

WASHINGTON AND LATIN AMERICA: A CONSIDERABLE INDIFFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers an analysis of historical, political, economic, and social events on which US-Latin American relations have been based. Centered on a constructivist approach, I review the main stages for explaining the quality and intensity of the interaction between the actors under consideration. In addition, I contend that US-Latin American relations have been cyclical in nature, and that these cycles have in turn complicated the task of assessing the dynamic of the relationship over the long term.

I argue that the US achieved economic and political control over Latin America from the Nineteenth century. Although the specific circumstances that governed US-Latin American relations changed throughout the Twentieth century, this basic condition of domination remained. The situation changed, however, at the beginning of the Twenty-First century, during which Washington effectively lost Latin America. Nonetheless, Washington and Latin America are currently experiencing a rapprochement. This paper explains this sequence in detail and opens new discussions.

Keywords: Latin America, Washington, constructivism, Barack Obama.

WASHINGTON Y AMÉRICA LATINA: UNA INDIFERENCIA CONSIDERABLE

RESUMEN

En este trabajo se presenta un análisis de los acontecimientos históricos, políticos, económicos y sociales en los que se basan las relaciones entre Estados Unidos y América Latina. Centrado en un enfoque constructivista, ofrece una revisión de las principales etapas para explicar la calidad e intensidad de la interacción entre los actores que se examinan. Además, el texto sostiene que las relaciones entre Estados Unidos y América Latina han sido de naturaleza cíclica, y que estos ciclos a su vez complejizan la tarea de evaluar la dinámica de la relación bilateral en el largo plazo.

La obra argumenta que Estados Unidos ha alcanzado un control económico y político de América Latina desde el siglo XIX. Además, a pesar de las circunstancias cambiantes específicas que rigen las relaciones entre Estados Unidos y América Latina, esta condición de dominación se mantuvo a lo largo de todo el siglo XX. La situación cambió, sin embargo, a principios del siglo XXI, cuando Washington perdió control e influencia sobre América Latina. No obstante, Washington y América Latina están experimentando actualmente un acercamiento. Este documento explica esta secuencia en detalle y abre nuevas discusiones al respecto.

Palabras clave: América Latina, Washington, constructivismo, Barack Obama.

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INTRODUCTION

This article emanates from recent approaches to the bilateral interaction between Washington and Latin America¹. While recent studies (Hakim, 2006; Randall, 2013; Weisbrot, 2013; Muñoz & Vieco, 2015) have shown that the United States diminished the capability not only to engage with the region but also to influence events in it, the constructivist reading here sheds additional light on bilateral relations analysis. Even today, when the current foreign policy of President Barack Obama has generated a new atmosphere.

The text consists of three main sections. It begins by laying out the constructivist framework as a means of explaining (not interpreting) the bilateral relationship between Washington and Latin America. Secondly, the article details some of the vicissitudes in the bilateral relationship during and after the Cold War. Finally, the paper reflects the cyclical nature of the relationship, which has been characterized by periods of relative closeness, distance and openness. In this light, I suggest that the current dialogue between Cuba and Washington may reflect such a cyclical shift. The concluding section speculates on future prospects for US-Latin American relations.

CONSTRUCTIVISM INSIDE THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN US AND LATIN AMERICA

Several IR² theories have emerged from the exigent dynamics of global international relations that have brought transformative effects on the discipline. Few such theories have generated as substantial an impact as Constructivism, especially given the crucial time when it appeared, right after the fall of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, before going into depth on why the theory is so important, one must first adumbrate the theory itself. Hence, the first question at hand ought to be: *what is constructivism in IR?*

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Constructivism is a theory that sees the nature of states and their relations as social constructs that are maintained or changed by institutions and society. In addition, according to Wendt (2000), constructivism is not normally oriented towards traditional variables that preoccupy scholars –e.g. national security, military power, global institutions, international trade, domestic issues, etc. - since they do not weigh on upon the question of social meaning. (It just pays attention to those variables when they are a result of social construction, not as objective measures of reality).

This is admittedly a very cursory definition,³ upon which space constraints alas permit only marginal elaboration. In general terms, the theory⁴ views the world of IR as a result of social constructs, meaning that what happens in the international system is based on collective decisions that societies make, not states as individual actors. Furthermore, it permits a role for individuals and other types of actors. As Michael Barnett puts it, “the core observation is the social construct of

¹ I want to acknowledge to Pablo Gallego for his valuable support in this process. In addition, I would like to thank the professors Jochen Kleinschmidt, Joshua Large and Santiago Sosa for their comments on various drafts of this paper. In addition to that, although it could be seen as a mistake, this paper often uses the expression Latin America as a unity.

² This is the abbreviation for International Relations, the subject that studies the interaction of states. It is recommendable to distinguish the difference between the academic field and the international practice. See, for example, Steven Smith's (2003) analysis, *International Relations and international relations: the links between theory and practice in world politics*.

³ Three pioneering constructivists are *Kratochwil* (1989) –Rules, norms, and decisions: on the conditions of practical and legal reasoning in International Relations and domestic affairs; *Omuf* (1989) –World of our making: rules and rule in social theory and International relations; and *Wendt* (1999) –Social theory of international politics.

⁴ If there is acceptance that it is a theory. Some, such as Princeton's Anne-Marie Slaughter, claim that constructivism is not a theory but an ontology.

reality” (Barnett, 2014: 158). What society perceives as “real” is that which ends up being “real” for the whole system.

Particularly, as Caleb Gallemore states, if one-day people began to think that the USA did not exist anymore, eventually it would cease to be reality, as indeed happened with the USSR (Gallemore, 2011). The USSR’s fate may itself have been formative in bringing constructivism to the fore within the discipline of IR,⁵ insofar as it serves as a poignant basis for constructivists to differentiate themselves from traditional IR theories of states as rational actors which seek self-defense and self-preservation. Furthermore, constructivists emphasize the notion that actors are not interchangeable black boxes, and they must be analyzed according to internal and social particularities. Hence, constructivism gives less importance to actions and events themselves than their socially constructed meanings (Finnemore, 1996).

With regard to more recent events in Latin America, such as the migration problem along the Colombian-Venezuelan border (or the recent reopening of diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba), scholars have speculated on what such events might mean for the various national governments involved (foreign policies and local politics). Yet we still have to see what each would mean for the social structures and how these events will affect society. The constructivist approach provides a means for analyzing ongoing dynamic and fluid relations and, in the case of Latin America, hypothesizing about how such dynamics may continue to unfold. This, using the more conventional constructivist variant led by Wendt.

Constructivism also offers a fruitful basis for explaining the actions taken by Latin America in its relations with Washington. Although the United States has not always enjoyed a confident influence in the majority of the region, this has not been its fault. It was not so much the policies of many Latin American countries, which -for many years- were under the influence of liberalism⁶ and a predominantly free market economy, but rather the opposition presented by many peoples of the region, which also determined the nature of Latin America-US relations.

During the Cold War, later on during the 90s and now in the 21st century, the people of Latin America did not have a good view of the US nor of its intentions, let alone how they accomplished what they wanted. This, if a generalization is allowed here -although it is against the constructivist tenets. As Friedman (2012) puts it best, no one south of the US border with Mexico had much tolerance for the US’s actions:

Thus did a talented young Mexican try to call attention to the manifest source of north-south incomprehension in U.S.-Latin American relations. While Washington policy makers and the U.S. public increasingly saw Latin American events through a Cold War prism in which anti-communism was the most urgent concern, many Latin Americans began from an entirely different point of view. To them, the superpower threatening to transform their societies, dominate their economies, and undermine their political independence was not the remote Soviet Union with its miniscule presence in the region, but the colossally powerful and historically activist United States (Friedman, 2012; 124).

⁵ Of course, not all IR constructivists are identical. Based on Christian Reus-Smit’s (2005) thoughts, we may distinguish three different constructivist perspectives: one based on a systemic reflection, another understood as unite-level constructivism, and lastly holistic constructivism.

⁶ Some speak about neoliberalism, but the essence of these policies is strictly liberal.

While this is not to say that the fears that Friedman (2012) illuminates of US imperialist intentions are entirely accurate, it does highlight the degree to which those intentions were mistrusted and misinterpreted. The anti-communist actions of the US were taken as an act of aggression or even a clear violation of Latin American sovereignty. This interpretation has contributed to Latin America's frequent distancing from the country nearest to it. The symbolic impact and meaning behind US presence in Latin America transmuted into intolerance and rivalry against Washington.

Such mistrust helps explain why, in 2003, several Latin American cities held protest rallies against US intervention in Iraq.⁷ These protests were followed up with strong anti-US symbolic acts, like burning US flags, along with questioning the importance of intervention and protesting the sanctity of life. The constructivist conceit that "human beings rely on 'understanding' of each other's actions and assigning 'meaning' to them" (Jackson & Sørensen, 2006) thus provides a clear basis for interpreting such events. Furthermore, as such, it is -based on literature studied here-evident that human interaction, human interpretation, and human judgment have determined US-Latin American relations throughout the years.

Nevertheless, what is the significance of this approach? Well, some could easily assume that any international phenomenon that presents itself today can be enlightened from a social standpoint. This is not to say that constructivism has the answers to all of life's IR questions, yet it does help paint a sharper portrait of events. The foreground for any decision taken by a state is the acknowledgement that whatever a state does, someone, somewhere, will be affected by it. What the state may not know, or cannot 100% work out, is what the event, decision, words, discussion, etc. might mean for the people that receive and view the event.

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The anticipation of possible effects could be one motivation for the study of IR through the constructivist approach. Studies of prospective events or possible phenomena could explain or foretell what could be seen as imminent episodes in the realm of IR. Another use of this method could be to bring to light dialectics of political decision-making and their social impact drawing-forth in turn topics of sociology and even psychology into the matter (Checkel, 2008).⁸

This paper proposes to read the relationship between Latin America and the US from the constructivist perspective, in order to explain how it has been during the last years. There has been a relevant group of social actors, which have pressed in making decision processes, to determine the current path of this association.

HISTORICAL ROOTS BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND LATIN AMERICA

According to López-Alves (2003), since the nineteenth century Latin America had substantial cultural, demographical and incidental differences from Europe and North America. The region also lacked a rooted nobility, a real industrial revolution, a strong bourgeoisie, and colonial do-

⁷ "Activists took the cities of Latin America to protest against George W. Bush and the intervention in Iraq in 2003". Cities like Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires, Bogota, Lima, Montevideo, and Mexico City, among others, participated in anti-US in Iraq rallies that were held on an international level. Most of the criticism upheld was defending the civilians of Iraq. A sort of ideological symmetry between Cold War anti-communism is apparent in the current fight against global terrorism, the new enemy under US foreign policy.

⁸ Wendt is considered an important pioneer of this approach, having laid the foundation for the popularization of constructivist theory in IR, but this formative edifice has been raised and embellished by the likes of Emanuel Adler, Michael Barnett, Nicholas Onuf, and Thomas Risse

minions, among others. Understanding the formation of the state in Latin America was therefore quite complicated (especially when based on theories that were designed to explain European and North American state formation). Huge institutional distances were seen during Latin America's development in comparison to the other Western Nations (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

At the beginning Latin American states were so weak and without competence or autonomy. In addition, they were “*centralizantes y corporativistas*” (centralized and corporatist), so small elites took the total control (López-Alves, 2003: 55). Such institutional chaos opened the door for the US to define the scope of its foreign policy towards Latin America. The region was furthermore newly a coherent political and cultural unit⁹.

The aforementioned circumstances, and the notorious institutional weakness Latin America enjoyed since its foundation¹⁰, set the stage for James Monroe's rejection of any European intervention in American affairs. His message of “America for the Americans” marked the start of domination that could only be challenged at the end of the 20th century. Given that, the international relations of the 19th century had in store for Latin America its first episode of domination under the Monroe Doctrine.

Cordeiro (2007) established an interesting parallel in which he alludes to two processes, typifying the region under a problematic scheme of political consolidation. On the one hand, he coined the sobriquet *Estados des-unidos de Latinoamérica* (Dis-united States of Latin America), which, on the other hand, he contrasted with the equivalent process of unification accomplished by the United States of America. The process of independence in Latin America created clusters of *republiquetas* (small republics) largely incapable of self-government (Cordeiro, 2007; Boersner, 1996). In the midst of the struggle between *Monroism* and *Bolivarianism*¹¹ it was very clear that the second ideology posed much stronger and accomplished asserting itself without major difficulties than the first one.

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The Monroe Doctrine, however, did not immediately signal the implementation of an assertive US foreign policy towards Latin America. The consolidation of US imperialism over the region was really a product of the turn of the twentieth century, when US companies spread across Latin America. The so-called “Banana Republics” were largely extensions of US private companies that took advantage of these newly founded republics that either overthrew their former European colonizers, managed to play around with them, or reject their governance over the region. Mark Moberg (1996) recounts, for instance, the case of the Boston-based United Fruit Company (UFC) in British Honduras, portraying the usurpation of British rule carried out by the UFC:

Yet the railroad's construction and operating losses only strengthened the company's hand in dealing with the [British] Colonial Office. Colonial authorities realised that the railroad's financial success depended upon United Fruit's willingness to supply it with freight. Because of the government's overriding, if

⁹ Latin American Independence, understood as the process of liberation and birth of the Latin American states, covers –in accordance to various studies– a period that can be stated between 1804 (Haiti Independence) and 1828 (Definitive Uruguayan Independence). Two recommended academic works for the historical analysis are Boersner (1996) and Cordeiro (2007).

¹⁰ Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2012) argue for a lack of institutional culture in Latin America. A circumstance they contrast with the robust institutionalism in North America.

¹¹ A piece of literature that is worth approaching to understand this political and ideological confrontation was written by Indalecio Liévano Aguirre in 1987. *Bolivarianism and Monroism* is a good comparative analysis of the two foreign policy models applied after 1850. Shortly, it is essential to relate Bolivarianism to Simon Bolivar and Monroism to James Monroe visions.

futile, desire to recoup the project's costs, the company was able to wring still further concessions from the Colonial Office, overcoming even parliamentary opposition to do so (Moberg, 1996: 372).

As so, the United Fruit Company demonstrated a zero tolerance policy for European governments in Honduras¹². Such market imperialism, however, also generated a social outcry among Latin Americans. Latin American societies helped to build all those events throughout the literature, social movements and political upheavals. The first three decades of the twentieth century marked a series of social eruptions against US companies, like the UFC, including, for instance, the 1928 Santa Marta Massacre in Colombia, itself a key event in the creation of the Colombian Communist Party, as well as, guerrilla groups everywhere of the region.

After the disintegration of Gran Colombia and the Peruvian-Bolivian Confederation, the end of the Pacific wars and the US Civil War, and the culmination of Spanish interventions in the Caribbean and South America came a new time for bilateral relations. Motivated by the French intervention in Mexico, the United States, under what was known as "Manifest Destiny",¹³ intervened in the defense of the Caribbean territories. For example, they did everything they could, both diplomatically and strategically, to retain control of the region to the future Panama Canal and implemented a foreign policy encapsulate in the notions of the *Big Stick* and *Dollar Diplomacy* (policies).

According to Boersner (1996), the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) and William Howard Taft (1909-1913) were defined by the application of a special foreign policy towards Latin America. The first based on the *Big Stick* policy, and subsequently on *Dollar Diplomacy*. Both reflected the increasing process of intervention and domination by American interests –socially constructed- in the Caribbean zone (Boersner, 1996).

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The 20th century thus witnessed a US neocolonial domination over great parts of Latin America. For instance, Haiti was obligated to subscribe to an agreement in which it became a protectorate of the United States. After the death of Benito Juárez, the new Mexican president Porfirio Díaz would soon be converted into an informal ally of the US and its interests. In addition, within that same direction, all of the conservative administrations of the first half of the 20th century continued to apply the interventionist policy towards the Caribbean and Latin America.

After an interregnum during the Depression and World War II, during which Franklin Roosevelt "Good Neighbor Policy"¹⁴ witnessed a reduction in US interventionism in Latin America, the Cold War (1947-1991) announced the reemergence of pressure from Washington on region. However, this process now took place in the context of the emergence of a bipolar world system. Under such conditions, Latin American states had only two options: to be for or against Washington. Of course, this reality came into being for Latin American actors and US after diverse interactions that I cannot expose because of lack of space.

¹² Mark Moberg (1996) briefly retells the experience British Honduras had with the United Fruit Company and all of the issues the privately owned Company had with the local government. For a more profound look into the case you can refer to this document.

¹³ Manifest Destiny is a concept and doctrine exercised after the Monroe Doctrine. The term was first enunciated in an article written by the journalist John O'Sullivan in 1845 in Democratic Review of New York.

¹⁴ The Good Neighbor Policy was another foreign policy strategy implemented by the United States across the region. It fundamentally consisted of the United States offering support and cordiality towards all nations of the region who would consider themselves as allies of the U.S. It was led by Franklin D. Roosevelt, and gradually assimilated itself as a possibility to end the interventionist style the country had over its southern neighbors. Cuba used this particularly to establish itself after the Wall Street collapse, and it was useful until 1959.

Before this scenario began, and with the existence of both the Rio Treaty and OAS¹⁵, it was very difficult for Latin American states to operate in conditions of independence and autonomy. With the exception of the Bolivian revolution from 1957-1958, led by Víctor Paz Estenssoro, the first decade of the second half of the century was characterized by complete domination and control of the United States over the region. During the next decade, with the Cuban revolution (1959) and the emergence of the nationalization process in that country (1961), the claims and intentions to separate from the US were very evident. Thus, the start of the creation of multiple and diverse guerillas. This time appeared so complex and contradictory in some cases.

The 60's, 70's and 80's were periods of constant armed action by the guerillas and interferences of all categories from Washington and right wing governments across Latin America. However, it was becoming evident that a power crisis was being faced by the US, which gave ease for the consolidation of Latin American countries while the rise of social actors was having place. This will coincide with two important events: on one side the end of the Cold War with the implementation of the *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* policies, and on the other hand the democratization of the region as illustrated by Close (2009) in his work regarding Latin America. Given that, the 80's decade was a democratic transition with some particularities highlighted by David Close:

In these cases, which were the dominant form in Latin America, democracy came not after a revolution or a mass popular movement, as was true in most of the ex-Soviet bloc, but after negotiations among a country's established elites –linked to an authoritarian system- and challengers who wanted democracy (Close, 2009; 166).

Unfortunately, while the transition started to take place, many corrupt elites who survived gradually began taking many of the Latin American nations, leading to the so known debt crisis in the region (I think this generalization is allowed, since it was almost homogeneous). As such, the 80's were transformed into a lost decade for the region (Craig & LaFollete, 1997). It was first Mexico, in 1983, and later Brazil, which announced the impossibility to pay off its debts to the international lenders. The period of *default* for the region was imminent, and here the beginning of the deterioration of the relation between Washington and Latin America.

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Particularly it was both the Manifest Destiny and Monroe Doctrine, which went from a foreign policy to a specific strategy¹⁶ that played against the interests of the United States. Moreira, *et. al.* (2014) defends the thesis that both doctrines are direct causes of the loss of influence and power of Washington over Latin America. This explains the reaction of many political actors who decided to abandon strategic alliances with the US. These politicians also chose what Peter Smith has denominated the action of “seeking extra-hemispheric partnership”:

Around 1990 it appeared that Latin America would have no chance of striking major deals with extra-hemispheric powers and thus offsetting the hegemonic position of the United States. By the middle of the decade, however, regional leaders were making remarkable efforts to develop economic (and political)

¹⁵ The Rio Treaty and OAS were based on four main principles: 1. Non-intervention; 2. Judicial equality for all states; 3. To solve controversies pacifically; 4. Collective defense against aggressions. As Jerome Slater (1967) pointed it out, the first two principles imply the defense of state's sovereignty; the other two emphasize the cooperation amongst the states. In certain moments, those two basic ideas have become contradictory in practice. In all cases, the last two could be managed by the hegemonic power (Boersner, 1996: 187).

¹⁶ However, debates indicate that Manifest Destiny is not really a foreign policy or a strategy. Many say it is more a cultural concept or a myth than the latter. Unfortunately these discussions are not included here

ties to outside powers. In differing degrees, they courted two possible allies: the European Union and the Asia-Pacific region, especially Japan (...) (Smith, 2000: 336-7).

According to Smith, today it is clear that China and India have much more relevance than Japan in this dialogue of extra-hemispheric actors. In addition, it is the fact that for diverse regional actors Washington is not an ally that they once wished it would have been.

THE DEBT CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

After the so-called “debt crisis” or “lost decade” (80s), a process of implementing plans and programs for structural adjustments started, elements traditionally part of what was known as the Washington Consensus. This set of regulations was adjusted to some radical notions of (neo) liberal economics. Those prescriptions were implemented in almost all of Latin America, in some places with better results than others. Nevertheless, in general terms the upshots could be considered problematic. Even so, a second generation of reforms was applied in order to “straighten” the road in which the region was passing through. Carlos Santiso (2003) defends the idea of pulling out the roads charted by the Washington Consensus and this way achieve a greater independence in Latin American politics. Santiso (2003) concludes there are two important aspects that the region must consider in the 21st century. Initially it is a requirement to strengthen governance over the region, but for that, it is primarily a priority to redefine the role of the state and its very own existence. Secondly, but bound with the first aspect, it is necessary to stipulate what methods of government and styles of decision-making must be taken into account as more institutional. This, according to Santiso (2003), guarantees that the region will not fall again into bad habits acquired by the irregular implementation of the Washington Consensus¹⁷. Here, Santiso looks like a rationalist recommender, but in details those recommendations are part of a process of generating social meaning.

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The debt crisis forced the region to accept what international financial institutions located in Washington had to offer. The already mentioned consensus implied privatization, state reduction, and intervention over interest rates, deregulation, etc. This is to say that everything was summarized into a strong application of (neo) liberalism and manifest state laxity towards the market. This reformist context meant converting the region into a laboratory for the implementation of capitalist democracy, fundamentally in a time in which it was clear that socialist models backed by the Soviet Union had failed:

The region has become one of the world’s most important testing laboratories for the viability of democratic capitalism as a global project (Reid, 2007; 4).

Actually, the work of Reid (2007) is viewed as a report on the advances of the mentioned laboratory. Its content brings forth the idea that progress in the region in search of consolidating a democratic system had a high economic component, especially during the 90’s. Therefore, it could be contradictory when Santiso and Reid’s perspectives are crossed.

In fact, from the Reid’s view one can appraise the empirical findings that show how Latin American society in general agrees with various postulates, amongst them: liberty, security, trans-

¹⁷ It is necessary to take into account that the Washington Consensus emerged from an academic paper made public in 1989 by the economist John Williamson (1990). It was here that recommendations were worked on for those countries submitted into the debt crisis.

parent and effective governments, social provisions, and implementing a market capitalist model (that secures employment, multiple opportunities and regional prosperity) (Reid, 2007). Contrary to the conservative vision of thinking of an unorganized Latin America that is both democratically immature and poor, evidence shows that its societies have been interested in economic policies that are both real and have positive social effects.

CLINTON AND HOPE TURNED TO SHREDS

The application of (neo) liberal measures exposed by the Washington Consensus coincided with the inauguration of Bill Clinton. In 1994, once his mandate as president began, Clinton invited the presidents of all American States¹⁸ (except Cuba) to talk about the current affairs in the continent. The initiative was attempting to converge interests concerning critical themes, reaffirming common values, and agree on compromises over concrete actions at a national and regional level, ones that would facilitate the development of the American nations.

It was an event without precedent in Latin American history. It was here that various hopes (based on a more diverse social participation) of a new time, not only for the region, but also for bilateralism with the traditional hegemonic power of the continent arose. After this event, which announced the initiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement¹⁹, everything seemed as if it were set to change.

The two halves of the continent, which during a long period were unavoidably blocked and worked with bilateralism based on different conceptions, had achieved nailing down common topics. Nonetheless, in the midst of this new diplomatic panorama the impulse was an unpleasant idea for Latin America, since it was the proposal to create a free trade area for all of the Americas (FTAA). Without it being very clear, the United States was opening the definitive road that would ultimately lead a determined Latin America to exit its sphere of influence. Not just that, because of the clear consequences of the drastic implementation of (neo) liberal measures the region was taken back into uncertainty on development topics.

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Between 1998 and 2002, the region suffered what the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (better known as CEPAL, from its initials in Spanish) called “a lost half-decade” of economic stagnation. The upshot was that in the two decades after 1982, the gap between average incomes in Latin America and those in the rich countries widened, while in many parts of Asia it narrowed (Reid, 2007; 6-7).

This disillusion was converted into a generalization, fundamentally in South America. Nevertheless, it was not just about a simple disappointment. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in a pessimistic report that reached the majority of the general public back in 2004, con-

¹⁸ This is how the series of American summits began, in which since 1994 a forum for discussions about topics that concern the continent has been consolidated. To this date, they have there have been seven meetings and preparations for the eighth in Lima: <http://www.summit-americas.org/defaults.htm> [visited November 28, 2014].

¹⁹ Said agreement, known as NAFTA (acronym for North American Free Trade Agreement) was signed between Canada, United States, and Mexico. Its conception rests over six objectives that defend commercial liberalization and economic dialogue that facilitate investment and generates employment. Particularly, with the execution of the agreement, Mexico went from being traditionally a Central American nation to part of North America. The text of the agreement is available at the website: http://datd.eclac.cl/controversias/Normativas/TLCAN/Espanol/Tratado_de_Libre_Comercio_de_America_del_Norte-TLCAN-pdf [Date consulted November 20, 2014].

cluded that Latin American countries had failed in developing democracies for their citizens. At the same time, Mario Vargas Llosa was indicating that the region was closer than ever to moving towards governments incapable of resolving the urgent basic needs of their citizens (Reid, 2007). This finally did happen, although not in the direction foreseen by the writer.

Therefore, a series of left wing politicians geared up to react against the legacy the (neo) liberalist measures had obtained in the 90's. Castañeda and Morales (2009) refer to the emergence of a new left wing. Using the term "cluster of the left", they referred to all countries that have had governments identified with the left since 1990. At the same time, they described two particular cases of reaction against the left: Colombia and Mexico. Both nations had (and have) the particularity of not turning towards the left, even if the general tendency of the region was to do so²⁰. It is essential to take into account the political parties at this point, but more specifically parties affiliated to the leftist spectrum. They have been so relevant to the bilateral relationship building process, such as constructivist approach claims it. Political parties are definitely imperative social actors, not just in Latin America but also in the world.

The Venezuelan case is appropriate in order to describe the rise of the left. The *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (PSUV) captured the state after the triumph of the Bolivarian Revolution. It took the control and dominated many institutions, including the legislative (just until 2015) and executive branches after 2007. In terms of Philip & Panizza (2011), while there was need for more empirical work about Chavez's attempt at promoting political participation from subordinated groups, it seemed clear that he had given a political voice to sectors of Venezuelan society that felt ignored by the old parties. The given empowerment was relevant for the change. In addition, it affected the mutual US-Latin American identity construction process.

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In face of the new political panorama, and with newfound rivalries having arisen in the Latin American region, George W. Bush had to deal with implementing the idea of a free trade area for the continent. However, it began diluting and his image became much discredited within the region. As so, the critics against the intention to liberalize commerce between North and South boiled down to developing a confrontation between Washington and many of the left wing governments that had won in the polls. Without a doubt, the Latin American voter had punished the supporters of the Washington Consensus and, at the same time, worked towards a different consensus (Buenos Aires – Monterrey) with a new tendency that was not in favor of American power.

OBAMA AND THE NEW HOPE'S WAVE

In the first decade of the 21st century, Barack Obama won the elections (2008), even while the Latin American political scene was against him. After his triumph, new hopes of change arose –once again- regarding bilateral relations between the region and Washington. However, in the passing of his first term a combination between rhetoric and good intentions were detected that, from the Latin American governments' perspectives, stopped the erosion of the relationship between the

²⁰ It may be easier to defend the idea of a much defined identity by the foreign policy of Mexico and Colombia in their relations with Washington. For the Mexican case, its connection is through NAFTA and of a shared border, which obligate them to think about common problems. It also is explained through common identity in terms of economic and commercial topic. Related to Colombia, if well the Plan Colombia outlined the route towards bilateralism for many years, there are other factors that must be considered within the analysis. Tickner's (2007) publications helps explain this dynamic dependency.

Americas. According to Randal (2013), Obama has maneuvered around this situation with a relative political ability and a very evident implementation of pragmatism.

The Obama administration has seen itself affected regarding issues more important than Latin America, like Iraq and Afghanistan, the euphoria of the Arab Spring, the global financial crisis, and Iran and North Korea's nuclear programs. Despite his pragmatism, it was almost a fact that the region had left the hands of the US precisely for the lack of attention and exchanges it had with it. The United States did not have the capacity to make decisions regarding the road Latin America would take, a situation noted.

Perhaps most importantly the United States has had to come to terms with the fact that it has limited capacity to dictate the course of events in Latin America (Randall, 2013; 21).

The perspective exposed by Randall (2013) coincided with Peter Hakim (2006), Russel & Tokatlián (2011), and Weisbrot (2013). All are authors who position themselves in defending the thesis that shows and reinforces the loss of interest, influence, and control by the United States over Latin America.

Before developing the author's arguments, it is important to emphasize the opportunity the United States had of rebuilding its depreciated relation with Latin American region. This was done (or, rather, not done) during Barack Obama's first administration.

Today, at the expense of a more dynamic region, with positive outcomes in the macroeconomic world, democratic stability, and judicial security (in most of the region's nations) it has been made clear that the United States has it very difficult to regain the time in which it subjugated and controlled Latin America. To this, it should be added that there are others extra regional actors that have achieved entering and converting themselves into valid partners for the Latin American states.

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WASHINGTON LOST LATIN AMERICA

The historic retelling proposed in this brief paper suggests, definitively, that the relation between Washington and Latin America is not the same as some decades ago. Since the Washington Consensus influenced economic decisions, the region has had the opportunity to diminish the dependency it had with the United States. This was done through influences from various state and non-state actors that have been developing a deeper contact with the region, and as such, facilitated diversification in mutual interactions. The expansion of Latin American horizons towards other global areas is in coincidence with the same fears that the United States has like the Middle East, for example (Russell and Tokatlián, 2011).

Hakim (2006) on his part, with the experience that is gained through being in charge of Inter-American Dialogue, is emphatic and categorical when pointing out that both actors have divorced from one another. It is a separation of interests and a new order, which explains their bilateral relations. Nonetheless, different from many other authors, he insists in not looking for culpability of the phenomenon just in Washington. He writes:

The United States is not the only culprit, however. Latin American leaders have also performed badly. Most Latin American governments have only partially completed the political and economic reforms needed to sustain robust growth and healthy democratic institutions (Hakim, 2006; 1).

Some reasons which Hakim (2006) uses to signal the loss of capacity and control by the United States over Latin America are tied into the performance of the nations of the region and the position George W. Bush adopted when in power. Also the presence of other important actors of international relations in America (cases China, India, and Russia as examples), the failure of FTAA as a strategy that tried to involve, very forcibly, all the markets from the Rio Grande downwards south.

Russell and Tokatlián (2011) worked on elucidating some dissimilarities between the different foreign policy models traditionally adopted by the Latin American countries regarding United States. According to them, the dialogue between US and Latin America is still alive. They proposed three new alternatives to manage the bilateral relations in the years for coming due to how much the scene has changed. Briefly, such alternatives will be explained:

Binding Multilateralism: It consists in the use of global institutions to limit the power of the United States. It is made possible through a highly institutional order at an international level, which facilitates limiting the power of the countries. For the United States this is impossible to ignore and for the region it is a type of international test that permits them to show they have effectively won influence.

Restricted containment: it implies the gradual creation of spaces at a regional level to prevent interventions from the United States within the area. It is done through a variety of themes, trying to increase its power to confront Washington. For its application, it is vital that the Latin American nations achieve convergence of interests, like the preservation of peace, democracy, and respect for political pluralism.

Selective cooperation: it consists in the creation of some cooperative ties with the United States for common problems that concern both actors. Said alternative requires a higher level of consultation, as it is priority that Washington is prepared to collaborate with countries in the region and that the decision to do so goes both ways.

Russell & Tokatlián (2011) are convinced that it is possible to move much beyond the traditional orthodoxy that wraps the bilateral relations of these two actors. According to them, it is precisely the visit made by president Obama in 2011 to the region a good sample about opening and wanting of cooperation between the White House and the Latin American countries. In spite of it, important steps are pending yet.

In turn, the region has been more attentive to its own problems and challenges. Both parties, in this intersection, have a unique opportunity to deal with inter-American relations by putting aside prevailing dogmas ad rituals (Russell & Tokatlián, 2011; 144).

Weisbrot (2013), on his part, has been more categorical in distancing the two sides of continental politics. For him, Latin America has been cared for less by Washington's interests in recent years. There was no negative consequence in the president's electoral campaign, as it is explained in his work, since the North American voter did not care much either.

On the contrary, it seems to have benefitted it. In its moment, according to Weisbrot (2013), the prime electoral pressure came from those that looked for more aggressive opposition towards left-wing governments. For example, the right wing of Florida, comprised of Cuban-Americans and their allies in Congress, who currently sit in the House of Representatives. The majority of

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the US foreign policy establishment does not worry about the region at all, and those who actually do share the common opinion that the turn made towards the left is a temporary matter that will be reverted in a few years.

Weisbrot points out that it is undoubtable that Latin America today has won its independence in relation to Washington; at least, in terms of reduction of asymmetries. Actually, the level of maneuverability of the region is much greater of what Europe has towards the same central North American power. Moreover, this change can be explained by analyzing structural reasons that have motivated this (that maybe are not easy to read from constructivism, since Weisbrot is not doing a constructivist analysis). Such reasons as the failure of (neo) liberalism for developing the region, the collapse of what is known as the creditor cartel of the IMF in Latin America, the rising influence of Asian countries in this region (through markets and investment funds)²¹, and the political multipolarity that exists in today's world (no evident for some). To this, it must be added the democratization of Latin American countries that opens the possibility to elect left-wing governments.

The reality on which Weisbrot's (2013) considerations are based, like that of many others that for reasons of length cannot be mentioned here, is really useful for understanding Latin America with a more active role in contemporary international relations. In addition, to comprehend a United States wrapped around in its tangled priorities that have kept them from seeing, for more than ten years, that south of the Rio Grande there are much more than traditional problems that they can imagine.

WASHINGTON IS RETURNING TO LATIN AMERICA

Today the US is redirecting itself once again south of its border to Latin America. The country is trying to resolve its bilateral relations with Cuba. It is not so much because Cuba is an important actor in Latin America in terms of trade or politics; rather it is the most significant and symbolic built rival to US presence in Latin America (in political and philosophical terms). The use of the rivalry between the US and Cuba is demonstrated in several situations where two have met (Cordeiro, 2007). Before reentering Latin America, the US must go through Cuba.

Under Obama's first administration, it was clear that neither Latin America nor Cuba held up as important subjects when it came to foreign policy. This was left clear as the initial attempt to close down Guantanamo ended in nothing happening and no secondary wave of action ever came to be. It was his second term where he had once again tried to reenter the situation. In addition, he has done well so far, largely thanks to the reopening of Cuban and American embassies in each country. Although certain breakthroughs have been made, what is significant is that this has been accepted not only because it is the new vision of US foreign policy to reopen relations with Cuba, but because Cuban American's have allowed (to a degree) for this to happen.

When taking in the theoretical framework of constructivism we need to reiterate that foreign policy and state interaction is largely caused by social interpretations and acceptance. Beforehand, the Cuban American population in Florida was strongly identified with mostly Republican Party

²¹ In this part, it is worth to stop and review the work of Leiteritz (2012) and understand a part of the explanations offered of what has been China's *Soft Power* strategy implemented not only in Latin America but also across the world. Using this strategy, China has installed itself in a gradual and without rejection manner in many of the activities in the Latin American productive system.

ideals on supporting anti-socialist policies, specifically towards the Castro regime. Their support of the embargo and restricted travel from the US to Cuba was a sign of protest against the revolution and its meaning. This all started greatly to failed attempt of the Bay of Pigs invasion and the strong policies of Ronald Regan against Cuba (Boersner, 1996). Yet as Girard *et al* (2012) present in their survey, Cuban American Republican affiliation has gone down since the 90's, dropping by 21% from 1995 to 2008. This change was also seen heavily in the evaluation of strong anti-Castro ideals, dropping at about 82% to 34%²².

This shift to a more accepting generation of Cuban Americans towards the Castro regime is a significant player in allowing the US to proceed with its intentions to reinstate itself with Cuba. As Bishin and Klofstad (2012) propose in their research, the Cuban American population is shifting in interests:

Given the large changes in the demographic and socioeconomic makeup of the Cuban American community, it seems quite possible that the changes in public opinion previously described are driven by the influx of post-Mariel immigrants with more progressive attitudes. Recall that these immigrants are primarily economic rather than political refugees (Bishin, Kolfstad, 2012: 590).

What they state in their research explains why the US is now shifting towards a more accepting stance towards the Castro regime because, like the Cuban American population itself, the US has more economic intentions when dealing with the Caribbean country.

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The new propensity among Cuban Americans is allowing for more relations with Cuba, lowering strict policies over the country, and leaning towards once again opening itself up to country. The influx of Cuban Americans are mostly due to looking for more opportunities in getting a job and providing for their families, not exiles looking to dismantle the Castro regime. Their acceptance of less strong foreign policies and openness to deal with Castro's Cuba is a sign of a transcending generation, which looks to Cuba as more of an opportunity than an adversary. This is heavily reflected in President Obama's 2014 speech when he announced the plans to re-open relations with Cuba.

"Neither the American nor Cuban people are well served by a rigid policy that is rooted in events that took place before most of us were born. Consider that for more than 35 years, we've had relations with China—a far larger country also governed by a Communist Party. Nearly two decades ago, we reestablished relations with Vietnam, where we fought a war that claimed more Americans than any Cold War confrontation" (Obama, 2014).

According to last lines one could analyze, as dealing with China and Vietnam, that the intentions to enter again into talks with Cuba is a search for opening another foreign market, and taking advantage in a period where the Cuban American population is more accepting of this trend.

This ideal of putting political principles aside can be seen from the other social side of the resolving conflict, as citizens in Cuba look towards the US as an opportunity to start again. In 2015 Bendixen & Amandi International in association with Univision and *Centro de Investigaciones*

²² In Girard, *et al* (2012) survey they looked to evaluate the tendency of acceptance amongst Cuban Americans in regards to 3 foreign policies: US ban on travel to Cuba, no trade with Cuba, and no diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba. The drop represented that the population does not support at least two of the policies, yet remain strong on one of the three.

Sociológicas de México conducted a survey²³, which asked people living in Cuba what their thoughts on several topics dealing with Cuban-US relations. In this survey, it became evident that Cubans (living in the Island) look at the US as a sign of progress for their country. The social perception of US President Barack Obama was significantly positive, and the opportunity of attracting tourism from the US has been seen as beneficial.

The most significant data from this survey is the difference between views on politics and the economy. Although negative views from the population on Raul and Fidel Castro was at 48% and 50% respectively, as well as 53% of the population unsatisfied with the political system, a staggering 79% of the surveyed population felt unsatisfied with the current economic system. It is clear, the intentions to once again receive (with open arms) the US is that of working towards opening Cuba's domestic market. So far, as Muñoz & Vieco say (2015), not just for Cuba but also for all Latin America, cooperation between US and the region is involved today.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between Washington and Latin America is that of an everlasting cycle of coming together but later breaking up (conflict and cooperation). The recollection of historic elements that portray the connection between North and South show how the US strongly takes initiative in investing south of the border, but receive much backlash when these attempts to create strong bonds with Latin America go wrong. When the United States hold simple economic intentions in the region, the governments and general population of Latin American countries held no significant rivalry towards the US. This was quite evident during its relations post Latin American independence all the way up to the start of the Cold War. It was then that the US employed assertive policies with the aim of reshaping each country's internal structure, or at least assuring that socialism would not reach the power center of each state.

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This regional urgency of avoiding influences marked a strong distancing between the US and Latin America. The relationship went downhill as the US left most of the countries to face internal problems only to reinstate itself when it needed to do so. When the US tried to reignite the connection with the region, it caught it in a bad moment. When trying to take advantage and create political structures that revolved around neoliberalism, the countries of Latin America once again felt the weight of the US. From here, it only got worse as the proposals of the FTAA and later George W. Bush's poorly perceived foreign policy only pushed Latin America further away. Yet, once again, the intentions to keep Latin America close to the US and far away from other states (China, Russia, India, etc.) has brought forth a new intention to reignite the burned out flame between Washington and Latin America. Although Obama's success with Cuba has been partial, it is a grand start, yet it marks a significant development: the US is gaining trust through economic purposes but not through implementations of strong-armed policies nor through trying to reshape sovereign political structures in Latin America.

Passing through economic interests that do not affect political structures means the people of Latin America –if generalization is allowed- will see the US as a trade partner, nothing more and

²³ The survey, titled *National Survey of Cubans Living in Cuba*, looked to answer various questions including who are Cuba's allies, how good are the people's perceptions on different political actors, and how satisfied they were with various elements, like the economy and the political system. The survey was conducted on a sample of 1200 people living in Cuba distributed

nothing less. The US currently do not present vigorous foreign policies or strategies similar to that of the Monroe Doctrine or the Washington Consensus that looked to shape Latin America, rather it merely seeks to move some countries towards open markets and foreign investment dynamics. Nevertheless, how long will this last before, once again, the US implement foreign policies looking to reshape the interior of these nations? Alternatively, will the tendency to reshape Latin American structures be something of a mistaken past of the US?

Beyond these open questions there still seems to be one that confronts the whole of the topic: Will the reopening of relations with Cuba, the biggest antagonist the US has in Latin America, reshape the perception of US interest in Latin America. Let us recall that Cuba is used as a figure in anti-American presence in Latin America, used especially by Socialist Venezuelan leaders in times that are more recent. The social perception of Latin American populations has guaranteed that “anti-imperialist” measures and discourses have been successful in many Latin American countries. That the interest to look towards other regions, like Asia-Pacific, has led to idea that the US is not a key player for the region as such. However, will the change in relations between Obama and Castro change any of this? Would Latin America be closer to the US than ever before?

So far, there is a significant trend in Latin American populations that would suggest the likelihood that this is possible. It is ultimately continuation and consistency that will dictate how far this will all go. Change is inevitable, and will most likely work hand in hand between state foreign policy and social acceptance, but one thing is certain, the cycle continues and the US is once again ready to bring Latin America closer to Washington.

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