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US INTERNATIONAL POLICY BETWEEN THE NEO-MONROISM AND WORLD OPENNESS: THE IX SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS IN THE AGE OF MULTIPOLARIZATION

Abstract:

The current phase of international politics is frequently seen as a period of increasing multipolarization. Faced with this, it is appropriate to ask what the doctrine of the United States is in relation to the size of the Western hemisphere and therefore to the future of relations with Latin America. The IX Summit of the Americas revealed a neo-Monroian trend in the United States, which is not surprising, however, when we consider the two-faced nature of North American international politics. This article aims to interpret the North American speech at the IX Summit of the Americas in light of the new international context and the US approaches in international politics.

Key words: IX Summit of the Americas, Monroe Doctrine, Neo-monroism, Latin America, Western Hemisphere.

Introduction

The growing multipolarization of the international scenario is leading global players to redefine alliances and friendships. International tables of a regional nature are becoming increasingly important, and this would confirm the process of segmentation of world political unity. This is the case of the IX Summit of the Americas¹, which received great attention from the world public opinion and analysts since it represents, in its specificity, an important moment of reflection on the future of US political projection. The United States has always experienced, in its political history, the tension between two fundamental trends: the

¹ The Ninth Summit of the Americas was an international conference held in Los Angeles, California, June 6-10, 2022. The theme was "*Building a Sustainable, Resilient and Equitable Future*" (editor's note).

"interventionist" one, open to world scenarios, in which to play a prominent role, and the "isolationist" one, which refers to the choices expressed with the Monroe Doctrine (Santoro, 1986). These two trends are not in sharp opposition, as they represent different phases of American international politics: they are expressed and implemented according to the specific moment and opportunity. Although the alternation between the Monroe Doctrine and isolationism (on the one hand) and world openness (on the other) seem consequential in chronological terms, in reality these tendencies are always alternating, in the public opinion of this country as well as in the ruling class thought. It is true that, with the end of the Cold War, the United States took on the responsibility of building a unipolar world order, based on the idea that the US would be the focal point of the international system. This type of decision is difficult to change, since it requires a commitment of political efforts and economic means of no small importance.

There has often been talk of the crisis of unipolarity and the advent of a multipolar world condition. The latter is described in a contrasting way by its interpreters: in the United States, in line with the realist school of interpretation, multipolarity is seen as a return to the political fragmentation of the international scenario, which, according to the thinkers of American realism as Kenneth Waltz (2010) is naturally anarchist and tending to multipolarization; it is instead hoped for by emerging countries as a new guiding principle of international relations, capable of making the distribution of world power more widespread, and therefore more equitable.

In this period of international uncertainty, the United States is "readjusting" its role in the international scenario, and with the IX Summit of the Americas it seems to want to propose itself as the leading country of a geopolitical space, the American one, which would correspond to the same of the Monroe Doctrine. Obviously this type of attitude is not in contrast with the global openness that the United States exercises, and with the political aims of a unipolar nature. Rather, we must read these two tendencies as balancing forces. Furthermore, we should be able to understand how the US balance between these two trends is useful, in turn, for the balance of US politics in a world in transition.

Latin America between two trends

Latin America has for a very long time lived a history of direct or indirect subordination to the United States. During the Cold War it was

the battleground between the political and economic control of North America and attempts at national independence, often supported by the Soviet Union. More nationalistic regimes like that of Perón maintained their own independence from both blocs, taking advantage of the clash between powers to carve out their own sphere of independence, while experiments like the Cuban one relied more explicitly on Soviet power, as for the famous missile crisis. At times, as in the case of Che Guevara's very particular vision, an extensive alliance of Third World countries was also hypothesized around the nascent economic and demographic strength of the communist China. This is how Latin America has always lived between two fundamental trends: one, aggregative, which wanted it unified against external powers and the influence of other countries, with particular reference to North America; the other, which saw it as a real "backyard" of the USA. Both of these tendencies are, paradoxically, linked to an integrative image, when purely Latin American, when instead neo-Monroian. The second, however, has often been criticized as integrative in words, but disintegrating in deeds, since it is based (according to its critics) on practices of economic domination and dispossession. Critopher Abel and Colin M. Lewis (2015, pp. 8-9) write about this:

"In the 1930s the combination of the World Depression and the challenges of international fascism and communism compelled the United States to reassess its relations with Latin America. The debate about foreign policy – economic and strategic – mirrored long-standing domestic conflicts, first between isolationist and internationalist tendencies in US society, and second between conservatives, stressing the passive role of the state and dominance of market forces, and liberals, urging selective intervention for remedial purposes. These issues shaped United States policies towards Latin America, which was perceived exaggeratedly in Washington, especially in the light of the Francoist victory in Spain, as an area of possible Axis expansion. The New Deal, elaborated as a set of ad hoc responses to particular problems in the United States, was translated into the Good Neighbor policy in the sphere of intra-American relations [...].

Policy makers in Washington saw Latin America as a new frontier to be opened up with trade and investment in a concerted and coordinated fashion (in contrast to the destabilizing scramble which had occurred during the 1920s), with the backing of the federal government in alliance with its Latin American counterparts.

[...] The liberal orthodoxy of Good Neighbor rapprochement has been challenged [...]. Both Latin and North American Marxists have argued

that the Good Neighbor policy represented not the rupture with the past claimed by its exponents, but a new and subtle instrument of the consolidation of US hegemony consonant with the needs of monopoly capital."

The presupposition of the need for the unification of the continent is traced back in the Latin American political tradition to Simón Bolívar, the *libertador* who gave independence from Spain to many current nations of South America. His political dream, collected by many great actors of that period, from Perón to Castro to Che Guevara, and of more recent history, as in the case of Hugo Chavez, was to unify the continent into a large independent entity. Bolivar, in fact, proposed the creation of a league of American nations that should have federated in the name of a common political destiny (Obregón, 2012, pp. 4-5). However, we must consider that, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, the demobilization of the Eastern Bloc, much has changed on the face of the earth. There were various political experiences that required, as mentioned, an appeal to the Soviet Union to maintain, in this delicate tension between opposites, a space of freedom and autonomy. However, Latin America has been able to seize the great historical opportunity, affirming its own political identity at the beginning of 2000.

The key event of this phase, which marked the arrival point of certain processes of building a political alternative, was the election of Lula as president of Brazil in 2002. This candidacy symbolically represented the victory of the workers and trade union organizations, of which Lula was a member. But, even more important for our recapitulation, it opened the door to an epochal turning point in Brazil's foreign relations, which again began to project its political and in some way charismatic influence on all other Latin American countries. Lula's victory ushered in a period of great political victories for the left, which gained government in most countries.

Thus it was that the ideas of continental unity and rapprochement between countries flourished in Latin America, together with large-scale economic projects. The alliance between the most radical countries in the processes of socialization, the ALBA (in which some of which were the heirs of the communist revolutions of the previous historical phase), were joined by supranational institutions, always promoted by Brazil, such as UNASUR and MERCOSUR. UNASUR as a project aimed at greater continental political concertation, MERCOSUR as its internal market. All this process was also framed in a broader diplomatic alliance, namely the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), which represented this

group of emerging economies with a particular and autonomous vision of the world and international relations. Lula himself recalled, in an interview he gave during his last incarceration, how the BRICS were created as a tool to achieve independence from the North American-led world economy:

“BRICS was not created to be an instrument of defense, but to be an instrument of attack. So we could create our own currency to become independent from the US dollar in our trade relations; to create a development bank, which we did – but it is still too timid – to create something strong capable of helping the development of the poorest parts of the world.

[...] This was the logic behind BRICS, to do something different and not copy anybody. The US was very much afraid when I discussed a new currency and Obama called me, telling me, ‘Are you trying to create a new currency, a new euro?’ I said, ‘No, I’m just trying to get rid of the US dollar. I’m just trying not to be dependent.’”²

However, the last few years have seen the entry into the scene of a complex social mechanism that has restarted the machinery of political struggle in Latin America. One by one, all the so-called "progressive" governments of Latin America have fallen, when politically weaker, or severely tested. We have seen in a very short time the change of government in Argentina, where Cristina Kirchner leaved the place to Macri's neoliberal government in 2015. There was the daring change of both political and international positions of Lenín Moreno in Ecuador, in stark contrast to the previous ones of Correa's government. There have been the famous revolts in Venezuela and numerous attempts at political destabilization in Cuba, and in both these cases the declarations of Donald Trump, then President of the United States, have been quite clear, going so far as to threaten invasions and regional wars. In particular, the threat of intervention in Venezuela seems to have been stopped by the diplomacy of force implemented by Russia and China in an unusual international tug-of-war³, but even if it has not materialized, it does not take away the heavy presence of very strong economic sanctions that are perpetrated by the USA against these two tropical countries.

² Pepe Escobar, *BRICS was created as a tool of attack: Lula*, on Asia Times: <https://asiatimes.com/2019/08/brics-was-created-as-a-tool-of-attack-lula/>

³ Cf. Tom O'Connor, *Russia, China and Iran Defend Support for Venezuela, Warn U.S. Cannot Tell Them or Latin America What to Do*, on Newsweek: <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-china-iran-defend-venezuela-1396605>

In Brazil, on the other hand, as is well known, Lula was incarcerated following a media and legal tussle that saw him accused of corruption. The government of the socialist *Partido do Trabalho* is then followed by the technocratic one of Temer and, today, that of Bolsonaro. The latter, with his electoral victory, has shown that he has stirred up the popular sentiment of discouragement and economic affliction, in a historical period that is certainly hard for the popular strata. What has been called by some scholars "the populist moment" in fact saw the explosion of the social contradictions. Those who have been able to interpret this situation best have therefore managed to capitalize on it in electoral terms. However, this does not necessarily presuppose a concrete solution to the real problems, and indeed it is often the opposite, since populist rhetoric is often synonymous with mere demagogism. Bolsonaro himself, although in Europe he is often associated with populism and sovereignty, is hardly traceable to the Latin American populist tradition (and in practice he seems very little interested even in national sovereignty, given the wide concessions in terms of autonomy he would like to reserve for the US). Obviously, a nominalistic problem arises here, typical of political positions within complex scenarios with multiple international interactions.

However, the recent political rearrangements in the region are again reshaping the patchwork of national governments. We must wait and carefully observe the upheavals both as national phenomena and within the regional framework, to understand the repercussions that they will necessarily have on international politics. The ideological question, however, is not far from this problem, since the political tendencies in question must be interpreted in the light of both phenomena. The choices of international politics, for a region like the Latin American one, are also and above all a matter of political traditions.

About the Monroe Doctrine

The German political theorist and jurist Carl Schmitt has been very involved in the study of the Monroe Doctrine and its implications for international equilibrium. Well aware that the world system represented an objective unity, which had to be analyzed from the global point of view, he fully understood the substantial implications of US isolation. According to Schmitt (2006, p. 281), the two guiding principles of the Monroe Doctrine were those of the Old World non-interference in American affairs (hence in a sense of the independence of America as a

specific region), as well as that of the defense of North American geopolitical interests (a disadvantage of subordinate countries):

“The Western Hemisphere counterposed to the Eurocentric lines of a global worldview a new global line that was no longer Eurocentric, and called into question the global position of old Europe. The public history of this new line in international law began with the proclamation of the so-called Monroe Doctrine on December 2, 1823. In President George Washington's political testament, his famous 1796 Farewell Address, he spoke of the Western Hemisphere without any geographical specificity. By contrast, President Monroe used the word "hemisphere" deliberately and with specific emphasis in his proclamation, which defined the space of America as this continent and this hemisphere. Intentionally or unintentionally, the expression "hemisphere" in this context signified that the political system of the Western Hemisphere, as a realm of freedom, was opposed to the political system of European absolutism. Ever since, the Monroe Doctrine and the Western Hemisphere have been linked together. They define the sphere of the special interests of the United States”.

Carl Schmitt hypothesized how this type of political discourse on the one hand served to de-legitimize any type of influence outside the American continent on it, through the internationalist doctrine of the great geopolitical spaces, on the other, however, proposed its own supervision over other countries that were not the US. Regarding the first aspect, Carl Schmitt wrote:

“[...] in President Monroe's 1823 pronouncement, the American line rejected European claims to land-appropriations. From the American perspective, this line at first had a defensive character directed at the powers of old Europe. It was a protest against further European land-appropriations of American soil. It is easy to see that the line thus gave the United States freedom to appropriate land on its own behalf, i.e., freedom to undertake its own land-appropriations in the Western Hemisphere, since there were still wide open spaces of American soil” (Schmitt, op.cit. p. 286).

This stance, however, did not prevent the open recourse to imperialism later, confirming the existence of two actual tendencies in North American foreign policy:

“The Spanish-American War (1898) was a sign to the rest of the world that United States foreign policy was turning to open imperialism. The war did not abide by the old continental concepts of the Western Hemisphere, but reached deep into the Pacific Ocean and into the old East. The antiquated Monroe Doctrine was replaced by a demand for the "open door" to the wide open spaces of Asia.” (op.cit. p. 292).

Even more, already at the time of the Monroe Doctrine there was an ambiguous attitude on the American side. This, as we have said, was placed on the one hand with respect to the rest of the continent:

“The United States, as the preminent power [...], asserted the right to prevent intervention by external powers in the American continent. It thereby asserted some form of pan-American political homogeneity that nevertheless fell short of direct annexation or imperialism. The American continent constituted a defined territorial-political space that was nevertheless distinct from its predominant power” (Hooker, 2009, p. 134).

On the other hand, this attitude was perpetuated towards Europe. In line with the exceptionalist principle that guided North American politics, the United States, which did not want any kind of external interference on its political space, equally did not want to disregard that of the Old Continent:

“The American posture vis-a-vis old monarchical Europe did not signify a renunciation; the United States continued to belong to the sphere of European civilization and to what was essentially still the European community of international law” (Schmitt, op.cit., p. 286).

Precisely in this non-renouncing attitude of the US it is therefore possible to understand the dual nature of North American international politics, ready for isolation and openness according to the world political phase in which it is immersed. The Monroe Doctrine in no way represented a disengagement from the search for American international interests, but at most a pause, the creation of a defensive line beyond which to entrench oneself in anticipation of better opportunities for intervention. We have seen how, in history, the neo-Monroian trend has re-emerged in phases of geopolitical rebalancing, one of which was the one before the Second World War. The example of the US-led “closure” of the Americas during Roosevelt's presidency is perfectly symptomatic of this double trend in American foreign policy, as well as the ambiguities of US isolationism. In this sense, the USA explicitly moved towards an integrative perspective:

“State-sponsored institutions – the Export-Import Bank and Foreign Bondholders Council – featured amongst innovations in foreign economic policy designed to promote the co-prosperity of the Americas as a means of cementing hemispheric understanding and fostering political stability in Latin America. Claiming to have benefited from the experience of the 1920s, reformist liberals in the US foreign policy bureaucracy, encouraged by various Latin American interests, sought to secure intra-American economic relations. Alarmed by the prospect of social revolutions, the

formation of autarkic blocks within Latin America and the negotiation of bilateral agreements with European powers which were viewed as prejudicial to the United States, Washington directly stimulated business initiative in the continent and performed a conciliatory role in regional conflicts so as to forestall renewed German penetration and re-establish US influence" (Abel, Lewis, 2015, p. 9). The character of this type of north-south relationship changed during the Cold War, in contrast to the attempts at autonomization of the Latin American geopolitical system.

Where are the Americas headed?

The aforementioned issues are actually of the utmost importance in order to correctly evaluate the outcome of the US intervention at the IX Summit of the Americas. If the balance of power is being redefined in the world, Latin America is a space of utmost importance that must necessarily be taken into account. It participates fully in the global equation for a whole series of not insignificant factors, including its commercial volume. The fate of Latin America is inevitably linked to that of the United States, any type of historical and geopolitical trend is confirmed by its decision-makers, therefore in the present phase of international politics this region has its own specific value. This year the Summit of the Americas was held in the United States, in Los Angeles. This location made the event a great chance for success or failure for the US. The general intentions of the United States had been put in black and white: "the United States is hosting the Ninth Summit of the Americas [...] in Los Angeles, California with a focus on *"Building a Sustainable, Resilient, and Equitable Future"* for our hemisphere".⁴ President Biden's speech amply clarified the main lines of North American discourse on regional issues. First, President Biden recalled the spirit of the first Summit of the Americas, held in 1994 once again in the United States, in Miami:

"We've come a long way together since the United States hosted the first Summit of the Americas 28 years ago. But the "Spirit of Miami," as it was known — the sense of hope and new possibilities that defined that first summit — remains key to facing the challenges of today and unlocking the incredible potential that exists in this hemisphere — in the Americas."⁵

⁴ *Summit of the Americas*, on U.S. Department of State website:

<https://www.state.gov/summit-of-the-americas/>

⁵ *Remarks by President Biden at the Inaugural Ceremony of the Ninth Summit of the Americas*, on *The White House* website: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing->

However, much has changed since that distant date. The Summit at the time was created to promote a North American-led free trade zone (a project which also failed), but since then the balance has shifted considerably in other directions. With regard to this ninth summit, in fact, someone spoke of a real failure, especially due to the desertion of many countries of capital importance. It all started with the US decision not to invite representatives from Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, asserting that the summit would be open only to "democratic" political realities. This choice, which sparked considerable controversy, was mirrored by the democratic semantics that also returned in President Biden's speech:

"Democracy is a hallmark of our region. Our Inter-American Democratic Charter, which grew out of the third Summit of the Americas, captures our unique commitment to democracy as a region. It affirms the right of people throughout the Americas to democracy and our obligation as governments to promote and defend democracy. As we meet again today, in a moment when democracy is under assault around the world, let us unite again and renew our conviction that democracy is not only the defining feature of American histories, but the essential ingredient to Americas' futures."⁶

There was also talk of "failure" for the summit in question⁷, since the decision to exclude some countries has led some heads of state, and in particular the Mexican President Obrador, to desert the forum, sending only diplomatic delegations. The change in the general direction impressed on the sense of the summit is precisely in the explicit independence of some state actors who should have taken part in it, and who have decided not to share the North American choices to limit the summit itself to those who did not have bad diplomatic relations with the United States. This is obviously a sign of the growing multipolarization of international relations and the affirmation of a increasing pluralism within this type of interstate tables. President Obrador has in fact declared very explicitly that "there cannot be a

[room/speeches-remarks/2022/06/08/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-inaugural-ceremony-of-the-ninth-summit-of-the-americas/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2022/06/08/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-inaugural-ceremony-of-the-ninth-summit-of-the-americas/)

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Interview: *With several countries absent, U.S. Summit of the Americas "a failure before it started"*, on *Xinhua*:

<https://english.news.cn/20220610/5ecfe9bdb4d74c96a6150b6c55978b9d/c.html>

summit if all countries are not invited, or there can be one but that is to continue with all politics of interventionism⁸”.

We therefore see how US policy on the southern part of the American continent is explicitly condemned where it is not expressed in terms of pluralistic collaboration with other countries. On the other hand, the general tone of the US President's speech was to emphasize the importance of building a space for regional cooperation:

“There is no reason why the Western Hemisphere shouldn't be secure, prosperous, and democratic, from Canada's northernmost reaches to the southern tips of Chile. We have all the tools we need right here in our own hemisphere. Our people are dynamic and innovative. Our nations are committed to working in partnership. And our region is forever knit together by the close bonds of family and enduring friendship.”⁹

Paradoxically, the trend towards regionalization, and the fact that the United States itself is placing the accent on the question, testifies to a sliding of the international scenario into the conditions of multipolarization.

Conclusions

The interpretative problem that arises at this point fits the trend lines previously highlighted in this essay. On the one hand, Latin America is experiencing a contradiction between dependence and autonomy. The autonomist perspective is combined, for historical and geographical reasons, with that of regional integration. The contrast that has surfaced on the pluralism of the Summit between the Mexican and US presidencies finds meaning within this contradiction. On the one hand, President Obrador confronts the US choice, deciding to desert the Summit in contempt of the exclusion of a part among the South American countries, at the same time denouncing the possibility of an "interventionist" attitude which should, instead, be avoided. On the other hand, he reiterates the importance of cooperation, and therefore possibly of greater integration, supporting the need to aggregate each

⁸ Quoted in Kelly Hooper, *Mexican president won't attend Summit of the Americas*, on *Politico*: <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/06/mexican-president-summit-of-the-americas-00037378>

⁹ *Remarks by President Biden at the Inaugural Ceremony of the Ninth Summit of the Americas*, on *The White House website*: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/06/08/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-inaugural-ceremony-of-the-ninth-summit-of-the-americas/>

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country to the Summit, avoiding that this type of events prove to be moments of support for the interest of only one part.

Secondly, we have seen how another trend alternation remains that of the United States between isolationist closure on the continent and internationalist openness. As regards the first, it is evident that the United States proposed, through the Summit, a perspective of a neo-Monroian character. The constant references to the dimension of the *hemisphere* speak clearly in this sense. However, President Obrador's statements recalled the ambiguity of the continental closure policy, which can support both a quasi-isolationist policy for the US and a development of US influence over Latin America. This, on the other hand, does not deny even an idealistic attitude: on the one hand, it is outlined by the emphasis placed on "democracy" in the Americas, which in other respects means the need for the US to "democratize" the New Continent; on the other, it opens up to international issues with President Biden's condemnations of the Russian Federation. The IX Summit of the Americas, in this sense, can be considered useful for the delineation of an interpretative scheme of US foreign policy, open to various operational possibilities. In many ways, it represents the return of a neo-Monroian paradigm. The important thing is to understand how the choices of the USA towards world politics are determined by the specific historical period in which they are expressed, but they live in moments of openness and closure.

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Polityka międzynarodowa USA między neomonroizmem a otwartością na świat: IX Szczyt Ameryk w dobie multipolaryzacji

Obecna faza polityki międzynarodowej jest często postrzegana jako okres rosnącej multipolaryzacji. W tych okolicznościach należy zadać pytanie, jaką jest doktryna Stanów Zjednoczonych w odniesieniu do półkuli zachodniej, a tym samym do przyszłości stosunków z Ameryką Łacińską. IX Szczyt Ameryk ujawnił tendencje do powrotu do doktryny Monroe (neo-monroism) w Stanach Zjednoczonych, co jednak nie jest zaskakujące, jeśli weźmiemy pod uwagę dwuaspektowość amerykańskiej polityki międzynarodowej: następujące po sobie fazy przewagi izolacjonizmu i otwartości na politykę światową. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu interpretację amerykańskiego przekazu, jaki miał miejsce podczas ostatniego Szczytu Ameryk, w świetle nowego kontekstu międzynarodowego i aktualnego stanowiska USA w polityce międzynarodowej.

Key words: IX Szczyt Ameryk; Doktryna Monroe; neomonroizm; Ameryka Łacińska; półkula zachodnia.