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The Inter-American System in an Era of Declining United States Hegemony

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The inter-American system encompasses the institutional and legal framework promoted by the United States of America following the first International Conference of American States in Washington, DC, in 1890 as a means of consolidating US hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. After WW II, it became most identified with the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (aka the Rio Treaty). The first significant challenges to US dominance and leadership within the inter-American system appeared in the 1970s and 1980s, although it did not become symptomatic of a wider decline in US hegemony in Latin America until the administration of George W. Bush. In particular, many countries withdrew from the Rio Treaty, refused to participate in the inter-American human rights system, and utilized the OAS to repudiate US foreign policy on Cuba and the "War on Drugs." Furthermore, new hemispheric organizations appeared such as the Union of South American Nations and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States that purposefully excluded the United States. During the Obama years, a frustrated US Congress threatened to cut US contributions, while administration officials retreated from taking a proactive role in the OAS. For its part, the Trump government has boycotted hearings of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and reduced its funding. The article concludes with a discussion of the inter-American system without the domineering presence of the nation which spawned it to promote its own geopolitical priorities, precisely when an effective regional body is crucial for addressing many hemispheric challenges.

Keywords: CELAC, hegemony, inter-American human rights system, OAS, PROSUR, UNASUR

El sistema interamericano abarca el marco institucional y legal promovido por los Estados Unidos de América después de la primera Conferencia Internacional de Estados Americanos en Washington, DC, en 1890 como un medio de consolidar la hegemonía estadounidense en el hemisferio occidental. Después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, se identificó más con la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA) y el Tratado Interamericano de Asistencia Recíproca (también conocido como el Tratado de Rio). Los primeros desafíos significativos para el dominio y el liderazgo estadounidense dentro del sistema interamericano aparecieron en las décadas de 1970 y 1980, aunque no se convirtió en sintomático de una disminución más extensa de la hegemonía estadounidense en América Latina hasta la administración de George W. Bush. De hecho, muchos países se retiraron del Tratado de Río, se negaron a participar en

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el sistema interamericano de derechos humanos y utilizaron la OEA para repudiar la política exterior estadounidense sobre Cuba y la "Guerra contra las drogas". Además, aparecieron nuevas organizaciones hemisféricas como la Unión de Naciones Suramericanas y la Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños que excluían expresamente a los Estados Unidos. Durante los años de Obama, un frustrado Congreso de los Estados Unidos amenazó con recortar las contribuciones estadounidenses, mientras que los funcionarios de la administración se retiraron de ejercer un papel proactivo en la OEA. Por su parte, el gobierno de Trump ha boicoteado las audiencias de la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos y reducido su financiación. Este estudio concluye con una discusión sobre el sistema interamericano sin la presencia dominante de la nación que lo generó para promover sus propias prioridades geopolíticas, precisamente cuando un organismo regional eficaz es crucial para abordar múltiples desafíos hemisféricos.

Palabras clave: CELAC, hegemonía, sistema interamericano de derechos humanos, OEA, PROSUR, UNASUR

Introduction

Despite being an ancient Greek word, the term "hegemony" only emerged as an important conceptual and theoretical tool in the mid-twentieth century as a consequence of the dissemination of the writings of the Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci (Fontana 2006, 23). In current international relations theory and analysis, while the concept of hegemony lacks settled definition, its terms of debate have revolved largely around two principal meanings: domination and leadership (Clark 2011, 18). Domination refers to the dominance of one state over others, or a nation's standing within a hierarchical order of great powers, and is usually measured by the aggregate resources possessed by a single actor across a wide range of material capabilities—including military and economic—as well as the degree of concentration of these resources in terms of their international distribution. (Clark 2011, 18) By contrast, leadership derives from the capabilities underlying the claim or from what others see in the hegemon in terms of perceived attributes (Clark 2011, 18).

The inter-American system—the umbrella term for a whole network of institutions, legal principles, and procedures—traces its origins to the invitation issued by US Secretary of State James G. Blaine to all the sovereign republics of the Western Hemisphere to send representatives to an International Conference of American States in Washington, DC, between January and April 1890. An underlying premise for the 1890 conference was the US desire to encourage hemispheric unity and prevent wars over boundary disputes that might provoke European intervention. This objective was very much in keeping with the spirit of the early nineteenth-century Monroe Doctrine. In addition, the United States was also interested in increasing its exports to Latin America and securing access to important commodities through the establishment of a Western Hemisphere customs union. Because both objectives could facilitate US political and economic domination over the Western Hemisphere, a majority of Latin American government rejected both US proposals. Despite initial misgivings, all

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the American republics eventually institutionalized the inter-American system in 1910 with the creation of the Pan American Union.[1]

This article provides a brief overview of the role played by the United States within the inter-American system when US hegemony was as its peak. It also briefly discusses the first concerted and successful pushback against US domination in the 1970s and 1980s. It then offers a more detailed examination on what has transpired in the twenty-first century to argue that there has been a noticeable decline in US dominance and leadership within the inter-American system. The article also explores whether hemispheric organizations purposefully excluding the United States offer viable alternatives. The article concludes by discussing recent developments that may contribute to a more effective inter-American system as well as additional required reforms.

The Inter-American System as a Tool of US Hegemony

It is important to emphasize that US hegemony within the inter-American system has always been contested. Despite this, for much of the twentieth century the United States usually maintained firm control of the agenda and the motions tabled and ultimately approved. Facilitating this before 1948 was the fact that the Pan American Union was headquartered in Washington, DC, and was headed by whoever happened to be the US Secretary of State. Accordingly, despite condemnations by Latin Americans of repeated US invasions and occupations of countries in the Caribbean Basin, the Pan American Union was incapable of approving any resolution blocking or reversing such actions.[2]

The heavy-handed influence of the United States in controlling and shaping the inter-American agenda became more subtle following the inauguration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933 and the announcement of his Good Neighbor policy. As result, the United States soon dropped its opposition to a legal commitment that forbade intervention by any American state in the internal and external affairs of the other republics. Because of these policy changes, the United States was later able to garner Latin American support for subsequent initiatives designed to keep the Axis powers out of the Western Hemisphere and to buttress the US war effort through the provision of primary commodities under generous terms.

Despite the creation of the United Nations (UN) after the end of WWII, the Latin American countries pushed for retention of an inter-American framework as it was seen as having a better chance to contain the United States as opposed to a multilateral institution with a global perspective. Hence, the Organization of American States (OAS) was established in 1948. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the OAS

[1] The Pan American Union was replaced by the Organization of American States in 1948. Among other institutional bodies associated with the inter-American system today are the Inter-American Development Bank and the Pan American Health Organization.

[2] One important explanation is that Brazil often took the side of the United States in the Pan American Union and used its subregional influence to squelch resolutions opposed to American interventions. For the first half of the twentieth century, at least, Brazilian foreign policy elites clung to the belief that a close working relationship with the United States and with Pan Americanism best served Brazilian interests (Roett 1979, 241). Brazil wanted the Americans to view it as a coguarantor of the Monroe Doctrine in South America, and thus it pursued an unwritten alliance with the United States, meaning that each country would take care of its respective regional subsystem (Poggio Teixeira 2012, 50).

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Charter includes numerous references and provisions prohibiting direct or indirect intervention in the internal and external affairs of the member states. In addition, the votes of all member states are equal with no country exercising any veto power (as the five victorious WWII powers do in the UN Security Council), and the chairmanship of OAS institutional bodies are rotated among member states (Shaw 2004, 29, 58). Unfortunately, these provisions were often subordinated in succeeding decades to the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance signed in 1947 that prioritized the foreign policy and military objectives of Washington, D.C.

Throughout the Cold War, successive US administrations used the national security rationale embodied in the Rio Treaty to either neutralize or ignore the nonintervention obligations of the OAS in an attempt to keep perceived Soviet-inspired Communist threats out of the Western Hemisphere. Often, these violations of sovereignty occurred with the connivance of Latin American governments dominated by elites fearful of leftist revolutions and/or obsequious to US objectives in order to secure American economic assistance (Farer 1979, xix; Connell-Smith 1974, 220). For example, the Eisenhower administration got majority support in the OAS for a 1954 resolution that gave the green light for the CIA to overthrow the democratically elected and reformist government of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala. In 1962, the United States successfully pushed for Cuba's suspension in the OAS followed by Cuba's diplomatic and commercial isolation in 1964. In 1965, the Johnson administration obtained approval for an OAS resolution that authorized sending an inter-American peace force to the Dominican Republic that had the practical effect of sanctioning its earlier, unilateral invasion and occupation of the country by US Marines.

During the 1970s, Latin American governments took more assertive positions within the OAS, oftentimes in direct opposition to the United States. This can be explained, in part, by the sharp increases in oil prices after 1973 that both enriched and empowered petroleum-producing nations such Mexico and Venezuela. At the same time, there was a widespread perception of hegemonic disequilibrium following the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary exchange system and US military defeats in Southeast Asia (Williams 2012, 234–235). Accordingly, in 1975 the OAS authorized member states, if they so desired, to re-establish trade and diplomatic relations with Havana. That same year, the United States found itself alone in opposing amendments to the Rio Treaty to include a provision that "for the maintenance of peace and security in the Hemisphere, it is also necessary to guarantee collective economic security for the development of the American states" (Farer 1979, xxii).

In 1979, as the Somoza dictatorship's demise appeared imminent, the United States sponsored an OAS resolution, that was resoundingly defeated, to establish a government of national reconciliation in Nicaragua and authorize the introduction of an inter-American peacekeeping force (Shaw 2003, 79). The defeat was surprising given how strongly the Carter administration had promoted respect for human rights in Latin America and worked to return the Canal Zone to Panama. This was not enough, however, to overcome the suspicions of many Latin American governments that the US resolution was a veiled attempt to keep a long-time ally in power. By the mid-1980s, the Latin American governments were utilizing other fora, including the UN, to end the civil wars raging in Central America because of perceived obstructionism by the Reagan administration at the OAS to

pursue peace negotiations. For its part, the United States—exercising the prerogative of a hegemon—simply sidelined and ignored the OAS when it supported Great Britain over Argentina during the Malvinas conflict in 1982, invaded Grenada in 1983, and forcibly removed former CIA protégé Manuel Noriega from power in Panama in 1989.

At the start of the 1990s, Latin America had experienced a decade of economic stagnation sparked by a regional debt crisis that began in 1982. In addition, the Soviet Union and its network of satellite states imploded. Accordingly, most governments throughout the Americas had come to accept the merits of market-oriented economic policies long advocated by the United States as the best remedy for Latin America's chronic underdevelopment. By 1994, most Latin American and Caribbean governments were also enthusiastic proponents of an ambitious project to establish a Free Trade Area of the Americas that would encompass the entire Western Hemisphere (but for Cuba). This shift in economic thinking also coincided with the fact that for the first time in history, the leaders of all the nations of the Western Hemisphere (but for Haiti between September 1991 and October 1994 and Fidel Castro) were democratically elected.

The high level of economic as well as political consensus in the Americas that characterized much of the 1990s helps to explain why the OAS General Assembly in 1991 approved Resolution 1080 on Representative Democracy. OAS members would now respond collectively "to the sudden or irregular interruption of the democratic political institutional process or of the legitimate exercise of power by a democratically elected government" in any member state.[3] A year later, the OAS General Assembly adopted the Protocol of Washington that entered into force in 1997 and authorized the OAS to suspend, upon a two-thirds majority vote, any member state whose democratically constituted government was overthrown by force.[4] Both developments marked the end of long-standing resistance from Latin American governments to anything that might be utilized by the United States as a pretext to intervene in their internal affairs and violate their sovereignty.

Challenges To US Leadership within the Inter-American System under George W. Bush

As the twentieth century drew to a close, the remarkable hemispheric consensus that characterized much of the 1990s began to unravel. On the economic front, it was becoming increasingly clear that neoliberal policies in and of themselves were insufficient to overcome the serious structural barriers that prevented an equitable distribution of the gains generated by market-based reforms in most Latin American countries. The election to the Venezuelan presidency in 1998 of an Army colonel (who had led an unsuccessful coup attempt in 1992) and his calls for a Bolivarian Alternative to the Free Trade Area of the Americas was a harbinger of things to come. In 2000, Ecuadoran President Jamil Mahuad was overthrown in a military coup supported by indigenous

[3] See Paragraph 1 to Resolution 1080 adopted at the 21st Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly in Santiago, Chile on June 4, 1991. *Proceedings Volume I* (Washington, DC: OAS General Secretariat, 1991), 1.

[4] The full text of the Protocol of Washington, which was incorporated as the new Article 9 to Chapter III of the Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS) and entered into force on September 25, 1997, is available at: http://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_A-56_Protocol_of_Washington.htm

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groups angered over his decision to substitute the US dollar for the national currency as well as for implementing a series of unpopular free market reforms. The implosion of the Argentine economy at the end of 2001, led to the end of its dollarized economy and rejection of neoliberal macroeconomic policies that Buenos Aires had eagerly embraced a decade earlier. The first decade of the twenty-first century also coincided with a phenomenon called the Pink Tide, in which presidents representing the left of the political spectrum were elected in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay, oftentimes on platforms explicitly rejecting the Washington Consensus economic reforms that Latin American governments pursued in the 1990s.

Following terrorist attacks in the northeastern United States on September 11, 2001, the OAS General Assembly, coincidentally meeting that same day in Lima, unanimously approved the Inter-American Democratic Charter following an impassioned speech in support by US Secretary of State Colin Powell. The Charter aimed to resolve some of the weaknesses of OAS Resolution 1080 and the Washington Protocol which were deemed incapable of addressing more drawn-out deteriorations in democratic governance. Days later, at the request of Brazil, the OAS Permanent Council meeting in Washington activated the collective security provisions of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance. In addition, it called for a meeting of the recently created Inter-American Committee against Terrorism. In 2002, this Committee designed and deployed an antiterrorism database and drafted the Convention Against Terrorism, which was signed by 30 members of the OAS in June of that year (Shaw 2004, 2).

Within a few years into the twenty-first century, however, the United States began to experience a number of setbacks that marked a steady decline of its traditional hegemony within the inter-American system. One important explanation for this phenomenon was the appearance of more assertive leftist governments throughout Latin America emboldened by new wealth generated by the Chinese-induced commodity boom. Yet another important factor is the way the Bush White House chose to respond to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks through its indiscriminate use of high-altitude bombings in Afghanistan that killed many innocent civilians, as well as the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Both wars, coupled with the initial US failure to categorically condemn the short-lived coup against Hugo Chávez in April of 2002, revived memories of past US interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean and rekindled widespread distrust of its motives. As a result of the US invasion of Iraq without UN Security Council authorization, Mexico formally withdrew from the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance in 2004. Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela followed suit in 2012.

In 2005, the preferred US-supported candidate to become Secretary General of the OAS, Francisco Flores (former president of El Salvador), had to withdraw his name when, for the first time in OAS history, a majority of the member states rejected the US nominee (Williams 2012, 338). A majority of OAS member states also rejected the US second choice, Mexican Foreign Minister Ernesto Derbez, in favor of José Miguel Insulza, the Chilean Foreign Minister and a Socialist who had spent much of the Pinochet dictatorship in exile.

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At the OAS General Assembly meeting in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in June 2005, the United States suffered another embarrassing defeat when the other member states rejected a US-proposed amendment to the Inter-American Democratic Charter. The amendment would have permitted the Permanent Council, relying on civil society input, to monitor compliance with a country's commitment to representative democracy and potentially undertake preventive measures. The basic idea was to provide an early warning mechanism before the actual explosion of a major political crisis that caught the hemisphere off-guard and left the OAS scrambling to respond. Reflecting the deep suspicions generated by the unilateralist foreign policy of the administration of George W. Bush, a clear majority in the General Assembly "implicitly rejected the U.S. proposal for a 'monitoring committee', arguing that any effort to strengthen democracy should be carried out with respect for the principle of non-intervention and the right of self-determination of citizens" (Dent and Wilson 2014, 116).

The Continued Diminishment of US Influence at the OAS under Barack H. Obama

The steady erosion of US influence in the OAS and its continued relevance as an important institutional framework for Washington to manage inter-American relations spilled over into the Obama administration, despite a stated desire to forge a new type of relationship premised on partnerships.[5] In 2009, the United States found itself outmaneuvered at that year's General Assembly meeting in San Pedro Sula, Honduras (ironically just weeks before the coup that ousted the host country's president), as OAS member states voted to rescind the 1962 motion that suspended Cuba as an active member of the OAS. While Cuba has, to date, not expressed any interest in reactivating its OAS membership, it did participate in the Seventh Summit of the Americas in Panama in April 2015. This was facilitated by the Obama administration's decision at the end of 2014 to begin the process of normalizing diplomatic relations with Cuba (after eighteen months of back channel diplomacy involving, among others, the new Argentine-born Pope Francis and the Canadian government).[6] Many Latin American and Caribbean countries had already made clear at the Sixth Summit of the Americas in Cartagena, Colombia, in 2012 that they would boycott the subsequent Summit in Panama if Cuba was not invited. Accordingly, if the Obama administration had not succeeded in normalizing diplomatic relations with Havana and insisted on strictly enforcing the proviso that only countries with a representative democracy can participate, the Sixth Summit in Cartagena might well have been the last.

[5] At the Fifth Summit of the Americas in April 2009 in Trinidad, US President Obama emphasized that the United States was meeting with partners on an equal level and that "[t]here is no senior partner and junior partner in our relations; there is simply engagement based on mutual respect and common interests and shared values." See Official Remarks of United States President Barack Obama on April 17, 2001, at the Opening Ceremony of the Fifth Summit of the Americas. Text available at: http://www.summit-americas.org/V_Summit/remarks_usa_en.pdf

[6] See "Epilogue: Cutting the Shackles of the Past: A Back-Chanel Success" in LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2014. The authors note Cuba policy became a focus of the Obama administration's second term as a result of the Sixth Summit of the Americas as "Obama and Clinton returned from Cartagena chastened by the vehemence and frustration expressed by the other heads of state" (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2014, 423).

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In September 2012, Venezuela renounced its ratification of the American Convention on Human Rights and acceptance of the compulsory jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in San José, Costa Rica. The Dominican Republic threatened to do the same after the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) based in Washington, D.C., condemned a September 2013 decision by that country's Constitutional Tribunal to rescind the Dominican citizenship of anyone whose forebearers had migrated from Haiti after 1929. For its part, Brazil rejected an interim IACHR measure in 2011 ordering suspension of construction activities at the Belo Monte hydroelectric complex until the Brazilian government fulfilled its international legal obligation to adequately consult local indigenous communities that might be detrimentally impacted. In retaliation, Brazil withheld its annual OAS dues payments, recalled its ambassador to the OAS, and for two years refused to put forward its candidate to sit on the IACHR. Angered by its frequent condemnations over his curtailment of press freedoms, Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa spearheaded an effort in 2012, joined by Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, to "reform" the inter-American human rights system.[7] At the same time, Argentina argued for moving the IACHR out of Washington, D.C. to a country that had ratified the American Convention on Human Rights. In the end, the Ecuadoran proposal did not prosper as most countries viewed it as an attempt to weaken the system, while the Argentine proposal fell by the wayside. Even so, the United States was put in an awkward position, defending entities it also undermines by its failure to recognize the binding nature of IACHR rulings.[8] In addition, the United States has never ratified the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights. Thus, by definition, it is not subject to the compulsory jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

In October 2013, the US Congress approved the bipartisan "Organization of American States Revitalization and Reform Act of 2013" that called for an accessed fee structure in which no member state would, after October 2018, pay more than the 50 percent of the organization's assessed annual dues.[9] The Act also called on the OAS to annually review and reduce the number of mandates not directly related to its core functions, ensure that new mandates be accompanied by an analysis of how they complemented the core OAS mission and how they would be funded, and implement a transparent and merit-based system for hiring, firing, and promoting staff.[10] The Act followed years of growing frustration, particularly among Republican members of the US Congress, with an organization viewed as advancing policies counter to US objectives. Even Obama administration

[7] Ironically, the Correa government also joined the United States in arguing that the IACHR does not have competence to adopt precautionary measures (i.e., injunctive relief), and that therefore there is no obligation for states to comply with them (Burbano-Herrera and Haeck 2019, 91).

[8] Although it did not change the traditional position that decisions of the IACHR are mere recommendations, the US government under Obama in 2015 did, for the first time in history, request a Commission hearing on the issue of criminal justice and race, and facilitated fact-finding missions by the IACHR to investigate detention facilities for juveniles as well as unaccompanied foreign minors within the United States. (Camilleri and Edmonds 2017, 2).

[9] See Public Law 113-41-Oct. 2, 2013 at 22 USC 290q. The full text of the OAS Revitalization and Reform Act of 2013 is available at: https://www.congress.gov/113/plaws/publ41/PLAW-113publ41.pdf

[10] For the US Congress, the core competencies of the OAS include: (1) strengthening peace and security; (2) promoting and consolidating representative democracy; (3) regional dispute resolution; (4) election assistance and monitoring; (5) fostering economic growth and development cooperation; (6) facilitating trade; (7) combating illicit drug trafficking and transnational crime; and, (8) support for the Inter-American Human Rights System.

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bureaucrats were heard to complain that a group of Latin American nations had "hijacked" the OAS General Assembly for their own purposes, without giving due consideration to US interests, thereby leading to a decision to lower the profile of the OAS and of the US role within it.(Heine and Weiffen 2015, 139–140). One example of this "hijacking" was adoption by the General Assembly in 2012 of a Venezuelan-backed OAS Social Charter that emphasized a humanistic model to encourage state-based economic development versus one premised on private sector driven neoliberalism (Biegon 2017, 123–124).

Potential Alternatives to the OAS?

The Bush and Obama years were also marked by the appearance of at least two new regional organizations in the Western Hemisphere—the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)—that had the potential to sideline the OAS and what was perceived by some governments as its major deficiency: the meddlesome presence of the United States.

UNASUR and PROSUR

In December 2004, the South American presidents launched the Community of South American Nations, which was transformed into the Unión de Naciones Suramericanas or UNASUR in 2008. The driving force behind UNASUR's creation was Brazil, which viewed the continental entity as a vehicle to secure its leadership role in South America (Trinkunas 2013, 83). In particular, Brazil envisioned itself as the axis of a subcontinental region receptive to Brazilian investment and industrial exports that would be strategic not only economically but also geopolitically, thereby boosting the country's status in the eyes of the international community (Espinosa 2014, 38). By forging a South American identity through common policies, Brasilia also sought to create a strategic orientation that, as a first step, aimed to contain external interference—particularly that of the United States—in continental affairs (DerGhougassian 2015, 175).

One specific area where UNASUR countries attempted to forge a common policy on regional security was through the establishment of a South American Defense Council. Brazil first proposed creating the Council in 2008 in response to an incursion into Ecuador by Colombian soldiers to attack a FARC encampment that led to the death of an important guerilla commander. In response, Venezuela sent troops to the Colombian border and Ecuador broke off diplomatic relations with Colombia. In establishing a South American Defense Council, the UNASUR countries hoped to overcome limitations within the inter-American defense system, historically perceived as serving the US national interest, rather than South American defense priorities (Battaglino 2012, 82). The Defense Council also provided a way to deactivate and prevent intraregional conflicts that the United States traditionally exploited to bolster its own objectives (Carrión Mena 2014, 62).

In an effort to avoid an arms race erupting among the South American countries, all the UNASUR governments were required to make public their expenditures on national defense as part of a South American Registry of Defense Spending. In addition, a South American Registry of Military

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Inventory was established in 2014. A UNASUR Center for Strategic Defense Studies opened in Buenos Aires in May 2011 to, *inter alia*, examine threats to regional security posed by transnational criminal networks, and to offer human rights courses to military personnel. The center was given responsibility for collecting, verifying, and disseminating the data collected for both registries. A South American Defense School located in Ecuador was established in 2014 to provide online training for both civilians and military personnel on matters related to regional defense and security as well for participation in international peacekeeping missions.

UNASUR was also active on the issue of energy security, including the need to expand the use of renewable or alternative energy resources as well as enhance energy efficiency and conservation. A South American Energy Council made up of the Ministers of Energy from all twelve UNASUR member states issued guiding principles for a South American energy strategy, a Plan of Action on Regional Energy Integration, as well as the general parameters for negotiating a South American Treaty on Energy Integration.

Furthermore, UNASUR became enmeshed in public health issues stemming from the social objectives in its founding treaty, including provisions calling for universal access to health services. A South American Health Council made up of the Ministers of Health from each member state was established shortly after UNASUR's launch in 2008. The Health Council approved a Five-Year Plan for the period 2010–2015 which, *inter alia,* outlined specific actions such as joint price negotiation and/or pooled procurement of high-cost medications.

In 2010, UNASUR created a South American Council to Combat Drug Trafficking in an attempt to harmonize policies and devise a continental strategy. One specific goal was to limit the intervention of nonregional actors as exemplified by the agreement Bogotá signed with the Obama administration in 2009 to permit a US military presence at a number of bases throughout Colombia to monitor drug trafficking. The heightened US military presence in Colombia was, in turn, the result of a decision by Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa not to renew the lease for a US drug monitoring facility at Manta in Ecuador. Although Colombia's Supreme Constitutional Court eventually scuttled the base agreement as an unconstitutional overreach on the part of President Álvaro Uribe, the 2009 agreement raised concerns that US military activities in Colombia might spill over into neighboring countries. UNASUR's drug trafficking council also facilitated a unified South American position to demand a new hemispheric drug policy in anticipation of the Sixth Summit of the Americas in Cartagena in 2012. It was at that Summit that member states called on the OAS General Secretariat to produce a report on the drug problem in the Western Hemisphere. Released in May of 2013, the two separate but interconnected reports, among other things, dismissed the decades-long US strategy of a war on drugs as a failure and emphasized addressing the drug problem from a public health perspective.

UNASUR effectively sidelined the OAS in resolving the political crises that erupted in Bolivia in 2008 in light of a civilian-led coup plot against President Evo Morales, as well as in addressing the impeachment of President Fernando Lugo in Paraguay in 2012. UNASUR also played a much more visible role than the OAS in mediating an end to the uprising in Ecuador in 2010 that resulted in

President Rafael Correa's temporary detention by dissident policemen. Although the OAS initially acted forcefully to the removal of President José Manuel Zelaya from the Honduran presidency in 2009 by invoking the Inter-American Democratic Charter and suspending Honduras from the OAS, it was actually UNASUR that facilitated Zelaya's return from exile and ended Honduras's suspension from the OAS in 2011. Furthermore, Colombia was pressured by other UNASUR countries in 2009 to release details of its previously secret deal with the United States to allow the Americans access to several bases in Colombian territory, a disclosure that helped de-escalate rising regional tensions over the issue. In addition, it was UNASUR, and not the OAS, that defused military tensions between Colombia and Venezuela in 2010 when Hugo Chávez was accused of providing asylum to Colombian guerrilla fighters in Venezuelan territory. Following the creation of a Technical Election Unit in 2014, UNASUR even fielded election observer missions in various national and municipal elections as well as plebiscites where similar missions from the OAS were specifically excluded. Until the election of former Uruguayan Foreign Minister Luis Almagro as Secretary General of the OAS in March 2015, UNASUR also played a more active role than the OAS in responding to the political instability and violence in Venezuela that followed student-led protests in February 2014. Undoubtedly, this was aided by the fact that the Maduro government clearly favored UNASUR and repudiated the OAS to act a mediator between it and the opposition (Nolte 2018, 141–142).

After former Colombian President Ernesto Samper stepped down as its Secretary General in February 2017, UNASUR entered a period of stagnation when it became impossible to reach the required consensus to select his replacement. The inability to name a new Secretary General meant that new personnel could not be hired to replace departing employees, an annual budget could not be formulated, nor new initiatives proposed. In April 2018, half of the twelve UNASUR member states (i.e., Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, and Peru) announced their intention to withhold annual dues payments over the inability to get anything accomplished within UNASUR (including the election of a new Secretary General) because of the intransigence of Bolivarian Venezuela. In August of 2018, Colombia formally announced its withdrawal from UNASUR, a move eventually followed by the remaining member states but for Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela.

In March 2019, the Presidents of seven South American nations (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Paraguay) met in Santiago to launch a new regional "organization" called the Forum for the Progress of South America or PROSUR as a substitute to UNASUR. PROSUR's institutional framework is nonexistent and it relies on the presidents and ministries of Foreign Affairs of each country to coordinate meetings and provide minimal logistical support. Decisions will be taken by consensus (the same voting system that ultimately contributed to the paralysis within UNASUR). PROSUR calls for tackling many of the same issues assigned to UNASUR: infrastructure development; integration of regional energy markets; improved access to health care; coordination of defense policies; and, responses to natural disasters. The fact that several South American governments found it necessary to create another forum with a similar program underscores that the core rationale for creating UNASUR remains as relevant today as it was more than a decade ago, albeit now devoid of any implicit agenda to provide an alternative to the OAS.

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CELAC

In December of 2008, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva hosted a meeting at the resort town of Sauípe in northeastern Brazil for the heads of state of all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Cuba was present, while the United States and Canada were purposefully excluded. At the three-day summit, Washington's decades-long trade embargo against Cuba was roundly condemned, as were US and European economic policies that allegedly caused the global economic instability that threatened the region at that time. The meeting helped underscore the growing economic and geopolitical power of Brazil and forewarned the United States of an emboldened Latin American bloc at the next Summit of the Americas scheduled for Trinidad and Tobago in April 2009. The meeting in Sauípe turned out to be the precursor for what eventually became the *Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños* or CELAC. CELAC, in turn, marked the latest manifestation of a movement with roots in the 1980s that arose in response to Latin American frustration at the inability of the OAS (because of the perceived stranglehold of the United States) to mediate an end to the conflicts raging in Central America at the time.

All the sovereign states of Latin America and the Caribbean are CELAC members, although Brazil suspended its participation at the beginning of 2020. Despite CELAC's very weak institutional framework and lack of even a dedicated web site, this has not prevented the European Union from utilizing CELAC to facilitate dialogue between both regions. At least two CELAC-EU Summits have taken place (the first in the Chilean capital in January 2013, and the second in Brussels in June 2015).

The Chinese have also been keen to utilize CELAC as a vehicle to channel discussions and negotiations with Latin America and the Caribbean through a single entity, just as they have done since 2000 with sub-Saharan Africa through Forum of China-Africa Cooperation. CELAC also provides China with a means of interacting with those countries in Latin America and the Caribbean with which it still does not have diplomatic relations. In January 2015, the People's Republic of China hosted a summit in Beijing with all the CELAC member states. The Beijing summit concluded with the announcement of a five-year cooperation plan and promises of billions of dollars in new Chinese loans and investments. Chile hosted the following CELAC-China summit in Santiago in January 2018, where Beijing formally invited Latin American and Caribbean governments to take part in the Belt and Road Initiative proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 to expand links between Asia, Africa, and Europe with billions of dollars in infrastructure investment and loans.

Donald Trump and the Inter-American System

Upon taking office, Donald Trump's White House appeared intent on undermining the inter-American system. In March of 2017, the Trump administration boycotted hearings by the IACHR reviewing its proposed travel bans on citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries and other proposed changes to US immigration procedures (Camilleri and Edmonds 2017, 3). This was followed by a failure at the June 2017 meeting of the OAS General Assembly in Cancun to secure the necessary

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two-thirds majority to approve a resolution on Venezuela. The resolution called on President Nicolás Maduro to, among other things, admit a delegation of representatives from OAS member states to try to mediate a solution to the Venezuelan political crisis. Some attributed the inability to pass this resolution to the last-minute decision of US Secretary State Rex Tillerson to skip the meeting and personally lobby for votes in favor (Camilleri 2017, 1). At that same General Assembly meeting in Cancun, the highly qualified US candidate to sit on the IACHR was passed over in favor of candidates from other countries vying for three vacant seats. The only time the American candidate had previously been rejected was in 2003, when the Bush administration nominated someone with a very weak human rights background (at a time of strong concern throughout the Americas as to whether the United States was still committed to a robust defense and enforcement of international human rights law) (Camilleri 2017, 1).

One thing that did emerge from the OAS meeting in Cancun favorable to US interests, however, was approval of a resolution that, *inter alia,* instructed the Permanent Council to propose changes to the assessed contributions, including "the gradual reduction of the percentage assigned to the largest contributor below fifty percent, as well as the possibility of not reducing the amount of its annual contribution."[11] In July 2018, the OAS Permanent Council approved Resolution 1103 (ratified, in turn, by the General Assembly in October 2018) that establishes annual percentage reductions in the assessed US contribution to the OAS that will reach just under 50 percent by 2023, while the percentages of all the other member states during that same time period will gradually rise.

For fiscal year 2018, the Trump administration proposed that US$ 42 million be allocated for the OAS (or US$ 8.5 million less than what the OAS assessed the US as its mandatory dues allocation for 2018) and provided for no voluntary contributions (Meyer 2018, 5). The United States has historically earmarked voluntary contributions to support special OAS initiatives that it favors such as democracy promotion, human rights protection, and security-related initiatives. The Trump administration's budget request for Fiscal Year 2019 for the OAS was essentially the same as the preceding year (again, with no voluntary contributions). The failure to provide voluntary contributions is particularly debilitating for the IACHR, as only US$ 5 million of its annual US$ 9 million operating budget comes from the OAS regular fund (Raderstorf and Shifter 2018, 15). Voluntary contributions (particularly from the United States) have previously covered the rest. In 2016, the IACHR was nearly forced to lay off forty percent of its personnel and suspended a number of activities, including hearings, due to a sharp decline in voluntary contributions (Meyer, 2018, 15).

In March of 2018 a young Cuban-American lawyer from Miami and former Florida legislator, Carlos Trujillo, became the US Permanent Representative to the OAS, a post that had been vacant since 2014. Trujillo has adeptly used the OAS as a forum to wage a propaganda campaign against the three countries the Trump administration labels the "Troika of Tyranny" in the Western Hemisphere: Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

[11] See Paragraph C.3 to Resolution 2911 adopted at the 47th Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly meeting in Cancun, Mexico on June 21, 2017, *Proceedings Volume I* (Washington, DC: OAS General Secretariat, 2017), 128–129.

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While the US held the rotating chair of the OAS Permanent Council for a period at the beginning of 2019, Ambassador Trujillo successfully led an effort to seat representatives appointed by Venezuela's National Assembly and not those representing President Nicolás Maduro, something that was reaffirmed at the General Assembly meeting in Medellin, Colombia, at the end of June 2019. Trujillo was, however, unable to secure the two-thirds majority required by Article 21 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter to formally suspend Venezuela as an active OAS member state because of an unconstitutional interruption in the democratic order. Similarly, OAS Secretary General Almagro exercised an expansive interpretation of Article 18 of the Democratic Charter to draft an extensive report in May 2016 detailing the threat to democracy in Venezuela and requesting a special meeting of the OAS Permanent Council to consider further actions, but nothing of substance ever came of that meeting (Perez 2017, 393–394). The reason for the inability of the OAS to take constructive measures against Venezuela is a legacy of Venezuela's former petroleum largesse in Central America and the Caribbean. Beneficiary countries form a bloc that thwarts the votes needed to pursue actions to preserve and strengthen the democratic system in Venezuela. Nevertheless, perhaps sensing an impending inability to continue influencing votes in the OAS following serious cutbacks in its generous petroleum export programs, the Maduro government announced on April 28, 2017, that it was leaving the OAS in order to defend its sovereignty and avoid foreign intervention and interference in its internal affairs, something that under the OAS Charter required another two years to take effect (Meier García 2017, 103; 112–113).

US Ambassador Trujillo had more diplomatic success in his efforts to address human rights violations and the erosion of democratic principles in Nicaragua. During the June 2019 OAS General Assembly in Medellin, Colombia, a resolution was approved invoking Article 20 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter authorizing the Permanent Council to appoint a commission to "carry out diplomatic efforts at the highest level to seek a peaceful and effective solution to the political and social crisis in Nicaragua and to submit a report within a maximum of 75 days".[12] That same meeting, incidentally, also approved a reform package long pushed by the United States that increases transparency and auditing to improve the effectiveness of the OAS.

Conclusion

The traditional dominance and leadership exercised by the United States in the Western Hemisphere since the end of the nineteenth century began dissipating with the presidency of George W. Bush.[13] Undoubtedly, one important factor has been the emergence of China as a major trading partner, lender, and investor throughout the hemisphere, particularly in South America.[14] This decline has been evident within the inter-American system, and was accompanied by the creation of CELAC

[12] See Paragraph 5 of Resolution 2943 adopted at the 49th Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly meeting in Medellín, Colombia on June 28, 2019. Provisional text available at: http://www.oas.org/consejo/GENERAL%20ASSEMBLY/Resoluciones-Declaraciones.asp

[13] For a more extensive analysis of the factors contributing to the loss of US dominance and leadership in Latin America and the Caribbean over the past two decades, see, e.g., Tulchin 2016; Santa-Cruz 2020.

[14] For a more extensive analysis on the challenges posed to traditional US dominance and leadership in Latin America and the Caribbean by China, see Chapter 6, "China in Latin America and the Caribbean" in O'Keefe 2018.

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and UNASUR. For a time, UNASUR displaced the OAS as the main mediator of conflicts in South America (Nolte 2018, 147). Even during its heyday, however, UNASUR never enjoyed the solid institutional framework or resource capacities of the inter-American system. The institutional deficiencies and lack of resources are more pronounced in the case of CELAC. More importantly, neither UNASUR nor CELAC ever had a mandate or a framework to ensure the protection of human rights. For many decades now, the inter-American human rights system has been a central actor in the promotion and defense of human rights in the Americas, and it continues to shape the regional human rights agenda (Engstrom 2019, 2).

The Trump administration has shown little interest in engaging and strengthening the inter-American system beyond utilizing it as a platform to rhetorically attack Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. In particular, the United States under Trump boycotts hearings of the IACHR and reduces its funding. President Trump was himself a no-show at the Eighth Summit of the Americas in Lima in April 2018 that gathered all the other heads of state in the Western Hemisphere, and was the first time a US president had not participated. Furthermore, the Trump administration's attempt to isolate the Maduro government at the OAS ultimately backfired as Venezuela withdrew from the inter-American system effective April 28, 2019.

The reduction in the assessed percentage of US contributions below fifty percent and increasing the contributions of other countries may reduce traditional perceptions that the inter-American system primarily existed to carry out US prerogatives. The budget shortfalls besetting the OAS in recent years have also forced necessary reductions in wasteful programs and unnecessary personnel and the adoption of measures to enhance transparency and accountability. Additional reforms are still required, however, such as limiting OAS mandates to those things it does best, or has the potential to do so, namely the promotion and protection of representative democracy and human rights in the Western Hemisphere. Nonpolitical goals such as economic and social development and the eradication of poverty are better left to the Inter-American Development Bank.

The demise of UNASUR and the severe institutional limitations of CELAC underscore the need for a robust inter-American system, as many of the challenges confronting the Western Hemisphere today can only be resolved through the type of respectful dialogue and intraregional cooperation the system can facilitate. These challenges include migration and human trafficking, the illicit narcotics trade, climate change, and the growing regional humanitarian crisis produced by the political and economic crisis in Venezuela. A more engaged and financially generous United States genuinely committed to forging partnerships with its hemispheric neighbors is essential, however, for revitalizing the inter-American system. Without reliable US financial assistance, there is a risk of further undermining institutional capacity and diminishing the inter-American system's credibility. The United States also risks China leveraging its permanent observer nation status at the OAS to further enhance its influence in Latin America and the Caribbean, as it has already done as a contributing member of the Inter-American Development Bank. To mark the tenth anniversary of becoming a member, for example, China was to host the Bank's 2019 annual meeting in Chengdu (cancelled over an impasse over who would represent Venezuela).

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