

# LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVES ON U.N. REFORM AN AGENDA

ARIEL GONZÁLEZ LEVAGGI

SETA | ANALYSIS

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## SUMMARY

Although a heterogeneous region, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a zone of peace and home to more than 650 million people.

Even if Latin America is becoming strategically more irrelevant,<sup>1</sup> it is still a central actor in global governance and a key partner in the development of multilateralism for the United Nations system. From the early days of the U.N. until now, LAC has advanced a progressive agenda fostering global stability by advancing a peaceful approach to international security and pushing developmental cooperation both in the North-South and South-South directions. The analysis examines the main contributions of Latin America and the Caribbean to the United Nations system and the position of the Latin American countries on the proposals to change and reform the United Nations Security Council.

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1 Andrés Malamud and Luis Schenoni. "Latin America Is Off the Global Stage,..."

## INTRODUCTION

Although a heterogeneous region, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a zone of peace and home to more than 650 million people, covering geographically from the south of the problematic U.S.-Mexico border to Ushuaia, the gateway to Antarctica. In the multilateral arena, the Group of Latin America and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC) involves 33 member countries from different linguistic, cultural, colonial, and racial origins.

Almost six decades ago, Robert Gregg described the Latin American bloc as an effective nominating caucus and a recognized force in United Nations affairs since its creation.<sup>2</sup> Since the establishment of the United Nations, the participation of the LAC has made a series of contributions that reshaped the global cooperation environment, strengthened multilateralism,

and fostered South-South cooperation. On the international security side, the LAC has demonstrated a historical commitment to peaceful resolution of conflicts, regional norms of nonintervention and sovereignty, denuclearization and disarmament, and support for U.N.-led peacekeeping operations.

In the socio-economic dimension, it has pursued economic development and support for international cooperation within a South-South cooperation framework. As Enrique Oviedo argues,<sup>3</sup> for LAC countries the cooperation between developing countries “is seen as an expression of solidarity among peoples and countries of the South with the aim of contributing to the pursuit of development goals. It is based on principles such as horizontality, solidarity, respect for sovereignty, complementarity, mutual benefit, equity, transparency, and accountability”. The analysis presents a summary of the main contributions of the LAC to the U.N. system and the countries’ position on the clashing proposals to change and reform the United Nations Security Council.

## LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN CONTRIBUTION TO U.N.: FROM GLOBAL SECURITY TO DEVELOPMENT

Latin America and the Caribbean is a zone of peace. The LAC Chief of States declared the region a zone of peace during La Havana’s second summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in 2014. According to Arie Kacowicz, a zone of peace refers

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2 Robert Gregg. The Latin American Bloc in United Nations Elections. *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, 46(2), 1965, pp. 146–154, at 147.

3 Enrique Oviedo. Evaluating South-South cooperation in six Latin American and Caribbean countries: Shared challenges for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Santiago de (ECLAC-AECID, Chile: 2021), 12–13.



to a region “in which a group of states has maintained peaceful relations among themselves for a period of at least thirty years though civil wars, domestic unrest, and violence might still occur within their borders, as well as international conflicts and crises between them”.<sup>4</sup> Even if there are a series of transnational and domestic security challenges and militarized crises occur, war is very unlikely. The LAC has a strong multilateral tradition rooted in its legacy of peaceful resolution of conflicts, development of shared norms centered on the respect of sovereignty, and the creation of regional institutions that makes a distinct regional international society.<sup>5</sup>

In the first half of the 20th century, Latin American jurists and diplomats offered a series of (anti-hegemonic) contributions to international law such as the Calvo Doctrine, which prohibits the forcible collection of public debts, and the Drago Doctrine, which condemns any intervention as legitimate methods of enforcing external debts.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Carlos Saavedra Lamas, an experienced Argentine politician and diplomat, promoted the signing of the Anti-war Treaty of Non-aggression and Conciliation (1933) and developed an active role as a mediator of a regional *ad-hoc* group that brought an end to the Chaco War (1935), thus becoming the first Latin American to receive the Nobel Peace Prize besides having an important role in the League of Nations during the mid-1930s.

*Contributions to International Security.* As the creation of the League of Nations presented

an opportunity for Latin American nations to strengthen their position in the international arena vis-a-vis the traditional European powers, a similar reaction to the new international order pushed Latin American nations in line with internationalism.<sup>7</sup> From the San Francisco Conference in 1945 onwards, the region generally promoted the peaceful resolution of conflicts from the support for the peace settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the creation of a Palestinian State to the repeated calls to end the Syrian Civil War or the general condemnation of the Russian military actions in Ukraine.

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Beyond the geographical and cultural distances and the limited strategic projection, the LAC has contributed to peace and international security in different ways. On the one hand, the region has been an active supporter of the U.N. peacekeeping operations both diplomatically and militarily. At the UNSC, it has normally accompanied consensus on the deployment of U.N. peacekeeping missions. At the same time, the LAC has contributed with personnel for those missions. In 2000, the LAC collaborated

4 Arie Kacowicz. *Zones of Peace: South America and West Africa in Comparative Perspective* (SUNY Press, New York: 1998), p. 9.

5 Federico Merke. Neither balance nor bandwagon: South American international society meets Brazil's rising power, *International Politics* 52, 2015, pp. 178–192, at 178.

6 Melisa Deciancio. La Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad de Buenos Aires en la historia del campo de las Relaciones Internacionales argentinas. *Revista de historia del derecho*, (52), 2016, pp. 31–63; Juan Scarfi. *The hidden history of international law in the Americas: empire and legal networks*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2017).

7 Margarita Fajardo. *World That Latin America Created...*, p. 3.

with 2.5% of all U.N. troops while a decade later it increased the contribution to over 8%, thus “becoming the world’s third-largest regional UN troop contributor, after Asia and Africa”.<sup>8</sup>

However, in 2021, there was a reversal to 3%, dropping it to the fourth position behind Western Europe but still surpassing Eastern Europe, North America, and Oceania.<sup>9</sup> In that regard, the contribution began early in the Cold War with the placement of Argentine and Chilean observers in the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) from 1948 until the present. Even if during the Cold War the participation was limited, after the demise of the bipolar conflict the region, especially Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile began to play a more critical role by sending military observers and peacekeepers all over the world but paying specific attention to the instability in Haiti. Haiti received the largest LAC contingent of troops with the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) between 2004 and 2017.

The region has been at the forefront of the developing world’s claims for a more just and equal world.

On the other hand, the LAC is a zone free of nuclear weapons. The region offers a positive trajectory in the use of nuclear energy for peaceful uses, a commitment to nuclear disarmament, and non-proliferation. The region has progressively joined the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (or Treaty of Tlatelolco), while the most advanced nuclear states – Brazil and Argentina – had unilater-

ally renounced the development of nuclear armament while signing the Non-proliferation Treaty (TNP) and became part of the Nuclear Suppliers Group in the 1990s. Brazil and Argentina also formed a bi-national safeguard agency, the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC), which allows mutual control of the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

In 2022, the region now has an unusual leadership with three high-ranking diplomatic Argentine officials leading nuclear-related institutions: Rafael Grossi as director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency; Gustavo Ainchil as chair of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and Gustavo Zlauvinen as president of the Tenth Review Conference of the NPT.

*Contributions to International Development and South-South Cooperation.* The region has been at the forefront of the developing world’s claims for a more just and equal world grounded on a developmental triangle: the ideas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the agenda at the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the promotion of South-South cooperation. The ECLAC was established in 1948 in Santiago de Chile and became the cornerstone of the developmental economic thinking centered on the figure of Argentine economist Raúl Prébisch and the support of leading Argentine, Brazilian, and Chilean economists. A foundational tenet of their project was that “Latin America’s place in the periphery of the global economy as producer of primary products and raw materials in exchange for manufactured goods from the world’s industrial centers constituted an obstacle for economic development”.<sup>10</sup>

Departing from modernization theory, the ECLAC argues that the regional development

<sup>8</sup> Arturo Sotomayor. *Latin America’s...*, p. 325.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations. *Summary of Troops Contributing Countries...*

<sup>10</sup> Margarita Fajardo. *World That Latin America Created...*, p. 4.

departed from national industrialization and the expansion of domestic markets as the path to autonomy in parallel with three critical external pillars: the development of more fair and balanced trade with the developed world, the increase of developmental aid from the core to the periphery and developing market integration initiatives.<sup>11</sup>

While the ECLAC leadership has begun to eclipse since the 1960s due to the challenge of the *dependentistas* from the left and the neoliberalism from the right, the main core-periphery tenets have had a deep impact in the third world. After leaving the ECLAC, Prébisch became secretary-general of the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) between 1964 and 1969. The UNCTAD called for a new economic international order, thus becoming an alternative form of non-Western internationalism in the context of the rise of the Non-Alignment Movement. Additionally, the Group of 77 (G-77) was created at the end of the UNCTAD's first session in Geneva, becoming the largest intergovernmental forum of developing countries in the United Nations system that facilitates the articulation and promotion of the Global South's collective economic interests.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the LAC has been a strong supporter of Global South developmental and technical cooperation. The milestone under LAC leadership was the approval of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (BAPA) in 1978, which underlines the role of technical cooperation among developing countries as a complement for the traditional North-South development cooperation. Forty years later – under the leadership of Jorge

Chediek, the envoy of the U.N. secretary-general on South-South cooperation – the 2<sup>nd</sup> High-Level U.N. Conference on South-South Cooperation was held in Buenos Aires (BAPA+40). In the final declaration, he called on the participants to “develop their own systems to assess the quality and impact of South-South and triangular cooperation programs and to improve data collection at the national level to promote cooperation in the development of methodologies and statistics, in line with the specific principles and unique characteristics of South-South cooperation”.<sup>13</sup>

Lately, the Latin American agenda at the U.N. has been focused on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The agenda addresses multiple issues, including the eradication of extreme poverty, the reduction of inequality, economic growth with decent work for all, the development of sustainable cities, and the implementation of policies to tackle climate, as central points for the future of the region.<sup>14</sup>

## THE WORLD IS BIGGER THAN FIVE: LATIN AMERICA ON THE UNSC REFORM

The veto power in the United Nations Security Council reflects the inequality among the member states and the undemocratic nature of decisions that affect millions of people from different regions. Starting from the UNSC's early establishment, the LAC has been critical of the right of veto of the permanent members of the Security Council.

Jose Arce, the first Argentine delegate to the United Nations, referred to the veto as a privilege

11 Margarita Fajardo. *World That Latin America Created: The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America in the Development Era*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge: 2022), p. 1.

12 G77, 2022, available at <https://www.g77.org/vienna/history-2/>

13 Enrique Oviedo. Evaluating South-South cooperation ..., p. 17.

14 UN/ECLAC. The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals:....

and an absurdity since “the nations, as the individuals, when they meet to debate and resolve matters of interest they must not believe in the possession of the absolute truth” and called for the suppression of the privilege and offered to change it for a qualified majority option.<sup>15</sup>

## Starting from the UNSC’s early establishment, the LAC has been critical of the right of veto of the permanent members of the Security Council.

### *G4 and Brasília’s unaccomplished aspirations.*

Since the creation of the League of Nations, non-Western countries have aimed to play a role in the exclusive council, which has both permanent and non-permanent members. Japan had a permanent seat until its resignation in 1933 after the invasion of Manchuria, but Brazil was excluded from that position despite diplomatic claims until 1926 when it decided to withdraw from the organization. Before making the decision, Brazilian Ambassador to the League of Nations in Geneva Afrânio de Melo Franco argued that because “for us to be considered in the Society of Nations and to have, within it, the authority to which our greatness, our devotion to the ideals of the Society and our large population entitle us, we (Brazil) must have a seat on the Council”.<sup>16</sup>

Brasília’s ambition continued after World War II when the Roosevelt administration considered the incorporation of the South American country as the sixth permanent member a positive step, although the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom blocked the initiative. As Celso Amorin – the Brazilian minister of foreign affairs

under President Lula da Silva’s government – said, “the issue of the presence of Brazil at the Security Council is as old as the foundation of the United Nations”.<sup>17</sup>

In the late 1980s, the democratic President José Sarney (1985-1990) returned to the old claim with a statement at the General Assembly supporting the country’s position to become a UNSC permanent member. In the post-Cold War context, Brazil has been a key promoter in the latest initiatives on the UNSC reform, although with ups and downs in the intensity of the claim. In the 1990s, Brazil rejected the U.S.-led “quick fix” (which admits only Germany and Japan), and partially supported the Razali Plan that proposed an increase of the membership from 15 to 24 members but tried to avoid tensions with Argentina under Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s administration. President Lula and MFA Celso Amorin pushed the issue to the top of the Brazilian global agenda. At the 63<sup>rd</sup> UGNA session in 2008, Lula underlined that: “Today’s structure has been frozen for six decades and does not relate to the challenges of today’s world. Its distorted form of representation stands between us and the multilateral world to which we aspire”.<sup>18</sup>

In this line, Brazil participated in the creation of the G4 (2004) with Japan, Germany, and India, and supported the Model A of the Annan Plan to reform the UNSC, which creates six new permanent seats with no veto and encouraged the vote on the L.64 draft resolution alongside the G4 and 23 other countries, including France.<sup>19</sup> After Lula’s departure, the diplomatic impulse de-escalated as Brazil entered political and economic turmoil. As Andrés Malamud asserted, “Insufficient resource endowment and cumulative policy mistakes

<sup>15</sup> Juan Lanus Archibaldo. *De Chapultepec al Beagle...*, p. 328.

<sup>16</sup> Eugenio V. Garcia and Natalia B. R. Coelho. “A Seat at the Top?...”, p. 737. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018801098>

<sup>17</sup> Celso Amorin..., p. 438.

<sup>18</sup> Kourosh Ziabari. *Brazil; an emerging global superpower...*

<sup>19</sup> Garcia V. Eugenio and Natalia B. R. Coelho. “A Seat at the Top? ...”

mounted over increasingly unfavorable international conditions to produce foreign policy retreat”.<sup>20</sup> The ambitious agenda on the UNSC reform was another victim of the South American giant’s international rollback.

*Broadening Participation in Uniting for Consensus.* Brazilian aspirations did not receive a consensus across the region despite the Brazilian Foreign Ministry developing an aggressive campaign in the region that gained many votes, including Chile and Uruguay. However, Argentina and Mexico have opposed Brasília’s position since the 1990s. Even in the post-2001 financial crisis period, Argentina was not very pleased with its secondary position and even less with the Brazilian leadership regional project, which includes the aspiration to get a permanent seat in the UNSC. Argentina’s soft-balancing moves have addressed both the Brazilian assumed leadership in the region, which highlighted the growing asymmetry of power in the Southern Cone, and its global aspirations. In 2004, for example, when the G4 group was launched, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf visited Buenos Aires and signed a joint declaration against the G4 position.

Argentina and Mexico supported the rotation for the entry of nonpermanent members and oppose the creation of new permanent members in the UNSC, in line with the Uniting for Consensus (UfC) group in which they have participated since the mid-90s with Canada, Italy, Pakistan, Spain, and Türkiye, among others. Recently, Colombia and Costa Rica also joined the group alongside dozens of countries that look favorably at the reform plan. Türkiye’s U.N. reform proposal following the UfC trajectory could be the basis for a more legitimate reform of the main organ

of the United Nations in matters of international peace and security. As President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said at the U.N. General Assembly, “A council structure based on democratic, transparent, accountable, effective and fair representation has become a necessity for humanity beyond choice”.<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSION: LATIN AMERICA AND THE U.N. REFORM AGENDA

Even if Latin America is becoming strategically more irrelevant,<sup>22</sup> it is still a central actor in global governance and a key partner in the development of multilateralism for the United Nations system. From the early U.N. days until now, the LAC has advanced a progressive agenda fostering global stability by advancing a peaceful approach to international security and pushing developmental cooperation both in the North-South and South-South directions.

Despite these long-standing contributions to global security and development, in recent years, there has been less active regional diplomacy due to the increasing domestic polarization and economic challenges, the impact of Covid-19, and the increasing political fragmentation within the region exemplified by the departure of most of the members from the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in the late 2010s.

The region will continue to uphold the values, norms, and institutions that make a distinct regional international society, although the passing from the diplomatic narratives to develop strategic autonomy in a changing, increasingly multipolar world is still a pending account.

20 Andrés Malamud and Luis Schenoni (2020) “Latin America is Off the Global Stage...”

21 Daily Sabah. “Security Council reform....”

22 Andrés Malamud and Luis Schenoni. “Latin America Is Off the Global Stage....”



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\* Andrés Malamud and Luis Schenoni. "Latin America Is Off the Global Stage...."

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