

Global Americans

High Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship

2019

The Role of Latin America and the Caribbean in Addressing New Global Challenges

Introduction

In 2017, with support from the Ford Foundation, Global Americans convened a working group of high-level, former policymakers, civil society and business leaders and scholars to discuss bipartisan and cross-regional ways to build on the past two decades of Inter-American relations. The initial set of policy topics addressed by our High-Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship are closely connected, and they reflect a long-standing hemispheric and bipartisan consensus that has helped to promote U.S. and hemispheric economic, diplomatic and security interests.

In April 2018, our group, representing civil society, academia, and the policymaking and business communities in the U.S., Latin America and the Caribbean, published an initial series of papers laying out members' consensus opinions on the topics of:

- Economic integration and trade
- Combatting organized crime and narcotics trafficking
- Greater U.S.-Latin America collaboration on anti-corruption
- Expanding and improving education exchanges in the Americas
- Extra-hemispheric actors

Now in its second phase, the group is producing a further three papers on the topics of:

- The Venezuelan refugee crisis
- A comprehensive strategy for addressing climate change in the Caribbean
- The role of Latin America in global geopolitics

Convinced that the countries of the Americas will best be able to establish themselves as important partners through collaboration that furthers their mutual and individual interests, the members of our high-level working group have made a series of recommendations on how the region can project itself in a changing global political climate.

In this paper, we lay out a series of recommendations and areas in which a region that has historically taken a backseat in global affairs can and should start looking beyond the Americas. Some of the themes we highlight—commerce, cybersecurity, transnational crime, democratic governance, disaster relief and emergency preparedness, climate change, peacekeeping, migration, and anti-corruption—are areas in which many of the countries in the region are already engaging, not just regionally, but globally. We argue that the U.S., either through the Executive or through Congress, can do more to support new, often ad hoc, multilateral efforts in these areas.

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The Role of Latin America and the Caribbean in Addressing New Global Challenges

Executive Summary

Today, Latin American and Caribbean countries are starting this process of working individually or collectively around demands expressed locally and internationally, on issues of renewable energy, climate change adaptation, cyber security, migration, and democracy and human rights. Latin America's liberal democracies can play new collective roles in a global realignment and in building a global commons, acting in concert with like-minded governments around the globe—at times hopefully with the U.S.' engagement or interest from the executive or legislative branches—to address new challenges such as climate change, the global refugee crisis, migration flows, and to adapt and sustain the global architecture that has increased prosperity, improved human rights and made the world safer. Indeed, addressing many of the issues confronting the world is something no country can nor should do alone, and hemispheric partners can be instrumental in advancing shared goals in these areas.

The proliferation of new global challenges, and the persistence of liberal democratic governments in the global north and south that are committed to them, present an opportunity to build a 21st Century rules-based international system as well as new relations, commitments and norms around them. But how this will evolve—as well as what will result from this evolution—will differ in construction and form from the U.S.-led order after World War II. The new path forward in the current global context will likely be functionally driven around issues of immediate concern to states such as transnational crime and climate change, and will likely emerge from demands and actions taken by citizens and individual governments alike, rather than hatched and developed by a coalition of larger developed countries.

In this paper, we identify specific themes for regional cooperation that will allow the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to better project themselves on the global stage. These include, but are not limited to, cooperation in the areas of:

- Commerce
- Cybersecurity
- Transnational Criminal Organizations
- Democratic Governance
- Disaster Relief and Emergency Preparedness
- Climate Change
- Peacekeeping
- Migration
- Anti-Corruption Initiatives

The Role of Latin America and the Caribbean in Addressing New Global Challenges

Report

I. A brief overview of Latin America and the Caribbean's challenges and opportunities

Despite a raft of well-crafted and well-intentioned resolutions and commitments under the Organization of American States (OAS) aimed to deepen the obligations and rights of governments to intervene in the defense of human rights and democracy, in recent decades member states have turned against those norms, creating tension between principles that would cede a certain amount of sovereignty on behalf of the common good on the one hand, and Westphalian concepts of national sovereignty on the other. Citing what were once thought to be antiquated notions of national sovereignty, governments have resisted and denounced international protections of popular sovereignty. The resurrection of state rights to determine their own form of government irrespective of international guarantees of human rights and popular sovereignty has not been limited to the autocracies in Cuba, Nicaragua or Venezuela. Even Brazil under the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (2003 to 2015), Argentina under the Peronists (2003 to 2015) and the Dominican Republic over the status of Dominicans of Haitian descent were willing enablers in the push back against international human rights protections and norms. And recently, the United States under the administration of President Donald Trump has flouted the OAS's inter-American system of human rights and has cut funding to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR).

These trends extend beyond the individual cases of governments bucking international norms for their own self-interest (or in some cases self-preservation) and certainly extend beyond the region to China and Russia, who are testing territorial limits, creating parallel multilateral organizations more in line with their interests to challenge the existing organizations and norms, and seeking to augment or sow discontent and disorder. These trends and the governments that are reasserting traditional notions of national sovereignty over international norms erode the fragile consensus that undergirds long-standing global public goods and popular sovereignty. These actions weaken the institutional architecture and moral authority of an international order to defend human rights and democracy and promote a global rules-based order on issues such as trade, investment, and managing international challenges such as security, migration, humanitarian crises, and internal discord and upheaval that affects national and global governance. Multilateral projects, organizations and norms emerge and function effectively when they serve the interests of a set of powerful stakeholders around concrete, shared interests.

Today, there is a critical mass of countries that are starting this process of issue-based and à-la-carte collaboration around renewable energy, climate change adaptation, cybersecurity, migration, and democracy and human rights. In the former cases, there are the efforts in the Caribbean Community (Caricom) and the network of Latin American, Caribbean and European groups to invest in climate-change mitigation and renewable energy. In the latter case, the *Grupo de Lima* and the 40-plus other governments around the world that have recognized Juan Guaidó as interim president in Venezuela represent nimble, informal efforts to further national interests and international norms when larger powers or existing multilateral institutions have failed or lacked the power to do so.

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The proliferation of new global challenges, and the persistence of liberal democratic governments in the global north and south that are committed to them, present an opportunity to build new relations, commitments and norms around them. But how it will evolve—as well as what will result from this evolution—will differ in construction and form from the U.S.-led order after World War II and the end of the Cold War. New modes of international cooperation will likely not match the grand multilateral institution-building projects of the past (Bretton Woods, United Nations, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade/World Trade Organization, and the European Common Market). The new path forward in the current global context will likely be functionally driven around issues of immediate concern to states such as transnational crime and climate change, and will likely emerge from the ground up. Whereas much of the post-war international order depended on U.S. initiative in its creation, leadership and security umbrella, today a new global system will likely be built by more pragmatic, sometimes ad hoc, collection of nations sharing a common concern over a topic.

Currently, formal regional efforts at collaboration are struggling. Recent efforts to create region-specific groups such as the Union of South American Republics (UNASUR) have collapsed. And tentative plans to create a successor, ProSur, proposed by Colombia President Iván Duque under a different ideological direction, will likely meet the same fate as UNASUR, should ProSur be seen only as an ideologically driven creation and make the same mistake of UNASUR of de-linking Central and North America from South America. At the same time, the rise of divisive rhetoric and assorted nationalist-chauvinistic demagogues in the developing world present new challenges to human rights and tolerance globally.

New efforts need to center on specific problems or challenges that are not focused on geographic proximity but instead seek to build a functional, problem/solution-focused network across regions and across the developed and developing worlds. Often, given the cumbersome and politicized nature of existing groups like the UN and the OAS, hampered both by the weight and veto power of states that inflexibly oppose specific issues—whether human rights and democracy, climate change, or improving coordination for refugee flows and migration—it will be necessary to create smaller, more nimble, interest-driven organizations. Rather than being a challenge to the existing order they should be seen as complementary, unbound by either anachronistic rules or transnational, bureaucratic/governance structures and missions that are increasingly seen as distant from the more immediate challenges many countries share.

There are several areas, which we elaborate below, that are key to Latin America and the Caribbean interests and experience, and around which it could better project itself on the global stage:

- Commerce
- Cybersecurity
- Transnational Criminal Organizations
- Democratic Governance
- Disaster Relief and Emergency Preparedness
- Climate Change
- Peacekeeping
- Migration
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II. Why Greater Hemispheric Involvement in World Affairs Is Relevant and Urgent

Latin America and the Caribbean are tightly bound up in a set of multilateral, economic and political ties not just with the United States but among themselves and with the developed world: trade agreements; the OAS and its human rights system; the Pacific Alliance (Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru); the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in the case of Canada, Chile, Mexico, Peru; APEC (Canada, Chile, Mexico, Peru, and the United States); OECD (Canada, Chile, Mexico, and the United States with Colombia in the process of becoming a member); the G-20 (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, and the United States); Colombia's NATO observer status; the Mexico-EU revamped trade agreement; and the recently signed, but not yet ratified, MERCOSUR-EU free trade agreement. Even the *Grupo de Lima* represents an organic effort to cooperate in the name of democracy and human rights. At the same time, there are close, extended, historical, family, cultural and personal ties between Latin America and the Caribbean and the United States, Canada and Europe. Those formal and personal ties serve not only relations with the U.S. and Canada but also within the region and across the Atlantic.

These can serve as a basis for asserting the region's interests and role globally. The past 70 years have demonstrated that with increased global activism come influence, clearer rules and power. At least since the end of the World War II, the reigning international order rested in large part on U.S. leadership and its commitment to the belief that peace, freedom and prosperity were better served by it. Absent a single, powerful hegemon to maintain that order, it is up to a collective of governments to attempt, in a more-narrow form, to pursue efforts to collaborate around public goods.

III. A Time for Global Collaboration

Re-creating or shoring up regional and international norms to defend open markets and open societies in the Americas and beyond requires a collective recognition of the challenge and the threats both within and outside the hemisphere. From the U.S. this requires more than dire warnings about the influence of large powers and singular focus on a new and outdated "axis of evil" and more of an effort to understand and respond to regional concerns and issues.

It must be noted that there has been backsliding in the region as well, even among democratically elected governments. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's dissolution of Pro-Mexico—a federal body to promote foreign direct investment—and his government's stated foreign policy of non-intervention—even on issues of human rights (what some have argued as a return to a narrow and sovereignty-based foreign policy)—has indicated a retrenchment of that country's support for and engagement in international norms.

As well, the resistance of a large bloc of countries to permitting the OAS Permanent Council to discuss and later to invoke the Inter-American Democratic Charter also demonstrates the decline of support for regional liberal norms and procedures. When the OAS finally approved a resolution on Venezuela at the June 4-5, 2018 General Assembly, Bolivia, Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines voted against it and 11 countries abstained.¹

¹ Those countries were: Antigua and Barbuda, El Salvador, Suriname, Belize, Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, Grenada, and St. Kitts and Nevis. <https://theglobalamericans.org/reports/48th-regular-session-of-the-oas-general-assembly/>

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At the same time, growing diplomatic recognition of China and the increasing influence of China and Russia’s “sharp power” in the region have also reinforced political polarization and raised concerns about the support for non-democratic governments, as in Venezuela and Nicaragua.

IV. Recommendations

There are a range of issues on which Latin America and Caribbean states can begin to partner within the region and internationally to advance their individual and collective interests and in doing so promote international cooperation and institution and norm building, and to stop punching below their weight in the international arena. These are issues in which, as discussed above, coordination will likely emerge organically, from countries’ individual actions and interests.

Rather than highlight specific institutional mechanisms to facilitate that convergence, we highlight specific themes on which there is already movement and around which countries in the region should continue to cooperate and look for international allies and forums for cooperation and how.

- 1) **Commerce:** The momentum for expanding markets and increasing international commerce continues south of the U.S. border. Select countries in Latin America and Caribbean countries have continued the approval process for the CPTPP—formerly the Trans-Pacific Partnership that the Trump administration pulled out of. At the same time, the Pacific Alliance continues making an earnest effort at trade integration and expansion within the hemisphere, and other initiatives have advanced such as the signed trade deal between MERCOSUR and the European Union. Through these efforts, with other countries, the region is supporting a rules-based commerce system that should be expanded and consolidated. Nevertheless, the United States under the current administration has increasingly turned not just to tariffs and trade wars to negotiate what it believes are better commercial relations, it has also threatened and used them as leverage for other matters, as it has done with immigration and Mexico.
- 2) **Cybersecurity:** As attempts to meddle in the recent elections in Colombia, Brazil and Mexico demonstrated, the threat of cybersecurity to democracy is real and imminent. But the threat also extends to the security of governments and their records and operations and the private sector. According to the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI), which measures the commitment of member states to cybersecurity, South American countries remain global laggards in establishing the legal, regulatory and institutional capacity for ensuring cybersecurity both in the public and private domains.² There are individual success stories—such as Brazil—that can be expanded. But whether it’s concerns over elections, state security or cybercrime, the issue remains broader than one state or region, making collaboration with other countries and regions essential.

² Global Americans and Florida International University, “South America 2030,” p. 11 (Last accessed May 20, 2019 https://theglobalamericans.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/DOD_South-America_FINAL.pdf).

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- 3) Transnational Criminal Organizations:** Regional efforts to cooperate and share information on a range of illicit activities such as money laundering, transnational crime, narcotics trafficking, terrorism, cyber security, and the links between illicit activities and terrorism is key. The region has made tremendous advances in detecting and disrupting these networks, but greater efforts should be dedicated to expanding and consolidating these efforts, as well as institutionalizing them under a broader framework.
- 4) Democratic Governance:** Despite the foundation of well-crafted and well-intentioned resolutions and commitments under the Organization of American States (OAS) aimed to deepen the obligations and rights of governments to intervene in the defense of human rights and democracy, in recent decades several governments have turned against those norms. But this is not just a phenomenon that concerns the Americas. The same has occurred in the European Union particularly with Poland and Hungary, and in Central Asia regarding electoral standards. In this, the United States needs to remain an engaged partner in the Americas across a range of interests important to its governments and citizens. Declining engagement and at times even contempt for multilateral organizations and processes like the UNHRC, the Paris Agreement/Conference of the Parties (COP), and the inter-American system of human rights erodes not just U.S. standing in the hemisphere on matters of human rights and international law, they also undermine the fragile consensus and support for these enterprises and their authority. Liberal democracies in the Americas need to work more closely with democracies and multilateral organizations globally to shore up their commitments and processes to defend human rights and democracy and to push back against the weaponization of migration, social media and disinformation.
- 5) Disaster Relief and Emergency Preparedness:** A region prone to earthquakes, landslides, hurricanes, and other natural disasters is well suited to lead regional and international cooperation on these issues. One of the first steps should be the standardization of protocols in disaster relief assistance across countries to better facilitate the urgent delivery of aid in times of need. Another step in this collaboration should be determining countries and procedures to jointly preposition material and equipment—as the U.S., Mexico and Canada had initially discussed in 2009 before the North American Leader Summits ground to a halt—in strategically located countries such as Panama, the Dominican Republic and Peru. Doing so will quicken response time and better tie these countries into leadership roles in the region in responding to natural disasters and the humanitarian consequences.
- 6) Climate Change:** We have already seen the region’s willingness to lead on issues related to climate change, including most recently Chile and Costa Rica’s agreement to host the next Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings. The global confab can help governments in the Americas to highlight issues close to home—such as the threats to Antarctica and the Caribbean, glacial melt, and the increasing examples of climate change migration—and globally.

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- 7) **Peacekeeping:** One of the many areas in which Latin American and Caribbean countries can step up their global role is through greater participation in UN peacekeeping as Argentina did in the 1990s, Brazil has done in Haiti and beyond, and Mexico started doing in 2015. If Latin American nations want a greater voice in international issues and multilateral fora, they also need to step up their commitments to the global commons.
- 8) **The Global Refugee Crisis and Migration Flows:** Migration and refugees fleeing violence and humanitarian crises have become a global crisis, from Europe, to the Middle East, to South Asia, to Venezuela, and to Nicaragua. The countries of the Americas have a stake in how international institutions and processes evolve in their field and can start with the crises in its own neighborhood to demonstrate how to compassionately, humanely and effectively deal with refugees and migrants. A number of countries—such as Argentina—have progressive legal frameworks governing the rights of immigrants that could be a model for other countries and regions. One of the first places to start, as we describe and detail in another paper in this series, is the refugee crisis stemming from Venezuela. The far-reaching outflow of Venezuelan citizens fleeing the multifaceted humanitarian crisis in their country can provide an opportunity and platform for regional coordination on the regularization and integration of immigrants and refugees, and provide a model for the rest of the world on how to effectively and compassionately cope with a regional migration crisis. It is also an opportunity for regional global leadership on the issue in which institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the Andean Development Bank and the United Nations can serve as an example of how to address these complex humanitarian situations.
- 9) **Anti-Corruption Initiatives:** Despite—or even because of—the region’s corruption crises, democratic governments from the Americas can help to promote transnational institutions and policies to address the scourge. This could include: supporting and encouraging multilateral efforts to investigate and prosecute corruption (including CICIG in Guatemala); promoting laws and regulations—similar to the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) in the U.S.—in other countries; improving coordination in investigations and prosecutions; and developing shared tools to address trade-based money laundering. Eventual efforts at recovering stolen assets or ill-gotten gains from the Hugo Chávez/Nicolás Maduro regime in Venezuela may prove an effective opportunity for greater collaboration; in much the same way that cooperation with the U.S. Treasury Department in the *Lava Jato* investigation and Odebrecht’s international scandal has facilitated greater international coordination on this critical issue. As the practice of cooperation in asset forfeiture and international cooperation on these topics increases, the region should seek to consolidate its experience and find ways to institutionalize investigation and prosecution efforts.
- 10) **Greater Focus on Transparent, Effective Infrastructure Investment:** The region needs to take the initiative to advocate for greater private and public collaboration on infrastructure investment. Working with the United States on its newly revamped Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) under the Build Act is one avenue. At the same time, improving transparency and accountability of public procurement in infrastructure is critical to address corruption and improve conditions for effective investment in this sector.

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Given the regional uproar over Odebrecht's extensive network of bribing public officials for public contracts, the time is ripe for a regional movement for greater transparency in public bidding and procurement. Another issue for needed collaboration is to monitor and cooperate with BRICS' New Development Bank (NDB) to ensure greater transparency and accountability. While a potentially welcome and necessary source of development assistance for infrastructure, the record of the founding members regarding corruption in public works projects should be a cause for concern. Brazil and other participating countries should seek to build in guarantees to reduce the likelihood of corruption in NDB-funded projects.

- 11) Multilateral Reform:** Alongside these new organic efforts, liberal, democratic governments should continue to push for reform of existing multilateral institutions as well as new directions for cooperation. For one, while expansion of the United National Security Council (UNSC) permanent membership beyond World War II victors appears to have stalled for now, Latin American and Caribbean countries should continue to explore ways to ensure that the UNSC reflects modern global rebalancing. One way to do this possibly is a rotating permanent seat on the UNSC among the largest democracies in the hemisphere. In the same vein, the U.S. and other members of the Americas should continue to push for the reform of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to give the larger economies in South, Central and North America more weight in those bodies
- 12) Educational Exchanges:** There are many forums and means in which these all of these issues can be pursued, formally and informally, top-down or bottom-up. One long-term, less direct but powerful way to affect change and foster greater collaboration around these issues is educational exchange programs. Identifying established and emerging leaders working on the front-lines of the above challenges and giving them access to international resources and networks to support their work is essential. The inter-cultural understanding and technical knowledge gained from educational exchange programs, not just with the United States but among all liberal democracies, helps provide the momentum and connections necessary for building international cooperation, discussion and rules around the above-mentioned themes.