattei | Andrés Manuel López Obrador | Dina Boluarte | Nicolás Maduro |
| Approval  | 29%               | 54%                       | 29%           | 40%           | 65%           | 14%             | 26%                  | 57%                         | 18%           | 16%            |

SOURCES: GDP growth forecasts, inflation rate, unemployment rate, government deficit as percentage of GDP: Bloomberg (March); Guatemala GDP growth forecasts: IMF (March); Guatemala unemployment rate: Trading Economics (March); Tax-to-GDP ratios: OECD (2022).


PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL: Argentina, Zuban Córdoba (January); Brazil: IPEC (April); Chile, Plaza Pública Cadem (April); Colombia, Invamer (February); Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Venezuela, CID Gallup (January); Ecuador, Perfiles de Opinión (March); Mexico, El Financiero (March); Peru, Ipsos (February). NOTE: Figures rounded to nearest percentage.

ALEJANDRO CEGARRA/BLOOMBERG/GETTY; CASA ROSADA VIA COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA; GETTY; SEBASTIAN BARROS/NURPHOTO/GETTY; FLICKR; HAMILTON LOPEZ/AGENCIA PRESS SOUTH/GETTY; JOHAN ORDONEZ/AFP/GETTY; RADIO ZÓCALO NOTICIAS; WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION VIA COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA; GABY ORAA/BLOOMBERG/GETTY

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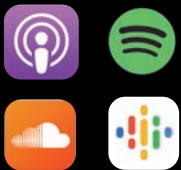
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# AQ

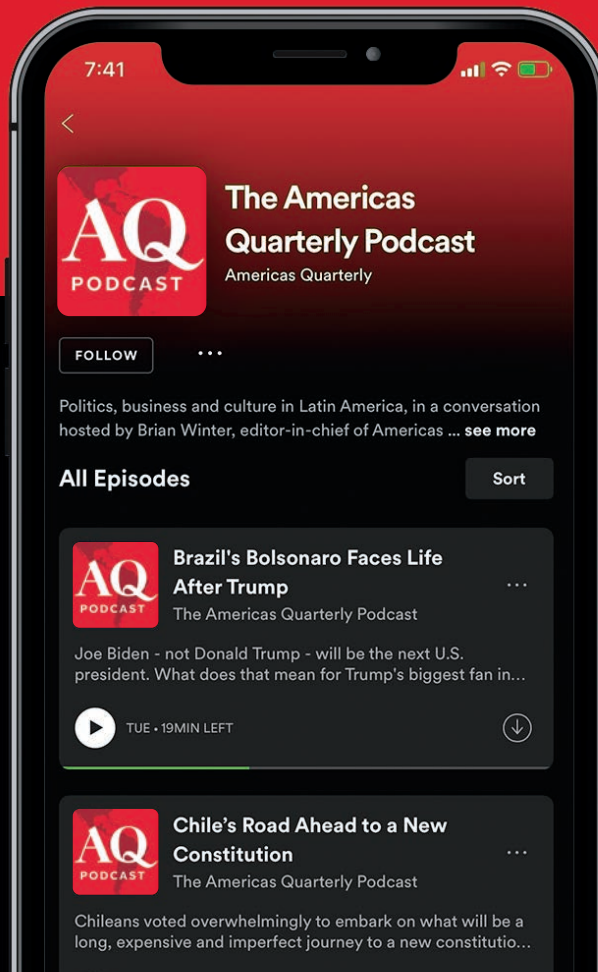
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