

Fall 2022 - Marcellus Policy Analysis

Winning the South: How the United States Can Win Back Latin America

By Scarlett Kennedy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Amid increasing tensions between the United States and Iran, it is crucial to have an effective plan in place for protecting the U.S. homeland from Iranian violence. This violence significantly decreased following the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) but has reignited since the agreement's collapse, constructing a worrisome picture for the future.¹ In 2020, following the U.S. killing of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, Iranian proxy Hezbollah vowed retaliation.² This retaliation presented itself this year against former National Security Advisor John Bolton in a plot that fortunately was uncovered and foiled by the United States.³ The U.S. Justice Department charged a Mexican national connected to drug cartels for being complicit with the plot, having agreed to carry out the murder. The retaliation against Bolton was not an isolated incident: assassination plotters in the past have commonly utilized Latin American networks to gain access to U.S. soil and will continue to do so in the future, making it the key region for protecting the homeland from Iranian terrorism.

The Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act of 2022 (S.3589), currently in Congress, presents an opportunity to create an overarching strategy for Latin America that would contend with the threat of Iran's access to Latin America while also addressing other emerging concerns, such as Russian and Chinese influence in the region. The lack of U.S. economic and security engagement in Latin America has left a vacuum for foreign influence from undesirable outside superpowers. A successful strategy will reprioritize the region, which for too long has been neglected despite its geographic proximity to the United States homeland (and, therefore, importance to U.S. security). In doing so, the United States should cooperate with Latin American nations to address economic and security problems while avoiding policies and rhetoric that attempt to impose U.S. interests on Latin American nations that already view the United States as an interventionist power.

The strategy should encourage strengthened economic ties, producing trade agreements beneficial to all parties. This can be done by reinstating Trade Promotion Authority, which enables a simpler, speedier, and more credible process for negotiating agreements.⁴ Expanded trade agreements should be paired with plans for supporting development in the region that include job training programs and funding for locally-led development initiatives in key nations. These actions will lend credibility to a new strategy for public diplomacy that addresses Washington's troubled past in Latin America and counteracts current negative perceptions of the United

States. This will be essential in order to combat the anti-Americanism in the region that Iranian terrorist groups thrive on. Additionally, changing the common negative perceptions of the United States as an interventionist power will help build trust and generate support for U.S. partnerships in place of stronger ties with China, Russia, or Iran. Through these efforts, the U.S. can repair its image in the region and become a reliable partner.

The U.S. should encourage security cooperation in critical zones like the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, and support efforts to improve the capacity of Latin American nations to take heightened security precautions. Support for such cooperation can be garnered by framing the issue as one of transnational crime, which most countries take seriously, instead of framing it as a counterterrorism effort.

Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012

When making an actionable plan for the Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act of 2022, policy-makers should learn from the mistakes of similar efforts in the past.⁵ The Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012 (H.R. 3783) illustrated some obstacles that the new bill is bound to face. H.R. 3783 required the Secretary of State to thoroughly assess the threat posed in the Western Hemisphere by Iran, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and Hezbollah, devise a strategy to confront the threat, and update Congress on the strategy's progress. Congress passed the bill shortly after an assassination attempt on the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States, on U.S. soil.⁶ The culprit was an IRGC Qods Force member who had met multiple times with a drug-trafficking cartel in Mexico, illustrating the importance of the U.S.'s southern neighbors in national security.

The goal of H.R. 3783 was to create a comprehensive strategy to engage regional allies and partners while building cooperation between agencies and generating a plan of action.⁷ The resulting strategy was released in June of 2013 and contained five key recommendations:

- Expand already existing intelligence-sharing networks
- Identify and disorganize criminal organizations in order to strengthen border security
- Continue to implement the Iran Freedom and Counterproliferation Act of 2012 (which expanded the scope of American sanctions on certain Iranian industries)
- Bolster capacity-building in the Western Hemisphere
- Continue application of international diplomatic pressure.

The strategy failed to stimulate meaningful action.⁸ It strongly emphasized risk assessment and a narrow definition of goals. However, it fell short of creating a plan that could be fully implemented, glossing over key areas such as resource allocation and the integration of necessary synchronous action into other government strategies.

Additionally, the resulting report dramatically downplayed the harmful effects of Iran's involvement in the region. Only a month prior to the release of the strategy, Argentinian prosecutor Alberto Nisman produced a 500-page indictment alleging that Iran had established terror networks across various Latin American countries. The report accused the Iranian government of directing Hezbollah to carry out the 1994 bombing in Buenos Aires that killed 84 people and left 300 wounded.⁹ In the previous decade, there was evidence that Iran sponsored at least three terror plots linked to Latin America targeting the United States.¹⁰ There was evidence, for example, that Iranian criminal networks in Latin America played a role in the foiled terror plot on John F. Kennedy International Airport in 2007.¹¹ Despite this, the resulting report by the U.S. State Department (DOS) described Iranian influence as "in decline."¹²

DOS interpreted H.R. 3783 to require it to create a plan of action only where it deemed a threat posed by Iran to exist. Since the report concluded that little threat existed, there was not much of a resulting plan for objectives such as protecting U.S. national security interests and its assets in the region.¹³ Dissatisfaction in Congress compelled the department to reassess its findings, but no revision was ever submitted.¹⁴ From then on, momentum stalled.

U.S. foreign policy in Latin America has long been overlooked and underprioritized. Ever since the end of the Cold War, the United States has allocated only a tiny proportion of resources to the region.¹⁵ The War on Terror pulled even more attention and resources away from U.S. engagement in the Western Hemisphere. In some ways, this is understandable. Unlike some other regions, Latin America does not pose a nuclear threat or host problems of interstate warfare. However, this does not mean that the region is not of vital strategic importance to the United States. As Dr. R Evan Ellis, research professor of Latin American Studies at the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute argues, “no other geographical region is as directly tied to U.S. security and prosperity than Latin America and the Caribbean, considering the intimate bonds of geography, commerce, and family.”¹⁶

Foreign Influence in Latin America: The Need for U.S. Engagement

Lack of attention and strategic thinking towards the region has left an open door for foreign actors opposed to U.S. interests to enter.¹⁷ In addition to Iranian intelligence and terror networks, Chinese and Russian influence have also penetrated many countries in Latin America. In light of intensified rivalry between the United States and these two powers, the United States has begun to show concern for both countries’ growing influence in the region.

However, this concern has not been reflected in practice in U.S. policy or strategy documents. In the National Defense Authorization Act for 2022, for example, Latin America was only mentioned as related to China or Russia; the act calls for assessing Chinese and Russian influence in the region, but not for any discrete action to address it.¹⁸ Additionally, Iranian and Hezbollah activities are not mentioned in the legislation.

Since underprioritization and a lack of strategic thinking are at the core of the foreign influence problem in Latin America seen today, the United States must revise its stance towards the region as a whole to address the issue fully. In the past, the United States may have gotten away with putting Latin America on

the back burner. Going forward, the new, more multi-polar world will be less forgiving as other nations are willing and able to step in and take the place of the United States.

The new Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act of 2022 presents a valuable chance for the United States to rethink its approach. To be effective, it cannot repeat the mistakes of 2012 in undervaluing the region’s strategic importance and downplaying the risk of continuing business as usual. While a thorough assessment of the problem is critical, the emphasis should be on creating an actionable plan that past efforts have lacked. So far, the bill looks promising on this front. It requires DOS to pursue increased security assistance and cooperation, tactics to counter foreign influence and criminal infiltration, strengthening of partnerships, and a strategy to increase public diplomacy.¹⁹ In that regard, the bill has already allowed less room for error than the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012.

Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act: Strengths and Weaknesses

Although S.3589 is already off to a much better start than H.R.3783, it is not without flaws of its own. While it mentions Russia and China’s potentially harmful influence, it does not acknowledge the threat posed by Iran. Iran may not be a global power in the same way as China or Russia but acts of terrorism and assassinations are uniquely characteristic of its regime, and it has proven willing to execute them on U.S. soil to pursue its goals. Furthermore, Chinese investment and Russian arms sales to countries that are near the United States but lack the intention or capability to target it do not pose the same level of threat to national security as acts of terrorism and assassination plots against U.S. government officials and American citizens.

The threat posed by Iranian activity in the Western Hemisphere is likely to grow as Iran searches for opportunities to fulfill its vows to avenge the assassination of Soleimani.²⁰ Shortly after the killing of Soleimani, the Joint Intelligence Bulletin warned that increased tensions between Iran and the U.S. presented a threat to the homeland.²¹ Two years later, U.S.

authorities uncovered a plot on John Bolton's life, planned by an IRGC member who had contacted a member of a Mexican cartel to carry out the assassination.²² Shortly after the failure of this plot, four Iranian intelligence officials were discovered to be plotting to kidnap Masih Alinejad, an Iranian American human rights activist living in New York, and smuggle her to Venezuela.²³ These incidents further illustrate the utility of Latin American nations to the IRGC in performing acts of terror. The potential utility offered by Latin America's proximity to the United States and Iran's willingness to exploit it should not be downplayed or ignored and deserves mention in the new security strategy for the Western Hemisphere.

Wisely, S.3589 acknowledges that transnational criminal organizations in the Western Hemisphere threaten the interests of the U.S. However, this acknowledgment is incomplete without the mention of Iranian influence, especially since Iran is known to take advantage of regions with less robust security.²⁴ The prevalence of transnational crime in the Americas is likely a significant factor in Iran's calculus to export malign activities to the region.²⁵ The highly lucrative drug market offers opportunities for covert raising of funds for purposes such as buying weapons in a location geographically convenient to the U.S. homeland. The activities of Hezbollah fuel the drug market and threaten the security and financial systems of Latin American nations and the United States.

The Tri-Border Area of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina is especially a place for concern and has been characterized as a "terrorist safe haven."²⁶ Brazil is also a nation of specific concern, presenting a likely opportunity for ideological influence, as it has the largest Muslim population in Latin America. Critically, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and DOS present conflicting reports on this topic, with the DEA citing drug trafficking as Hezbollah's main financing mechanism while State's reports often fail to mention this dynamic at all.²⁷ This suggests a lack of cohesion between agencies that the new strategy should seek to address.

Additionally, while S.3589 focuses on security cooperation, Washington will need to engage Latin America in security and trade holistically. Increased foreign influence in the region is a consequence of general under-engagement on the part of the United

States, which the new security strategy should aim to recognize. This can be accomplished with a complementary economic strategy to assert the benefits of a strong partnership with the United States and reduce the incentive to align with undesirable actors.

Despite little mention of Iranian influence in the Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act, the bill presents ample opportunity to counter Iran in Latin America. Countering foreign influence of any kind will require the U.S. to reverse its regional strategic retreat. Inhibiting Iranian influence, therefore, will go hand-in-hand with inhibiting Russian and Chinese influence. Most consequential to the bill's effectiveness will be the level of commitment the U.S. shows to engaging its neighbors and following through on the resulting strategy. Such a strategy should include an economic component that emphasizes trade deals and efforts to address poverty and inequality, as well as security cooperation and increased public diplomacy.

Emphasize Transnational Crime, Not Terrorism

The Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act of 2022 wisely calls for cooperation with Latin American security agencies to address the shared concern of illicit trafficking and transnational criminal organizations. Close cooperation with Latin American leaders to more accurately understand Hezbollah's activities in the Americas should inform a new cohesive agreement between DOS and other U.S. agencies on how to understand and tackle the threat. Anti-terrorism legislation in Latin America is weak, with only eleven out of twenty-one states in the region possessing laws that make terrorism a federal crime.²⁸ The U.S. is unlikely to be able to convince countries to change this without reframing the problem.²⁹

While terrorism is treated with low legislative urgency, transnational crime is regarded as a top-priority national security threat in most Latin American countries.³⁰ Therefore, the United States should frame the concern of terrorism in connection to transnational crime. Countries with the political will to engage in specific actions to address counterterrorism should receive legal support from the U.S. to establish more robust powers for intelligence and security programs

to conduct investigations and prosecutions.

Increase Security Capacity in the Tri-Border Area

Specific attention should be paid to the free trade zone in the TBA between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay. Hezbollah and Islamist militants exploit vulnerabilities in these areas.³¹ According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the TBA has been a key area for generating Islamic radicalism in Latin America.³² Between 1991 and 2001, as much as \$500 million was sent from Arab communities (primarily in Brazil) to financial institutions based in Paraguay run by Hezbollah and Hamas.³³ The 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Argentina and the 1994 bombing of the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association were both carried out by Iran and Hezbollah and organized in the TBA.³⁴ The individual who carried out this bombing was found to be coming illegally in and out of Brazil, recruiting young Brazilians to attend religious classes in Tehran.³⁵ Additionally, Hezbollah operatives conduct shipping fraud from Brazil, sending containers up to the TBA.

During the War on Terror, the United States ramped up security cooperation initiatives within the TBA.³⁶ The “3+1 Group on Tri-Border Area Security” was established between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and the United States to combat transnational crime and terrorism. This resulted in increased information sharing, joint patrols, and intensified surveillance of the area. These activities enjoyed some level of success—many criminals were arrested, and many others were forced to leave the region. A 2009 Brazilian operation, named Agata 2, managed to cut illegal crossings from the critical Ciudad del Este to Foz de Iguazu by an estimated 50% with military patrols and heightened surveillance.³⁷ The efficiency of Agata 2 benefitted from unmanned drones crafted in Israel. It is worth noting that security operations in the TBA yield stronger results when conducted jointly between states.

Increased oversight of goods and operations in these free trade zones should be considered.³⁸ The United States could act as an important partner in increasing the capacity of these countries to carry out increased oversight, benefitting all parties involved. The U.S. should discuss the possibility of reinstating a group

structured similarly to the 3 + 1 in order to increase dialogue between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and itself concerning best practices for combatting transnational crime in the TBA. Drones have proven useful for reconnaissance purposes, and the United States should consider supporting their production for use in the TBA.³⁹

All security cooperation should have clear goals that are agreed upon by both the United States and the country receiving security support. Reviving a structure similar to the 3 + 1 would provide a forum through which nations can debate and discuss best practices to reduce transnational crime. U.S. policymakers should avoid framing this as an effort to protect democracy, given the nation’s history of using pro-democracy rhetoric to undermine governments in the region it did not believe to be sufficiently pro-American. Instead, such goals should be narrowly focused on targeting transnational crime and terrorism.

An Economic Plan for Renewed Partnership

Security operations, while necessary for combatting transnational crime, are not a sufficient solution. The root causes behind the intense levels of transnational crime in the Western Hemisphere must be addressed. The security environment of Latin America would benefit immensely from economic growth and policies that address the persistent high levels of poverty in the region. Since the United States has a vested interest in having stable, secure nations in its proximity, it should invest in Latin America’s economy and in its people.

Trade Promotion Authority and the Case for Increased Trade

While the Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act of 2022 does not explicitly mention strengthening economic partnerships, it does call for strengthening alliances and partnerships overall. The United States cannot assert itself as a primary partner to Latin American countries if it neglects the importance of economic power and trade deals. While the United States has been hesitant to establish new trade

deals in Latin America and invest in the region in recent decades, foreign actors have been quick to fill the demand. Strong economic partnerships are one steppingstone to better cooperation and closer relationships with Latin American nations that leave less room for overseas influence. If it is to convince these countries that alignment with the United States is more beneficial than alignment with Iran, China, and Russia, Washington must demonstrate its interest in meaningfully investing in the region.

One path to bolstering free trade with Latin America is implementing TPA. TPA is a legislative mechanism by which Congress defines objectives and guidelines for the President to follow during the process of negotiating free trade agreements (FTAs).⁴⁰ At the end of negotiations, Congress simply rejects or approves the deal with no amendments. The purpose of TPA is to resolve tensions between Congress's constitutional authority to "regulate commerce with foreign nations," and the president's power to "make treaties" by establishing governmental consensus so that the president can negotiate credibly with other nations while creating a quicker process for implementing trade agreements.⁴¹ It also prevents foreign countries from having to negotiate with Congress, which is notoriously slow and wrought with partisan divisions. Fourteen trade agreements have been made under the TPA process since 1974, improving trade freedom for Americans by reducing tariffs on foreign goods.⁴² In an analysis comparing trade agreements made under TPA to non-TPA trade agreements, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) found three key differences:

- While the U.S. trade deficit has been growing in recent years, due mainly to increased imports from non-FTA countries in Asia, trade deals made under TPA have resulted in more balanced trade.⁴³
- The U.S. exports more manufactured goods to TPA countries than it does to countries without deals made under TPA.
- U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) to TPA countries grew as much as 20% from 2002-2005. In comparison, FDI to non-TPA countries grew by only 7% during the same time period.

In addition to the GAO report, a report by the United

States International Trade Commission (USITC) concluded that these agreements:

- Increased overall U.S. real GDP by \$88.8 billion.⁴⁴
- Raised income by \$98.3 billion.
- Increased employment by 485,000 jobs.
- Increased exports by \$37.4 billion.

TPA expired on June 30, 2021 and has yet to be renewed by the Biden Administration.⁴⁵ Its renewal would facilitate the creation of new trade agreements with Latin American partners, allowing for a simplified and more efficient pathway to strengthening trade partnerships and reducing incentives for trade with less desirable partners like Russia, China, and Iran. Improved trade relations would also strengthen Latin American economies, potentially lowering the prevalence of organized crime that Iranian-sponsored terrorist groups depend on.

Latin America is home to many nations that could be exemplary options for free trade deals. Ecuador, which has multiple trade deals with the European Union (EU) and is in the process of negotiating a deal with Mexico, has expressed a desire to establish a free trade deal with the United States. With its plentiful resources and shared values, Ecuador is an ideal candidate for a new trade deal.⁴⁶ The U.S.-Ecuador Partnership Act of 2022, which instructs the DOS and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to invest in the country and increase economic ties and security assistance, is currently in Congress pending Senate approval.⁴⁷ The Biden Administration could aim to push this bill through Congress and use TPA to help fulfill its objectives.

Uruguay would be another excellent candidate for a new free trade deal, being home to a robust democracy that scores high in economic freedom.⁴⁸ It has also publicly denounced authoritarianism in the region, demonstrating its commitment to democracy.⁴⁹ The expansion of free trade deals could play an additional role in strengthening the new strategy overall if countries that demonstrate a willingness to cooperate diligently on security efforts are given priority for new deals.

Strengthening economic partnerships with Latin America would prove especially beneficial in light of

the war in Ukraine. Latin American countries have been struggling with inflation, increased poverty, and food security due to the war, and their economic conditions could be aided by increased trade with the United States.⁵⁰ The EU is already looking towards the region to help alleviate economic troubles such as gas shortages.⁵¹ The United States should do the same by becoming a reliable and exciting partner that is willing to forge new trade deals with Latin American nations.

Supporting Local Development to Improve Relations and Security

Since poverty is a driving factor for criminal organizations in Latin America, the United States should engage in efforts to develop the region's labor market. In 2000, the U.S. government launched a partnership with Colombia called Plan Colombia in an effort to combat the rampant drug trade.⁵² The strategy was widely regarded as a success. Not only were homicides cut in half, but terrorism decreased by 90%.⁵³ This makes it an excellent model for the new strategy for the Western Hemisphere. Fostering development and programs to combat inequality will help address the root causes of transnational crime. If the United States plays a part in these programs, it can counteract the negative perceptions of the superpower and anti-American sentiment in Latin America that often fuel violent extremism.

One reason why Plan Colombia achieved such success was because there was U.S. support for programs to grow Colombia's economy, including by building schools and offering job training programs to Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.⁵⁴ One critical component was that local communities in Colombia were given agency in their development. Mayors and town councils would work in their communities to form petitions for American-funded development projects. Not only did this engage local populations by giving them a voice in their own development, but it also allowed Plan Colombia to utilize the knowledge of Colombians themselves in what would be most useful. Plan Colombia cut rural poverty by an impressive 30%, illustrating the powerful potential of such programs.⁵⁵

The United States should implement some of the proven strategies from Plan Colombia into its new

economic strategy. Brazil, which recently elected Lula da Silva to the presidency and is a critical nation regarding Iranian influence, is a contender for such policies. Lula has a record of using social programs to combat poverty in Brazil and would likely be open to cooperating with the United States in such efforts.⁵⁶ Brazil is also a Hezbollah recruiting hotspot due to its large Muslim population.⁵⁷ Investing in the development of Brazil would foster a positive image of the United States to combat the anti-Americanism that terrorist operatives seek to spread, help alleviate the conditions that allow transnational crime to thrive, and combat the widespread negative perception of how the United States deals with left-leaning governments in the region.⁵⁸

Cooperation Based on Shared Interests, Not Ideology

The Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act of 2022 calls for an increase in public diplomacy and engagement with the general population of the Western Hemisphere. Fostering a new image for the United States in Latin America will be critical to the success of all efforts to engage the region. Past public diplomacy efforts in Latin America have been plagued by the history of U.S. intervention, especially during the Cold War, which these efforts have commonly failed to address.⁵⁹ Since 1776, 34% of United States interventions have taken place in Latin America.⁶⁰ As illustrated during President George W. Bush's 2007 tour of Latin America, which was often met with protests, the United States struggles to form a message that is received as sincere when it attempts to glaze over its troublesome past with messages of American exceptionalism.

The United States should be wary of the manner in which it speaks against authoritarian regimes in Latin America. President Bush, for example, once stated in a speech in Miami, "When I say something, I mean it. We will not rest until the Cuban people enjoy the same freedoms in Havana that they receive here in America."⁶¹ While strong statements about commitment to democracy and freedom in Latin America are meant to be ones of respect and goodwill, they are often perceived far differently by those in the region they are intended for. Regardless of their views on

any specific regime, citizens in Latin America, who often perceive the U.S. as quick to intervene militarily, receive these messages apprehensively.⁶² In Latin America, the thought of U.S. intervention conjures memories from the Cold War period of repression, breakdown of democratic institutions, and even mass murder.⁶³ When U.S. presidents use aggressive rhetoric when speaking on bolstering democracy in the region, this is the image that is brought to the mind of many Latin Americans. Aggressive ideological political messaging complicates the United States's ability to cooperate on common interests with countries that differ ideologically while accomplishing very little, if anything, to further U.S. interests.

Hostile rhetoric coming from the United States on Latin American nations is often paired with efforts to isolate unfriendly authoritarian countries in the region. Continuing to pursue policies of isolation in the future will prove counterintuitive to U.S. interests. For an example of the futility of isolation in Latin America and the advantage of engagement, the United States can look to Cuba. After 60 years of attempting to isolate Cuba, little progress was made toward the goals isolation was meant to accomplish.⁶⁴ Once the United States and Cuba began to pursue normalized relations, however, a dialogue was opened on human rights concerns, 53 political prisoners were released, bilateral agreements were signed on various key issues, and Cuban access to information expanded.⁶⁵ Isolation in a multipolar world will prove even less effective. Cutting diplomatic ties leaves a vacuum to be filled by undesirable influences without yielding meaningful accomplishments toward U.S. goals. Since the United States reversed some of the normalization initiatives with Cuba in 2017, the island's ties with Russia and China have strengthened significantly.⁶⁶ Careful engagement seems to be much more promising.

To counteract the perception of Washington that has dominated the common view in Latin America, the United States should adopt non-interventionist rhetoric that focuses on accepting nations as they are. National ideology may come and go, but geography is permanent. While strategies of isolation have proven ineffective and even harmful in the past, this is especially important today, when rivals like Russia, China, and Iran are willing substitutes for U.S. engagement.

President Joe Biden's failure to invite strategically important but non-democratic countries to the 2022 Summit of the Americas illustrates why putting ideology over common strategic interests is a vital strategic mistake.⁶⁷ Upon the announcement of President Biden's decision not to invite Nicaragua, Cuba, or Venezuela to the summit, several Latin American countries threatened to boycott it. In the end, Bolivia and El Salvador did not attend and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador sent his foreign minister in lieu of attending himself.⁶⁸ What was supposed to be a summit to discuss the common interests of the region such as migration, climate change, transnational crime, and foreign influence instead became a symbol of division between democracies and non-democracies, with important actors left out of the conversation.

Although attitudes towards the United States remain positive overall in many Latin American countries despite this troubling history, positive attitudes trend toward decline.⁶⁹ Iran and Hezbollah have capitalized on shared experiences of suffering under U.S. intervention to spur anti-Americanism in Latin America. The Trump presidency saw particular damage to Latin American perceptions towards the United States.⁷⁰ With U.S. rivals gaining influence in the region, this is a concern. However, the fact that attitudes are not overwhelmingly negative points to opportunity. The United States therefore must revise how it publicly frames its goals in Latin America. It should cultivate a new image of a cooperative partner genuinely interested in the region's development. Language reminiscent of calls for regime change should be avoided and promises of increased cooperation and closer ties should be reinforced with action.

An Even-Handed Approach to the Western Hemisphere

Iran's growing influence in Latin America results from Washington's lack of engagement in the region. While security cooperation is vital, it only addresses a symptom of the real issue. A genuine solution is for the United States to reverse its strategic retreat in the Western Hemisphere by engaging the region on security, the economy, and in the realm of public opinion. This would include:

- A security strategy that engages Latin American nations as equal partners and frames the problem as one of transnational crime instead of focusing on terrorism or ideology.
- Discussing the possibility of reopening a forum similar to the 3+1 between the United States and TBA nations of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay.
- Considering supporting the acquisition of drones in TBA nations for surveilling criminal activity.
- An economic strategy, supported by the reinstatement of TPA, that focuses on new trade deals to strengthen U.S. partnerships and weakens incentives to turn towards overseas actors.
- Investing in the people of Latin America through education and job creation programs, modeled after successful social efforts carried out during Plan Colombia.
- A strategy for public diplomacy that focuses on cooperating on common interests and accepting nations as they are instead of adopting harsh rhetoric against unsavory regimes.

Implementing these policies will demonstrate that the United States is a willing and reliable partner, reducing the need for reliance on peer competitors.

Strictly defined goals and emphasis on mutual cooperation will prevent the United States from repeating past policy mistakes in Latin America made under the Reagan Administration's War on Drugs, which took a hardline punitive approach towards an ill-defined enemy.⁷¹ During this period, the United States sought to eliminate the drug trade through crop eradication and military support against leftist counterinsurgencies. This was not only a war on drugs but became a war against political guerilla fighters and leftist regimes like Cuba and Nicaragua, which President Ronald Reagan accused of using the drug trade to destabilize the United States and fund Marxism in the region. While there was evidence that some government officials in Cuba and Nicaragua had been complicit in the drug trade, this was likely a matter of corruption and not of any policy pursued to destabilize the United States, nor was it occurring at a systematic level.

By treating Latin American nations themselves as enemies, adopting policies that punished Latin Amer-

icans as a whole, and extending the war on drugs to what essentially also became a war against Marxism, the War on Drugs in practice became a continuation of Cold War-era interventionism in Latin America. In order to avoid repeating these mistakes, the new strategy should treat Latin American governments as partners instead of enemies and adopt policies that strictly target transnational crime as opposed to combatting political enemies in the region. Under the new strategy, the United States must recognize the common interests it shares with its southern neighbors regardless of ideology if cooperation is to be a success. This approach to security, paired with stronger economic partnerships and positive rhetoric, will set the new U.S. strategy apart from its past failures.

These policy areas can work in tandem. Nations will be incentivized towards security cooperation if they view the United States as a reliable economic partner with common values and interests. Additionally, the United States can prioritize making trade deals with nations that cooperate energetically on security issues. The new public diplomacy strategy cannot work without cooperation on economics and security. This cooperation will show that the Washington's rhetoric of partnership is sincere.

Endnotes

1. Farah, Douglas, Kathryn Babineau, and Roberto S. Filho. 2019. "Extra-regional Actors in Latin America: The United States is not the Only Game in Town." PRISM. <https://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/1767399/extra-regional-actors-in-latin-america-the-united-states-is-not-the-only-game-i/>.
2. "Hezbollah: It's time for Iran's allies to start working to avenge Soleimani." 2020. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-security-hezbollah/hezbollah-its-time-for-irans-allies-to-start-working-to-avenge-soleimani-idUSKBN1ZB0LJ>.
3. Joffre, Tzvi, and Daniel Chen. 2022. "Iranian IRGC member charged for plot to kill John Bolton." The Jerusalem Post. <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-714366>.
4. "Trade Promotion Authority | United States Trade Representative." n.d. USTR. Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://ustr.gov/trade-topics/trade-promotion-authority>.
5. "H.R. 3783." 2012. Congressional Budget Office. <https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/112th-congress-2011-2012/costestimate/hr37831.pdf>.
6. "Two Men Charged in Alleged Plot to Assassinate Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States." 2011. Department of Justice. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-men-charged-alleged-plot-assassinate-saudi-arabian-ambassador-united-states>.
7. "H.R.3783 - Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012." 2022. Congress.gov. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/house-bill/3783>.
8. "Strategy to counter Iran in the Western Hemisphere has gaps that State Department should address." 2014. United States Government Accountability Office. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-14-834.pdf>.
9. U.S. Congress, Senate, *S.Res. 167 (114th): A resolution expressing the sense of the Senate regarding the courageous work and life of Argentinian prosecutor Alberto Nisman, and calling for a swift and transparent investigation into his tragic death in Buenos Aires on January 18, 2015*. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-resolution/354/text?r=97&s=1>
10. Humire, Joseph M., and Berman, Ilan, eds. *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014. Accessed November 9, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central, 106.
11. Levitt, Matthew. 2013. "Exporting Terror in America's Backyard." The Washington Institute. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/exporting-terror-america-backyard>.
12. Humire, Joseph M., and Berman, Ilan, eds. *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014. Accessed November 9, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central, 106.
13. "Strategy to counter Iran in the Western Hemisphere has gaps that State Department should address." 2014. United States Government Accountability Office. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-14-834.pdf>, 14.
14. Humire, Joseph M., and Berman, Ilan, eds. *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014. Accessed November 9, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central, 106.
15. Ellis, Evan. "The U.S. Military in Support of Strategic Objectives in Latin America and the Caribbean." PRISM | National Defense University, February 19, 2019. <https://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/1761014/the-us-military-in-support-of-strategic-objectives-in-latin-america-and-the-car/>.
16. Ibid.
17. "U.S. Neglect of Latin America Poses Risks for Both." Knowledge at Wharton. Knowledge at Wharton, July 29, 2003. <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/u-s-neglect-of-latin-america-poses-risks-for-both>; Seligman, Lara. "Biden Urged to Focus on Long-Neglected Latin America as Chaos Erupts." Politico, July 15, 2021. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/07/15/biden-latin-america-crisis-499752>.
18. S.1605 - "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022" 2022. Congress.gov. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1605/text>.
19. "S.3589 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act of 2022." 2022. Congress.gov. Accessed October 28, 2022. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/3589>.
20. Beck, Randi. n.d. AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF CRIMINAL COMPLAINT. Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1525106/download>, 2.
21. "(U//FOUO) Escalating Tensions Between the United States and Iran Pose Potential Threats to the Homeland." 2020. Public Intelligence. <https://info.publicintelligence.net/DHS-FBI-NCTC-Iran-Threats-2020.pdf>.
22. JOFFRE, TZVI, and DANIEL CHEN. 2022.

“Iranian IRGC member charged for plot to kill John Bolton.” The Jerusalem Post. <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-714366>.

^{23.} “Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces Kidnapping Conspiracy Charges Against An Iranian Intelligence Officer And Members Of An Iranian Intelligence Network.” 2021. Department of Justice. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/manhattan-us-attorney-announces-kidnapping-conspiracy-charges-against-iranian>.

^{24.} Naccache, Anis. 2022. “Trends in Iran’s External Plotting.” Combating Terrorism Center. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/CTC-SENTINEL-022022.pdf>, 3.

^{25.} Palmer, Julian. Hezbollah in Latin America: Should we be Worried?. Washington: The Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2016. <http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/reports/hezbollah-latin-america-should-we-be-worried/docview/1805464240/se-2>, 8.

^{26.} Campbell, Jason H., Stephen Dalzell, Anthony Adler, Mary Avriette, Jalen Zemen, and Kevin J. Connolly. n.d. “U.S. Resourcing to National Security Interests in Latin America and the Caribbean.” RAND Corporation. Accessed November 9, 2022. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4847-1.html, 72.

^{27.} Palmer, Julian. Hezbollah in Latin America: Should we be Worried?. Washington: The Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2016, <http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/reports/hezbollah-latin-america-should-we-be-worried/docview/1805464240/se-2>, 9.

^{28.} Humire, Joseph M., and Berman, Ilan, eds. *Iran’s Strategic Penetration of Latin America*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014. Accessed November 9, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central. 109.

^{29.} Ibid, 110.

^{30.} Shuldiner, Henry. “Latin American Leaders Voice Security Concerns at United Nations General Assembly.” InSight Crime, September 23, 2022. <https://insightcrime.org/news/latin-american-leaders-voice-security-concerns-united-nations/>.

^{31.} Ibid, 111.

^{32.} Kosmyńska, Stanisław. 2020. “The Problem of Organized Crime in the South American Tri-Border Area: Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina”. International Studies. Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural

Journal 25 (1):17. <https://doi.org/10.18778/1641-4233.25.02>.

^{33.} Ibid, 18.

^{34.} Nielsen, Sarah. 2019. “Fighting Terror in the Tri-Border Area.” Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/fighting-terror-the-tri-border-area>.

^{35.} Levitt, Matthew. 2016. “Iran and Hezbollah Remain Hyperactive in Latin America.” The Washington Institute. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iran-and-hezbollah-remain-hyperactive-latin-america>.

^{36.} Kosmyńska, Stanisław. 2020. “The Problem of Organized Crime in the South American Tri-Border Area: Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina”. International Studies. Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal 25 (1):22. <https://doi.org/10.18778/1641-4233.25.02>.

^{37.} Ibid, 23.

^{38.} Financial Action Task Force. 2010. “Money Laundering vulnerabilities of Free Trade Zones.” FATF. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/ML%20vulnerabilities%20of%20Free%20Trade%20Zones.pdf>, 16.

^{39.} Cawley, Marguerite. “Drone Use in Latin America: Dangers and Opportunities.” InSight Crime, March 27, 2017. <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/drone-use-in-latin-america-dangers-and-opportunities/>.

^{40.} “Trade Promotion Authority | United States Trade Representative.” n.d. USTR. Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://ustr.gov/trade-topics/trade-promotion-authority>.

^{41.} “What Future Does Trade Promotion Authority Have in a Biden Administration? | Yeutter Institute.” n.d. Yeutter Institute. Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://yeutter-institute.unl.edu/what-future-does-trade-promotion-authority-have-biden-administration>.

^{42.} Smith, Tori K. 2021. “Trade Promotion Authority: A Road Map for Congress.” The Heritage Foundation. <https://www.heritage.org/trade/report/trade-promotion-authority-road-map-congress>.

^{43.} U.S. Government Accountability Office. International Trade: An Analysis of Free Trade Agreements and Congressional and Private Sector Consultations under Trade Promotion Authority. GAO-08-59. (Washington, DC: 2007). 84-89. Accessed November 19, 2022. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-08-59.pdf>.

^{44.} United States International Trade Commission. Economic Impact of Trade Agreements Implement-

- ed under Trade Authorities Procedures, 2021 Report. Open-file report 2012-1113. (Washington, DC: 2021), 15. <https://www.usitc.gov/publications/332/pub5199.pdf>.
45. “What Future Does Trade Promotion Authority Have in a Biden Administration? | Yeutter Institute.” n.d. Yeutter Institute. Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://yeutter-institute.unl.edu/what-future-does-trade-promotion-authority-have-biden-administration>.
46. Berg, Ryan C., and Daniel F. Runde. 2022. “The US should take note of potential trade deal between Ecuador and China.” The Hill. <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/592215-the-us-should-take-note-of-potential-trade-deal-between-ecuador-and/>.
47. “S.3591 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): United States-Ecuador Partnership Act of 2022.” n.d. Congress.gov. Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/3591>.
48. “Uruguay.” n.d. The Heritage Foundation. Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/uruguay>.
49. Runde, Daniel F. 2022. “US should forge deeper partnership with Uruguay.” The Hill. <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3269504-us-should-forge-deeper-partnership-with-uruguay/>.
50. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Repercussions in Latin America and the Caribbean of the War in Ukraine: How Should the Region Face This New Crisis?*, United Nations Digital Repository, 2022. 13. https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/47913/S2200418_en.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y.
51. Brzozowski, Alexandra. 2022. “EU, Latin American leaders seek closer ties amid Ukraine war fallout fears.” EURACTIV.com. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/eu-latin-american-leaders-seek-closer-ties-amid-ukraine-war-fallout-fears/>.
52. U.S. Global Leadership Coalition. n.d. “Plan Colombia: A Development Success Story.” USGLC. Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://www.usglc.org/media/2017/04/USGLC-Plan-Columbia.pdf>.
53. Ibid.
54. “Plan Colombia: How It Worked - BORGEM.” 2021. BORGEM Magazine. <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/plan-colombia/>.
55. “USAID Assistance for Plan Colombia | Fact Sheet.” 2016. U.S. Agency for International Development. <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/factsheets/usaid-assistance-plan-colombia>.
56. Cleveland-Stout, Nick, and Connor Echols. 2022. “What a Lula presidency would mean for US-Brazil relations.” Responsible Statecraft. <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/08/31/what-a-lula-presidency-would-mean-for-us-brazil-relations/>.
57. David, Steven R. “Why the Third World Matters.” International Security 14, no. 1 (1989): 50–85. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538765>
58. Pagliarini, Andre. 2022. “With Lula, Biden has path to repairing relations with Brazil.” Responsible Statecraft. <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/11/02/how-biden-can-repair-relations-with-brazil-after-lulas-win/>.
59. Fisher, Ali, and Lucas, Scott, eds. *Trials of Engagement : The Future of US Public Diplomacy*. Leiden: BRILL, 2010. Accessed November 9, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central, 162.
60. Cleveland-Stout, Nick, and Connor Echols. 2022. “What a Lula presidency would mean for US-Brazil relations.” Responsible Statecraft.
61. Fisher, Ali, and Lucas, Scott, eds. *Trials of Engagement : The Future of US Public Diplomacy*. Leiden: BRILL, 2010. Accessed November 9, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central, 169.
62. Ibid, 170.
63. Ibid, 171.
64. Washington Office on Latin America and Center for Democracy in the Americas. n.d. “The United States and Cuba: A New Policy of Engagement.” Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA). Accessed November 9, 2022. 6. <https://www.wola.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/A-New-Policy-of-Engagement-PUBLIC-1-4-21.pdf>.
65. Ibid, 5.
66. Washington Office on Latin America and Center for Democracy in the Americas. n.d. “The United States and Cuba: A New Policy of Engagement.” Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA). Accessed November 9, 2022. 11. <https://www.wola.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/A-New-Policy-of-Engagement-PUBLIC-1-4-21.pdf>.
67. Newman, Lucia. 2022. “Summit of the Americas: A squandered opportunity at critical time.” Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/9/summit-of-the-americas-a-squandered-opportunity-at-critical-time>.
68. AS/COA. “Who’s Coming to the Summit of the

Americas?,” June 13, 2022. <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/whos-coming-summit-americas>.

69. Fisher, Ali, and Lucas, Scott, eds. *Trials of Engagement : The Future of US Public Diplomacy*. Leiden: BRILL, 2010. Accessed November 9, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central, 177.

70. Johnson, Courtney. “Fewer People in Latin America See the U.S. Favorably under Trump.” Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project. Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project, April 12, 2018. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/04/12/fewer-people-in-latin-america-see-the-u-s-favorably-under-trump/>.

71. Getchell, Michelle. “The Enduring Legacy of Reagan’s Drug War in Latin America.” *War on the Rocks*, December 20, 2018. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/12/the-enduring-legacy-of-reagans-drug-war-in-latin-america/>.