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Chair of Comparative  
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# USA Foreign Policy in Latin America: the Challengers

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## **Introduction**

After a long period of decreasing interest in the southern part of the Western Hemisphere, the United States of America is once again turning toward the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. Recent developments and potential changes in the political, economic and social arrangements of the area are drawing the attention of US increasingly. The appearance, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, of a wave of mostly left-leaning governments in the region accounts for much of this renewed interest.

This new political framework of the LAC region, together with the unprecedented economic growth of countries like Brazil and Venezuela, brought incredible changes to the balance of the area. This economic growth has allowed the countries of the region to pursue greater independence and autonomy in both their economic and foreign policies. Additionally, this gradual shift has initiated a process of deeper regional integration, aimed at creating an alternative to extant US-led hemispherical institutions, such as the Organization of the American States (OAS).

The driving force behind this general spread of socialist or social democratic governments and values throughout the region was Hugo Rafael Chavez Frías in Venezuela, who came to power in 1999 and led the first of this array of governments. The former Venezuelan leader's quest, successful by many standards, was the extraordinary improvement of regional integration in pursuit of the Pan-American ideal, inspired by the vision of the Venezuelan *libertador* Simon Bolívar and fuelled both by Chavez's incredible charisma and the incredible oil resources of his country. Through generous foreign aid grants to neighbour countries, Chavez acquired ever-increasing

influence in the region. Using this leadership role in the region, both Chavez and his chosen successor Nicolás Maduro spread the former's anti-imperialist ideas and anti-American rhetoric. For these reasons, this thesis will consider Venezuela as one of the greatest challengers to the US in Latin America, especially in light of recent developments in the country.

Any discussion of challengers to the US in the Latin American context must necessarily engage the Republic of Cuba, its principal antagonist in the region for more than fifty years and, by the estimation of some, a bigger threat to American values and hegemony. Perceived as a serious threat during the years of the Cold War, though isolated from the rest of the world since 1961, recently Cuba has begun opening itself up to the outside world in critical ways, mostly especially economic. This process, too, is linked to the changes in Latin America described above, since increased autonomy in foreign policy decisions has allowed those nations to engage Cuba anew or reinforce their existing relations with the long-excluded and isolated island nation.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis will be to understand the tone of United States foreign policy towards the whole region, the US plan for engaging with the emerging economies of Latin America in terms of diplomacy and economy, and its reactions or lack thereof to the ongoing leftist political trends in the region. Venezuela and Cuba, the aforementioned major challengers to the US in the LAC region, will be the primary focus, allowing for discussion of the reasons why they represent such a challenge and what US attitude, past, present, and future, toward them has been and might be.

To address these questions, this thesis is divided into three parts, each in turn divided into three chapters. Part one is devoted to US foreign policy in the region. It begins with the presidency of George W. Bush and how his administration shaped relations with the countries of Latin America, engaging the differences between the

kinds of cooperation that he intended to achieve with the US's southern neighbours and the actual foreign policy outcomes of his two-term presidency, marked as it was by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Focus will then shift to the Obama Administration, with discussion on its approaches to Latin America as distinct from those of the preceding administration, and how these differences were viewed by the peoples of Latin America. The unit concludes with an introduction to the crucial challenges that the region as a whole presents to the US.

The second part instead is devoted to a detailed analysis of Cuba, the more long-standing of the aforementioned challengers. It begins with a historical overview from the fall of the Soviet Union, that is to say, when Cuba lost its main source of income and its protector, which will introduce and frame current developments. This is followed by a discussion of the recent agreement reached by the US and Cuba, which entails some reduction in the economic sanctions that the North American power has imposed on the island since 1961. After providing a comprehensive panorama of the reception of this agreement, mainly in the Western Hemisphere, the second part ends with a presentation of the possibilities opening up before Cuba, focusing particularly on its potential relations with the US and Venezuela, its main ally since the election of Hugo Chavez.

The third and final part will deal precisely with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, using a discussion of the "special relationship" that Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro had, as a natural segue between my topics. The similarity of their ideologies and the long and comprehensive collaboration between the two countries, even after the transition in leadership to Fidel's brother Raul, will feature here. Next, Venezuela's ambiguous and fluctuating ties with the US, from Chavez's burning rhetoric and the invectives against it to the sizeable amount of trading exchanges between the two nations, will be considered. The final chapter will engage Chavez's efforts to establish

both regional and global leadership for Venezuela through his diplomatic and economic policies. Thanks to the immense oil resources of his country and to his incredible charisma, the Bolivarian leader bequeathed his successor Maduro a foreign relations spectrum encompassing neighbouring countries of the Bolivarian alliance and controversial relations undertaken with so-called rogue states, especially with the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran. My analysis concludes with a consideration of how these peculiar and criticised bonds have affected US perception of Venezuela, speculating about the variables and future possibilities for the relations between these two countries.

## **PART I**

### **US FOREIGN POLICY IN LATIN AMERICA**

The growing importance of Latin American countries on the international political landscape has increasingly compelled the US to focus its attention on the area. The region poses several challenges, both economic and political, to the international powers and to the US, in particular.

The first part of my thesis intends to understand the ways in which the US has been trying to cope with these challenges. First, I will analyse the approach of the second Bush Administration. Next, I will deal with the changes in foreign policy brought by Barack Obama's election. Finally, I will present the most crucial matters that Obama and his successor need to face in order to improve relations with their neighbours.



## **Chapter 1: The Bush Administration**

During his presidency, George W. Bush was beset by animosity from Latin American nations. The main reason for these adverse feelings by the peoples of Latin America toward the US President was that he did not treat the area and its problems as a priority of US foreign policy. Several times during his election campaign, Bush reaffirmed his willingness to strengthen and enhance the relations between North and South America, creating hopes that were later dashed when promises did not bloom into policy.

The aim of this first chapter is to analyse and understand Bush's initial intentions for the area and the intervening variables that changed this attitude completely.

### **1.1. The 2000 Election Campaign**

George W. Bush was elected President of the United States of America on November 7, 2000, with 47.87% of the popular votes and 271 electoral votes against the 48.38% of the popular votes and 266 electoral votes gained by Al Gore, his Democratic opponent<sup>1</sup>. Throughout his electoral campaign, Bush spoke sparingly about his plans for foreign policy. He focused mainly on domestic affairs, such as health, education, and the reform of the tax system and Social Security.<sup>2</sup> However, even if rarely he talked about his intentions for international relations, he managed to raise the hopes of the Latin American countries. The reasons for this favourable reception in the area were primarily the explicit declarations that Bush made during his few speeches about

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<sup>1</sup> Data regarding the electoral results taken from: <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=2000>

<sup>2</sup> See Dietrich J. W., *The George W. Bush Foreign Policy Reader*, New York, Routledge, (2005), p. 4.

foreign affairs.

Several times, during interviews and speeches for his election campaign, he criticized the outgoing Clinton Administration for having involved the US too much in missions abroad, while ignoring or, at least underestimating, the issues coming from its southern neighbours. Clinton's decisions to continue the mission in Somalia and send troops to Haiti are prime examples of Bush's stated opposition, because in both cases US intervention aimed beyond humanitarian aid, and instead at nation-building.<sup>3</sup> In fact, in several presidential debates, he called for decreases in foreign commitments, especially military ones, because: "if we do not stop extending our troops all around the world and nation-building missions, then we are going to have a serious problem coming down the road, and I am going to prevent that."<sup>4</sup> [...] I am concerned that we are over deployed around the world.<sup>5</sup> [...] I do not want to be the world's policeman, I want to be the world's peacemaker."<sup>6</sup> A humble nation and a humble foreign policy was what Mr. Bush sought. If he became president, he aimed to change the world's perception of the United States by these limitations, which would make the US seem less arrogant and presumptuous. He highlighted the need to allow people of other nations the freedom to shape their own governments and societies without outside pressure.<sup>7</sup>

However, where foreign policy and Bush's views on Latin America are concerned, the clearest declaration of his position comes from a speech he made on August 26, 2000, at Florida International University in Miami.<sup>8</sup> On that occasion,

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Presidential Debate at Wake Forest University at Winston-Salem, North Carolina on October 11, 2000.

Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29419>

<sup>4</sup> Source: Presidential Debate at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, October 3, 2000.

Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29418>

<sup>5</sup> Source: Presidential Debate at Washington University in St. Louis, October 17, 2000.

Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29420>

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 4.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 3.

<sup>8</sup> See Di Ruzza M., *L'America Latina sulla scena globale. Nuovi lineamenti geopolitici di un continente in crescita*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubettino Editore, 2011, p. 45-46.

surrounded by a predominantly Cuban-American audience, the then-governor of Texas expressly discussed his ideas for the relations between the US and Latin America, saying:

Our future cannot be separated from the future of Latin America. Should I become the president, I will look south not as an afterthought, but as a fundamental commitment. [...] Those who ignore Latin America do not fully understand America itself, and those who ignore our hemisphere do not fully understand American interests. This country was right to be concerned about a country like Kosovo, for example, but there are more refugees of conflict in Colombia. America is right to be concerned about Kuwait, but more of our oil comes from Venezuela. America is right to welcome trade with China, but we export nearly as much to Brazil.<sup>9</sup>

As we can see from Bush's own words, he openly declared his intention to focus on Latin America and its ties to the US, if elected president. Actually, he did not limit his words to the reaffirmation of general principles, but instead described entirely new programs aimed at helping Latin America.<sup>10</sup> He talked about economic aid designed specifically to address key issues for the area, such as the protection of environmental resources, assistance to small-business entrepreneurs, training of law enforcement, and the fight against the production and trafficking of drugs.<sup>11</sup> His ideas for the future relationship between North and South America sought to help the neighbours of the US to improve both their economic conditions and their democratic values, to help them become stronger partners. His speech imagined a "Century of the Americas,"<sup>12</sup> a period

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<sup>9</sup> Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/26/us/2000-campaign-texas-governor-bush-vows-put-greater-us-focus-latin-america.html>

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 2, p 35.

<sup>11</sup> See footnote 9.

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 2, p. 34.

that could be marked by the predominance of the entire American continent not only of the United States achievable thanks to collaboration and engagement. To this end, he proposed to create a new program called the “American Fellows,” which would have welcomed young people from other countries on the American continents into yearlong internships within the US’s federal agencies. This way, he said, “we will encourage [the formation of political parties] and help monitor elections. These are ways to treat the symptoms of corruption and discord before they turn into violence and abuse of human rights.”<sup>13</sup>

Among Latin American countries, Bush singled out Mexico for specific mention in his speech, perhaps because he had met with Vicente Fox, the newly elected president of Mexico, shortly before speaking in Miami. Bush affirmed the “special relationship”<sup>14</sup> between the US and Mexico, comparing it with the one between Canada and the United Kingdom. Mexico and the US share a border, a common history, and a set of core values, as well as participation, with Canada, in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed in 1994. Despite these common bonds, an important and divisive issue, the matter of immigration, continues to exist between the two countries. According to the Migration Policy Institute, the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States more than doubled in the decade between 1990 and 2000,<sup>15</sup> and it was expected to continue growing after 2000. Consequently, the question was both crucial and delicate during Bush’s election campaign, for two reasons, namely the complexity of the issue itself and the potential loss of significant support in the electorate if Bush had failed to address it during the campaign. For this reason, especially in the southern states, where Latino minorities comprise a larger part of the voting population, Bush’s

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<sup>13</sup> Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/26/us/2000-campaign-speech-bush-sets-goal-free-trade-agreements-with-latin-nations.html>

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>15</sup> Source: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/mexican-immigrants-united-states>

presidential campaign used a variety of strategies to engage the public, including campaign advertisements and Spanish-language public speeches by Bush and other campaign supporters,<sup>16</sup> and attempts to emphasize Bush's personal and family connections with the Hispanic world, namely his Texan origins, his personal ties to Vicente Fox, and the Mexican heritage of his sister-in-law Columba Bush, wife of his brother Jeb, the then-governor of Florida.

Bush's campaign emphasis on limiting US foreign intervention elsewhere in the world, while promoting increased cooperation with the nations of Latin America, set the stage for what was to come. Perhaps as a result of these campaign declarations, the largest countries in Latin America, were consistently favourable toward the US at the beginning of Bush's Presidency in 2000 (See Chart 1.1.1). Though the hopes and expectations of Latin American nations were raised on the eve of his election, this support fades as George W. Bush's presidency continues. The dissatisfaction of Latin American countries with the US abates with the election of Barack Obama, whose presidency sees a slow return to a more positive impression of the US in Latin America. The reasons for Bush's inability to maintain the support and benevolence of Latin America, with special consideration of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and its impact on Bush's foreign policy guidelines, is the topic of the next section.

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<sup>16</sup> See Subervi-Velez F., *The Mass Media and Latino Politics: Studies of US Media Content, Campaign Strategies and Survey Research: 1984-2004*, New York, Routledge, 2008, p.254.

<b>U.S. Favorability</b>															
	1999/ 2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Argentina	50	34	--	--	--	--	16	22	38	42	--	--	41	36	43
Brazil	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	62	62	61	73	65	73
Chile	--	--	--	--	--	--	55	--	--	--	--	--	68	72	68
Mexico	68	64	--	--	--	--	56	47	69	56	52	56	66	63	66
Peru	74	67	--	--	--	--	61	--	--	--	--	--	--	65	70
Venezuela	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	53	62	51

Note: 1999/2000 survey trends provided by the U.S. Department of State.  
Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey, Q12a.  
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Chart 1.1.1: Survey trend of the US favourability in the world.<sup>17</sup>

## 1.2. The “Bush Doctrine” and Latin America<sup>18</sup>

The first months of Bush’s presidency, from his election on November 7, 2000 until the September 11 attacks, started with the efforts to keep pace with the promises he made during the campaign. As a way to demonstrate the renewed attention that he intended to give to Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), his first international visit was to Mexico,<sup>19</sup> breaking the tradition newly-elected US presidents since Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 had observed, namely making their first official visit to Canada.<sup>20</sup> George W. Bush and Vicente Fox had their first official meeting in San Cristobal on February 16, 2001. Both the meeting at Fox’s private ranch and the subsequent news conference observed an informal and relaxed tone. On that occasion, the two presidents reasserted their commitment to improve the relations between their nations and to enhance inter-American cooperation. Another similar meeting between the two presidents was held on September 5, 2001,<sup>21</sup> only six days before the terrorist attacks.

<sup>17</sup> Source: Pew Research Center. See: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/23/global-publics-back-u-s-on-fighting-isis-but-are-critical-of-post-911-torture/bop-report-38/>

<sup>18</sup> See Prevost G., Oliva Campos C., *The Bush Doctrine and Latin America*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> See: <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/president/bush-george-w>

<sup>20</sup> See: <http://www.canada.com/business/obama+first+foreign+visit+canada/1164013/story.html>

<sup>21</sup> See: [https://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=2463\\_0\\_2\\_0](https://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=2463_0_2_0)

The “two amigos”<sup>22</sup> both repeated their commitment to the reciprocal intentions they had traced by in their previous talks. Some of President Bush’s remarks bear quoting here:

“[The US’s relationship with Mexico] is our most important relationship, because Mexico is our neighbor, and neighbors must work together. And we do. [...] Over the past hours, we discussed the importance of NAFTA, not only between Canada and Mexico and the United States, but free trade throughout the hemisphere. [...] When we trade as much as we do, there are going to be issues that inevitably arise. And we will deal with those with mutual respect and honest discourse.

And finally, an area that has gained a lot of interest, because it’s an important issue, of course, is the issue of migration[...] We share a lot of principles. One, that we both recognize how important the contribution to our economy the Mexican workers have made; that we want people treated with respect; that we both have a mutual and shared responsibility to make sure our border is safe, and that we enforce the border; that I hope to come forward with a program that will pass the Congress[...] And I would like to do that as soon as possible[...] Mr. President, I think this is a continuation on the road for trust, respect, and cooperation.”<sup>23</sup>

Soon after this clear example of harmony and commonly-held intention, the terrorist attacks of September 11 shook the foundations of the White House’s entire foreign policy agenda.<sup>24</sup> The first reactions worldwide, of course, were the expression of grief and support for the United States and the American people, and the Latin American countries joined these manifestations of solidarity of the whole world. As a

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/nationworld/mexico/20130426-once-solid-the-george-w.-bush-vicent-e-fox-partnership-faded-after-911.ece>

<sup>23</sup> Source: <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010906-6.html>

<sup>24</sup> See footnote 8.

demonstration of political solidarity, within the framework of the Organization of the American States (OAS), the Latin American nations agreed on the stipulation of the “Inter-American Convention against Terrorism,” on June 3, 2002.<sup>25</sup> This document was principally aimed at enhancing regional cooperation in order to facilitate control along the borders,<sup>26</sup> cooperation among law enforcement authorities,<sup>27</sup> mutual legal assistance,<sup>28</sup> and coordination of policy on the treatment of the suspects.<sup>29</sup>

The reaction of the US and the strategy it would pursue were expressed by President George W. Bush on January 29, 2002, during the State of the Union Address,<sup>30</sup> and better systematized few months later, on September 17, in the *National Security Strategy 2002* (NSS 2002).<sup>31</sup> This document, which came to be known also as the “Bush Doctrine,” was mainly directed at identifying the path to follow in the fight against terrorism. According to the document, the US would “make no distinction between terrorists and those who knowingly harbour or provide aid to them.”<sup>32</sup> The document also affirms US intention and commitment to act unilaterally and preemptively, if necessary, to protect the right to self-defence against terrorists and rogue states. Reading this document, a change in US foreign policy priorities is discernible: relations with other nations were to be improved especially in order to fight against terrorism. Each single US action seemed to be focused on two purposes: first, strengthening regional cooperation to enhance border control and collaboration between competent authorities, in order to simplify the search for suspected terrorists; and second, being involved in the process of reinforcing democratic values in countries

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<sup>25</sup> For the text of the Convention see: <http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-66.html>

<sup>26</sup> See the Convention, Art. 7.

<sup>27</sup> See the Convention, Art. 8.

<sup>28</sup> See the Convention, Art. 9.

<sup>29</sup> See the Convention, Artt. 10-15.

<sup>30</sup> See: <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>

<sup>31</sup> For the text of the Strategy see: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> See the Strategy, Chap. 3.



where democracy was unstable, for the purpose of having stronger neighbours resilient to the threat of the spread of terrorism.

The US continued to clarify the expression of the changes in its foreign affairs policies, as is evident from a comparison of the US Department of State Strategic Plan of 2000<sup>33</sup> and that of 2004.<sup>34</sup> Both plans were outlined during Colin Powell's tenure as Secretary of State. The first one contains several objectives for US foreign policy that reflected the international situation and transformations of the time, in particular the responsibilities of and challenges posed to the US by its supremacy after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the strategic plan for 2004-2009, written jointly with Agency for International Development (USAID), was an adaptation of the previous plan to the new events that had occurred in the intervening years. Hence, it included a strong emphasis on the "war on terror," repeating many of the ideas contained in the NSS 2002. As a consequence of these shifts in the agenda, Latin America tumbled down the hierarchy of US foreign policy priorities, with the concrete realization of some of the original programs of cooperation between the two parts of the continent also suffering. The two clearest examples of this deviation are the cessation of talks with Mexico on the immigration issue and the abandonment of the proposal for the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in the framework of the Summit of the Americas.

The immigration problem, discussed above, was central to the earlier meetings of Presidents Bush and Fox and also to the former's election campaign. However, the terrorist attacks increased levels of surveillance and security in the US, as well as the severity of its border protection. Furthermore, after September 11, a new atmosphere of

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<sup>33</sup> For the text of the Plan of 2000 see: [http://1997-2001.state.gov/www/global/general\\_foreign\\_policy/2000\\_dos\\_stratplan\\_body.pdf](http://1997-2001.state.gov/www/global/general_foreign_policy/2000_dos_stratplan_body.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> For the text of the Plan of 2004 see: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/24299.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> See footnote 18, p. 81.

concerns and doubts toward foreigners and the immigration policies, which had to deal with the incoming and outgoing flow of people, spread throughout the country. “There was very little communication after that. – said Juan Hernández, Fox’s point person on immigration affairs, referring to the 9/11 – Fox, I think, felt blacklisted.”<sup>36</sup> Slightly different was the opinion of Tony Garza, Bush’s ambassador to Mexico from 2002 to 2009: “I’m certain they both wanted to see immigration reform get done, but even before the [Twin] Towers, that was going to be tough, and 9/11 made it impossible. [...] I never felt that President Bush lost interest in the issues related to Mexico, but there are only so many hours in a day, and the safety and security of our country had to come first.”<sup>37</sup> Thereafter, the agreement on immigration seemed more and more unlikely to happen.

The other important area in which the cooperation and harmony between the US and LAC sank was the Summit of the Americas and the creation of the FTAA. The Summit of the Americas is an international forum of discussion that gathers the heads of state of the Western Hemisphere. This event, ideological heir of the Inter-American Conferences of the nineteenth century, started in 1994 with the first Summit of Miami. There, the western heads of state decided to proceed with the creation of this “new architecture,”<sup>38</sup> charged with solving common political, economic, and social challenges by addressing them collectively. It was within this context that the member states started to think about the project of a new free trade agreement that would have enlarged the new-born NAFTA.<sup>39</sup> Had it taken shape, the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) would have been responsible for creating the largest market in the world by 2005. Notwithstanding the anti-globalization protests of *no global*, an

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<sup>36</sup> See footnote 22.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>38</sup> See footnote 18, p.72.

<sup>39</sup> The agreement between the United States, Canada, and Mexico entered into force in 1994.

organization which worried that the initiative would have only resulted in increased wealth for already prosperous nations, the creation process continued smoothly during the Summit of Quebec City on April, 2001. On that occasion, the heads of state reiterated their commitment to the FTAA, emphasizing 16 themes including: Democracy, Human Rights, Justice, Hemispheric Security, Civil Society, Trade, Disaster Management, Sustainable Development, Rural Development, Growth with Equity, Education, Health, Gender Equality, Indigenous Peoples, Cultural Diversity, and Children and Youth.<sup>40</sup>

However, soon after September 11, the collegial atmosphere began to cloud over, with the consequences to US priorities on the immigration issue I highlighted previously. Congress, and particularly Congressional Democrats, began to take an unfavourable posture toward the agreement, both for its exclusions (the lack of regulations against social and environmental dumping) and for its inclusions (the elimination of the trade barriers on fruit and the opening of the market to the extremely competitive agricultural production of Latin America, unfavourable to the powerful and influential lobby of the citrus producers of Florida).<sup>41</sup> The situation was further exacerbated by a counter-campaign led by the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. He was not pleased by the official and immediate recognition by the Bush Administration of the Carmona government, which had come to power for few days after a *coup d'état*. In the end, all these factors led to the burial of the negotiations on the agreement in the Summit of Mar del Plata on November 2005.

On the other hand, President Bush dedicated considerably energies toward the so-called *Plan Colombia*. First conceived in 1998, the *Plan Colombia* directed economic and military support from the US to Colombia expressly to combat groups of

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<sup>40</sup> See: [http://www.summit-americas.org/iii\\_summit.html](http://www.summit-americas.org/iii_summit.html)

<sup>41</sup> See footnote 8, p.56-57.

armed guerrilla operatives, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), in the country. After years of political fights against the government, those groups had become deeply intertwined with drug production and trafficking and other sorts of criminal activities. Comprehending the extent of the problem, the US<sup>42</sup> invested considerable commitment in the *Plan*. According to an official report from the US Government Accountability Office, US funding for the military component of *Plan Colombia* was, on average, \$540 million per year, more than the half the expenditure the Colombian government provided for the campaign.<sup>43</sup> As we can see from the chart below, the action of *Plan Colombia* and the main part of the economic efforts were directed to the fight illegal drugs and the organized crime. Despite the efficacy of the significant efforts invested in the *Plan Colombia* during the Bush Administration where the eradication of coca crops is concerned (see chart 1.2.2), the official opinion from the Embassy of the United States in Colombia was that “much remains to be done.”<sup>44</sup>

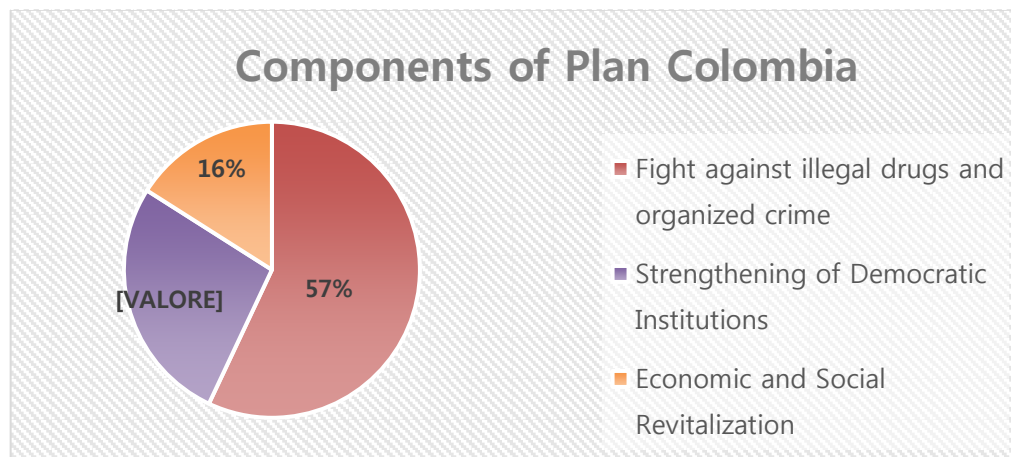


Chart 1.2.1: Distribution of resources in *Plan Colombia* (1999-2005).<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> The US was not the only contributor and sponsor of the Plan, but, especially at the beginning of the initiative, it was the main one.

<sup>43</sup> See Mejía, D. *Plan Colombia: An Analysis of Effectiveness and Costs*, p.4.

<sup>44</sup> See: <http://bogota.usembassy.gov/plancolombia.html>

<sup>45</sup> See Acevedo B., *Ten Years of Plan Colombia: An Analytic Assessment*, USA, The Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Programme, (2008), p.5.

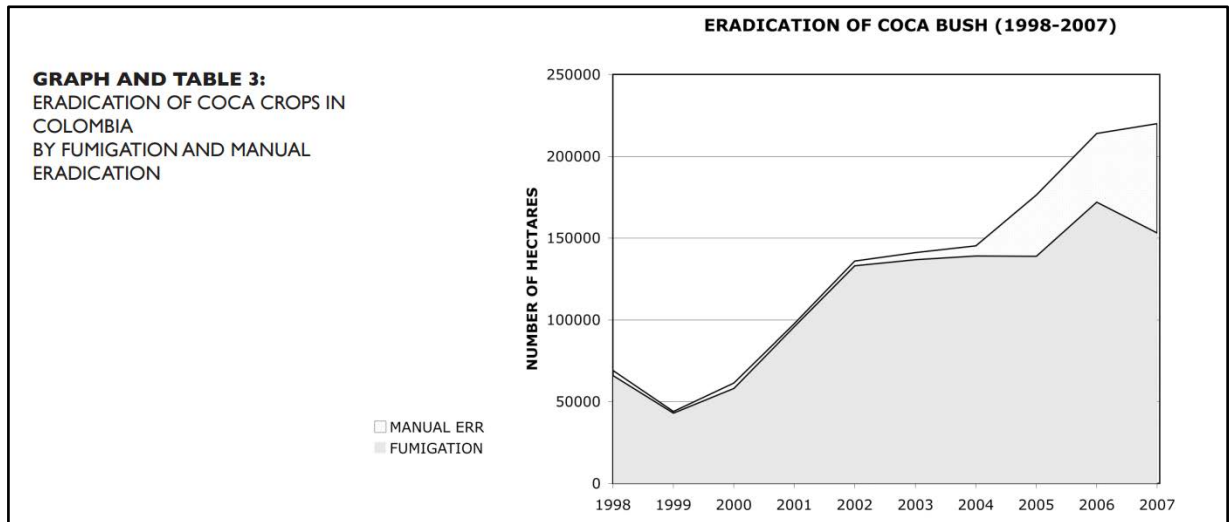


Chart 1.2.2: Eradication of coca crops in Colombia.<sup>46</sup>

In 2002, an expansion of the *Plan Colombia* called the *Andean Counterdrug Initiative* (ACI) was created. Begun as a proposal by President George W. Bush, the ACI's goal was to assist the countries more likely to harbour terrorist cells. As a US equivalent of the *Plan Colombia*, it encompassed other South American countries, including Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela, in addition to Colombia itself. Its aims were principally: eliminating the production of drugs, improving the law enforcement authorities, and enhancing the legal and investigative framework in order to eradicate the problem at the root through the arrest of the traffickers. To this end, US funding for ACI from 2000 to 2004 totalled \$3.5 billion,<sup>47</sup> allocated mainly to Colombia.

To conclude, I analysed the most important sectors of the foreign policy of President Bush's first term, in particular, and the outcome that came up was a negative balance for him.

Just as President Bush amplified his administration's participation in plans to

<sup>46</sup> See footnote 44, p.6.

<sup>47</sup> See Veillette, C., *Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI) and Related Funding Programs: FY2005 Assistance*, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, (2005), p.2.

eradicate drug trafficking in South America, ostensibly as part of a broader campaign of counter-terrorism on a global scale, his White House was diminishing its other foreign interventions and commitments in Latin America and the Caribbean. These include: the tepid reaction of the US to the devastation caused by hurricane Michelle in the Caribbean in 2001; the hardening of the sanctions against Cuba, by limiting the amount of remittances Cuban-Americans could send to their families still on the island; the chilly reception of newly-elected presidents in Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega) and Bolivia (Evo Morales); and the lack of economic aid for Argentina during the financial crisis. Coupled with suspicions of American involvement in the *coups d'état* in Haiti and Venezuela, the United States' reputation shifted marked from Mr. Bush's initial posture as "amigo" and favourably-inclined head of state within the American continental context, to that of rabid authoritarian police presence, on the one hand, and aloof and compassionless neighbour, on the other. All these events combined suggested the "forgotten relationship"<sup>48</sup> between the US and the LAC and contributed to the loss of Latin America<sup>49</sup> by Mr. Bush. As Voice of the People reported, only in the Middle East was the general attitude towards the United States harsher than in Latin America.<sup>50</sup>

Given the change in leadership at the State Department between George W. Bush's first and second terms of office, the next section of my thesis will evaluate if the advent of Condoleezza Rice brought in its wake a significant change in foreign policy.

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<sup>48</sup> See Castaneda J. G., *The forgotten relationship*, «Foreign Affairs», (2003), 82(3), 67-81. See: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/south-america/2003-05-01/forgotten-relationship>

<sup>49</sup> See Hakim P., *Is Washington Losing Latin America?*, «Foreign Affairs», (2006) 85(1), 39. See: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/south-america/2006-01-01/washington-losing-latin-america>

<sup>50</sup> See: <http://www.coha.org/latin-america-the-bush-administration%E2%80%99s-disappeared-foreign-policy-and-kerry%E2%80%99s-future-vision-for-the-region/>

### 1.3. Condoleezza Rice and her Secretariat

Condoleezza Rice,<sup>51</sup> daughter of John Wesley Rice Jr. and Angelena Rice, was born on November 14, 1954 in racially segregated Birmingham, Alabama. She attended the University of Denver, where she earned a degree in political science in 1974. She continued her studies in political science at the University of Denver's Graduate School of International Studies, earning her Ph.D. in 1981. Later that year, she began a position as political science professor at Stanford University.

Her political career began in 1989, when she assisted President George H.W. Bush as consultant regarding the dissolution of the Soviet Union. She served President George W. Bush as national security adviser from 2001–2004, when she was nominated to the office of Secretary of State. Upon her confirmation, she became the first African-American woman to hold this office. When she assumed appointment, Rice attempted to redirect the course of US foreign policy, favouring diplomatic solutions and multi-lateral dialogue over the military intervention. Dr. Rice made an attempt to restyle the American image abroad, and in Latin America in particular, by focusing attention on a new “capacity of persuasion”<sup>52</sup> rooted in renewed soft power approaches by the US. With her kind manners and strategic agenda, she attempted to move foreign perception of the US away from the “arrogant nation”<sup>53</sup> characterization President Bush manifestly criticized in his first election campaign. In order to demonstrate this commitment, Dr. Rice prioritized official international visits<sup>54</sup> to some of the countries of Latin America as early as April 2004, only four months after she began her term. This first tour, comprised of the visits to Brasilia, Bogotá, Santiago, and San Salvador, aimed to prove that the US and its president did not have any difficulty opening and sustaining dialogue

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<sup>51</sup> For Rice’s biography see: <http://www.biography.com/people/condoleezza-rice-9456857#early-life>

<sup>52</sup> See footnote 8, p.133.

<sup>53</sup> See footnote 3.

<sup>54</sup> See: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/trvl/c14226.htm>

with countries guided by exponents of left-wing parties, nor that they wanted to subvert the political order of the countries whose policies were not aligned to those of the Bush Administration.

Shortly thereafter, President Bush himself began to express a revised concept of US foreign policy. On January 20, 2005, the day of his second Inaugural Address, he stated that the only real concern of the US foreign policy “is to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture.”<sup>55</sup> This exact sentence inspired Secretary Rice to elaborate the so-called "transformational diplomacy."<sup>56</sup> In a speech at the Georgetown University, in Washington, DC, on January 18, 2006, the Secretary of State noted:

“Let me be clear, transformational diplomacy is rooted in partnership; not in paternalism. In doing things with people, not for them; we seek to use America's diplomatic power to help foreign citizens better their own lives and to build their own nations and to transform their own futures[...] Transformational diplomacy requires us to [...] work on the front lines of domestic reform as well as in the back rooms of foreign ministries. There are nearly 200 cities worldwide with over one million people in which the United States has no formal diplomatic presence. This is where the action is today and this is where we must be.”<sup>57</sup>

One of the main procedural points of this new diplomacy was the reshaping of US embassies around the world, owing to the emergence of a new international environment in the wake of the end of the Cold War. As a direct consequence of this policy change, Brazil was finally classified as a country with strategic importance, and saw an increase in the personnel of the US embassy in its territory, a significant gain for Latin America.

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<sup>55</sup> For the text of the Inaugural Address of 2005, see: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4460172>

<sup>56</sup> See: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/59306.htm>

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem.



Though it failed to coalesce, the principles of the FTAA, coupled with the new attitude espoused by the State Department under Rice, led to the lowering of ambitions regarding trade programs and an attempt to achieve bilateral cooperation at the regional level. This mutual recognition of the unfavourable historical and political circumstances of the era led to the signature of three bilateral trade agreements with Latin American countries: with Chile in 2004,<sup>58</sup> and with Peru<sup>59</sup> and Colombia<sup>60</sup> in 2006.

While the agreements noted above constitute significant diplomatic achievements, the greatest success of Bush Presidency in the region is the *Central American Free Trade Agreement* (CAFTA),<sup>61</sup> later renamed CAFTA-DR with the participation of Dominican Republic. The official negotiations for the agreement began on January 8, 2003 and included the US and five Central American States: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. While the original agreement was signed on May 2004, the Dominican Republic made overtures for its inclusion, resulting in the updated agreement, under the new name CAFTA-DR, which was signed on August 5, 2004 in Washington, D.C. Put into force in 2006, the main provisions of the CAFTA-DR were the gradual elimination of tariffs on consumer and industrial goods exported to the participant countries; and the promotion of regional stability, economic integration and development, and labour and environmental protection.<sup>62</sup> The magnitude of this success for the Bush Presidency is underscored by the following statements from the Office of the United States Trade Representative: “Central America and the Dominican Republic make up the 2nd-largest US export market in Latin America, behind only Mexico and larger than Brazil. The US exports more than \$15

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<sup>58</sup> See: <https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/chile-fta>

<sup>59</sup> See: <https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/peru-tpa>

<sup>60</sup> See: <https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/colombia-fta>

<sup>61</sup> See: [http://www.sice.oas.org/TPD/USA\\_CAFTA/USA\\_CAFTA\\_e.ASP](http://www.sice.oas.org/TPD/USA_CAFTA/USA_CAFTA_e.ASP)

<sup>62</sup> Precisely, the agreement entered into force in 2006 for the United States, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, for the Dominican Republic in 2007, and for Costa Rica in 2009. See: <http://www.export.gov/FTA/cafta-dr/index.asp>

billion annually to the region, making it America’s 13th-largest export market worldwide; CAFTA-DR is a larger US export market than Russia, India, and Indonesia combined.”<sup>63</sup> Chart 1.3.1<sup>64</sup> demonstrates the positive effects CAFTA-DR, graphing the data of US import/export for the area, from 2005 to 2012.

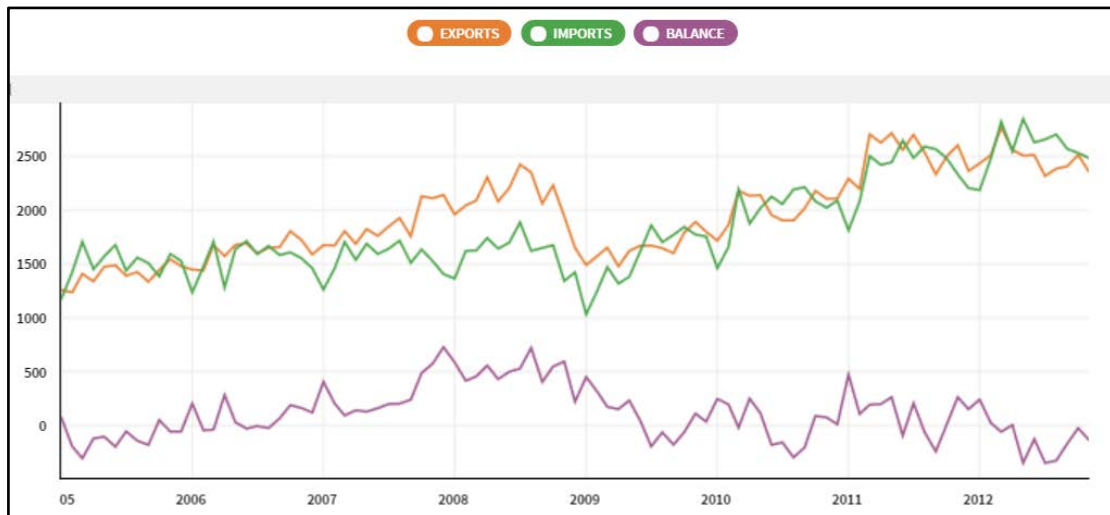


Chart 1.3.1: United States Import/Exports - CAFTA-DR (2005-2012).

Despite these foreign policy victories, the years of Bush Presidency were also marked by a fierce opposition conducted by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who took office in 1999. While I will examine this antagonistic relationship in greater detail in the third part of this thesis, a brief recounting is appropriate here. The skirmishes between the two Presidents began in 2002, when the US immediately recognized the Carmona government, which had come to power in a *coup d'état*. For this reason, Chavez began to deconstruct and thwart each one of the Bush Administration’s attempts to “reconquer” Latin America. Chavez further aggravated his position by establishing

<sup>63</sup> From the CAFTA Policy Brief – February 2005. See: [http://www.sice.oas.org/TPD/USA\\_CAFTA/USTR%20Briefing%20book/Overview.pdf](http://www.sice.oas.org/TPD/USA_CAFTA/USTR%20Briefing%20book/Overview.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> Data from the US Census Bureau, supplied by Quandl: [https://www.quandl.com/data/USCENSUS/IE\\_0017-United-States-Import-Exports-CAFTA-DR](https://www.quandl.com/data/USCENSUS/IE_0017-United-States-Import-Exports-CAFTA-DR)

close relationships with some of the *rogue States*, named in a US list,<sup>65</sup> fuelling American suspicions of Venezuelan ambiguity towards terrorism.<sup>66</sup> In order to address this challenge, Secretary Rice developed two approaches simultaneously: the *National Security Strategy 2006*, the State Department's annual global policy; and the so-called "inoculation strategy,"<sup>67</sup> a kind of *containment policy* specific to Venezuela.

From this point on, the US tried to adopt a double behaviour towards Venezuela, because on the one hand, there was the attempt to isolate Chavez politically, with the "inoculation strategy." To this end, President Bush and Secretary Rice undertook several trips to Venezuela's neighbouring countries, especially Brazil, with which the US signed an agreement on the trade of ethanol on March, 2007. In any case, these US efforts at isolating Venezuela did not yield remarkable results, because Brazilian President Lula, as well as other heads of state in the region, belonged to left-wing parties, which, though more moderate than Chavez's, were not completely indifferent toward his anti-Yankee rhetoric. Bush was similarly unsuccessful in obtaining the support of the Mexican Presidents Fox and later Calderon for this strategy, since the dialogue on immigration had stalled. On the other hand, in 2006, Chavez was still extremely strong, having won re-election for the third time and enjoying wide support of the lower segment of both Venezuela's population and of that of some of the other neighbouring countries of the area. Therefore, the US had to find a way to defuse the tensions between the two countries. Thomas Shannon, the Undersecretary for the Western Hemisphere Affairs, offered an indication of slightly more open attitude during a speech at the *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, underscoring the willingness of the Bush Administration to overcome its differences with Caracas and to

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<sup>65</sup> See: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/c14151.htm>

<sup>66</sup> A related aspect of this fear is the Triple Border region. See *Terrorist and organized crime groups in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of South America*, Defense Technical Information Center, (2003).

<sup>67</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/18/usa.venezuela>

deepen the dialogue on the cooperation.

Despite the array of evidence presented here, arguing that Condoleezza Rice's tenure as Secretary of State represents the Bush Administration's attempt to recover credibility in Latin America, many critics suggest that "Rice's *Transformational Diplomacy* initiative mainly comes down to serving the Bush Doctrine, and leaves out a number of other areas of crucial strategic importance to long-term US national interests."<sup>68</sup> The evidence for this claim is both positive and negative. Because of Dr. Rice's use of Bush's guidelines in NSS 2002 as the basis for her decision-making, she devoted much of her attention and commitment to the Middle East, leaving behind the Latin American countries. The lone exception is Brazil, a country considered strategic for the US interests, while others in Latin America were not. Many have even argued that most of the aid, plans, and agreements concluded by the US functioned solely to mask their continuing efforts to control and surveil unstable areas, pointing specifically to the *Plan Colombia* and an agreement with Paraguay that allowed US troops to patrol the area of the Triple Border as evidence.<sup>69</sup> The agreement with Paraguay is also considered a thinly-veiled excuse for US troop deployment in a territory quite near to Venezuela, an assessment in line with Chavez and his propaganda campaign against all US actions in Latin America under Bush.

As a further consequence of the void of the US engagement in the region, some of the Latin American countries started to look elsewhere for economic partnerships. Many countries, such as Venezuela, Cuba, and Brazil, focused their attention on China and Russia, countries actively seeking to expand their markets in the region. Far more dangerous were the friendly relationships cultivated in the period by Venezuela and

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<sup>68</sup> See: <http://www.coha.org/the-bush-white-house-condoleezza-rice-and-latin-america-transformational-diplomacy-and-other-fancy-talk/>

<sup>69</sup> See Footnote 66.

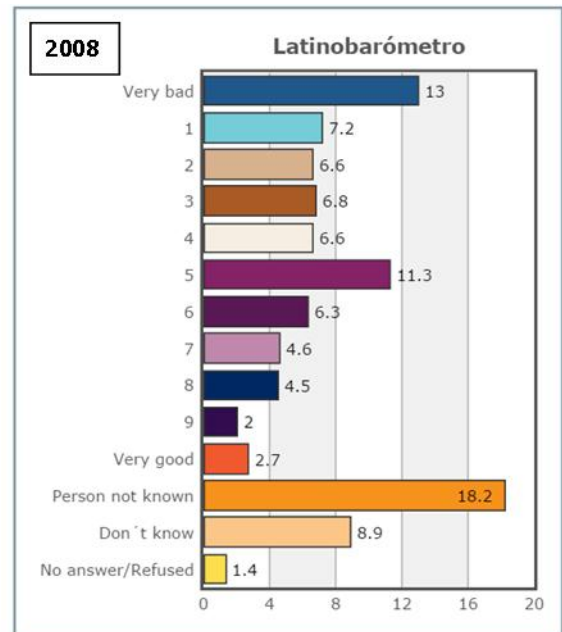
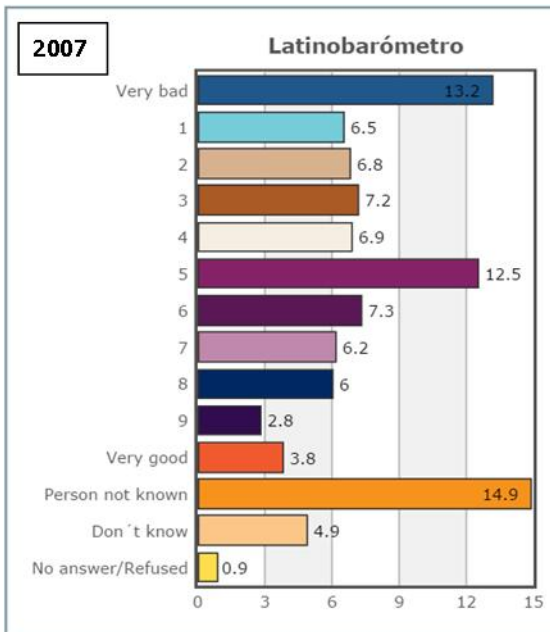
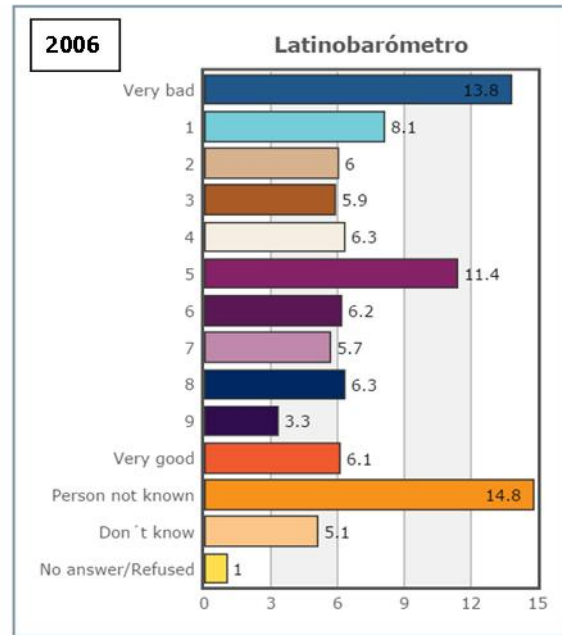
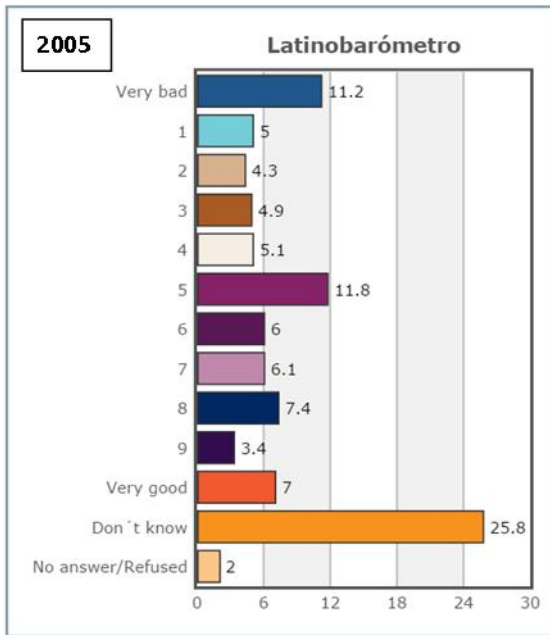
Nicaragua with Iran and Syria, which seem directly at odds with the Bush Administration's efforts to stem the spreading tide of terrorism around the globe.

Though less an interventionist in the domestic affairs of Latin American countries than his predecessors, when George W. Bush concluded his second term, he was considered one of the most unpopular US presidents in the opinion of Latin Americans,<sup>70</sup> as demonstrated by a survey conducted by *Latinobarómetro*. According to this survey, the Latin Americans polled were asked to evaluate George W. Bush on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 corresponds to "very bad" and 10 to "very good," with those unfamiliar with him or disinterested in foreign affairs able to indicate as much, as well. The data compiled for all Latin American countries from the surveys during the years 2005–2008 is aggregated and represented in the charts that follow.

Given the negative public opinion of President Bush in Latin America, the dramatic change in opinion following Barack Obama's election to the presidency is a striking contrast. Obama's immediate acquisition of the confidence and hopes of the peoples of Latin America, and whether or not, based on a consideration of his main foreign policy guidelines, he deserved such an overwhelmingly positive appraisal will be the topic of the next chapter of this thesis.

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<sup>70</sup> See Footnote 8, p.47.



Charts 1.3.2: Question of the survey: "I want you to evaluate George W. Bush on a scale from 0 to 10, in which 0 means "very bad" and 10 is very good, or do you not know the person well enough to respond?"<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Source: <http://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>

## Chapter 2: Obama's Election: Changes in Foreign Policy

In the previous Chapter, I presented a comprehensive accounting of the attitude and foreign policy of the United States toward Latin America from 1999 to 2007, that is, from the end of George W. Bush's first presidential election campaign until the end of his second term as president. This chapter will examine Barack Obama's presidency, the changes he brought, and the challenges he has been ready to face, in order to repair diplomatic relations with the countries of Latin America. While he chose to continue various plans and agreements begun by his predecessor, including the *Plan Colombia*; the *Merida Initiative* (discussed in greater depth in the section below); and the CAFTA-DR, President Obama was not afraid to restyling these approaches if necessary, or generate entirely new ones to address the peculiar and significant problems of the region.

### 2.1. Mexico and Brazil: New Strategic Partners

The election of Barack Obama as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America occurred on November 4, 2008. Obama beat his Republican opponent John McCain, winning 67.8% of the electoral votes and 52.86% of the popular votes.<sup>72</sup> Formerly the junior senator from Illinois, Obama became the first African-American president in US history. His election, was greeted with remarkable enthusiasm all over the world, and especially in Latin America (See charts 2.1.1 and 2.1.2).<sup>73</sup> This reception of the new president stands in sharp contrast to that of his outgoing predecessor: Obama's approval rating was inversely proportional to Bush's.

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<sup>72</sup> Source for the electoral results of 2008: <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/index.html>

<sup>73</sup> Source: <http://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>

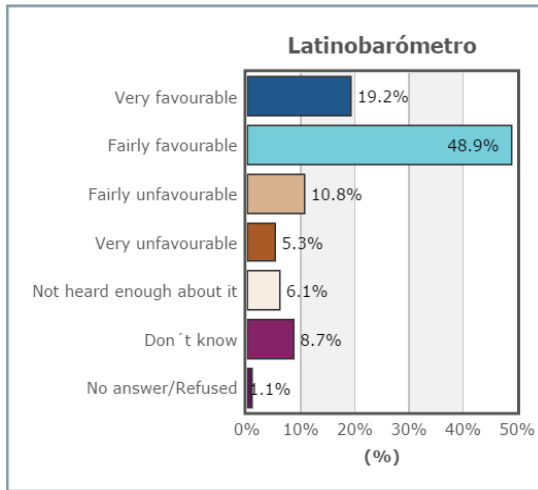


Chart 2.1.1: Question of the survey: "Would you say that you have a very favourable (1), some favourable (2), some unfavourable (3) or very unfavourable (4) about Barack Obama."

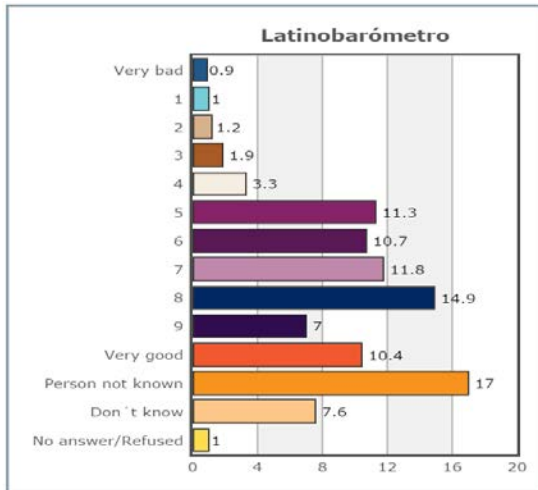


Chart 2.1.2: Question of the survey: "I want you to evaluate Barack Obama on a scale from 0 to 10, in which 0 means "very bad" and 10 is very good, or do you not know the person well enough to respond?"

As early as the primary elections during his presidential campaign, Obama demonstrated a more comprehensive attitude toward foreign policy, sharply criticizing the Republican obsession for the continuation of burdensome military commitments, such as the Second Iraq War, begun by the Bush Administration:

“When we’re having a debate with McCain, it is going to be much easier for the candidate who was opposed to the concept of invading Iraq in the first place to have a debate about the wisdom of that decision than having to argue about the tactics subsequent to the decision. Not only have we been diverted from Afghanistan, we’ve been diverted from Latin America. We contribute our entire



foreign aid to Latin America is \$2.7 billion, approximately what we spend in Iraq in a week. It is any surprise, then, that you've seen people like Hugo Chavez and countries like China move into the void, because we've been neglectful of that.”<sup>74</sup>

This statement reflects Obama's awareness of the necessity to reverse both the negative trends in the US foreign policy toward Latin America, as well as to address the dangerous consequences of those actions, in particular the involvement of volatile actors in the region and the further erosion of US presence by unfriendly nations.

An early and crucially important event for Obama's foreign relations approach to Latin America was the fifth Summit of the Americas, held in Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad and Tobago, in April 2009. This was the first gathering of all the heads of state from the American continents since the disastrous Summit of Mar del Plata in 2005, where the dream of the FTAA was extinguished. For Obama, president for only sixteen months, it was the opportunity to present himself to the Latin American leaders, and to impress them positively with the more attentive attitude his administration would take toward its neighbours. In remarks presented at the summit, Obama restated his conviction that, even if this was a “critical moment for the people of the Americas,”<sup>75</sup> because of the economic crisis and the security threat posed by terrorism, “this peril can be eclipsed by the promise of a new prosperity and personal security and the protection of liberty and justice for all the people of our hemisphere. That's the future that we can build together, but only if we move forward with a new sense of partnership.”<sup>76</sup> Though the summit ended with a general declaration of commitment rather than a series of specific agreements, gestures of symbolic

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<sup>74</sup> Source: Democratic debate at University of Texas in Austin Feb 21, 2008. See: [http://www.ontheissues.org/Archive/2008\\_Dems\\_Texas\\_Barack\\_Obama.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/Archive/2008_Dems_Texas_Barack_Obama.htm)

<sup>75</sup> See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-summit-americas-opening-ceremo>

<sup>76</sup> [ny](#)  
Ibidem.

importance, like a handshake between Chavez and Obama, pointed to a more relaxed atmosphere in diplomatic relations in the hemisphere.

The *National Security Strategy 2010* reflects the “new sense of partnership” Obama spoke of during the summit in fundamental ways. The document refers to the American commitment in the Middle East, saying that “these wars and our global efforts to successfully counter violent extremism are only one element of our strategic environment and cannot define America’s engagement with the world.”<sup>77</sup> In the NSS 2010, Obama also wrote about the emergence of new strategic actors, such as China, Russia, and India, explicitly including Brazil, a Latin American nation, as part of the group. He acknowledged the Brazilian leadership in the region, and he wished for a broader collaboration for facing together the common challenges.

Though Obama’s speeches and policy documents declare the shift in attention to the whole region he sought with his administration, Mexico and Brazil received special status as the main and privileged interlocutors of the US in the Latin American world. The United States’ relationship with Mexico, as discussed in the previous chapter, has been always marked by the immigration issue. Since the two countries share a 1989-mile border,<sup>78</sup> controlling the entire area and preventing a significant influx of illegal immigrants to the US are difficult and significant challenges. Some population statistics put the issue into proper perspective: in 2014, the estimated Hispanic population in the US was 55 million,<sup>79</sup> a significant minority, considering that the total US population in the same year was almost 320 million. These numbers begin to explain the diplomatic importance of the phenomenon of the Mexican immigration to the US, where people from Mexico or of Mexican descent comprise the great majority of immigrants to the

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<sup>77</sup> See the text of the NSS 2010, p.16: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> Source: [https://help.cbp.gov/app/answers/detail/a\\_id/578/~/\\_border-in-miles](https://help.cbp.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/578/~/_border-in-miles)

<sup>79</sup> Source: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/25/u-s-hispanic-population-growth-surge-cools/>

US (see Charts 2.1.3 and 2.1.4).

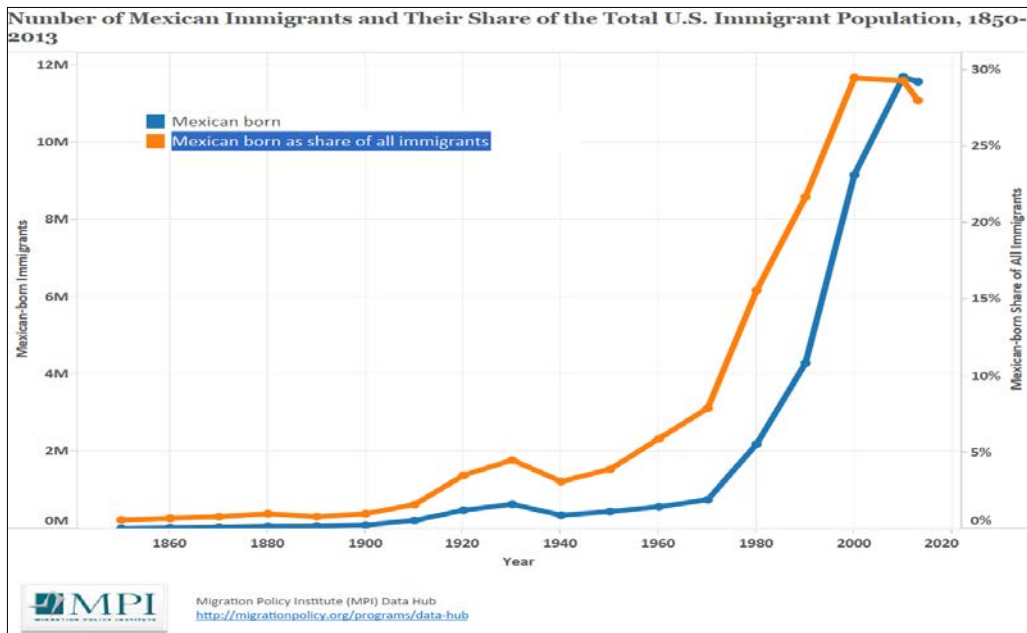


Chart 2.1.3: Number of Mexican Immigrants and Their Share of the Total US Immigrant Population, 1850-2013.<sup>80</sup>

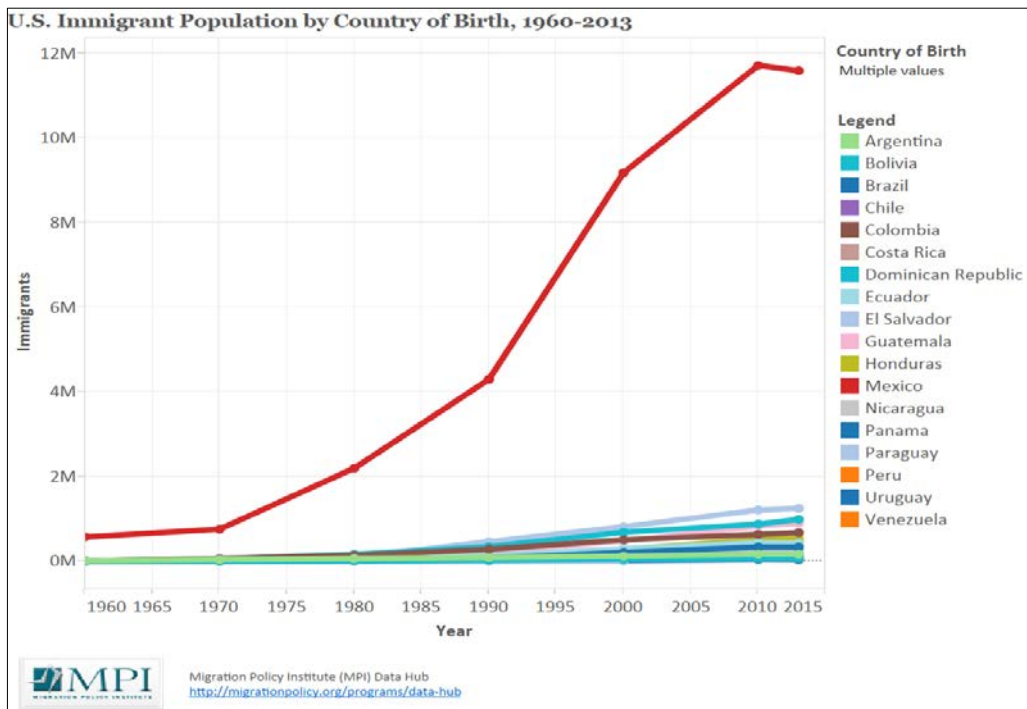


Chart 2.1.4: Number of Mexican Immigrants Compared to that of the other LAC countries.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Source: Migration Policy Institute. See: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/mexican-born-population-over-time?width=1000&height=850&iframe=true>

<sup>81</sup> Source: Migration Policy Institute. See: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigration-trends#source>

Given the importance of the phenomenon and its intricate relation with drug and arms trafficking, and other criminal activities, Obama decided to perpetuate the *Mérida Initiative*, a program started by his predecessor. This program is based on four pillars: disrupting organized criminal groups, institutionalizing the rule of law, creating a 21<sup>st</sup>-century border, and building strong and resilient communities. To fund the US part of this bilateral partnership, Congress allocated nearly \$2.5 billion from 2008 to 2015.<sup>82</sup> Beyond this initiative, owing to the critical nature of this struggle, both for Mexico and the US, the Obama Administration requested \$119 million from Congress for 2016 “to help advance justice sector reform, modernize Mexico’s borders (north and south), and support violence prevention programs.”<sup>83</sup>

Although a bilateral commercial and economic relationship had existed between the US and Mexico since the inauguration of NAFTA in 1994, it was further strengthened in September, 2013, when a new proposal, the *High Level Economic Dialogue* (HLED), was launched. However, the HLED has thus far produced only moderate effects in the fields of transport and telecommunications,<sup>84</sup> because the negotiations are still underway.

The United States’ other privileged partner in trade and international cooperation, as I said, is Brazil. Brazil experienced incredible economic growth during Lula’s presidency (2003–2009). As was discussed in section 1.3, the Bush Administration had begun changing the tenor of relations between the two nations with the agreement on ethanol. Currently, Brazil is the second largest economy in the Western Hemisphere, and the seventh largest in the world.<sup>85</sup> As a result of its prodigious

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<sup>82</sup> See: Seelke C. R., and Finklea K., *US-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond*, Washington DC, Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, (2010).

<sup>83</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>84</sup> See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/06/fact-sheet-us-mexico-high-level-economic-dialogue>

<sup>85</sup> See: <http://publications.atlanticcouncil.org/usbrazil/>

growth, Brazil has assumed a leadership role among Latin American nations, a springboard to increasing acknowledgments at the international level. Recognizing its increasing influence in the region, its enormous political and economic potential, and its abundance of natural resources, Obama sensitively decided to focus efforts on strengthening ties between Brazil and the US, developing three important and effective tools for implementing this policy decision in the economic dimension. The first, the *Joint Commission on Economic and Trade Relations*, stresses greater cooperation on economic and trade issues. Next, the *Commercial Dialogue*, attempts to ease the way to trade and investment. Finally, the CEO Forum, gathers the respective business communities, in order to talk about commercial and economic issues. The chart below demonstrates the success of this policy, measured in the sizable increase in the US trade with Brazil, from 2000 to 2015.



Chart 2.1.5: United States Import/Exports – Brazil.<sup>86</sup>

Another important field of cooperation between US and Brazil is the *Strategic Energy Dialogue*, which aims to strengthen the energy security of both countries and reduce carbon emissions, in the context of a shared commitment to the fight against

<sup>86</sup> Data from the US Census Bureau, supplied by Quandl: [https://www.quandl.com/data/USCENSUS/IE\\_3510-United-States-Import-Exports-Brazil](https://www.quandl.com/data/USCENSUS/IE_3510-United-States-Import-Exports-Brazil)

climate change.<sup>87</sup> Presidents Obama and Rousseff announced the creation of this Dialogue in March 2011. According to the White House, the priority areas of cooperation include oil and natural gas, biofuels, and clean energy and efficiency.<sup>88</sup>

Despite these advances in US-Brazil cooperation on economic and energy policy, on the broader political landscape, things are a bit more tense and uncertain, given Brazil's desire to play an important role in international multilateral forums. Brazil and other countries, like India and South Africa, leaders in their respective regions, maintain that the permanent members of the UN Security Council reflect an outdated world order. They are therefore urging that membership in the Security Council be broadened to include emerging regional powers, in order to widen the range of perspectives on new global challenges, so that more comprehensive and realistic solutions can be implemented. In response, the US and the Western powers in general, across the membership of the UN, have meted out other, more marginal roles in different multilateral frameworks to nations like Brazil, India, and South Africa, to divert attention from their request.

Despite the focus of this section on the successes of the Obama Administration in Latin America, particularly in its partnerships with Mexico and Brazil, the evolving foreign policy situation during Obama's presidency is not one marked solely by success. In the next section, I will focus on Venezuela and its allied states, and their posture toward the United States under Obama.

## **2.2. The Countries of the “Chavist Axis”**

The expressions “Chavist axis” and “Bolivarian axis” intended to describe the

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<sup>87</sup> See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/06/30/us-brazil-joint-statement-climate-change>

<sup>88</sup> See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/04/09/fact-sheet-us-brazil-strategic-energy-dialogue>

group of Latin American countries that rallied around former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez in his stand against the US role in Latin America, a posture begun by Chavez during the Bush Administration. Alternatively known among partisans of this philosophy as the “Axis of Hope,”<sup>89</sup> beyond Venezuela, member nations include: Cuba, led by the now-dynastic Castro government; Bolivia, since the election of Evo Morales; Nicaragua, with Daniel Ortega; and Ecuador, with Rafael Correa.

Undoubtedly, the pivotal figure and pulsating heart of this group of countries was Hugo Chavez, who, from his first election in 1998 until his death on March 5, 2013, committed himself and his country to the project of attaining autonomy from the US for the countries of Latin American. Chavez sought to liberate the region from the American oppressive presence, just as Simón Bolívar had done with the Spanish Empire. His aspiration was surely facilitated by the incredibly rich oil deposits in his country, resources that allowed him to perpetrate an unscrupulous “oil diplomacy” throughout the region and beyond. This ideology, however, was nurtured over time, becoming the basis of Chavez’s policymaking, since the initial relationships between Venezuela and the US, and Chavez and Bush, were quite relaxed, because both presidents were well aware of their shared and significant economic interests.

As was mentioned in Chapter One, the tipping point in the relationship between the two nations, and their presidents, came in 2002, with a *coup d’état*, and the US’s ill-advised and premature reaction to the overthrow of Chavez’s government. When he returned to power after only two days, Chavez clung to the US’s endorsement of the Carmona government, an action that engendered the tensions that would lead to Chavez’s campaign of anti-American propaganda. The reaction to this recognition was not limited to Venezuela and Chavez, but echoed throughout Latin America, much of

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<sup>89</sup> See Tariq A., *Pirates of the Caribbean: axis of hope*, Verso Books, (2008).

which discerned a familiar paternalistic and imperialistic attitude in the US reaction. The ripple effect continued, and cast the US in a bad light worldwide. Though the reason for this appraisal may, at first, appear to be a reaction to betrayal by an ally, in truth it is a response to hypocrisy on the part of the United States, which had always cast itself as the bravest defender of democracy and its values, and had, in this instance, favoured a government that sought to replace a democratically-elected president.

As has been previously noted, from the moment Chavez returned to power, his every effort was devoted to eliminating the American presence in Latin America. The most effective example of his attempts, the *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (ALBA), reflected the anti-American purposes of its inventor even more provocatively in its original name, where the word “alternative” appeared instead of “alliance.” Created in 2004 and consisting of an original exclusive membership of two nations, Cuba and Venezuela, ALBA was essentially the counterproposal of the FTAA, seen as an American initiative, the dream of which definitively ended in the same year. As time passed, its membership grew to include other countries of the Caribbean region, namely Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, S. Vicente y Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Grenada, and Saint Kitts and Nevis. In order to weaken the presence of the US oil companies in the area, in 2005 ALBA also launched the *Petrocaribe* initiative, the inspiring principles of which were Unity, Solidarity, Cooperation, Complementarity, Energy Security, Socioeconomic Development, Focus on the South.<sup>90</sup>

In order to raise capital to achieve ALBA’s aims of political, economic, commercial, and financial cooperation, Venezuelan oil was sold to the member countries at a more favourable price, one below market value. This tactic on Chavez’s

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<sup>90</sup> See: [http://www.petrocaribe.org/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/union/readmenu\\_acerca2.tpl.html&newsid\\_obj\\_id=627&newsid\\_temas=4](http://www.petrocaribe.org/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/union/readmenu_acerca2.tpl.html&newsid_obj_id=627&newsid_temas=4)



part had numerous collateral benefits, chief among which was aiding the spread of his anti-Yankee ideas. It further knit Chavez into the politics of other nations of Latin America, allowing him the capital to bankroll Ortega's political programs in Nicaragua,<sup>91</sup> in order to speed up and foster the country's economic growth, and to purchase part of the Argentinian public debt in 2005. Situations such as these made Venezuela a "last resort lender"<sup>92</sup> as an alternative to the IMF, further concentrating the solidarity among the countries of the South.

The advent of Obama only partially alleviated the friction between the two countries. The handshake shared by Obama and Chavez at the Summit of Trinidad and Tobago and the reciprocal decision to reopen embassies in 2009 seemed to suggest a slight thawing of US-Venezuela relations after the period of expulsions during Bush presidency. In reality, both Presidents continued to remain reciprocally distrustful. One of the main reasons for these doubts was Venezuela's advancement of its economic and commercial ties with specific foreign powers outside Latin America. Chavez made no secret of his personal ties with and official visits to countries like Iran, during the Ahmadinejad regime, and Syria, under Bashar al-Assad, both sworn enemies of the US, and both promptly invited by Chavez to the role of observer states of ALBA. Another factor preoccupying the US was the astonishing growth in the volume of commercial exchange between Venezuela and China, passing from 1.4 million dollars in 1974, to 4.3 billion dollars in 2006.<sup>93</sup> Below, two charts show Venezuelan imports and exports divided among the main partners. In both, China's importance is second only to the United States, a position it attained after only a few years of cooperation. A final obstacle to the normalization of US-Venezuela relations, and an extremely alarming

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<sup>91</sup> See: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2011/0407/Venezuela-s-Chavez-bankrolled-Nicaragua-with-1.6-billion-since-2007>

<sup>92</sup> See footnote 8, p.87.

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem, p. 168.

one, was Chavez’s fierce and obstinate “oil diplomacy.” Obama feared for the energy security of his country, since Venezuela was, and still is, one the main oil exporters in the US (chart 2.2.2).

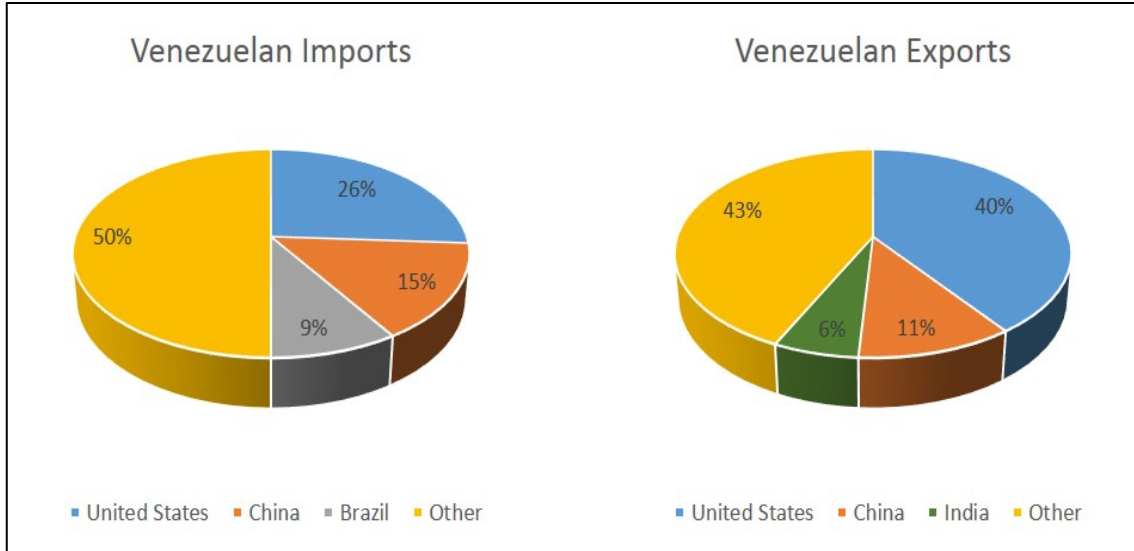


Chart 2.2.1: Venezuelan Import/Export updated on January of 2016.<sup>94</sup>

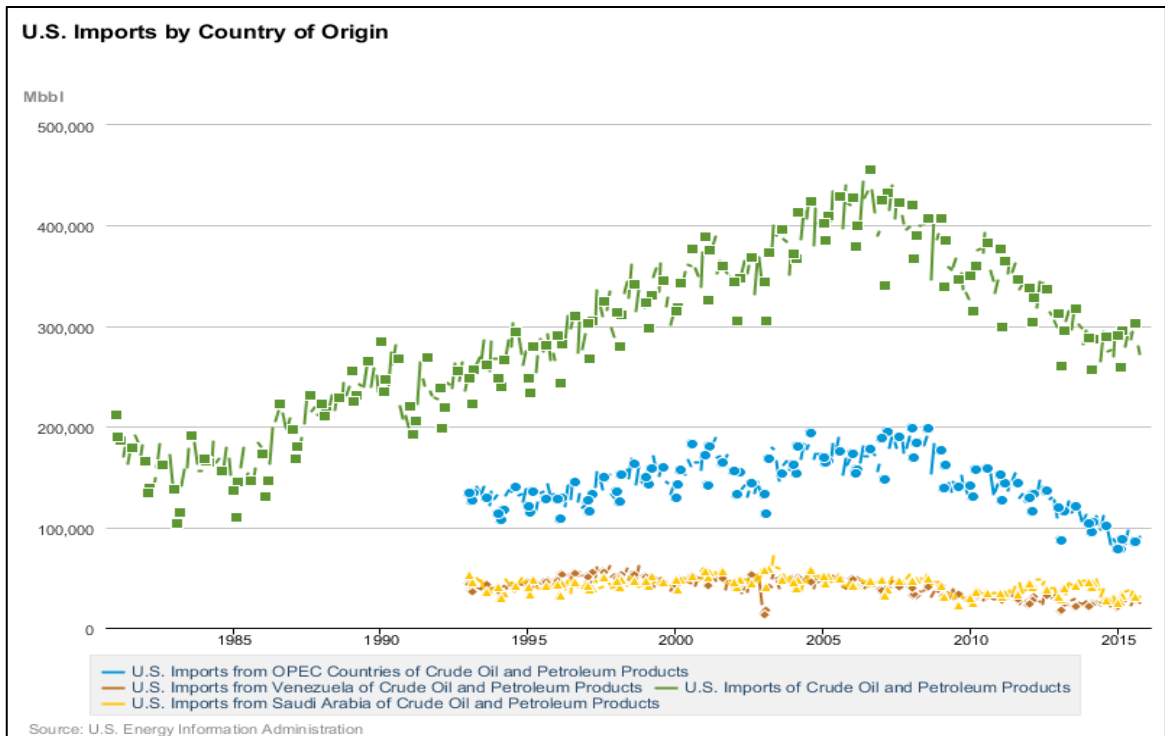


Chart 2.2.2: US Oil Imports by Country of Origin.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Source: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/search.aspx?q=venezuela>

Beyond these commercial and economic obstacles to the *rapprochement* between the two nations are Chavez's other, more clandestine activities in Latin America. In 2008, the discovery of a "secret archive"<sup>96</sup> during a raid on a FARC camp linked Chavez's government to the Colombian rebels. These files were collected and disseminated by the International Institute for Strategic Studies as a report entitled, "The FARC Files: Venezuela, Ecuador, and the Secret Archive of "Raúl Reyes." This document accused Venezuela of supporting the violent subversion of Colombian government by FARC groups through harbouring the groups, protecting them, and providing them sustenance and arms. The Venezuelan embassy in London labelled the report "unreliable,"<sup>97</sup> characterizing it as "an aggressive propaganda tool"<sup>98</sup> against Caracas.

Beyond these, two final issues of critical importance also remained within the tangled web of diplomatic relations between Caracas and Washington: the question of Cuba, and Obama's position on human rights in Venezuela. Cuba, Venezuela's founding partner in ALBA, had been under US embargo since 1962, a source of considerable tension between the island nation and the Western superpower. Chavez, alongside the leaders of the majority of the Latin American countries, repeatedly called for the repeal of this embargo. This position was made manifest at the Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain, in 2009, where Chavez and his more faithful allies refused to sign the summit's declaration in protest against the American arrogance that kept Cuba isolated economically and socially from the rest of the world. As Obama's presidency continued into its second term, American concern for the respect of human rights in

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<sup>95</sup> Source: US Energy Information Administration. See: [https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/pet\\_move\\_impcus\\_a2\\_nus\\_ep00\\_im0\\_mbbl\\_m.htm](https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/pet_move_impcus_a2_nus_ep00_im0_mbbl_m.htm)

<sup>96</sup> See Smith J. L., *The FARC Files: Venezuela, Ecuador and the Secret Archive of 'Raul Reyes'*, International Institute for Strategic Studies (2011).

<sup>97</sup> See: <http://colombiareports.com/venezuela-dismisses-unreliable-report-about-farc-links/>

<sup>98</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/11/venezuela-attacks-chavez-links-farc-files>

Venezuela grew, prompting him to issue an Executive Order (E.O.) on March 09, 2015. According to the White House press office, “the E.O. targets those involved in: actions or policies that undermine democratic processes or institutions; significant acts of violence or conduct that constitute a serious abuse or violation of human rights, including against persons involved in anti-government protests in Venezuela; actions that prohibit, limit, or penalize the exercise of freedom of expression or peaceful assembly; or public corruption by senior officials within the Government of Venezuela.”<sup>99</sup> The E.O. poses sanctions on this latter group, seizing assets owned by these corrupt officials within the US, prohibiting US citizens and entities from conducting business with these officials, and blocking their possible entry into the United States.

In this portion of chapter two, I have compiled a complex list of challenges posed by the countries of the “Chavist axis” and, above all, by Venezuela under Chavez, to the US, and to Obama Presidency in particular, to the normalization of diplomatic relations between the US and Venezuela. As the mastermind of the majority of the economic and political actions affecting Latin American relations with the US, Chavez occupied a unique position until his death in 2013. After this, the sheen of his Bolivarian alliance has dulled. In the next portion of this chapter, I will examine the current situation in Venezuela and the implications for its regional leadership.

### **2.3. The Plurality of Actors: the OAS and the EU**

One among the several important innovations of the Obama’s foreign policy toward Latin America is the new attention to the OAS, and his willingness to accept and encourage the involvement of the European Union in the region.

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<sup>99</sup> See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/09/fact-sheet-venezuela-executive-order>

The Organization of American States, the oldest regional international organization in the world, includes 35 independent nations over North and South America. It is the result of a long and complicated process<sup>100</sup> of negotiation and deliberation, culminating in the signing of OAS Charter in 1948, at the conclusion of the Ninth Pan-American Conference. The organization had five main objectives: the promotion of democracy, the defence of human rights, the guarantee of a multidimensional approach to security, the fostering of development, and the support of Inter-American legal cooperation. As the most powerful and influential member country and its main sponsor, providing almost 60% of its total budget<sup>101</sup>, the US has traditionally and historically dominated the OAS. More recently, as a consequence of the Bush presidency's effect on popular opinion of the US, the OAS and all its initiatives incorporating the presence of the US suffered a parallel loss of credibility and reliability among the Latin American countries.

Since Obama's election, he has channelled considerable efforts into the revitalization of the OAS, to combat its declining influence and that of the Summit of the Americas. At the time of his inauguration in January 2009, a Summit of the Americas had not occurred since the disastrous 2004 summit in Mar del Plata, where the FTAA sank. Obama's desire to resuscitate the OAS is clear, considering the dramatic increase in US funding allocated to the organization, as compared with the previous funding levels under the Bush Administration (see chart 2.3.1). This infusion of capital can be understood as part of the Obama Administration's broad-based attempt to re-establish a positive image of the US in Latin America, precisely through the OAS,

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<sup>100</sup> The Pan-American conferences happened between 1826 and 1889, were several meetings between American states held to discuss problems of common defense and juridical matters. They further extended their aims to the reciprocal assistance, and solidarity. See: <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Pan-American-conferences>

<sup>101</sup> Source: OAS Program Budget. See: <http://www.oas.org/budget/>

rather than through direct US intervention into the domestic affairs of the other member states.

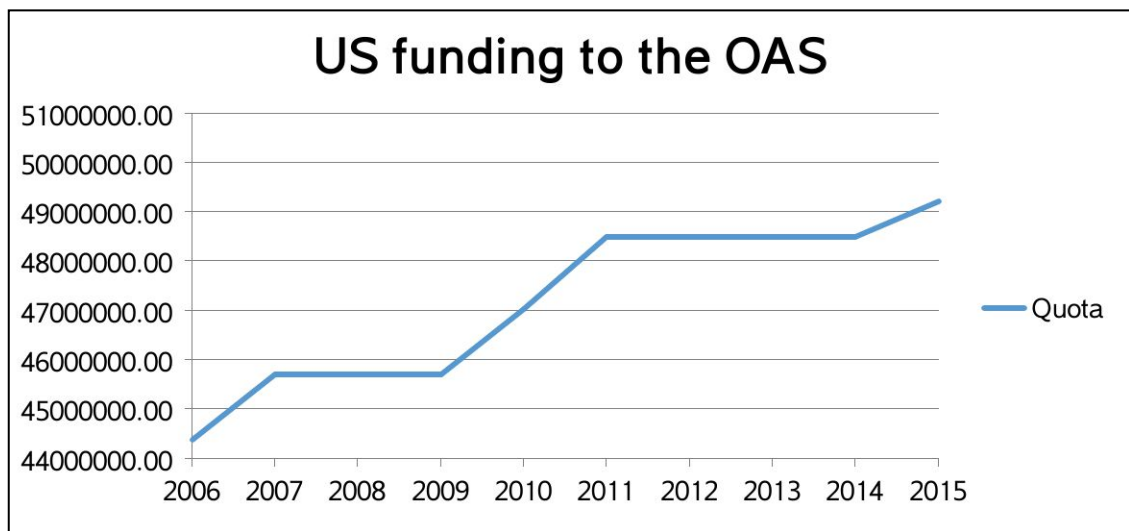


Chart 2.3.1.: US funding to the OAS from 2006 to 2015.<sup>102</sup>

This backdoor approach to renewed positive appraisal of the US seems to underlie a series of events and reactions set in motion in 2009, the first year of Obama's presidency. In that year, the *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights*, an autonomous organ of the OAS in charge of the examination of the status of human rights in the member countries and of their protection, issued a report on Venezuela, which the newly-elected president attempted to substantiate. This report analysed Venezuela along a variety of human rights dimensions, including: political rights and participation in public life; the independence of public powers; freedom of thought and expression; freedom of association; the right to life; the right to human treatment, and to personal liberty and security, within which sphere it focused particularly on the living conditions of prisoners; and finally, the economic, social, and cultural rights. Across this array of dimensions, in almost every area, Venezuela did not receive a positive

<sup>102</sup> See footnote 101

assessment from the IACHR.<sup>103</sup> Obama expressed his concern for the critical situation the report described, hoping Venezuelan government would adopt a changed course of action. When this did not occur, Obama took stronger action as a way of persuading the government to take severe measures to ensure respect for human rights. He decided to impose some economic sanctions on the country, in the form of the executive order he issued in March 2015 (discussed in the previous section of this chapter). Still fearing impropriety and perhaps seeking to discredit the troublesome neighbour government, Obama called for the intervention of the OAS as a credible observer to monitor the Venezuelan National Assembly elections, held last December.

A further example of OAS involvement in the political life of one of its member states is the Honduran crisis of 2009. In June 2009, Roberto Micheletti seized power in Honduras, arresting then-president Manuel Zelaya with the support of the military. Zelaya had attempted to eliminate presidential term limits through a non-binding referendum to modify the Constitution, which expressly prohibited presidential re-election in an unmodifiable passage. Honduras' Supreme Court ordered Zelaya's arrest, which was accomplished by the armed forces of the nation. This action, coupled with the declaration of a state of siege by Micheletti, led the international community to real concern,<sup>104</sup> prompting both the OAS and the EU to intervene. The OAS suspended Honduras from the organization and assigned the task of verifying the conditions for its readmission to Secretary General José Miguel Insulza. Simultaneously, the EU decisively condemned Micheletti's government. Among all the EU countries, Spain was the most alarmed and disappointed, even withdrawing its ambassadors from Tegucigalpa. Meanwhile, the OAS continued its mediation with the Costa Rican

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<sup>103</sup> For the full text of the report, see: <http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Venezuela2009eng/VE09.TOC.eng.htm>

<sup>104</sup> See footnote 8, p.231.

president, reaching an agreement that provided for the fair execution of the scheduled elections and the establishment of a coalition government, as a response to the crisis. Despite this agreement between the OAS and the Honduran president, Spain and many Latin American countries saw these conditions as insufficient redress, calling instead for the restoration of the previous status quo. Elections were held on November, 2009, and Porfirio Lobo became president. Eventually the EU, Spain included, agreed to reinstate normal diplomatic relations with Honduras. A year after the crisis, the Insulza commission delivered a report to the Permanent Council of the OAS, asserting that Honduras was entitled to be readmitted to the organization, on the condition that it allowed Zelaya to re-enter the country. Zelaya returned in May 2011,<sup>105</sup> and Honduras was readmitted to the OAS on November 16, 2011.<sup>106</sup>

The last case deserving mention in this section is Cuba. The Caribbean island was excluded from membership in the OAS after 1962, owing to the US's pre-eminent position within the organization and the strictures of its policies and embargo against the Communist government. On June 3, 2009, Cuba was readmitted to the organization, with the stipulations laid down in these words of resolution: "the participation of the Republic of Cuba in the OAS will be the result of a process of dialogue initiated at the request of the Government of Cuba, and in accordance with the practices, purposes, and principles of the OAS."<sup>107</sup> This readmission was the fruit both of a long campaign of advocacy carried on by the other Latin American countries and of the thawing of relations between the US and Cuba. As a priority of Obama since his election, this move was possible because of changes at top levels of Cuban government, and because he sought to work for improved relations with the Latin American world through the

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<sup>105</sup> See: <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/americas/05/28/honduras.zelaya/>

<sup>106</sup> See: [http://www.oas.org/en/member\\_states/member\\_state.asp?sCode=HON](http://www.oas.org/en/member_states/member_state.asp?sCode=HON)

<sup>107</sup> See Resolution on Cuba, AG/RES. 2438 (XXXIX-O/09).



agency of the OAS. As expressed in the conditional language of the resolution, the island must take the initiative itself, and promise the international community the improvement of the conditions of human rights within its borders. It is therefore not surprising that Cuba still has not taken part in any of the meetings of the organization. Cuba and its *Líder Máximo* view the olive branch extended to them by the OAS, always considered as U.S.-dominated, as a "Trojan horse" for American interference in the country,<sup>108</sup> and have said the nation has no interest in re-joining the group. Despite these strong pronouncements, movement to the contrary can be discerned: last year, Raul Castro decided to participate to the Seventh Summit of the Americas in Panama City, Panama, on April 10-11, 2015.

These changes in consideration of Cuba are not solely attributable to the Obama Administration and the OAS. Another important player in the achievement of these results is the EU, an entity to which both Obama and some of sectors of Cuban society look as a mediator. Member nations such as Spain, Portugal, and Italy, with their historical and cultural ties to Latin America, are ideally situated to serve in this mediating capacity between the US and Cuba as relations continue to thaw. For its own part, since 1996, the EU has applied a "Common Position" toward the island nation. This policy aims at encouraging peaceful change in Cuba, especially in the area of human rights, through a systematic dialogue with the government, the Cuban people, and politically dissident groups.<sup>109</sup> Beyond the scope of this dialogue lie the considerable economic interests of the EU toward the normalization of the diplomatic relations with Cuba, especially in the tourism sector, a key consideration in the intensity of EU efforts in this mission. Cuba's unique situation, inspiring coordinated action on the parts of the US, the OAS, and the EU, singles it out as the clearest and most recent

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<sup>108</sup> See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8082146.stm>

<sup>109</sup> See: <http://www.coha.org/the-european-union-and-cuba-the-common-position/>

example of this new trend of cooperation among those players, a fitting culmination for the discussion international actors operating in Latin America in this section. A step-by-step analysis of the process undertaken by Cuba and the US will be examined in the second part of my thesis.

Here, in summarizing this section, it is important to note that a bifurcation in the Obama Administration's foreign policy with regard to Latin America exist. This chapter has specifically engaged those foreign policy decisions that did not encounter much opposition within the United States itself. The next chapter will deal with immigration and international commerce, two unique and challenging obstacles to the improvement of US-Latin American relations, which, by their very nature, are more difficult to face and solve, because of their more direct effect on American society.

## **Chapter 3: Crucial Challenges for the US Action in Latin America**

This chapter seeks to analyze the critical issues that Obama, in the last year of his presidency, will need to face, and likely pass along to his successor, in order to achieve the long-awaited *rapprochement* with Latin America. Here, I will analyse immigration and international commerce policy, the two fundamental areas in which Obama and the US must make progress. Resolving both these contentious issues will be exceptionally difficult, given Congress's historic inability to reach compromises on them.

First and foremost, the eyes of the world are fixed on Cuba. Cuba's Latin American neighbours and the international community alike are eager to know what the outcome of the attempt at normalizing relations between the island nation and the United States will be. The most pressing question seems to be: will Obama be able to reach a compromise with Raul Castro for the lifting of the embargo, or not? The difficulty on the American side is in finding and steering a middle course between imposing too many conditions Cuban and being satisfied with the few economic reforms already launched by the government of the island. Given the complexity and relevance of this issue, I will leave it aside here and explore it in the requisite depth in the entire second part of my thesis.

### **3.1. A Regional Perspective**

This section will outline a comprehensive political and economic regional framework within which the US needs to respond to the challenges posed by Latin America. With the complex array of phenomena that described this framework, the

most sensitive and noteworthy is the so-called “Pink Wave” or “Pink Tide,”<sup>110</sup> the election of several leftist leaders and government in Latin America that began with Hugo Chavez’s success in Venezuela in 1999. Beyond Venezuela and Chavez, the main nations and actors within this phenomenon are: Argentina, with the Kirchners; Brazil, first with Lula and then with Dilma Rousseff; Bolivia, with Evo Morales; and finally Ecuador, with Rafael Correa. The commonalities that unite these nations within the “Pink Wave” are:<sup>111</sup>

1. Shared foreign policy guidelines directed toward strengthening regional ties among the countries of the LAC through increased commercial and political agreements, conceived of as alternatives to similar initiatives designed and guided by the US.
2. Communal strategies to deal with existing and future economic growth, based on export expansion to the wider continental market, obtained by those agreements from point 1. These strategies would need to shape and manage both extant (as in the case of Brazil) and future pronounced economic growth, using the growth rates of the rising Asian countries rather than those of European or Northern American ones as a pattern.
3. Collective efforts to achieve social change through the impressive redistribution of wealth to the lower classes, using new mechanisms of taxation, and through increased access to a wider range of social services.

This array of policies and strategies on the part of the “Pink Tide” countries constitute a real challenge to the US, as an alternative to the American economic and social model. Although this seems monolithic, the application of this list of principles differs among the nations of the “Pink Tide,” which tailor their approaches to the particular needs and

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<sup>110</sup> See: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35060390>

<sup>111</sup> See: <http://www.cittafuture.org/10/09-II-cammino-dell'America-latina.html>

priorities of each country. The two most prominent examples, Brazil and Argentina, should be considered first. Brazil's turn toward these principles aligns with the election of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, from the Workers' Party, in 2002. Lula, riding the wave of the economic success and incredible growth of his country, launched some initiatives aimed at redistributing income to the lower brackets of the population. Both he and his successor, Dilma Rousseff, worked to extend and universalize education at a variety of levels.<sup>112</sup> They also created several mechanisms for greater inclusion where accessibility and availability of social services were concerned. Their social democratic leadership in Brazil has demonstrated a significant commitment to achieving pre-eminence in the region, especially in its participation in existing institutions created for regional integration. These ambitions, coupled with the country's high economic potential and location within the LAC region, have led Brazil to prominence, fuelling international impressions of its potential as the leading nation of the LAC, a possible detriment to the United States' position, ambition, and interests there. This future is by no means set in stone, as impeachment proceedings for corruption loom over the head of President Rousseff,<sup>113</sup> the results of which might redirect the course of social democracy in Brazil.

The other "Pink Tide" giant is Argentina. In 2003, when Nestor Carlos Kirchner took office as president, he found and had to face an incredibly harsh economic, social, and political situation. The country's economy was in crisis, plummeting in the space of a few short years and leaving Argentina with an incredibly high unemployment rate (more than 30%),<sup>114</sup> and more than half of its population below the poverty line (see chart 3.1.1).

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<sup>112</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>113</sup> See: <http://cambridgeglobalist.org/2016/02/01/latin-america-why-the-left-refuses-to-be-left-out/>

<sup>114</sup> See footnote 111.

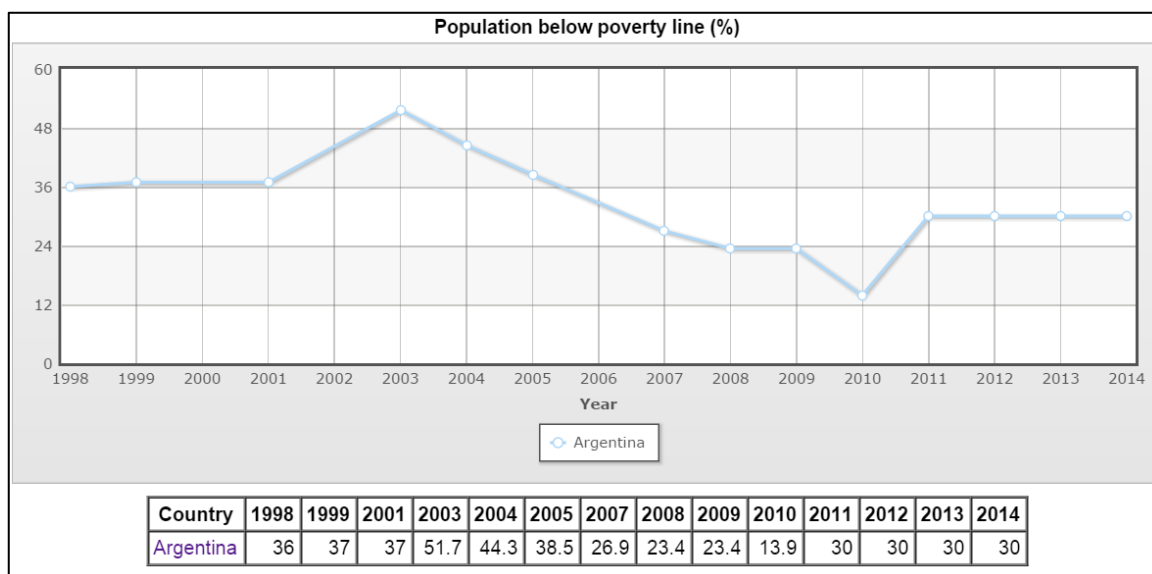


Chart 3.1.1: Population below the poverty line in Argentina (1998-2014).<sup>115</sup>

Kirchner and his wife, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, who succeeded him in 2007, faced the crisis by renegotiating the Argentine debt on the basis of the state's actual capacity to repay it. Furthermore, as their counterparts in Brazil had done, they launched several plans against the marginalisation and the exclusion of the poorest ones.<sup>116</sup> Despite the populist cast of these programs, Mrs. Kirchner also inaugurated some measures, such as the 2009 “Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual” (Audio-Visual Communication Services Law), interpreted by most as authoritarian.<sup>117</sup> The aforementioned law limits the number of licenses that a single could own, thus dividing control of the media between more entrepreneurs, in order to attenuate the negative campaigns some of the previous owners were carrying on. Furthermore, “Presidenta” Kirchner never hid her negative feelings about the US, demonstrating them especially in her critical reaction to Obama’s Executive Order against Venezuela,<sup>118</sup>

<sup>115</sup> See: <http://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?c=ar&v=69>

<sup>116</sup> See footnote 111.

<sup>117</sup> See: [http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/12/151230\\_argentina\\_ley\\_medios\\_macri\\_vs](http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/12/151230_argentina_ley_medios_macri_vs)

<sup>118</sup> See: <http://www.limesonline.com/rubrica/obama-raul-castro-e-il-vertice-storico-in-cui-non-si-e-deciso-niente>

discussed in the section 2.2. However, despite the great success enjoyed by Mrs. Kirchner and her party and their efforts for the people of Argentina, those same people chose Mauricio Macri, the first non-Peronist candidate in years, in their 2015 presidential elections. If he manages to stay in power, since the outcomes of the elections were really split in half, he promised that he will rebalance foreign relations by reorienting ties to foreign powers, deepening those with the US and Europe while lessening those with China, Venezuela, and Russia.<sup>119</sup>

The minor players in the “Pink Tide” are Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. While the third portion of this thesis will investigate Venezuela’s role in posing threats and challenges to the US in Latin America in greater depth, a few notes here will underscore its connections to the regional policies that link the “Pink Tide” nations. As I have said before, Venezuela’s previous leader, Hugo Chavez, had been the pulsating heart of the movement for deeper regional integration, for anti-American sentiments, and for the redistribution of income to the poor. In fact, for example, in 2006 Chavez’s government managed to reach the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating poverty, by reducing the number of people living in extreme poverty to 11.1%<sup>120</sup> of the population. It was on the strength of Hugo Chavez’s persuasive charisma, not to mention the common ground of ideological values, expressed in the three policy points delineated at the start of this section, that Bolivia and Ecuador were drawn into the “Pink Tide.” Each nation adapted those principles in its own way, to fit the unique challenges its people face. In Bolivia, Evo Morales, considered “the reddest”<sup>121</sup> on the political spectrum of Latin American leaders, focused much of his attention on issues regarding the indigenous population of the country. Being the first president elected

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<sup>119</sup> See: <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21679192-mauricio-macris-remarkable-victory-will-rev-erberate-across-south-america-ebbing-pink>

<sup>120</sup> See: <http://www.slideshare.net/LinksSocialism/venezuela-and-the-millennium-development-goals>

<sup>121</sup> See: <https://news.vice.com/article/the-year-the-pink-tide-turned-latin-america-in-2015>

from an indigenous group,<sup>122</sup> in a country where the majority of the overall population is indigenous, Morales has easily enjoyed the support of the masses. Morales has also managed to lift the country's economy and gain the approval of world financial institutions that consider him economically prudent.<sup>123</sup> In Ecuador, Rafael Correa took office in 2007. He inherited a country among the most stricken by the international economic crisis, owing to its heavy dependency on foreign aid.<sup>124</sup> In spite of this obstacle, Correa obtained surprising results in his efforts to curtail the unemployment rate, eradicate poverty, and overhaul the education and healthcare systems. From the beginning of his first term as president, Correa was invested in environmentalism, promising not to exploit the oil deposits found in the Natural Reserve of Yasuní in the Amazon rainforest, in order to preserve nature and the environment. Unfortunately, recent hopes of receiving foreign investments for the care and maintenance of the Reserve having been dashed, Correa has reversed course and ended the initiative, allowing drilling in the area by 2016.<sup>125</sup>

Many believe the “Pink Tide” is ebbing,<sup>126</sup> because its leaders are disappearing from the political scene, being replaced, in some cases, by an inadequate “second generation.”<sup>127</sup> Two points tend to argue otherwise.<sup>128</sup> First, this trend is not only a matter of charismatic leaders, but also of cultural values internalized by the people. Second, the drastic changes in the economic environment of Latin America, most notably its increased integration, are so fundamental and entrenched that, if the US wanted to recover the economic and political position it enjoyed in the area in past

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<sup>122</sup> See: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/b4c2218a-50d2-11e5-b029-b9d50a74fd14.html#axzz3zL5cHh4p>

<sup>123</sup> See footnote 121.

<sup>124</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/feb/15/rafael-correa-ecuador-elections>

<sup>125</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/may/23/ecuador-amazon-yasuni-national-park-oil-drill>

<sup>126</sup> See: <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21679192-mauricio-macris-remarkable-victory-will-revitalize-across-south-america-ebbing-pink>

<sup>127</sup> See footnote 110.

<sup>128</sup> See: <http://www.coha.org/the-pink-tide-recedes-end-of-an-era/>



decades, it would need to advance really innovative ways and persuasive agreements to accomplish this goal.

While this section has presented a general outline of the political, ideological, and economic situation of the region, the next two sections will instead develop the discourse in detail, focusing on immigration and commercial policies and suggesting partial solutions or approaches to them. These issues are much more specific challenges to the US from Latin America.

### **3.2. Immigration Policy**

This section will explore the general landscape of immigration from Latin America to the US as a crucial item on the agenda of the current president, and likely on that of his successor. In order to achieve a more comprehensive and complete description of the issue, first, a detailed historical overview of the situation prior to the election of Barack Obama will be provided. As discussed in Chapter One, soon after George W. Bush took office in 2001, he made his first official trip to Mexico, using his selection of destination, a departure from that of his predecessors, to declare that the US had a “special relationship” with its neighbour to the south. In meeting with his Mexican counterpart, “amigo” Vicente Fox, both on his occasion and many others, the principal topic of conversation was the thorny issue of immigration. In the course of those meetings, Bush promised several times that he would develop a new plan for immigration, one which would solve the problem of legal and illegal immigration between the two nations, as well as address the issue of regularization of the numerous illegal Mexican immigrants already residing in the US. Despite these promises, Bush’s plan failed to materialize. His various attempts to enact new immigration reform came to nothing, because of resistance from some of the members of his own Republican

Party in Congress.<sup>129</sup> They disagreed with the idea of widening immigration policy, specifically provisions that would naturalize some of the “undocumented” and launch some guest-worker programs.<sup>130</sup>

These problems notwithstanding, any small glimmer of hope Bush may have had for reaching an agreement with the Congress on immigration disappeared after the September 11 attacks. Suddenly, the defence of national borders and stricter controls and investigations within the country to identify potential threats were the only priorities. As it had historically done before, this set of priorities quickly devolved into a sort of witch hunt against strangers, leading numerous illegal immigrants were deported back to their countries.<sup>131</sup> The year 2006 marked the lowest point in Bush’s immigration policy. In the months before the mid-term elections, fearful of losing consensus, he launched “Operation Jump Start.” This program, directed at securing the southern border against the entry of illegal immigrants more than before, included an initial deployment of 6,000 National Guard troops, thereby tripling the size of the border patrol to 18,000.<sup>132</sup> To aid the mission further, both as a blockade and an armature for surveillance, a series of fences was also constructed. This initiative by the US government provoked huge protests, both within the US and also in many Latin American countries, chiefly Mexico, where the actions were perceived as disrespectful and terribly offensive. Despite this resoundingly negative reaction, construction of fences and walls, now totalling 650 miles of the 1,954-mile boundary,<sup>133</sup> continued, to the delight of Republicans, who still affirm they want to finish the work. This Republican position has drawn sharp criticism, both because many sectors of American

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<sup>129</sup> See Gutiérrez R., *George W. Bush and Mexican Immigration Policy*, (2007). See: [http://www.cairn-int.info/article-E\\_RFEA\\_113\\_0070--george-w-bush-and-mexican-immigration.htm](http://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_RFEA_113_0070--george-w-bush-and-mexican-immigration.htm)

<sup>130</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>131</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>132</sup> See: <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/08/20060803-7.html>

<sup>133</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/01/unfinished-us-mexico-border-wall-texas-secure-fence-act>

society oppose the project entirely, and because of the enormous cost the completion of such an endeavour would have. According to the Government Accountability Office, the actual construction cost for the remaining 1,300 miles wall could be as high as \$16 million per mile, with a total price tag of \$15 to \$25 billion,<sup>134</sup> before considering the additional expense of maintenance and the salaries of the personnel assigned to the task of patrolling the area, which would raise the price tag even more.

This was the status of immigration Obama inherited when he took the oath of office. The importance of the issue for the US has always been clear, because of the profound impact immigration has on many aspects of the internal workings of the United States, chief among which is the economy. While the total number of immigrants in the US, which I reported in section 2.1, is undoubtedly great, here I would like to highlight four other statistical dimensions of the immigration issue: the numbers regarding the illegal immigrant by country (chart 3.2.1), the remittances inflowing (3.2.2) and outflowing (3.2.3), and the impact of immigration on the civilian labour force (3.2.4).

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<sup>134</sup> See: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/09/this-is-what-trumps-border-wall-could-cost-us.html>

## Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States

Demographics	Estimate	% of Total
Unauthorized Population	11,022,000	100%
<b>Top Countries of Birth</b>		
Mexico	6,194,000	56%
Guatemala	704,000	6%
El Salvador	436,000	4%
Honduras	317,000	3%
China	285,000	3%
<b>Regions of Birth</b>		
Mexico and Central America	7,797,000	71%
Caribbean	260,000	2%
South America	690,000	6%
Europe/Canada/Oceania	423,000	4%
Asia	1,509,000	14%

Chart 3.2.1: Amount of illegal immigrants by country (2013).<sup>135</sup>

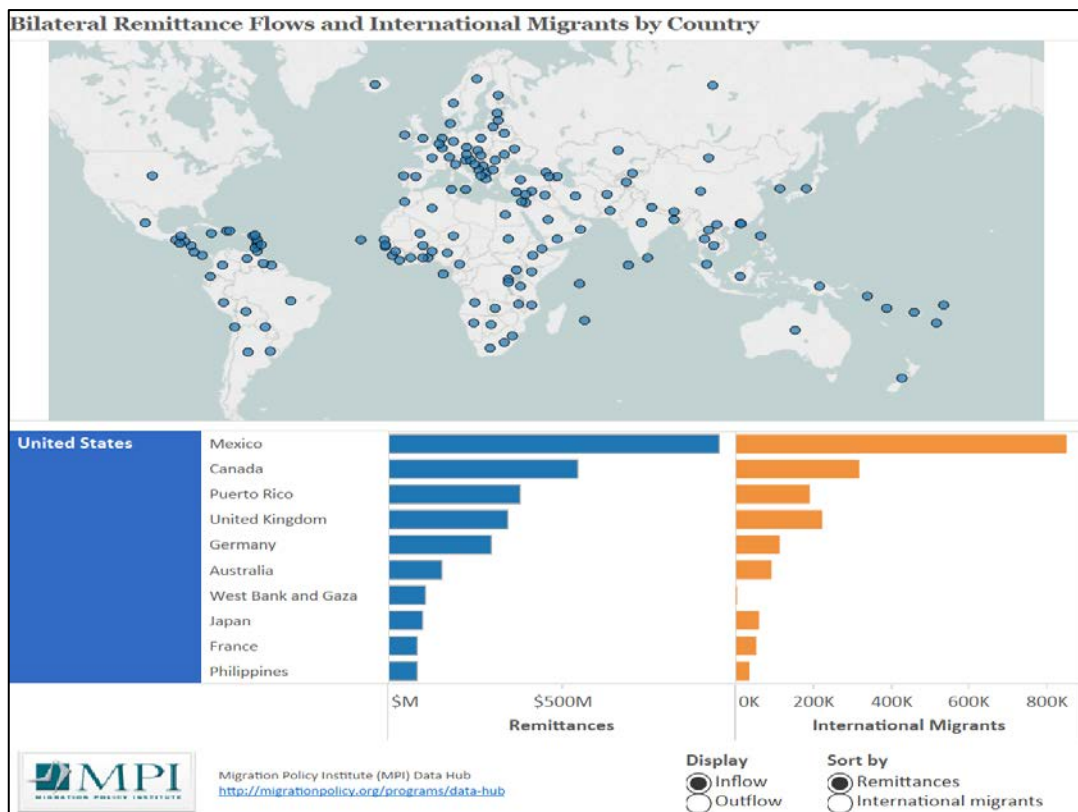


Chart 3.2.2: Inflow of remittances in the US (2013).<sup>136</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Source: Migration Policy Institute. See: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/authorized-immigrant-population/state/US>

<sup>136</sup> Source: Migration Policy Institute. See: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/bal-remittances-guide>

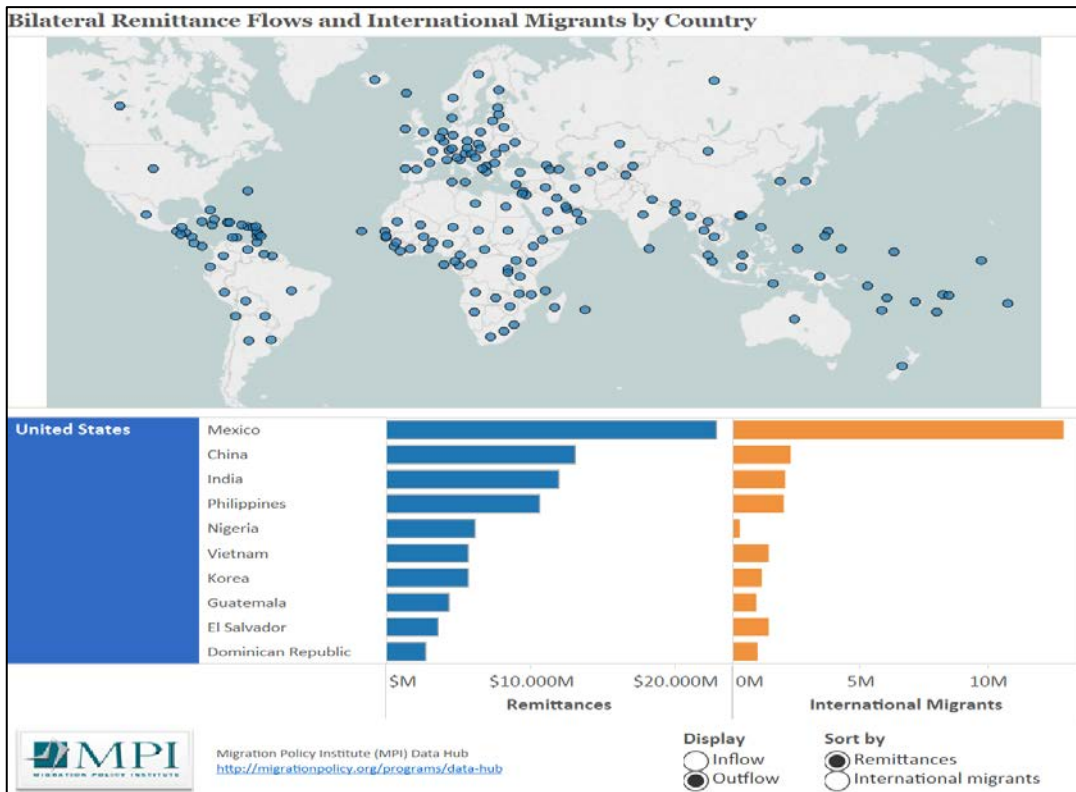


Chart 3.2.3: Outflow of remittances from the US (2013).<sup>137</sup>

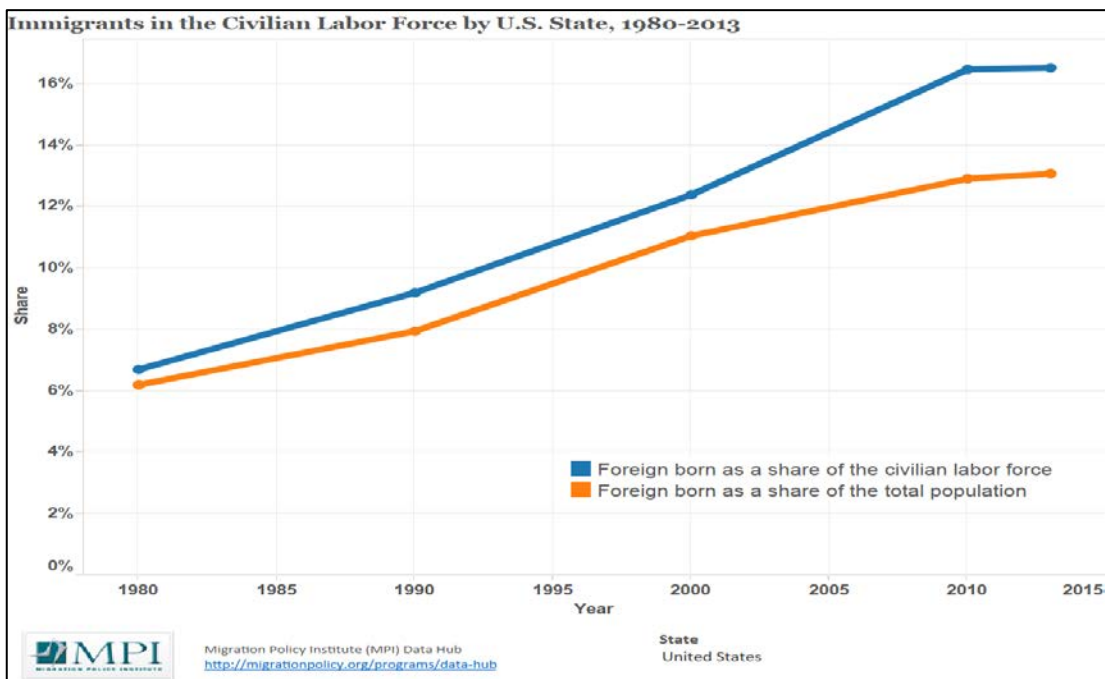


Chart 3.2.4: Incidence of immigration on the civilian labour force.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Source: Migration Policy Institute. See: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/global-remittances-guide>

<sup>138</sup> Source: Migration Policy Institute. See: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigr>

These charts make clear the relevance of immigration trends, especially those from Latin America, on the American economy, as immigrants constitute a considerable part of the workforce in the US (chart 3.2.4). Furthermore, as the chart 3.2.1 shows, the fact that the number of illegal immigrants in the US exceeds 11 million people should suggest that the first fundamental mission of the President should be the naturalization or legalization of the “undocumented.” It was with this purpose in mind that the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) was proposed to Congress in 2001. The DREAM ACT sought to offer the opportunity for full, legal inclusion in American society to illegal immigrants. This opportunity was, unfortunately, neither simple nor unconditional, but rather a step-by-step process applicable only to young people meeting several requirements. In order to obtain conditional states for a limited period of time, applicants needed to prove that they had arrived in the US when they were under 16 years of age, lived continuously in the US for at least 5 years, graduated from a US high school, and not committed any crimes. After enjoying conditional status for six years, applicants must prove that they attended college or served in the US military for at least 2 years, passing additional criminal background checks and demonstrating good moral character. If any applicant proved unable to fulfil these requirements, they will lose their legal status and be subject to deportation.<sup>139</sup> Versions of this proposed legislation have been repeatedly presented to Congress since 2001, but none has become law.<sup>140</sup> The fear among certain congressmen is that legislation such as this would lay a welcome mat at America’s borders, opening the door to surging waves of immigration from Latin American countries. Furthermore, they feel the provisions of the act, as proposed in various forms so far, are in effect a

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<sup>139</sup> For the requirements of the DREAM Act see: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/DREAM-Act-WhiteHouse-FactSheet.pdf>

<sup>140</sup> See: <http://www.lawlogix.com/what-is-dream-act-and-who-are-dreamers>

kind of amnesty for those who break the laws of the United States in crossing the border clandestinely. Undaunted by these hostile positions within Congress, the Obama Administration is strongly campaigning in favour of the Act, because, it argues, “it’s clear that fixing our broken immigration system would boost our economy and help all workers by increasing worker productivity, creating more jobs, improving wages of all workers, and reducing the deficit.”<sup>141</sup> According to the fact sheet of the DREAM Act released by the White House,<sup>142</sup> the initiative would also have positive effects on military recruitment by increasing the size of the pool from which to recruit. Furthermore, having more young people willing to study and continue their educational path, will contribute to the economic growth of the country.

Seen the impasse in Congress, on November 20, 2014 Obama announced that he would issue a series of executive orders addressing the illegal immigration issue. These initiatives work in two important ways. First, they aim maximizing the number of people allowed to remain legally in the US, either through naturalization or through obtaining “the right papers,”<sup>143</sup> without the fear of being deported and being separated from their families. This provision would confer a certain degree of protection on an estimated 87% of the illegal immigrant population, according to the Migration Policy Institute.<sup>144</sup> Second, they target for deportation noncitizens who have been convicted of serious crimes, the actual criminals that could realistically constitute threats to public safety, or those who, once deported, try return to the US.<sup>145</sup> Again, according to the MPI’s estimates, this category encompasses the small remaining part of the

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<sup>141</sup> See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/immigration/economy>

<sup>142</sup> See footnote 139.

<sup>143</sup> See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/immigration/immigration-action>

<sup>144</sup> See: [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/23/us/politics/most-undocumented-immigrants-will-stay-under-obamas-new-policies-report-says.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/23/us/politics/most-undocumented-immigrants-will-stay-under-obamas-new-policies-report-says.html?_r=0)

<sup>145</sup> See: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/understanding-potential-impact-executive-action-immigration-enforcement>

“undocumented,” about 13%.<sup>146</sup> These executive actions have so far yielded some substantial results. Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson has said that illegal immigrants on the border were caught 331,000 in 2015, the lowest number since 2011.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, the number of deportations decreased to 231,000 in 2015, the lowest level since 2006.<sup>148</sup> These data are further supported by a 2015 report issued by the MPI. The document asserts that, if the guidelines are strictly followed, it may be possible to reduce the number of deportations by 25,000 annually.<sup>149</sup> Despite these actual and projected successes from the president’s executive actions, more needs to be done. Obama himself has said, “the steps we took were never meant to be a permanent solution, [...] that’s why we need Congress to pass a bipartisan, common sense immigration reform bill as soon as possible so that these ‘Dreamers’<sup>150</sup> can keep contributing to this country and help us live up to our history as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.”<sup>151</sup>

Despite Obama’s demonstrably significant commitment and concerted effort toward the resolution of this issue, and his desire to strike a compromise among the various factions, the success of his strategy is impossible to foresee right now. A sensible further step that may boost his efforts toward the reform of immigration policy in the US could lie in securing more active involvement in process by the countries of Latin America, linked as they are to the problem. By seeking compromises with these nations, while attempting to aid their growth and development into more stable and resilient democracies, possessed of the same democratic values, the US, under Obama

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<sup>146</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>147</sup> See: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/oct/7/jeh-johnson-credits-obama-immigration-policies-for/?page=all>

<sup>148</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>149</sup> See Rosenblum M. R., *Understanding the Potential Impact of Executive Action on Immigration Enforcement*, Migration Policy Institute (2015).

<sup>150</sup> Dreamers is the name given to the applicants to the DREAM Act.

<sup>151</sup> See: <http://thehill.com/regulation/administration/305785-a-year-later-obama-calls-deferred-action-for-dreamers-a-success>



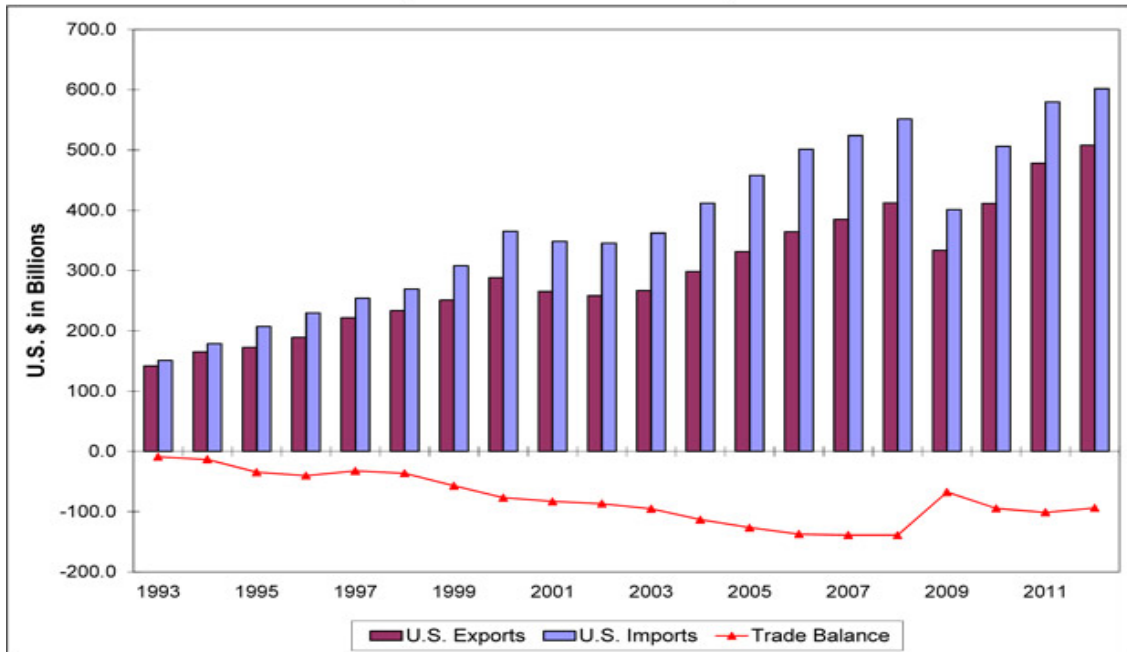
or his successors, might help to ensure that people living in these countries will not have any reason for emigrating, enjoying a safer environment, with a stronger rule of law, and a more stable and prosperous economy in the lands where their roots lie.

### **3.3. Commercial Policy**

The United States and Latin America have a long tradition of robust commercial ties, given their geographic proximity. However, by the end of the Nineties and the beginning of the new millennium, US trade with Latin American countries began to change. Over roughly a decade, from 1994 to 2006, the US concluded almost all the trade agreements that it had with the countries of the Latin America and the Caribbean.

Inaugurated in 1994, as discussed above, NAFTA was the first and most effective among the bilateral and multilateral agreements involving the United States and members of the LAC area. The free trade area with Canada and Mexico had a surprising effect on the American economy: an increase in US trade with these countries, as shown in chart 3.3.1. The combined effect of NAFTA and the other trade agreements with LAC countries that followed it was a redirection of US trade toward Latin America. If Mexico and the rest of the LAC countries are considered together, Latin America proves to be the second-largest market (22.1%) for US goods after Asia, surpassing even the EU, which received only 16.9% of US trade, as chart 3.3.2 illustrates.

**U.S. Trade with NAFTA Partners: 1993-2012**  
(billions of nominal U.S. dollars)



Source: Compiled by CRS using trade data from the U.S. International Trade Commission's Interactive Tariff and Trade Data Web, at <http://dataweb.usitc.gov>.

Chart 3.3.1: US Trade with NAFTA Partners from 1993 to 2012.<sup>152</sup>

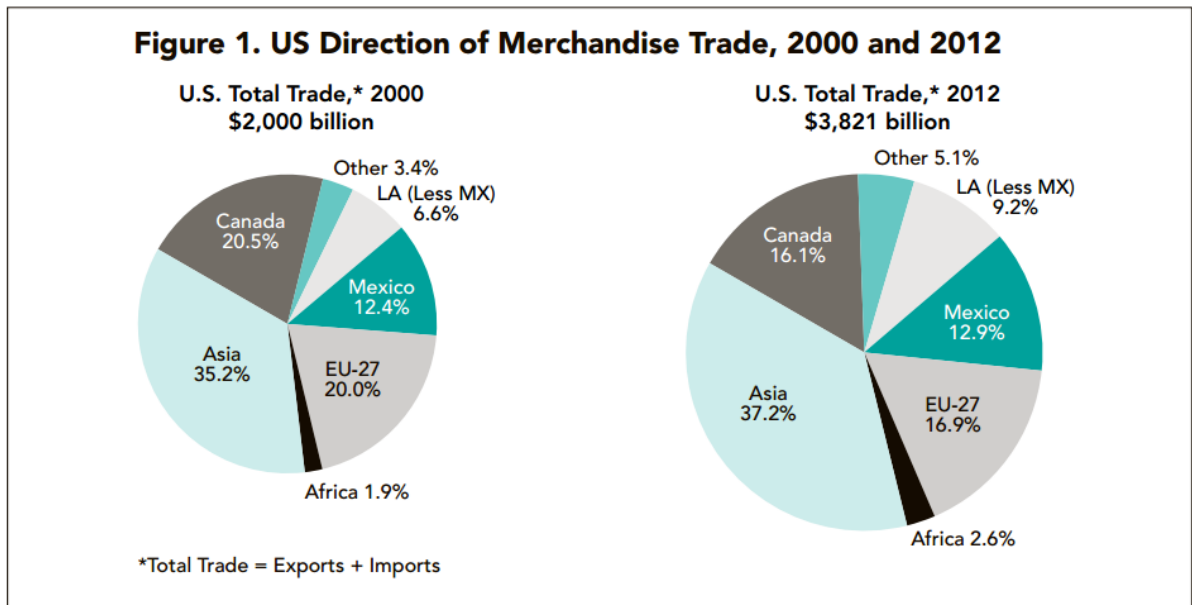


Chart 3.3.2: US Direction of Merchandise Trade, from 2000 to 2012.<sup>153</sup>

Despite the demonstrable commercial growth of the region growth in absolute terms, the soaring influence of China on the Latin American economy is gradually

<sup>152</sup> Source: Council on Foreign Relations. See: <http://www.cfr.org/trade/naftas-economic-impact/p15790>

<sup>153</sup> Source: <http://www10.iadb.org/intal/intalcdi/PE/2014/13718.pdf>

decreasing the space in which the US can manoeuvre. The so-called “Leap East” strategy,<sup>154</sup> started in late 2012 when the President Xi Jinping took office, aimed at expanding the economic presence of China in Latin America by outpacing both the EU and the US. The evidence of this policy’s effectiveness is alarming: China has already become the primary export destination for goods from Brazil, Chile and Venezuela, and it has concluded free trade agreements with Chile, Costa Rica and Peru.<sup>155</sup> China is even trying to extend its influence over Mexico, the US’s major Latin American trade partner.<sup>156</sup>

The emergence of this new actor on the Latin American scene should push the US toward strengthening and widening existing bilateral and multilateral agreements, as well as encouraging commitment to the creation of new markets in the area. Currently, the US has free trade agreements with ten Latin American countries. Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, El Salvador participate in the CAFTA-DR, while Chile, Peru, Panama, and Colombia have individual FTAs with the US. Since I have already discussed the CAFTA-DR in detail in section 1.2, I will only repeat here that the agreement, still in place and producing significant revenue for the economies in play, remains the most important result achieved in Latin America during Bush presidency.

Among the oldest of the remaining FTAs is the US agreement with Chile. Signed in 2003 and in force by January 2004, it has proven a successful deal for the US (see chart 3.3.3). Notwithstanding this success, China’s “Leap East” has begun to threaten US pre-eminence among Chile’s trade partners: China is now the first export destination and the second import origin, immediately after the US, within Chile’s trade

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<sup>154</sup> See: <http://thediplomat.com/2014/09/chinas-two-front-diplomacy-go-west-and-leap-east/>

<sup>155</sup> See: <http://www.as-coa.org/articles/infographic-china-latin-america-trade>

<sup>156</sup> See footnote 153.

network.<sup>157</sup> Consistent work by the US to revive and improve bilateral commercial exchanges may allow it to regain some of its lost status.

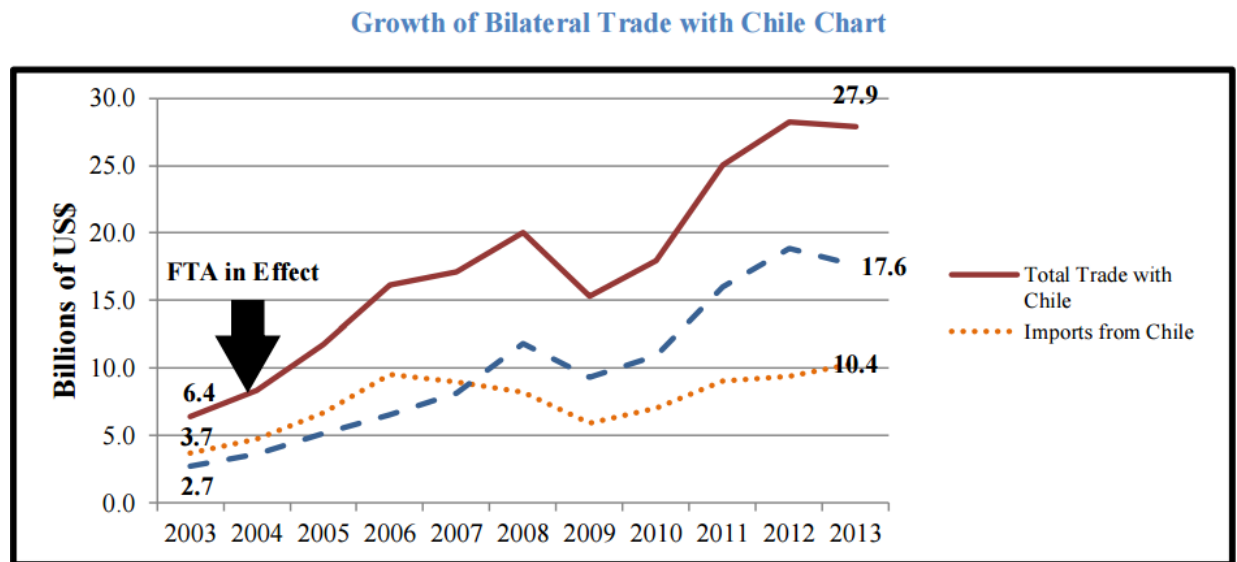


Chart 3.3.3: Growth of Bilateral Trade between the US and Chile, from 2003 to 2013.<sup>158</sup>

In 2006, other two important trade agreements were signed. The first, with Peru, began formally in 2009. As the Office of the United States Trade Representative shows, the US goods trade surplus with Peru was \$1.9 billion in 2013, a likely result of four years of this FTA. However, trade with Peru is also succumbing to the same aggressive Chinese trade policy that influenced commerce in Chile. China is currently second in both imports and exports with Peru, the small gap with the US closing fast.<sup>159</sup> The second, and more troubled, of the 2006 agreements was signed with Colombia, the third largest economy in Central and South America. This FTA aims to deepen trade relations between the two countries, which already cooperate on the *Plan Colombia* in the fight against drugs and terrorism. Unlike the agreement with Peru, Congressional approval

<sup>157</sup> See: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/chl/>

<sup>158</sup> Source: International Trade Administration. See: [http://business.usa.gov/export-portal/?%5C/static/2013%20US-Chile%20FTA%20fact%20sheet\\_Latest\\_eg\\_main\\_017585.pdf](http://business.usa.gov/export-portal/?%5C/static/2013%20US-Chile%20FTA%20fact%20sheet_Latest_eg_main_017585.pdf)

<sup>159</sup> See: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/per/>

for the FTA with Colombia only materialized in 2012, due to the reluctance of some groups to conclude an agreement with a country still embattled by human rights violations, as a result of FARC actions. The International Trade Commission (ITC) has estimated that the tariff reductions provided by the trade promotion agreement will expand exports of US goods by more than \$1.1 billion.<sup>160</sup> The agreement is very favourable to US economy, because it benefits from the immediate duty-free access to many sectors of the Colombian market, including agriculture. These agricultural provisions within the Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) have drawn sharp criticism, because they create competition between the output of Colombian farmers and heavily-subsidized US products that can now enter the Colombian market without tariffs.<sup>161</sup> An Oxfam report outlines the crisis:

“In the two years after entry into force of its trade deal with the US, Colombia’s agricultural trade deficit increased by 300%, helping to push the country from having a trade surplus with the US to having a trade deficit. The study also shows that small and medium-scale farmers [...] faced the greatest risk of being adversely affected as a result of the FTA. [...] Many have had to resort to reducing their use of inputs, reducing household consumption or defaulting on debts. Overall, farmers’ incomes dropped, they reduced production and saw themselves facing an uncertain future.”<sup>162</sup>

Many opponents to the agreement argue that these consequences and others like them should have been anticipated by the supervising authorities, and the same critics

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<sup>160</sup> See: <https://ustr.gov/uscolombiatpa/facts>

<sup>161</sup> See: <http://www.thenation.com/article/horrific-costs-us-colombia-trade-agreement/>

<sup>162</sup> See: <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/press/fast-track-and-tpp-bad-for-development/>

call for a re-examination of the TPA now. If left unchecked, this trend would have disastrous consequences for delicate agricultural sector, leaving rural Colombians with “no more than three options: migration to the cities or to other countries...working in drug cultivation zones, or affiliating with illegal armed groups.”<sup>163</sup> If this comes to pass, the consequences Colombian people, including increased violent crimes at the hands of drug traffickers and gangs, will be grave. The resultant instability of Colombia as a commercial partner will undoubtedly affect the US, too. For this reason, a reconsideration of the agreement, in order foster a fairer approach to the issue and, in the words of Oxfam America President Raymond C. Offenheiser, to “truly promote shared prosperity,”<sup>164</sup> seems urgent.

The final remaining FTA, between the US and the small Latin American state of Panama, should now be considered. After a long history of cooperation and common interests, in 2012 the two countries began enforcement of this new agreement on tariffs reduction and elimination. The US will undoubtedly benefit significantly from Panama’s strategic position as a major shipping route between the Atlantic and the Pacific.

Despite its lack of an exclusive trade agreement with the US, any discussion of improving US commercial presence in Latin America must also include Brazil, the 22nd largest export economy in the world and the 56th most complex economy, according to the Economic Complexity Index (ECI).<sup>165</sup> Dating back even to the Bush presidency, attempts have been made at negotiating a trade agreement, especially because of the Brazilian production of ethanol. These attempts have not met with success, plagued by American lobbies desirous of retaining protectionist tariffs. Rather than continue

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<sup>163</sup> See footnote 161.

<sup>164</sup> See footnote 162.

<sup>165</sup> See: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/bra/>

fighting a losing battle, Brazil has more recently refocused its commercial endeavours, preferring to strengthen its leadership and trade relations in Latin America within the framework of MERCOSUR or to bolster economic and commercial ties with China, the largest importer and exporter for the country.<sup>166</sup> If the US wants to halt or prevent creeping commercial threats from “foreign” actors like China, and to regain its former primacy as a trade partner with the region, compromise with Brazil’s internal lobbies and the launch of a new negotiation process with the largest economy in Latin America are an excellent place to begin.

Despite the array of negative circumstances and consequences I have explored above, two programs, the Look South Initiative and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, are making strides toward a more attentive and comprehensive approach to US commercial ties with the region. The former is a governmental initiative “to help more American companies ‘Look South’ to do business with and expand sales to dynamic markets including Mexico and our ten other Free Trade Agreement (FTA) partners in Central and South America.”<sup>167</sup> Mired in the negotiation phase since 2011, the latter is the project for a broad agreement to enhance trade and investment; promote innovation, economic growth and development; and support the creation and retention of job among nine member states: Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam, and the United States.

In concluding, I would like to consider the crucial interconnection between immigration and commercial policies in the US, and the future of the relations between the two halves of the Western Hemisphere. The fulfilment of fairer and stronger commercial policies among the countries of the area will improve their economic conditions. By enhancing those conditions, the democratic dimensions of those

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<sup>166</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>167</sup> See: <http://export.gov/tradeamericas/looksouth/index.asp>

countries also benefit, since a richer State means the gradual renovation and refinement of the rule of law, and a safer environment with better life conditions. These advantages would also lead to a decrease in immigration to the US by citizens of its southern neighbours.

This concludes the first part of my thesis, which examined the US and its approach to Latin America. The second part will take a specific look at the relations between Cuba and the US, analysing the ongoing process of change occurring between these two historical enemies. Important considerations will include how the present changes were set in motion, and whether these changes signal the approach of a historic tipping point, or suggest a possible regression in the dialogue between Washington and Havana.



## **PART II**

### **THE CUBAN CHALLENGE TO THE US**

Based on the analysis of US foreign policy in Latin America, including the general and comprehensive framework of the status quo of the relations within the countries of the Western Hemisphere, provided in part one of this thesis, the second part will examine the role of Cuba within this context, and the particular challenges it poses.

The enmity between the US and Cuba, the closest Communist outpost to US territory, began during the Cold War and even withstood the fall of the “Soviet Empire” in the early 1990s. Memory of a time before Cuba’s Communist regime has fired American presidential imaginations with dreams of restoration and re-conquest across the long decades of ideological separation. Despite the official, public strictures of embargo and cessation of diplomatic relations, from the beginning of the Castro’s regime through the Missile Crisis and beyond, the governments of the two nations have conducted various kinds of negotiation, more or less secret. These steps were essential in paving the way for the current thaw, overseen by two current respective presidents, Barack Obama and Raul Castro. Owing to these historic steps toward reconciliation, the

aim of this second part of my thesis will be to describe in detail the terms of the agreement between the two countries. I will analyse the roots of that agreement, focusing on several dimensions and facets of the negotiation process and considering the different important actors participating, or at least facilitating, the talks. By way of conclusion, I will advance a list of prospects and possible outcomes of this diplomatic effort.

In order to begin, the first chapter of this part of the thesis will deal with the historical roots of the agreement and its current evolution.

## **Chapter 4: The US-Cuba Agreement and Its Roots (1989–2016)**

In order to examine the agreement, its negotiations, and its origins, I will divide this chapter into three sections. The first one will examine the deep roots of the thaw and describe the historical, social, and economic context that emerged with the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union. The second will build on this historical background to discuss the secret talks that occurred between 1959 and 2008. The third and final section will describe and grapple with the most recent developments, namely those since the election of Barack Obama.

### **4.1. The fall of the Soviet Empire and its consequences**

In order to comprehend the full impact of the crumbling of the USSR on Cuba, we must first investigate the deep interconnections between the two nations that preceded the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The incredible volume of exchanges happening between Cuba and the USSR and the magnitude of the subsidies channelled to the Caribbean island by the Communist superpower are critical evidence of their interconnectedness, and ample testimony to the catastrophic effects that followed in the wake of the USSR's demise.

Historically, Cuba has vested its entire international trade in a single partner. Before the Cuban Revolution, the nation's predominant commercial partner was the United States (see chart 4.1.1).

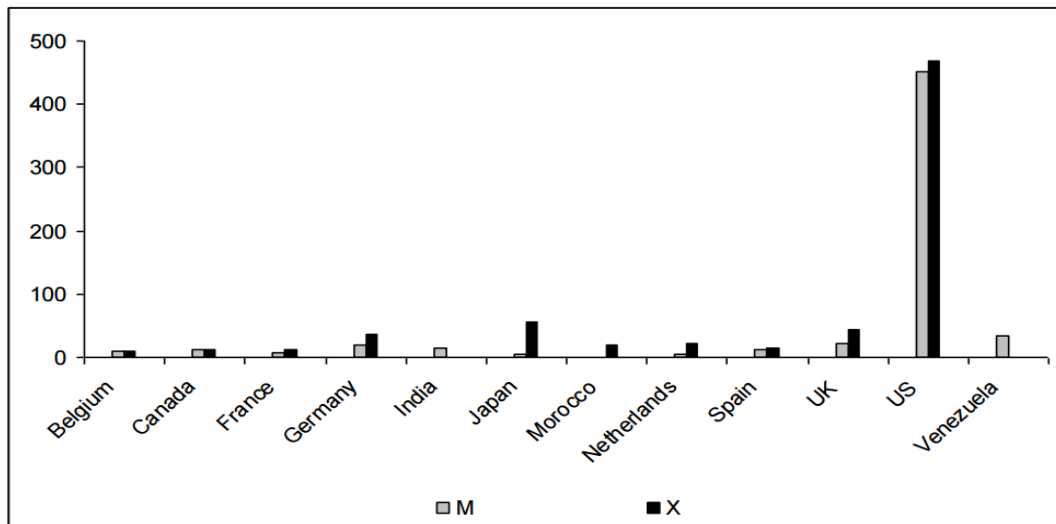


Chart 4.1.1: Pre-Embargo Cuban Trade Partners in 1957.<sup>168</sup>

Even after Fidel Castro took the power, this extant relationship with the US remained, because, at the beginning, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 was not directly linked to Communist ideology. Cuban domestic and foreign policies began to veer toward Communism and the Soviet Union in 1961 with the Bay of Pigs invasion, the event that manifested US intentions to overthrow the Cuban regime. Cuba's increased political and economic relations with the USSR were almost necessitated by the US embargo, begun in 1962, as it eliminated Cuba's ability to trade with almost any state but those of the Soviet bloc. The impact of this embargo was a shift from the US to the USSR as Cuba's primary trading partner. From 1965 to 1970, the Soviet Union purchased over 24 million tons of sugar from Cuba and, in return, provided the island with discounted oil, both for their consumption and to sell.<sup>169</sup> In fact, it has been estimated that by 1970 more than 70% of Cuban trade was with the USSR, and another 15% was with its Eastern European allies.<sup>170</sup> This trade cooperation, coupled with other supportive initiatives, such as significant economic subsidies, and technical and military

<sup>168</sup> Source: International Historical Statistics. See: <http://www.auburn.edu/~thomph1/cubahistory.pdf>

<sup>169</sup> See Sweig J., *Cuba: What everyone needs to know*, New York, Oxford University Press, (2009), p.70.

<sup>170</sup> See: <http://www.countriesquest.com/caribbean/cuba/economy.htm>

aid granted to Cuba, allowed the survival of the regime and fuelled the improvement of the life conditions of its citizenry. Unfortunately, in order to meet Soviet bloc demand for such huge amounts of sugar, Fidel Castro committed all available resources to this sector, hoping to increase productivity, leading to the dependence of the entire Cuban economy on this single crop.

In the 1980s, Cuba's dependence on the USSR increased even more. The oil shortages of the previous decade had prompted increased production by petroleum-rich nations, causing prices to plummet and remain extremely unstable. With these market conditions, Cuban earning potential from the sale of Soviet-provided oil on the international market was very low.<sup>171</sup> As a consequence, and as the decade progressed, the annual Soviet subsidy rose to between \$4 billion and \$6 billion.<sup>172</sup>

While these data are both impressive and suggestive of the depth of Cuban dependence on Soviet trade and financial contributions, those that reflect the Soviet contribution to Cuba over the duration of their economic relationship are equally important to consider. Between 1959 and 1991, the Soviet Union delivered 170 million tons of oil, 13 million tons of grain, and 300,000 trucks, cars and tractors to Cuba.<sup>173</sup> These data are reflective of Soviet contributions that cushioned the impact of the beginning of the Soviet crisis, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and of the actual dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. That same year, several meetings between Mikhail Gorbachev and the US Secretary of State James Baker led to the announcement that the USSR would end its subsidies to Cuba and withdraw the Soviet advisors and troops. An appalling shock for the Cuban economy and for the Castro brothers, this decision left the island without any source of income to support its trade and sustain its

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<sup>171</sup> See: <http://www.coha.org/cuba-russia-now-and-then/>

<sup>172</sup> See footnote 169, p.71.

<sup>173</sup> See footnote 171.

people. According to the Russian parliament, trade between Russia and Cuba decreased from \$9 billion in 1990 to \$710 million three years later, Russian exports to Cuba falling by 70%.<sup>174</sup> Among these decreases were oil exports, which fell twice between 1989 and 1992.<sup>175</sup> The two charts below describe graphically the economic shock.



Chart 4.1.2: The 1990s Cuban Collapse of Real Output Growth.<sup>176</sup>

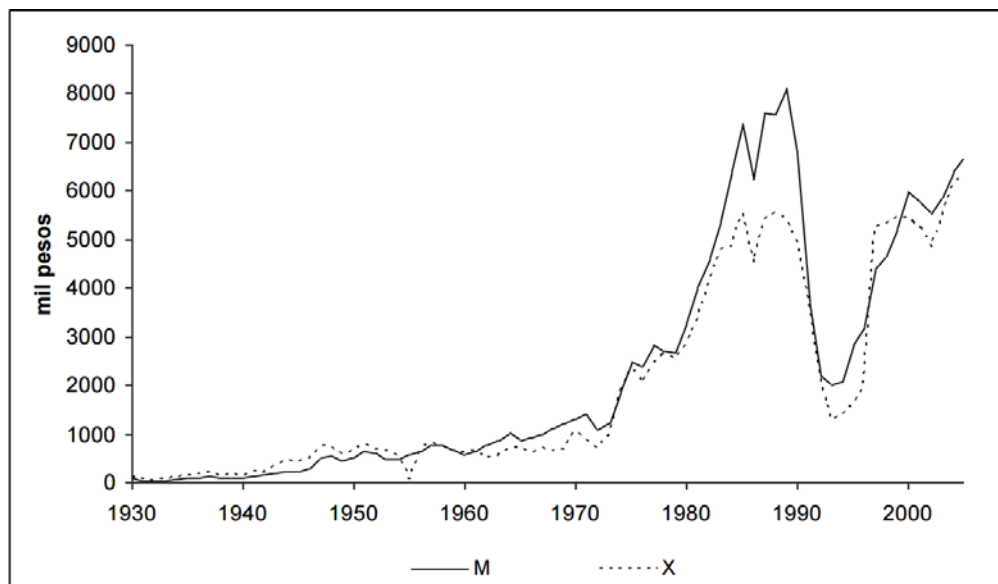


Chart 4.1.3: Cuban Exports and Imports.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>174</sup> See footnote 171.

<sup>175</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>176</sup> Source: International Monetary Fund. See: <http://www.auburn.edu/~thomph1/cubahistory.pdf>

<sup>177</sup> Source: International Historical Statistics. See: <http://www.auburn.edu/~thomph1/cubahistory.pdf>

In order to face this crisis, Fidel Castro announced the “Special Period in Times of Peace.” Despite its pleasant sound, this expression concealed terrible consequences for the people, including sharp cuts on social services and the termination of all the stockpiles and reserves of any kind of good, even primary goods, such as food. Cubans suffered continuous electrical shortages and blackouts, at times having electricity for only a few hours a day. Malnourishment, poverty, and diseases spread in the country, with the government powerless to do much.

These dire consequences of the loss of Soviet aid and trade prompted other political reactions. One, whose scope was admittedly limited, was the decision to draft new amendments to the Cuban constitution, which, ratified in 1976, reflected the legacy of Cuban-Soviet relations. These new amendments sought to loosen the strictures of Communist society in Cuba, especially through four new features:<sup>178</sup>

1. The recognition of freedom of religion.
2. The new focus on the importance of the national unity, with a concomitant reduction in references to the Communist ideology and party.
3. A qualified guarantee of the expansion of popular participation in the free election of their representatives, chosen from a list of candidates compiled by the Communist Party.
4. The explicit recognition of the ability for foreign joint ventures to own property within the Cuban territory.

This first step in the hesitant process of reform would soon involve the economic sector, where changes were indispensable for the survival of the Castro regime. Fidel Castro was profoundly mistrusted opening Cuba to new economic opportunities, wary that Washington was looking intently for any breach in the Cuban wall through which

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<sup>178</sup> See footnote 169, p. 128-129.

to penetrate in the nation's economy and destabilize the entire system. In order to save the Revolution and to avoid the collapse of the country, eventually even he relented and accepted some of the proposed changes.

Cuba's multifarious economic reform began in 1993 with a meaningful and important first step: permission from the government for Cubans to possess US dollars. This substantial change opened the island's economy to American currency, giving Cubans with relatives in the US the possibility to spend any dollars sent to them without fear of reprisal or clandestine currency exchange. This policy reform also allowed for citizens to engage in small, private entrepreneurial activities,<sup>179</sup> such as taxi driving, hairdressing, repairs, small restaurants and local "casas particulares,"<sup>180</sup> that is, bed and breakfasts. This was followed in 1994<sup>181</sup> by a change in internal agricultural commerce, when governmental authorities granted permission to farmers for the sale of their products directly to Cuban consumers, stripping state interference from these transactions. These changes to the internal Cuban economy laid the groundwork for another remarkable shift in the Cuban economic and financial system: a new openness to foreign capital and its investment, with the implicit understanding that this would be closely monitored by Cuban authorities. While the bulk of foreign capital flowing into the Cuban economy came from EU countries, particularly Spain, Canada, Brazil, Israel, and Mexico were also key players in the new opportunities emerging from the change in policy. These foreign investments went principally into the tourism sector, which, as a result, became the country's most prominent industry.

Despite the decidedly liberal direction of these reforms and the speed with which their effects could be felt, improvement in the living conditions of the average

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<sup>179</sup> See footnote 170.

<sup>180</sup> See footnote 169, p. 132.

<sup>181</sup> See footnote 169, p. 131-132.



Cuban arrived much more slowly (see chart 4.1.4). They were too limited in the scope and concomitantly, the US occasionally severed the embargo. Furthermore, not all the changes brought by tourism were positive: increased tourism led to an increase in prostitution and the growth of the black market.<sup>182</sup>

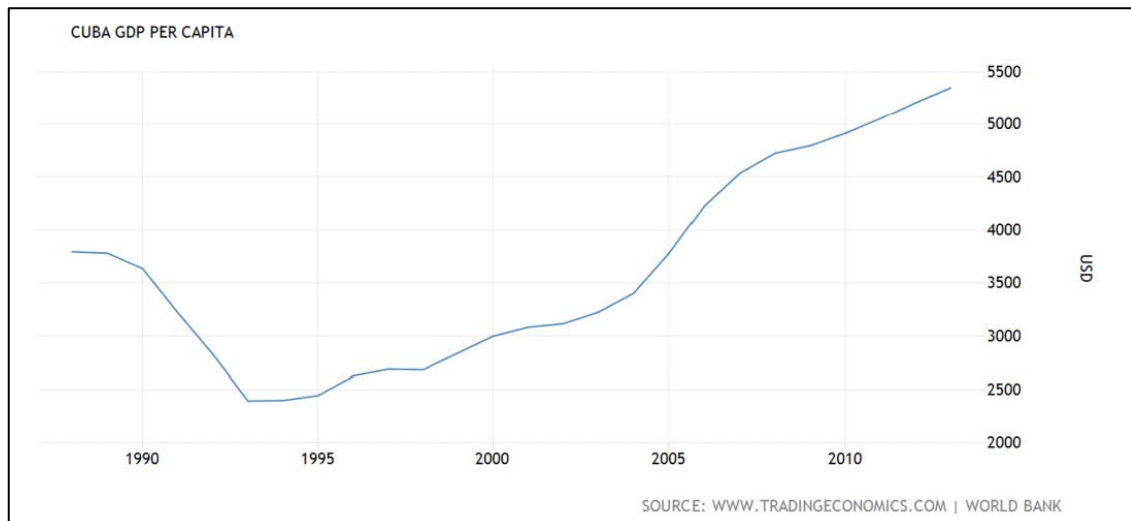


Chart 4.1.4: Cuba GDP per capita, from 1988 to 2015.<sup>183</sup>

Meanwhile, throughout the period here analysed, the US continued to search for ways to undermine the Cuban government, as Castro feared. On occasions like in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Soviet empire, the US suspended the measures provided by the embargo, hoping to take advantage of the weakened Cuban economy. A legislative example of this strategy is the so-called “Cuban Democracy Act” in 1992. Sponsored by Representative Robert Torricelli, the legislation outlined a two-pronged attack of sanctions and ideological propaganda to accomplish the failure of the Cuban government over a projected period of a few weeks. The sanctions aspect had three key components: the ban on trade with Cuba by subsidiaries of US companies based in third

<sup>182</sup> See footnote 169, p. 135.

<sup>183</sup> Source: Trading Economics. See: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/cuba/gdp-per-capita>

countries was reintroduced and expanded; ships docked in Cuban ports within the last six months were not prohibited from doing so in US ports; and a cap on the amount of funds Cuban exiles in the US could send to their relatives on the island was introduced. As for the propaganda campaign, its aim was simple: to convince Cubans their country was governed by a tyrant, positioning the US as the bastion of democracy and therefore Cuba under Castor's ideological opposite. To accomplish this goal, phone and postal service to Cuba were resumed, and the sale of medicines directly to the Cuban people, without the intrusion of the state, effectively mimicking the agricultural policy Castro's government put in place, was permitted. For all its byzantine machinations, the law was a clear and complete failure. The "Cuban Democracy Act" of 1992 was followed by the "Cuban Liberty Act" four years later. Also known as the Helms-Burton Act, this legislation sought to strengthen the embargo further by making it law, with the aim of openly attacking the Cuban economy and trade. By changing the embargo from implicit policy to explicit law, the "Cuban Liberty Act" eliminated the president's power to modify or shaping the content of the embargo,<sup>184</sup> rendering it useless as a malleable diplomatic instrument.

As we have seen, the crumbling of the Soviet Union had profound and disastrous consequences for Cuba. The sudden loss of the Soviet support left the Cuban government scrambling for other ways and other partners to ensure its survival. The internal reforms in which it engaged immediately after 1991 forced Cuba to open its system to the incoming flow of foreign capital in some measure. The litany of US attempts to destabilize the Castro government in the 1990s might suggest their sincere commitment to eradicating Communism so close to home, but it is belied by a series of secret attempts at achieving peace between the US and Cuba. These secret talks, which

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<sup>184</sup> See: <http://www.coha.org/helms-burton-act-resurrecting-the-iron-curtain/>

set the stage for the more public overtures to *rapprochement* occurring today, will be analysed in the next section, specifically to determine their influence on contemporary events.

#### **4.2. The Secret Talks between the Countries**

Before beginning the discussion and analysis of this section, a clarification is necessary. This section will deal specifically with the secret negotiations and informal talks undertaken by US officials and their Cuban counterparts from Castro's seizure of power in 1959 to 2008, just before the election of Barack Obama. This discussion is a counterpoint to the one presented in the previous section, which detailed public economic and political activities on the part of both nations, either to secure their own prosperity or undermine that of their ideological opponents. In this way, I hope to balance and complete the picture of the USA-Cuba relations that will be provided and in so doing to facilitate the identification of the thorniest issues currently at stake.

During the near-fifty-year period considered by this section, practically every president from Eisenhower to George W. Bush had to engage in some kind of negotiation with the Cuban government. Before its transformation into a Soviet satellite, Cuba sought to maintain its relations with the US, as demonstrated by Fidel Castro's goodwill tour<sup>185</sup> in April 1959. Relations soured when Castro began to convert the existing economic system into a more authoritarian one, declaring his fully discretionary power to revert US properties and major American businesses in Cuba to national control. President Eisenhower responded by cancelling the US purchase of the sugar quota for 1960. This reaction created an opportunity for USSR to manoeuvre in

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<sup>185</sup> See Leogrande W. M., Kornbluh P., *Back channel to Cuba: the hidden history of negotiations between Washington and Havana*, UNC Press Books, (2014), p.13.

and cement its ties to the island nation by purchasing the surplus sugar quota, originally destined for the US. Hence, the Eisenhower Presidency concluded with the decisive rupture of diplomatic relations with the Caribbean island in 1961.

It would not be an understatement to call the years of Kennedy Presidency the tensest ones for relations between Cuba and the US. The events of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis further drew Cuba into the Soviet Union's orbit. However, even during this period, some meetings between emissaries of the US and Cuba occurred. Following one of these clandestine meetings, Ernesto "Che" Guevara outlined a list of five points<sup>186</sup> beyond which Cuba's concessions to the U.S. would have never gone:

1. Cuba would have committed to pay for the expropriated American possessions and businesses through trade, rather than returning them to the US
2. Cuba would have loosen its economic and military ties with the Soviet bloc, but not its ideological proximity and support.
3. Free elections would have been held, but only in the context of the one-party system, as overseen by institutions consistent with revolutionary ideals.
4. Cuba would have kept its commitment to spread the revolution to the other Latin American countries.
5. Guantanamo should not be attacked.

These points were never accepted as sufficient steps for serious negotiations. After the assassination of President Kennedy, the window opened by his attempts to refresh the dialogue snapped shut. With the advent of the Johnson Administration, the United States strategy shifted its focus toward covert operations organized by the CIA

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<sup>186</sup> Ibidem, p.45.

in order to topple the Castro's regime.

Renewed interest in the construction of a path toward negotiations occurred during Henry Kissinger's term as Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977. The efforts that Kissinger lavished on the Cuban issue must be understood within the context of his overall activity as the Secretary of State. By the time he turned his attention to Cuba, he had already managed to achieve great results in the *détente* with the People's Republic of China. These results seemed to suggest a new diplomatic climate, one in which decades-old Cold War enmities seemed to relax. Against this backdrop, and in light of Cuban involvement in attempts to destabilize some of the pro-US governments in Central American, a further diplomatic success in the Caribbean would have constituted an epic turning point in the Cold War. Unfortunately, Kissinger's window of opportunity opened only after the Watergate scandal and the resignation of President Nixon. Nixon, a real hard-liner on Cuba, had in fact asked the CIA for specific "paramilitary pressure"<sup>187</sup> on the island, and either resisted or opposed every initiative proposed by Kissinger and his team for the normalization of the relations with Castro.

Under the Ford Administration, Secretary Kissinger was able to accomplish the most serious efforts toward a reconciliation since the break of the diplomatic relations occurred in 1961. Given his accomplishment of the mission to Communist China, domestic and international public opinion were shifting toward a more relaxed approach to Cuba, and even for a discontinuation of the embargo. In fact, many OAS countries, like Chile, Peru and Argentina, decided to reopen their embassies in Cuba in protest against the diplomatic and trade sanctions that the US had persuaded them to impose in 1964. These pressures made a US initiative on the island even more urgent.

The first earnest secret contacts occurred in 1974 with the intermediation of

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<sup>187</sup> Ibidem, p.120.

Frank Mankiewicz, on behalf of Kissinger. These meetings found Castro favourable to the dialogue, laying the groundwork for a series of secret exploratory talks that followed between 1975 and 1976. The mediators on the US side were Deputy Under Secretary for Management Lawrence S. Eagleburger and Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs William D. Rogers. Their Cuban counterparts were first Secretary of the Cuban Mission to the United Nations Nestor Garcia, and a member of the Cuban Communist Party, Ramón Sánchez-Parodi.<sup>188</sup> The initial positions of both sides were quite firm. The Americans sought compensation for the expropriated businesses and properties, the release of US prisoners, improvements on human rights, a halt to Cuban involvement in Puerto Rico and the countries of Latin America, and the assurance of Cuban neutrality. For their part, the Cubans asked that the embargo and other additional sanctions the US had imposed be lifted immediately, that Guantánamo be returned, and that the country be re-integrated into the Inter-American institutions from which it had been excluded or expelled. In order to encourage the talks by building a good-faith foundation, Kissinger asked for the reduction of sanctions involving third countries companies.<sup>189</sup> As a result, Cuba softened its position that lifting of the embargo was a necessary precondition to any negotiation.

This trend of improving relations kept going on with other positive signs on both sides: with Carter's assent some of the measures contained in the embargo were lifted, and Castro allowed a limited number of family visits on a humanitarian base. However, negotiations started to derail for two main reasons: Puerto Rico and Angola. In the perspective of the proxy war entailed in the Cold War, the Cuban actions in both fields were unacceptable, on the geopolitical stage, it was an insolent challenge to the United States. Things precipitated on October 1976, when some violent exile groups, supported

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<sup>188</sup> Ibidem, p.141.

<sup>189</sup> Ibidem, p.133.

by the US, bombed a Cuban airplane killing seventy-three people. This event led to a complete regression in the US-Cuba relations.

The Carter Administration marks the first real attempt initiated by a sitting president to engage in talks with Cuba since Kennedy. Good intentions notwithstanding, Carter's single term in office was studded with political and near-military tensions between the US and Cuba. Castro's continuous commitment to counter the US-supported military groups not only to Angola but to Africa more generally did not improve matters, leading, in 1977, to the deployment of additional troops, this time in Ethiopia, to help the Soviet-like revolutionaries. Then, in 1980, Cuba and the US came to the brink of open conflict<sup>190</sup> because of the Mariel exodus.

As the 1980s dawned, the Cuban economy was not in good condition and the refugee situation was a source of real embarrassment for the government. President Carter expressed his sincere sympathy for the refugees that attempted to leave Cuba, saying: "we see the hunger of many people on that island to escape political deprivation of freedom and also economic adversity. Our heart goes out to the almost 10,000 freedom-loving Cubans who entered a temporarily opened gate at the Peruvian Embassy just within this week."<sup>191</sup> In response to these words, perceived as an unacceptable insult, Castro decided to allow those who wished to leave the island for the US the freedom to do so from the port of Mariel. The so-called "Mariel Boatlift" ended in October 1980 by mutual agreement between the US and Cuban governments,<sup>192</sup> having resettled 125,000 refugees<sup>193</sup> in US territory. Needless to say, the combination of these events and Carter's defeat in the 1980 presidential election, which deprived him of renewed opportunities to engage the issues, again led to a cessation of negotiations

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<sup>190</sup> Ibidem, p.221.

<sup>191</sup> See: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33245>

<sup>192</sup> See: <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/castro-announces-mariel-boatlift>

<sup>193</sup> See: <http://www.ascecuba.org/c/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/v14-pedraza.pdf>

between the US and Cuba.

Castro did not view Carter's successor, Ronald Reagan, in a positive light, and for good reason: in order to achieve a resolution to the "perpetual hostility"<sup>194</sup> between the US and Cuba, the newly-elected president was prepared to resort to armed invasion, if necessary. Alongside this lingering threat, the Reagan years relied on a combination of new and existing strategies to achieve the desired result in Cuba. Among the new approaches was the creation of the so-called "Radio Martí," a radio station envisioned by Reagan as a vehicle for establishing contact with the Cuban people and disseminating propaganda, with the aim of destabilizing the Castro government. President Reagan also tightened the sanctions provided by the embargo,<sup>195</sup> a familiar tactic from the now-decades-long hostilities. Despite these attempts to undermine the island nation's status quo, the Reagan Administration and Castro's Cuba were able to conclude several agreements on immigration and the rivalries in southern Africa.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the change at the White House with George H.W. Bush's election to the presidency, the US ceased to perceive Cuba as a serious threat. Even so, perceiving Cuba's extreme vulnerability in the wake of her old ally's demise, the first President Bush committed more efforts to toppling the regime. A new idea was launched by Bush senior in respect to the Cuban issue, it was not only a matter of foreign relations of the island with the unstable countries of Latin America or Africa, but also of the kind of regime in Cuba. Bush insisted on two indispensable preconditions for US negotiations with Cuba, regime change and respect of basic human rights, in a published statement, saying, "freedom and democracy, Mr. Castro, not sometime, not someday, but now."<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> See: <http://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/story/28147/20150423/sifting-through-the-secret-history-of-talks-with-cuba>

<sup>195</sup> See: <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/08/23/world/reagan-acts-to-tighten-trade-embargo-of-cuba.html>

<sup>196</sup> See: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=19598>



A different, though no less inflexible, attitude was adopted by Bill Clinton. Like some of his predecessors, he was firmly committed to the normalization of US-Cuba relations, and, in fact, managed to achieve some positive results. Again, like his predecessors, Clinton's terms of office were stymied by unforeseeable crises, hampering any desired efforts. Two in particular merit mentioning: the "balsero crisis" in 1994, a sort of repetition of the "Mariel Boatlift" incident; and Castro's decision to shoot down two small planes off the Cuban coast in 1996. As mentioned in the previous section, Washington responded legislatively with the Helms-Burton law, removing the president's discretionary power to shape the contours of embargo. These events, coupled with continued leadership of Fidel Castro, served to delay the resumption of normal diplomatic relations by another administration at least.

As his father before him, George W. Bush adopted a much more hard-line approach toward Cuba. Convinced of the inevitable fate of Castro's regime, the younger Bush aimed to bring "an expeditious end [to] the dictatorship"<sup>197</sup> by tightening the sanctions against Cuba. Even when Raul Castro succeeded to his elder brother in 2006 and gave a national address indicating Cuban willingness to reopen the dialogue, Washington replied that it had not the interest to begin talks unless Cuba made concrete steps to change the internal situation of the country.<sup>198</sup> This remained the US stance on Cuba until the end of Bush presidency.

As has been shown, both sides have attempted to achieve the normalization of the relations often throughout the decades following the break in diplomatic relations and the imposition of the embargo. Timing has always been critical to achievement of the ends these efforts envisioned, and the fluctuating political will necessary to carry on the *détente* has alternatively spurred the two countries to action or hardened their

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<sup>197</sup> See: [http://fpif.org/bushs\\_dysfunctional\\_cuba\\_policy/](http://fpif.org/bushs_dysfunctional_cuba_policy/)

<sup>198</sup> See footnote 185, p.366.

entrenched diametric opposition. The next section of this chapter will analyse current developments, seeking to understand the reasons why the steps taken under the Obama Administration seem the right path to a resolution of half-century of conflict.

### **4.3. The agreement: developments, actors and achievements**

Even before his election to the presidency, Barack Obama's attitude towards Cuba was different from his predecessor. During a 2007 campaign debate, when asked if he, as president, would engage with leaders of countries like North Korea, Venezuela, Iran and Cuba, Obama replied, "I would."<sup>199</sup> When Obama took office in 2009, he renewed his early declarations on Latin America and Cuba, as discussed in section 2.1, most notably not opposing the proposed conditional reintroduction of Cuba into the OAS, advocated for through protest by the other member states of the organization over a period of years. Furthermore, he also moved to restore the cultural and academic linkages that Bush had worked to tighten.

Despite these positive signs and promising beginning, Obama in his first term did not do anything new compared with the Clinton presidency. He did not eliminate Cuba from the list of states that sponsor terrorism, nor did he decrease the funds for USAID's programs for "democratic promotion" in Cuba, nor did he even manage to repeal completely the sanctions over tourist travel to the island. Furthermore, in 2009, during one of the USAID's operations aimed at spreading the availability of the Internet on the island, one of the agency's subcontractors, Alan Gross, was arrested by the Cuban police for "acts against the independence or the territorial integrity of the state."<sup>200</sup> Gross's detention constituted an impasse for US-Cuban relations, because the

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<sup>199</sup> See: <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/national/article4596901.html>

<sup>200</sup> See footnote 185, p.377.

US demanded his immediate release before any further talk could take place. Congress continued to oppose any bill regarding the alleviation of sanctions against Cuba, including one in 2010 that would have lifted the travel ban. Taken together, these events led to a deadlock in the dialogue with Cuba throughout Obama's entire first term.

Just as relations between the two nations seemed to run aground again, other actors, such as Spain and the Holy See, stepped in to play fundamental roles in setting negotiations afloat again. Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero and his Foreign Minister Moratinos seized every opportunity to propose themselves as mediators in the renewed process of normalization between the US and Cuba. Moratinos acted as a back channel, carrying messages between the two nations, and, when the dialogue stalled, Spain itself took the initiative to propel it forward once again. In May 2010, some discussions about the release of political prisoners between Raul Castro and Cardinal Jaime Ortega, acting as a representative of the Vatican, were undertaken. Moratinos, too, came to be included in these discussions, and, after only a month of multilateral meetings, Castro decided to release 52 prisoners, who were allowed to go into exile in Spain, if they wished. As negotiations progressed after an additional few weeks, the total number of freed prisoners grew to 127, including also the prisoners of conscience.<sup>201</sup> The crowning element of this great success was Castro's decision to authorize Ortega to brief Washington about the developments, and to deliver a message regarding Castro's hope for improving relations. Unfortunately, the opening of a dialogue with Obama was again delayed by a mixture of factors, including the prolonged detention of Alan Gross and the death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, a Cuban human rights activist and political dissident, after a hunger strike over alleged beatings and degrading jail conditions.<sup>202</sup>

Renewed hope for the situation came in 2011 when Raul Castro invited former

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<sup>201</sup> See footnote 185, p.382.

<sup>202</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/feb/24/cuba-political-hungerstriker-zapata-dies>

President Jimmy Carter to Cuba. On that occasion, the possibility of a prisoner exchange as a mutual demonstration of willingness to open dialogue was proposed, Cuba releasing Alan Gross in exchange for the US freeing the remaining three agents of the Cuban Five, a group of operatives sent to Florida to carry out espionage operations in the US and arrested in 1998. However, the exchange was refused because, according to Cuba, the two cases were not linked in any way.

Though Obama's first term passed without significant achievements or improvements, his second term began auspiciously with a historic breakthrough in US-Cuban relations, Obama's authorization another round of secret talks with Havana in spring 2013.<sup>203</sup> These secret talks, hosted by Canada and the Vatican, were led on the US side by a delegation composed of Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes, considered close to Obama; and National Security Council Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere Ricardo Zuniga.<sup>204</sup> A major impasse to the negotiations was the issue of prisoners. The compromise achieved, which allowed negotiations to proceed, entailed the release of Alan Gross on humanitarian grounds,<sup>205</sup> and a prisoner exchange: the US released three members of the Cuban Five, still imprisoned, in exchange for Rolando Sarraff Trujillo, a former member of Cuban Intelligence, who had languished in Cuban prisons for 20 years after his arrest for espionage on behalf of the US.<sup>206</sup> When the discussions ended on December 17, 2014 after eighteen months, both presidents unexpectedly announced the mutual re-establishment of full diplomatic relations, as well as the release of the prisoners.

The Vatican played a crucial role in the US-Cuba deal, both through its intermediaries and more particularly the direct efforts of Pope Francis, who wrote and

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<sup>203</sup> See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-usa-reconstruction-idUSKBN0JV2DM20141217>

<sup>204</sup> See footnote 199.

<sup>205</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/17/cuba-frees-alan-gross-obama-officials>

<sup>206</sup> See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/19/world/americas/cia-mole-now-out-of-prison-helped-us-identify-cuban-spies.html? r=0>

spoke to both leaders encouraging them toward dialogue.<sup>207</sup> The Vatican's renewed involvement came in March 2012, when the papal ambassador's office in Washington received a request for help from a group of US lawmakers, inducing both Benedict XVI, then reigning pope, and Francis to commit to the cause. The groundwork for friendly relations between Cuba and the Holy See was laid by their predecessor, Pope John Paul II, who made a historic visit to the island nation in 1998. Pope Francis continued and extended the conciliatory practices of his predecessors, offering the assistance of the Holy See in order to facilitate the dialogue. Francis's efforts to encourage the thaw were emblemized by his highly symbolic visit first to the US and then to Cuba in September 2015. President Obama praised Francis, "whose moral example, shows us the importance of pursuing the world as it should be."<sup>208</sup>

The contents of the historic agreement between the two countries cover several areas. First, Cuba was removed from the list of states that sponsor terrorism in May 2015.<sup>209</sup> This critical action paved the way for a highly symbolic event, the reopening of the reciprocal embassies, which occurred on July 20, 2015. Secretary of State John Kerry presided over the ceremony, which also involved the three ex-Marines, James Tracy, 78; Larry Morris, 75; and Mike East, 76; who lowered the US flag at the location for the last time, on January 4, 1961. Notwithstanding this historical achievement, the US has not yet nominated an ambassador to the island. An important second dimension of the agreement facilitates the expansion of travel to Cuba across 12 categories: family visits; official business of the US government, foreign governments, and certain intergovernmental organizations; journalistic activity; professional research and meetings; educational activities; religious activities; public performances, clinics,

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<sup>207</sup> See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/centralamericaandthecaribbean/cuba/11873213/Ho-w-the-Pope-played-a-crucial-role-in-US-Cuba-deal.html>

<sup>208</sup> See: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/18/world/pope-francis-cuba-diplomacy/>

<sup>209</sup> See: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239410.htm>

workshops, athletic and other competitions, and exhibitions; support for the Cuban people; humanitarian projects; activities of private foundations, research, or educational institutions; exportation, importation, or transmission of information or information materials; and certain export transactions that may be considered for authorization under existing regulations and guidelines.<sup>210</sup> Tied to the issues of travel are ones of commerce, and the US-Cuba expands the range of goods and services that can be traded between the two countries. Additionally, US travellers to Cuba “will be authorized to import \$400 worth of goods from Cuba, of which no more than \$100 can consist of tobacco products and alcohol combined.”<sup>211</sup> Moreover, the cap on the amount of dollars Cuban Americans send to their relatives on the island has been raised to \$2,000 every three months. Lastly, the accord seeks expand Cuban access to communications and the Internet, since the island’s possibility to have free access to the Internet is one of the lowest in the world.<sup>212</sup> Alongside these expanded opportunities for contact between the island nation and the US, the White House underscores, “a critical focus of these actions will include continued strong support for improved human rights conditions and democratic reforms in Cuba. [...] The US efforts are aimed at promoting the independence of the Cuban people so they do not need to rely on the Cuban state.”<sup>213</sup>

Though this agreement inaugurates a “new chapter”<sup>214</sup> in US-Cuba relations, many things remain to be done, and much still remains fragile. The economic questions of removing the embargo and committing significant aid to bolster Cuba’s economy and institutions fall to Obama and the next president of the United States. The challenges and threats to renewed US-Cuba relations and political developments internal to the island will be the subjects of the next chapter.

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<sup>210</sup> See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/foreign-policy/cuba>

<sup>211</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>212</sup> Source: Freedom House. See: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/cuba>

<sup>213</sup> See footnote 209.

<sup>214</sup> See: <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/12/17/politics/cuban-embargo-questions-answers/index.html#>

## **Chapter 5: Which are the enemies or obstacles to the agreement?**

“De un lado está nuestra América, y todos sus pueblos son de una naturaleza, y de cuna parecida o igual, e igual mezcla imperante; de la otra parte está la América que no es nuestra, cuya enemistad no es cuerdo ni viable fomentar, y de la que con el decoro firme y la sagaz independencia no es imposible, y es útil, ser amigo.”<sup>215</sup>

José Martí, the Cuban national hero who died in 1895,<sup>216</sup> used these words to characterize desirable relations with North America. They perfectly describe the United States and Cuba, two countries simultaneously so different but with so much in common, which indeed now more than ever have the necessity and the possibility to cooperate and “be friends.” As discussed in the last chapter, the important agreement reached between Washington and Havana last December is the result of more than five decades of attempts. Such a fragile and delicate outcome is susceptible to numerous threats and enemies, sources of opposition that could obstruct the potential progress the agreement seeks to make in the relations between the two countries. Since the road ahead is not yet paved, the aim of this chapter is to identify all the possible setbacks, interruptions, and adverse positions, both foreign and domestic, to the agreement and the realization of its promise.

### **5.1. US Internal Opponents to the Thaw**

Though much progress has been made within the United States in the last few

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<sup>215</sup> “On one side there is our America, and all its peoples are similar in their natures; on the other side instead, there is the America that does not belong to us, whose enmity is neither sensible nor viable to encourage; with which, however, keeping a solid moral and a clever independence, it is not impossible to be friend, actually it could be useful.” See: <http://www.josemarti.cu/publicacion/honduras-y-los-extranjeros/>

<sup>216</sup> See: <http://www.biography.com/people/jos%C3%A9-mart%C3%AD-20703847>

years, obstacles still remain to the normalization of relations with Cuba. One of the most critical to consider is the complex situation of the primary instrument of US sanction against Cuba since 1962, the ongoing embargo of the nation. As discussed in detail above, the embargo's elasticity is a direct reflection of the fluctuating relationship between the governments of the US and the island nation. The two moments of greatest stricture on the embargo, both created by legislation, are the Cuban Democracy Act (1992) and the Helms-Burton Act (1996), which, again, were described in greater detail in section 4.1. Though both were adopted during the Clinton presidency, it is the latter in particular that marked a change in the usual legal framework of the embargo. Though the Helms-Burton Act both imposed further restrictions and offered "carrots" to the Cuban people, on the whole, its impact has been decidedly negative for two key reasons. First, as discussed above, enshrining the embargo into law impeded the ability of future US presidents to change or shape the contents of the blockade as they had before. Second, since it is a law, in order to dismantle the embargo, Congressional approval is required for its abrogation.

Obtaining this objective would be a further feather in the cap of the Obama Administration where Cuba is concerned, but it will by no means be an easy thing to accomplish. In order to be a credit to the administration, the decision must come during the few remaining months of President Obama's final term of office. The time constraint alone is a significant hurdle, but, when coupled with the challenge of achieving a bipartisan coalition in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, each house currently controlled by Republicans,<sup>217</sup> chances do not seem to favour the realization of this goal. Republicans have traditionally adopted hard-line positions on the Cuban issue.

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<sup>217</sup> Source: <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0774721.html>. The 114<sup>th</sup> US. Congress, which will stay in office until 2017, is made up by 44 Democrats and 54 Republicans at the Senate, and by 188 Democrats and 246 Republicans at the House.



Often in the past, they managed to prevent the approval of measures aimed at releasing sanctions against the Caribbean island, and there is evidence to suggest that this tendency will not change soon. During an interview on the issue, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said: "This president has been involved in ... talking to a lot of countries: talk, talk, talk. And Cuba is a good example. He thinks that simply by engaging with them we get a positive result, [...] I don't see any indication that Cubans are going to change their behavior."<sup>218</sup> Many other prominent members of the Congress, like Florida Senator Marco Rubio or Texas Senator Ted Cruz, share this opinion.

Opposition to the elimination of the embargo reflects its power as a political tool, as well as the fear of what abolishing that tool, whether prematurely or at all, could mean. Some opposition to Obama's efforts at normalization and embargo repeal stems from Cuba's failure to meet the conditions provided in the Helms-Burton Act, namely the legalization of all political activity, the democratization of institutions, and the protection of human rights and freedoms. Since the Cuban government has not yet accomplished these requests, ending the embargo would make the US look weak.<sup>219</sup> Furthermore, since the embargo the United States' chief bargaining tool, keeping it is a useful means to apply pressure to the Cuban government in order to improve measures on human rights. Other rationales for keeping the embargo in place betray the belief that it keeps the Cuban government in check. If the embargo were to end, the virtual lack of a private sector in Cuba would mean that the government would gain most of the advantages of the regularization in trade. Given Raul Castro's announcement of his intention to resign in 2018, uncertainty has spread on the Cuban political scene, leading hard-liners to argue that changing US. policy toward the island before knowing what changes will take place is unwise.

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<sup>218</sup> See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-usa-congress-idUSKCN0PM0UT20150712>

<sup>219</sup> See: <http://cuba-embargo.procon.org/>

Surprisingly, the main supporters of these views among the Republicans are Rubio and Cruz, both candidates for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination and both men with Cuban-American origins. The question of heritage actually features significantly within the groups who oppose Obama's policy towards Cuba, with Cuban-Americans divided on the issue.<sup>220</sup> The most recently arrived from the island, those born in the US, and the youngest favour Obama's attempt to renew relations with Castro, while the remainder of the Cuban American population oppose him.<sup>221</sup> This latter group feels betrayed by Obama's behaviour,<sup>222</sup> believing in fact, as Mr. Rubio has said, that "appeasing the Castro brothers will only cause other tyrants from Caracas to Tehran to Pyongyang to see that they can take advantage of President Obama's naïveté."<sup>223</sup> While this concern seems broadly based on the despotic tendencies of those other nations listed, it is especially tied to the issue of human rights, reflecting the belief that the US should not maintain diplomatic relations with a country that does not grant any respect for the rights and freedom of its citizens. For these reasons, the congressmen who support the embargo have promised to block or filibuster every initiative concerning the dismantling of the sanctions. Evidence of this extends back to the historic re-opening of the US embassy in Havana on July 20, 2015—since that event, Obama has had no success appointing an ambassador to Cuba, since these positions require Congressional oversight and approval. Rubio has further pledged that, if he becomes the President, he would downgrade the embassy, because "embassies are designed for countries we have

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<sup>220</sup> See: <http://news.fiu.edu/2014/06/cuban-americans-favor-a-more-nuanced-policy-toward-the-island/78799>

<sup>221</sup> See: [http://bendixenandamandi.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/BendixenAndAmandi\\_ElNuevoHerald\\_TheMiamiHerald\\_TampaBayTimes\\_Cuban-American-Flash-Poll.pdf](http://bendixenandamandi.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/BendixenAndAmandi_ElNuevoHerald_TheMiamiHerald_TampaBayTimes_Cuban-American-Flash-Poll.pdf)

<sup>222</sup> See: <http://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/Cuba-Protests-Planned-in-Miami-Turnout-Unclear-286458521.html>

<sup>223</sup> See: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-30537826>

diplomatic relations with”.<sup>224</sup>

While the Republicans may boast the majority hardliners against this process, they are by no means the only political party with members opposed to these measures. Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey, a Cuban American and a Democrat, is among those who disagree with Obama’s decision. He has said, “it’s a fallacy...to believe that Cuba will reform because an American President opens his hands, and the Castro brothers will suddenly unclench their fists.”<sup>225</sup>

On the other hand, many support the normalization of US-Cuba relations and the end of the embargo, which Obama himself has called an “outdated approach.”<sup>226</sup> Wayne Smith, the former Chief of Mission of the US Interest Section in Havana, said during an interview: “President after president, we went on, year after year, doing the same thing. For God’s sake! Let’s try something new! This doesn’t work!”<sup>227</sup> Smith and many others agree with Obama, and the American people itself is shifting its opinion toward an increasingly favourable attitude to the Cuban issue. As showed by the Gallup charts below, Americans opinion of Cuba is the highest it has been in nearly 20 years (see chart 5.1.1), and the majority of the population favours both the re-establishment of diplomatic relations (see chart 5.1.2) and the end of the embargo (see chart 5.1.3).

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<sup>224</sup> See: <http://www.hughewitt.com/senator-marco-rubio-on-the-latest-developments-concerning-the-iran-deal-hillary-clintons-server-campaign-2016/>

<sup>225</sup> See: [http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2014/12/18/senator\\_robert\\_menendez\\_a\\_fallacy\\_to\\_believe\\_castro\\_brothers\\_suddenly\\_will\\_unclench\\_their\\_fists.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2014/12/18/senator_robert_menendez_a_fallacy_to_believe_castro_brothers_suddenly_will_unclench_their_fists.html)

<sup>226</sup> See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/17/statement-president-cuba-policy-changes>

<sup>227</sup> See: <http://ged-project.de/topics/competitiveness/the-crossroads/the-crossroads-cuba/>

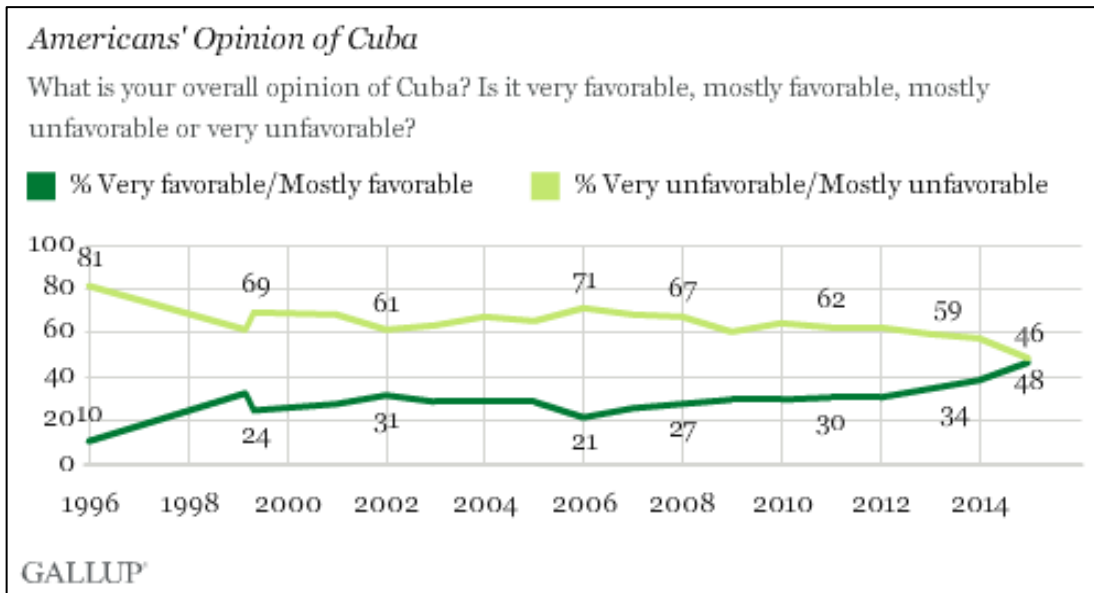


Chart 5.1.1: Americans' Opinion on Cuba since 1996.<sup>228</sup>

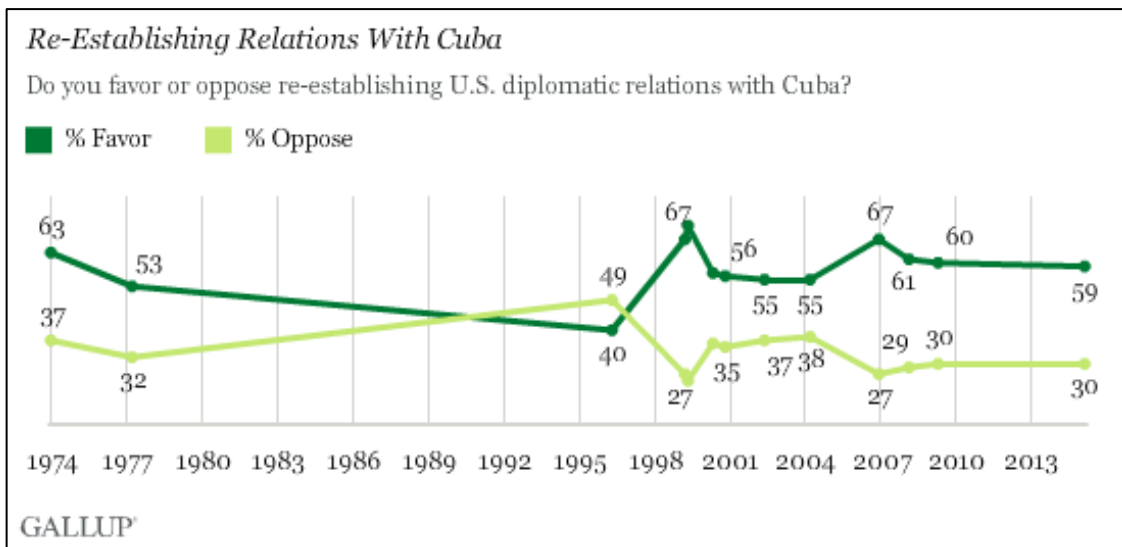


Chart 5.1.2: Americans' favourability to the re-establishment of the relations with Cuba.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>228</sup> Source: GALLUP. See: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181625/americans-opinion-cuba-highest-nearly-years.aspx>

<sup>229</sup> Ibidem.

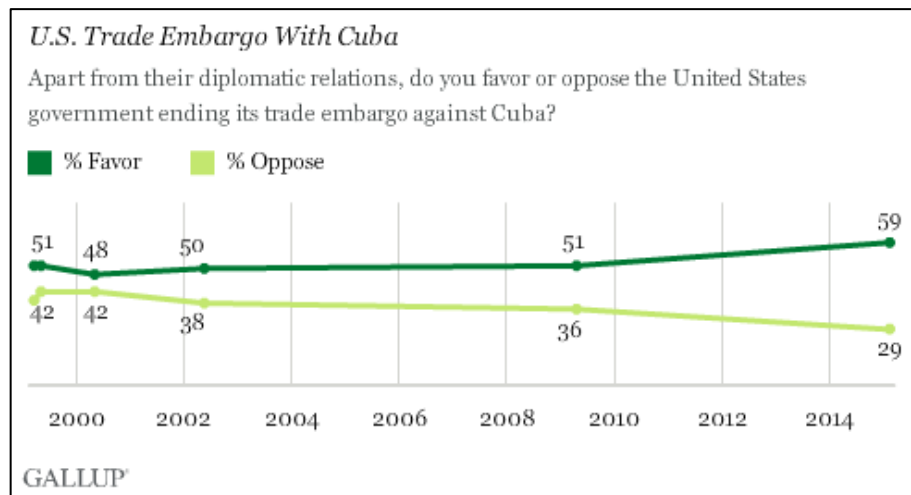


Chart 5.1.3: Americans' favourability to the end of the embargo on Cuba.<sup>230</sup>

Given the sharp division between those in favour of Obama's efforts and those who oppose it, it should be no surprise to discover that the issue has had a polarizing effect on the campaigns of those vying to become president in November. Candidates like Rubio and Cruz are voicing their opinions, and each of them is strategically choosing sides on the embargo in order to gain as much electoral support as possible. Officials in Cuba are concerned about the possible outcomes of the elections,<sup>231</sup> fearing serious difficulties in achieving more concessions and developments on the matter if one of the hard-liners wins and becomes president. Similarly, the impending change in leadership in Cuba, seemingly distant now, is still approaching and the attitude of Raul Castro's successor to reconciling with the US cannot be predicted. The next section of this thesis will engage with the Cuban reaction to the agreement, how broad-based acceptance of its terms seems to be, and whether or not the people of Cuba are ready to embrace the potential developments that lay before them, should the agreement proceed as envisioned.

<sup>230</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>231</sup> See: [http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/12/cuban-negotiator-us-presidential-election-improved-relationships-](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/12/cuban-negotiator-us-presidential-election-improved-relationships)

## 5.2. Cuban Internal Obstacles

According to a survey by Bendixen & Amandi carried out in April 2015, 97% of the Cuban population favours the normalization of relations with the US and 58% thinks that Cuba will benefit more from the agreement than the US.<sup>232</sup> Indeed these strikingly favourable results suggest the encouraging environment waiting in Cuba in which the agreement could be enforced. Nonetheless, threats, obstacles, and setbacks may also be hiding in the Cuban social and economic fabric, and in future behaviours and decisions of the government.

One possible hindrance to the development of relations could be the contentious issue of the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station, the oldest overseas American naval base in the world.<sup>233</sup> Guantanamo Bay has been under US occupation since 1898 when, during the Spanish-American War, US Marines landed on the bay and made it their base of war operations. In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt signed an agreement with the Cuban government for the lease of some area around Guantanamo Bay for use as a naval station.<sup>234</sup> The Cubans later renewed the leasing deal in 1934 under the government of Fulgencio Batista. This renewed deal established that “until the two Contracting Parties agree to the modification or abrogation of the stipulations of the agreement in regard to the lease to the United States of America of lands in Cuba for coaling and naval stations [...] the stipulations of that Agreement with regard to the naval station of Guantánamo shall continue in effect.”<sup>235</sup> With the victory of the revolution, Castro and his government did not recognize any of the obligations established by the previous

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<sup>232</sup> Source: Bendixen & Amandi. See: <http://fusion.net/story/116406/historic-poll-97-of-cubans-cheer-open-relationship-with-u-s/>

<sup>233</sup> See: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/05/15/why-the-u-s-base-at-cubas-guantanamo-bay-is-probably-doomed/>

<sup>234</sup> See: <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/09/how-guantanamo-bay-became-the-place-the-us-keeps-detainees/279308/>

<sup>235</sup> See: <http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/funfacts/guantan.htm>

government. Therefore, the official position of the Cuban government has been that the current American occupation of the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station is a violation of international law.<sup>236</sup> In fact, the Castro brothers have never cashed the US checks remitted in payment of the lease, since they do not recognize its validity.<sup>237</sup> Given the importance Guantanamo has for the Cuban government and the Castros specifically, it should come as no surprise that Raul Castro has included the restitution of that portion of national territory as a necessary precondition for normalization of relations with the US.<sup>238</sup>

A second point of contention is the Cuban government's repeated request that the US stop its programs to promote democracy on the island, based on the Cuban belief that those initiatives are only excuses to support and collaborate with dissidents in order to topple the Castro regime. Last September, Castro's government said that the process of normalization of relations still has far to go, and it will only "be reached when the embargo is ended, [...] and subversive [TV and radio] programs are ended, and there is compensation to our nation for the human and economic damages that it continues to suffer."<sup>239</sup> However, the US continues to refuse these requests, since, according to them, the operations are not aimed at subverting the political order, but rather have a humanitarian character and are aimed at helping the Cuban people.

As discussed in the previous section, Congress's continued concern with the protection of human rights is one of the principal objections raised to ending the embargo, one whose dimensions are attested by leading human rights advocacy organizations. According to the Index of Economic Freedom, Cuba ranks 177<sup>th</sup>, just

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<sup>236</sup> See: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-31059030>

<sup>237</sup> See footnote 234.

<sup>238</sup> See footnote 236.

<sup>239</sup> See: <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/politics/2015/09/28/raul-castro-at-un-diplomatic-relations-cant-truly-resume-until-us-lifts-embargo/>

before North Korea for the overall score.<sup>240</sup> Similarly, Freedom House classifies the island on the whole as “not free.”<sup>241</sup> Furthermore, in its report for 2014/2015, Amnesty International continues to denounce the presence of prisoners of conscience and the systematic repression of criticism of the government in Cuba.<sup>242</sup> If the lack of protection of human rights and the perpetration of authoritarian behaviours by the Cuban government remains, it could bring the agreement to a stalemate, if not force it into a regression.

Additional obstacles come in the form of entrenched distrust of US diplomats on the part of the Cuban government, which views diplomatic delegations as riddled with potential spies.<sup>243</sup> In January 2015, Assistant Secretary of State Roberta Jacobson held a breakfast meeting and spoke to a group of dissidents to exchange views and opinions.<sup>244</sup> This seemingly benign activity raised the suspicions of the Cuban government, which characterized Jacobson’s initiative as an intrusion in the internal affairs of the island. In order to overcome the mistrust that persists and further the agreement, Cuban officials may require US diplomats in Havana to refrain from meeting with dissidents.

Cuba’s economy is another fundamental element in need of reform in order to support, rather than hinder, the US-Cuba deal. Cuba’s very peculiar monetary system is based on two different currencies—the Cuban convertible peso (CUC), employed particularly in the tourist sector and pegged to the dollar; and the Cuban peso (CUP), used in the payment of the state workers—whose value is unbalanced value, one CUC equalling 25 CUPs.<sup>245</sup> As a consequence, those paid in CUC for their work in the tourism sector and those who receive funds from family in the US may afford higher

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<sup>240</sup> See: <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/cuba>

<sup>241</sup> See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/cuba>

<sup>242</sup> See: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/americas/cuba/report-cuba/>

<sup>243</sup> See: <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/07/us-cuba-relationship-obstacles-119650>

<sup>244</sup> See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-usa-idUSKBN0KW2C720150123>

<sup>245</sup> See: <http://www.cfr.org/cuba/cuba-after-communism/p30991>



standards of living that those paid in CUPs. Besides creating economic inequality in the country, this system deters foreign companies from doing business on the island, because it makes estimating real costs difficult.<sup>246</sup> According to IMF Executive Director Otaviano Canuto, such a system leads the regime to be “inimical” to market forces and to curb the free action of economic agents.<sup>247</sup> Therefore, Cuba might need a rationalization of the exchange rates in order to improve the effectiveness of the allocation of resources.

The currency situation is not the only aspect of the Cuban economy that could hinder more advanced relations with the US. Reconsideration of the ways it uses existing capital, as well as the policies in place would pave the way for an influx for foreign capital investment. Injecting more money into the infrastructure sector and restoring the status of ownership would go a long way to drawing increased attention from foreign investors.<sup>248</sup> With these obstacles removed, the fears of needing to build up non-existent infrastructural resources and losing goods and property to expropriation by the government would also disappear, leading to the more liberal economy sought by the US.

As is true in the US of Obama and his successor, Raul Castro and his successor after 2018 (likely his heir apparent Miguel Diaz Canel) need to accomplish a wide variety of tasks in order to carry progress forward. They will have to decide whether or not the restitution of Guantanamo by the US really is a deal breaker. Humanitarian reforms, in order to allow more political participation and dissent, will also need to be implemented. Economic reforms, too, are essential, not only to secure the future of the agreement, but also to avert Cuba’s collapse.

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<sup>246</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>247</sup> See:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iouVIUBQXcQ&feature=iv&src\\_vid=IghryTTAdiY&annotation\\_id=annotation\\_3294142377](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iouVIUBQXcQ&feature=iv&src_vid=IghryTTAdiY&annotation_id=annotation_3294142377)

<sup>248</sup> Ibidem.

Beyond internal threats to the agreement within each nation, there are outside threats that could endanger the success of the agreement between the US. and Cuba. One foreign actor that might not favour this deal with the “Yankee” neighbour is Venezuela. Given the long-standing alliance between Cuba and Venezuela, the next section will analyse the opinion that this country has of the new relationship between Cuba and the US, posit what role it will play in the wider Latin American context.

### **5.3. A difficult ally: Venezuela**

As will be demonstrated in greater detail in chapter 7, Cuba and Venezuela have enjoyed a “special relationship” since the beginning of Hugo Chavez’s presidency in 1999. Chavez, the former Venezuelan leader, considered Fidel Castro and the Revolution he succeeded in spreading in Cuba an inspiration for his own regime and cultivated a kind of devotion to Castro as a result. Beside the ideological affinity, the two leaders established a deeply intertwined cooperation that entrenched the interdependence of the two countries. Their multidimensional collaboration encompassed a wide range of exchanges, from the heavy economic reliance of Cuba on Venezuelan oil exports, to the dispatch of doctors, teachers, and other professionals to Venezuelan social missions; and more, from the Cuban dependence on trade of goods and services from the Bolivarian Republic, to the support of Cuban intelligence and military advisors.<sup>249</sup>

Cuba’s excessive dependency on Venezuela as its major, if not only, partner, echoes disturbingly the relationship between the Caribbean island that the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Perhaps recalling the harsh times of the “Special Period” that

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<sup>249</sup> See: <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2014/06/16-cuba-venezuela-alliance-piccone-trinkunas/cubavenezuela-alliance-piccone-trinkunas.pdf>

followed the fall of the Soviet Union, when Cuban economy was decimated by the sudden loss of its major trading partner, motivated Raul Castro to a different sort of personal relationship with Maduro, the current Venezuelan president, than his brother enjoyed with Chavez. Other factors, like the Venezuelan turmoil of 2014 and the December 6, 2015 parliamentary elections, which shifted the majority to the opposition gathered in the *Mesa de la Unidad Democrática*, make blindly continuing this dependence both politically and economically unwise. It cannot be a coincidence that the secret negotiations between Cuba and the US began a few months after Chavez's death on March 5, 2013.<sup>250</sup>

As has been repeated often in this thesis, relations between the US and the Cuban ally have never been simple and relaxed since Chavez's first election. The political and social unrest of the last two years has only escalated the tension. For example, Venezuelan police killed some of the protesters during the ineffectual anti-government demonstrations against the continuous shortages of primary goods in the country in 2014. This episode attracted international attention to the overall situation in the country and to the inadequate protection of human rights and political freedoms. Following the path laid out by his master and predecessor, in a speech, Maduro blamed the US for having organized those uprisings as part of an elaborate plot for destabilizing the Venezuelan government and expelled three US diplomats from the country using these accusations as justification.<sup>251</sup>

President Obama's Executive Order (E.O.), issued on March 9, 2015, aimed at "advancing respect for human rights, safeguarding democratic institutions, and protecting the US financial system from the illicit financial flows from public

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<sup>250</sup> See: <http://time.com/3639939/venezuela-role-cuba-america-relations/>

<sup>251</sup> See: <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/02/20/world/americas/venezuela-qa/>

corruption in Venezuela,”<sup>252</sup> has only exacerbated the situation. This E.O., which strikes most damagingly at corrupt government functionaries in high positions by blocking or freezing their properties in the US, has been undoubtedly perceived as revenge against Venezuela and as a way to topple the government. Several other countries, like Cuba, Bolivia, Argentina, and Ecuador, share this understanding of the executive order, with Ecuador’s President Rafael Correa describing it as the continuation of illegal US interventionism in Latin America.<sup>253</sup> In response to the document’s description of Venezuela as an “unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States,”<sup>254</sup> during the Seventh Summit of the Americas in Panama, Maduro said, “this is no longer a time for imperialism and threats...this is a time for peace... and respect for nations.”<sup>255</sup> He also managed to obtain 10 million signatures for a petition against the measures provided in the E.O.,<sup>256</sup> an initiative supported by Cuba. Fidel Castro even wrote to Maduro, using words redolent of the strong, but outdated, tones of the old revolution: “I congratulate you for your brilliant and brave speech in the face of the brutal plans by the United States government. Your words will go down in history as proof that humanity can and will know the truth.”<sup>257</sup>

By way of explanation, US officials have said that the word “threat” is employed whenever such kinds of sanctions are imposed, and that its use was not some sort of prelude to an American attack.<sup>258</sup> In fact, an interview with Secretary of State John Kerry affirms the opposite: during the secret negotiations for the agreement with Cuba, the two delegations discussed Venezuela and Cuba’s possible role as a privileged

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<sup>252</sup> See footnote 99.

<sup>253</sup> See footnote 118.

<sup>254</sup> See footnote 99.

<sup>255</sup> See: <http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-obama-venezuela-20150410-story.html>

<sup>256</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>257</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/17/us-venezuela-cuba-diplomacy-maduro-castro>

<sup>258</sup> Ibidem.

mediator between its ally and the US.<sup>259</sup> Since both the United States and Cuba share a common interest in Venezuela and neither of them would benefit from the country's failure, this could be a very sensible choice. If the Venezuelan government were to fail, the country could fall into chaos and violent political unrest, leaving a power vacuum easily filled by drug-traffickers and armed groups, who would then control Venezuela's vast oil resources and their potential for sale to the US and Cuba. Positioning Cuba as a mediator could prevent this kind of future and ensure access to natural resources for both Cuba and the US.

Bearing all these aspects in mind, Raul Castro has two options available to him. If he decides to continue supporting Maduro in his anti-American campaign, this choice effectively ends the brief period of cooperation with the US, returning the island nation to the familiar isolation of the last 50 years. Alternatively, if he accepts the US proposal to serve as mediator with Venezuela and is placed in the position of urging some changes, ironically on human rights issues, relations with the US will continue to intensify, at the expense of revolutionary values and the years of alliance with Chavez and his successor.

The previous sections have focused on possible opponents and obstacles, both internal and external, to the agreement between the US and Cuba in those nations, as well as Cuba's chief ally, Venezuela. In the next section, the scope of analysis on obstacles and opponents widens to consider the opinion of the other countries of Latin America and of the UN, in order to understand their perceptions of the embargo on Cuba and of the agreement.

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<sup>259</sup> See: <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/andres-oppenheimer/article31558346.html>

#### 5.4. Different positions: the Latin American countries and the UN

The decision by Raul Castro and Barack Obama to re-establish the diplomatic relations between their countries; and to launch a process of negotiations to expand and deepen their economic, cultural, and social ties has been greeted enthusiastically by all the countries in the region (see chart 5.4.1). In fact, the need for some changes toward the Caribbean island, especially with regard to the embargo (see chart 5.4.2), had been always perceived in the area.

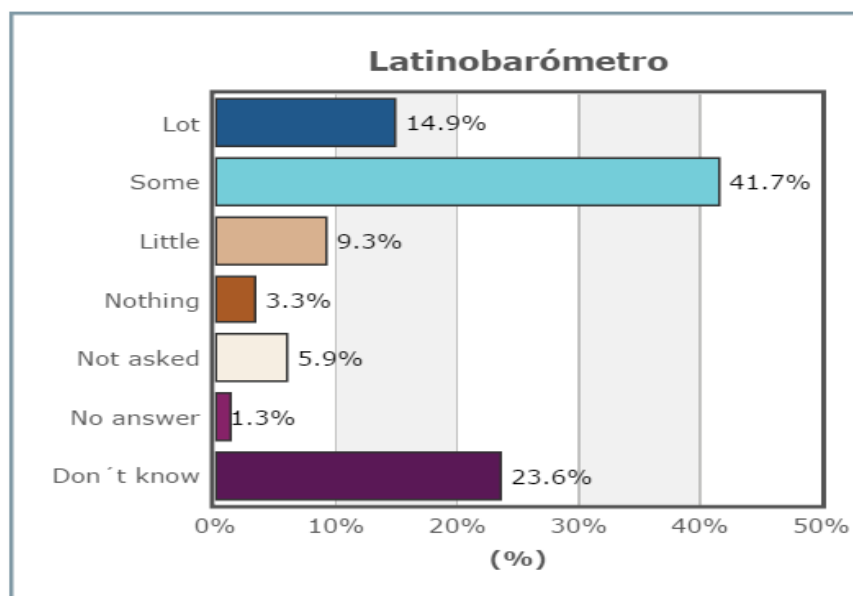


Chart 5.4.1: Survey question: "How much do you agree with the US decision to renew diplomatic relations with Cuba?" (2015).<sup>260</sup>

<sup>260</sup> Source: Latinobarómetro. See: <http://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>

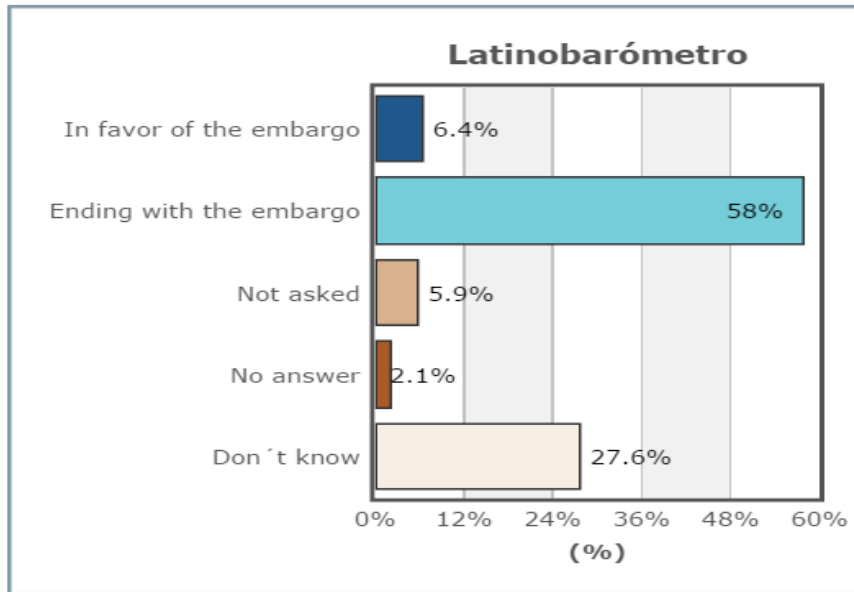


Chart 5.4.2: Survey question: "Are you in favour of maintaining the US embargo against Cuba, or are you in favour of ending the US embargo against Cuba?"<sup>261</sup>

The other Latin American countries have always looked at Cuba with the hope of, and the commitment to, reintegrating it into the political and economic fabric of the region. A concrete example of this hope and commitment lies in ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, created in 2004 and discussed extensively above, as this sealed the bilateral relation between Cuba and Venezuela. But ALBA is only one part of a consistent effort, stretching back decades, to realize this vision. The aspiration to achieve a deeper regional integration without the interference of the US led the Latin American countries to the creation of the Rio Group in 1986, which admitted Cuba in 2008. The Rio Group's successor organization, CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), created in 2010, admitted Cuba the following year and chosen as the location for CELAC's third meeting in 2014. All these measures stress the necessity to reopen dialogue with Cuba.

Only recently, however, has the pressure these Latin American countries applied

<sup>261</sup> Ibidem.

to the US over the years begun to bear fruit. As previously said, persuading the US to accept the reintegration of Cuba into the OAS in 2009 was the first such result. Although the readmission was conditional to several requests, and even though Fidel Castro rebuffed the invitation, saying that “Cuba will not return to the OAS,”<sup>262</sup> this was an important first success, because it constitutes both an admission that times were changing and an acknowledgement that the island was no longer considered an enemy of free market economies. Building on this initial step, the majority of the LAC countries pushed for Cuba to be invited to the Summit of the Americas in 2012. It was also hoped that this move would both facilitate the US-Cuba *rapprochement* and lead to further reintegration of Cuba into the international organizations of the Western Hemisphere. The outcome of these pressures was the historical meeting between the Presidents of the United States and of the Republic of Cuba, during the Seventh Summit of the Americas, in Panama City in 2015. Though this meeting was the first after more than five decades of animosity, its importance must be qualified by the fact that the two countries had already announced the re-establishment of their relations. Even so, without the multilateral commitment of the countries of the region to the Cuban cause, it may not have happened.

Besides the multilateral cooperation engaged in by these nations, some of them also decided to take unilateral action, at regional level, for helping Cuba to gain momentum, both economically and politically. Brazil, already characterizing itself as a lead among the LAC nations, began intensifying its commercial ties with Cuba in 2008. Moreover, in 2011, the Brazilian government invested almost \$1 billion to finance the renovation of the Cuban Port of Mariel.<sup>263</sup> This area will become an Economic

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<sup>262</sup> See: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-organization-of-american-states-oas-and-the-re-establishment-of-ties-between-the-u-s-and-cuba/5442045>

<sup>263</sup> See: <http://thebrazilbusiness.com/article/commercial-relations-brazil-and-cuba>



Development Zone, a special free-trade zone that aims to attract foreign investment through relaxed economic policies and more flexible governmental measures.<sup>264</sup> This project is considered a valuable test case for encouraging a more liberal economic system in a defined area. Should the experiment succeed, its principles could be adapted and expanded to fit the whole island and boost the growth of the country, thus easing the way for the normalization of relations with the US.

Another country that has recently intensified its ties with Cuba is Mexico. Owing to Mexico's close collaboration with the United States during the years of US-Cuba conflict, it did not maintain good diplomatic relations with its island neighbour. Things began to change in 2013, when the foreign ministers of each nation announced the re-launch of their relationship and signed a series of eight agreements on trade and investment, extradition, legal assistance in criminal matters, tourism, higher education, the environment and natural resources, and bilateral cooperation.<sup>265</sup> Furthermore, on November 5-7, 2015, Raul Castro met with Enrique Peña Nieto, the Mexican President, during a state visit there. They signed five more agreements to strengthen mutual cooperation on various fields, like immigration, educational collaboration, and promotion of sports and tourism, in their respective countries.<sup>266</sup> This constituted a further demonstration of the willingness of Cuba's government to turn the page and also to engage with countries that previously would not have considered reliable partners.

Castro's participation in negotiations aimed at solving the long-standing armed conflict between Colombia and the FARC sends a similar message. Along with Venezuela, Cuba had always been a supporter of the FARC, but, in altering its usual

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<sup>264</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/19/welcome-mariel-port-cuba-economic-liberalisation>

<sup>265</sup> See: <http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/cuba-mexico-relationship-re-launched-agreements-signed/>

<sup>266</sup> See: <http://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/mexico-cuba-rebuild-a-soured-relationship/>

diplomatic policy and attempting act as a “guarantor” of peace,<sup>267</sup> it opted to play a constructive role in the hemisphere. This “diplomatic investment” has yielded two positive outcomes. First, it fostered a renewed dialogue between Cuba and Colombia about cultural exchanges and scientific and technical cooperation. Second, and with the ring of broader implications to come, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos praised both Obama and Castro in December 2014, saying that it was “a fundamental step to normalize the relations between nations and will positively affect the entire hemisphere.”<sup>268</sup>

Beyond the support that Cuba has received from the other Latin American countries since 1962, one of the most relevant international actors in favour of ending the embargo is the United Nations. The UN has been promoting the Cuban case since 1991. Every year since 1991, in fact, the General Assembly condemns the US trade embargo against Cuba in a resolution. Last October marked the 24<sup>th</sup> year for this resolution, which reaffirmed the principles of “freedom of trade and navigation”<sup>269</sup> enshrined in the UN’s charter, and invited the US “to take the necessary steps to repeal or invalidate as soon as possible”<sup>270</sup> the measures imposed against Cuba. The resolution was adopted by 193 members of the assembly, with only two contrary votes, the US and Israel.

This section aimed at pointing out the positive and supportive perspectives of other important actors, regional and not. While doing this, the intention was to highlight the slow but undeniable progress that Cuba has made throughout the years. This progress includes moving towards a more integrated regional foreign policy, achieved by overcoming the political and economic isolation that the US embargo imposes on the

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<sup>267</sup> See: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/09/28/new-cuba-moment-can-latin-american-states-help-spark-reform/ii4b>

<sup>268</sup> See: <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-hails-us-will-normalize-relations-cuba/>

<sup>269</sup> See: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/62/plenary/cuba/bkg.shtml>

<sup>270</sup> Ibidem.

island.

Having analysed the roots of the agreement and its development so far, in the next chapter I will deal with the potential prospective that this deal is opening to Cuba. It will discuss the possible future of the relations with the US, highlighting the fields most likely to be improved first and the further challenges that these two countries will have to face. The chapter will also deal with the fate of the other current commercial and political partners of Cuba, bearing in mind that the government of the island may have to make some hard choices and alienate some partners, if it prioritizes the thaw in relations with the US.

## **Chapter 6: The Future of Cuban Foreign Policy**

During the years of their regime, Fidel and Raul Castro have been hard and obstinate players on the diplomatic field. In fact, as discussed in section 4.2 on the past secret talks with the US government, the two brothers have had a long history of setbacks and reconsiderations when it came to US-related issues. However, this time it seems that their intentions are finally permanent. This change happened thanks to a significant coincidence of factors, such as growing support for the thaw in public opinion, the natural aging and changes within the Cuban Politburo, Raul Castro's announcement of his intention to resign in 2018, together with a more unstable Venezuela, and with a process of partial economic transformation already undertaken.

Therefore, this chapter will provide a brief outline of the possible prospects for the future of Cuba's foreign relations. Considering all the factors previously mentioned, the first section will imagine and describe the possible developments of the agreement, including the state of ties with the US in the future. The second section will deal with Cuban decisions regarding its other current commercial and political partners, in order to understand which allies Cuba might retain without hindering collaboration with its northern neighbour, and whether exchanging economic improvement might actually likely to limit its freedom of action on the international scene.

### **6.1. Relations with the US**

A potentially unknown, and therefore surprising, fact is that, in 2013, the US was the seventh largest source of imports in Cuba (see chart 6.1.1). This status can be traced, in part, back to 2000, when the US Congress passed a bill called Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSREEA). This act allowed US exports of food

and medicine to Cuba under licensing and financing restrictions.<sup>271</sup> After Hurricane Michelle struck Cuba in 2001, destroying the national agricultural sector, US exports, mainly agricultural products, to the island experienced incredible growth. These exchanges between the US and Cuba, achieved despite the embargo, indicates the high level of interconnection between the two countries, and is a sign of their willingness to keep on going in this direction.

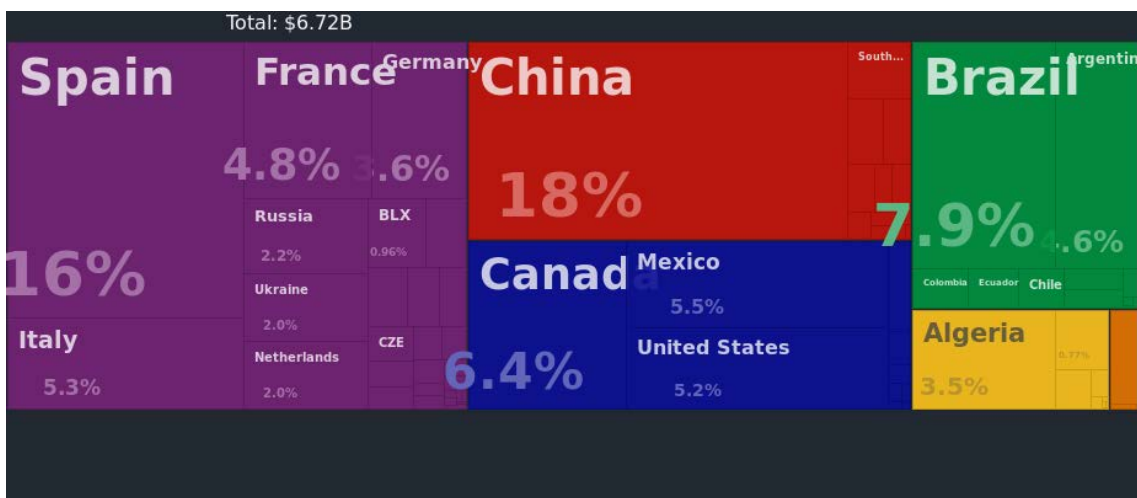


Chart 6.1.1: Top Import Origins of Cuba, (2013).<sup>272</sup>

In fact, at the beginning of this year, Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe announced the signing of an agreement to foster commercial opportunities between ports in Virginia and Cuba.<sup>273</sup> This agreement, involving the Cuban Port of Mariel, will lay the foundation for business dealings in the future and for extending their collaboration in areas of mutual benefit.<sup>274</sup> Governor McAuliffe also launched an initiative for the development of cooperative programs and academic exchanges

<sup>271</sup> See: <http://www.agchallenge2050.org/farm-and-food-policy/2015/04/a-new-era-for-us-agricultural-trade-with-cuba/>

<sup>272</sup> Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity. See: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/cub/#Origins>

<sup>273</sup> See: <https://governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/newsarticle?articleId=13750>

<sup>274</sup> See: <http://ideastations.org/radio/news/port-virginia-signs-agreement-port-mariel-cuba>

between the University of Havana and Virginia Commonwealth University.<sup>275</sup>

However, there are still many issues to face in order to normalize the relationship completely and ease the way for further and deeper economic, social, and political cooperation. The chief concern, already highlighted and discussed several times, is the end of the embargo. This step is essential, as the embargo is perceived worldwide as an excessive and unfair measure, and because its end is fundamental for boosting the Cuban economic growth by easing the way for American businesses to enter the Cuban market and to invest there. The end of the embargo, together with the right mixture of economic reforms, analysed in section 5.2, would increase the Cuban economy surprisingly.

An issue important to the Cuban government in the negotiations is immigration. The current American immigration policy towards Cubans grants them special status as compared to immigrants coming from other countries of the same region (e.g., those from Mexico, as shown in section 3.2). This so-called “Wet Foot, Dry Foot” policy, introduced in 1995, grants Cubans who manage to reach the US the possibility to obtain US citizenship after one year of residence in the country. By comparison, those who are intercepted in the waters between the two nations are sent back home. The Cuban government has criticised this kind of policy for years, because it incentivised escape attempts from their country, thus putting Castro’s regime in a bad light.

Abolishing all limits on travel constitutes a further point of consideration here. Though some steps have already been made on the issue (e.g., Obama’s expansion of the right to travel to the island to the 12 categories, listed in section 4.3, and his re-establishment of the commercial air travel between the US and Cuba<sup>276</sup>) and while the

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<sup>275</sup> See: [http://www.richmond.com/news/local/city-of-richmond/article\\_b8dec671-be3b-5ad4-a55f-4b1c8eef124a.html](http://www.richmond.com/news/local/city-of-richmond/article_b8dec671-be3b-5ad4-a55f-4b1c8eef124a.html)

<sup>276</sup> See: <http://www.theverge.com/2015/12/17/10428592/us-cuba-air-travel-flights-obama>

complete removal of barriers on travel would benefit the interests of both countries, the immediate effects for Cuba's tourism sector, and therefore the island's entire economy, would be overwhelmingly positive. On the American side, Republican Senator Jeff Flake has characterized the repeal as "an issue of freedom, Americans should be able to travel wherever they want, unless there's a compelling national security reason, and there hasn't been with Cuba for a long, long time."<sup>277</sup>

In spite of these unresolved issues, which should, in my opinion, be handled as soon as possible before the end of Obama's term, signs indicated positive movement toward the same objective: maintaining contact and keeping relations with the US alive. In fact, since as Venezuelan crisis continues and becomes more serious, Cuba needs to find a reliable partner in order to be prepared for possibly oppositions overthrow of Maduro and what the loss of Venezuela as an ally would mean for them. In that case, without any doubt, MUD<sup>278</sup> cease supplying the island with oil, leaving Cuba without one of its primary source of income. Hence, it seems all the more likely that Raul Castro would put aside, if necessary, the old alliance with the Bolivarian Republic.

A further element that could play a positive role in the continuation of the ties with the US is the natural process of generational turnover within the Cuban Politburo, due to the aging of some of the original members. This new ruling class, together with Raul Castro's planned retirement in 2018, might usher in an era of new ideas and more open and cooperative action toward the US, with respect to their predecessors in the country.

Finally, an official visit to the island by President Obama would further endorse this process and mark a tipping point. As a symbolic gesture and a historical moment, it would openly manifest the strength and firm willingness of the US to continue moving

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<sup>277</sup> See: <http://www.cato.org/events/toward-new-era-us-cuba-relations>

<sup>278</sup> *Mesa de la Unidad Democrática*, the Venezuelan coalition party that unites the opposition.

forward, toward progress, rather than allowing any setback or regression. However, this remains a much discussed topic in the US, because, as many opponents to the deal assert, an official visit to Cuba by a US President should only take place when the Cuban government has provided clear signs of improvement into the fundamental field of the protection of human rights. Since there has been no movement on this issue, the likelihood of an Obama visit to the island seems remote.

Assuming that the dialogue will remain open with the US, what are the possible alternatives for Cuba regarding its relations with the other partners? The next section will complete the general outlook of the future of Cuban foreign relations by dealing with all the remaining commercial and political partners with whom the island had remarkable exchanges throughout the Castro's regime. The aim will be to identify the changes that the Cuban government will have to undergo if it wants to maintain and improve its relations with the US, and whether it is likely to accept them.

## **6.2. The prospects for the other political and commercial partners**

Despite the US embargo on the island and its aim of isolating Cuba from the rest of the world both politically and economically, the Castro brothers have managed to develop close ties with many countries on almost every continent during their rule. One of the most lasting and successful partnership is with the European Union, as a whole, and with some of its members, bilaterally. This was, by no means, an unproblematic decision, given the EU's relationship with the United States, the embargo, and the inclusion, by the US, of Cuba on the list of states that sponsor terrorism in 1982.<sup>279</sup> EU involvement began in 1984, when the organization began sending humanitarian and

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<sup>279</sup> See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/30/us/us-removes-cuba-from-state-terrorism-list.html? r=0>



development aid to the island, and continued with the official restoration of diplomatic relations in 1988.<sup>280</sup> In order to navigate the divide between the US and Cuba, the EU Common Position on Cuba was created in 1996. Basically, this document is a set of fundamental principles that guides the action of the EU towards Cuba, including:<sup>281</sup>

- Encouraging the transition of Cuba's government to pluralist democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and improvement in the living standards of the Cuban people;
- Partnering with Cuba in the progressive and irreversible opening-up of the Cuban economy;
- Cooperating fully with Cuba depending upon improvements in human rights and political freedom;
- Supporting progress toward democracy in Cuba and its assessment of the democratic process through different means, including the intensification of political dialogue and of cooperation, and exploring the possibilities for negotiating a cooperation agreement.

These guidelines led to the adoption of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) in 2014. The PDCA is essentially a framework for negotiating with the island in order to strengthen extant commercial and political ties, to create new ties that aim to improve living conditions of the Cuban people further, and to protect human rights.<sup>282</sup> The document is composed of three chapters, which focus on political dialogue, cooperation and policy dialogue, and trade, respectively.<sup>283</sup> During the most recent meeting in December 2015, the parties reached a final agreement on all elements

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<sup>280</sup> See:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/549075/EXPO\\_IDA\(2015\)549075\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/549075/EXPO_IDA(2015)549075_EN.pdf)

<sup>281</sup> See footnote 280.

<sup>282</sup> See footnote 280.

<sup>283</sup> See:

[http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/cuba/documents/press\\_corner/20150305\\_press\\_lines\\_3rdround\\_negotiations\\_es.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/cuba/documents/press_corner/20150305_press_lines_3rdround_negotiations_es.pdf)

contained in the trade and economic cooperation chapter and further improved the contents of the cooperation and policy dialogue chapter. The parties are committed to reaching a wider compromise on the political dialogue chapter during the next round of negotiations.<sup>284</sup>

Where the bilateral relationships with EU member nations are concerned, Cuba has agreements with Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Luxembourg. Among these, the most important tie the island has in Europe is with Spain, a country with whom it shares history and common values. Despite the imposition of the embargo, the former motherland continued to trade with Cuba, increasing the volume of exchange over the years (see chart 6.2.1), becoming, in 2013, the third largest export destination and the second largest import origin.<sup>285</sup> Owing to this volume of cultural and economic exchange with the island nation, Spain played also the important diplomatic role of mediator during the secret negotiations between Cuba and the US, as outlined in section 4.3.



Chart 6.2.1: Trade Balance for Cuba to Spain (1962-2013).<sup>286</sup>

<sup>284</sup> See: [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/151202\\_04\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/151202_04_en.htm)

<sup>285</sup> See: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/cub/>

<sup>286</sup> Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity. See: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/line/sitc/show/cub/esp/all/1962.2013/>

Therefore, considering all the efforts that the EU and its members have committed to increasing exchanges with Cuba and the endurance of their multiple ties, it is easy to predict that the Cuban government will likely to keep following this path toward the EU. This likely tendency on the part of Cuba ultimately helps achieve US goals on the island, since the EU and its member nations also aim to improve human rights and democracy in Cuba, making them natural and reliable allies, as well as useful friends for the US, which will in turn certainly encourage the development of such partnerships.

Outside the EU, one of the countries toward which Cuba is redirecting its attention is Russia. The fall of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Eastern bloc naturally loosened the ties that once bound the two countries tightly together.

A renewed emphasis on those old ties appeared during Vladimir Putin's presidency in Russia. Putin is committed to the recovery of Russian positions on the island, left vacant by the Soviet departure in 1991 and subsequently filled by other foreign investors who stepped into the economic void in the Cuban market. The sincerity of this commitment is evidenced by an agreement, since in October 2013, that cancelled 90% of Cuban debts to Russia and stipulated the repayment of the remaining \$3.2 billion over a ten-year period.<sup>287</sup> The agreement may be linked to some surprising news that came from the two old allies in July 2014: the reopening of a Soviet-era spy base in Lourdes, Cuba. The base was in operation from 1967 to 2001, when it deemed too expensive and subsequently closed.<sup>288</sup> Russian commitments to Cuba notwithstanding, the decision to reopen the base has been viewed by some in light of the embitterment of the relations between the US and Russia, due to American interference

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<sup>287</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/10/russia-writes-off-cuban-debt>

<sup>288</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/16/russia-reopening-spy-base-cuba-us-relations-sour>

in Ukraine, the Russian “backyard.”<sup>289</sup> To these commentators, the move seems redolent of the tensest Cold War moments, when the two superpowers used Cuba to send reciprocal warnings. Further evidence of the renewed relationship between Russia and Cuba, if not the regressive trend toward old animosities, came in October 2015, only few months after the reopening of the embassies in Washington and Havana, when the presence of Cuban paramilitary and Special Forces on the ground in Syria was confirmed.<sup>290</sup> Those forces are siding the Russian military in support of the regime of Bashar al-Assad, toward whom both Castro brothers have always manifested their solidarity. The news of the rebirth and the strengthening of old ties with Russia, and especially its military and espionage dimensions, could be seen, as Dr. José Azel, a scholar at the University of Miami has said, as “a slap in the face by Raul Castro to President Barack Obama.”<sup>291</sup> However, considering the importance of his achievement with Cuba and the time spent to accomplish it, it seems unlikely that Obama would now reverse his decision. Whether or not these developments will have a deleterious effect on relations with the US in the future is difficult to say, because it will depend on the attitude that Raul Castro will choose, as well as on mind-sets of the future presidents of the US and Cuba, and on Congress.

Given Cuban involvement in the current crisis in Syria, one of the rogue states on the US “blacklist,”<sup>292</sup> the question of Cuba’s position on Iran easily springs to mind.<sup>293</sup> Diplomatic relations between the two countries span nearly 37 years,<sup>294</sup> owing to similarities between their ideologies, as asserted by the Iranian Ambassador to Cuba

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<sup>289</sup> See: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/10/16/cuba-is-intervening-in-syria-to-help-russia-it-s-not-the-first-time-havana-s-assisted-moscow.html>

<sup>290</sup> See: <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/10/14/cuban-military-forces-deployed-to-syria-to-operate-russian-tanks-say-sources.html>

<sup>291</sup> See: <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2015/10/15/a-slap-in-the-face-to-obama-cuban-troops-fight-for-assad-in-syria/>

<sup>292</sup> The list of states sponsor of terrorism. See: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/c14151.htm>

<sup>293</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>294</sup> See: <http://theiranproject.com/blog/2014/10/08/envoy-undercores-iran-cuba-growing-relations/>

Ali Chegini: “Iran and Cuba are both revolutionary countries, both are resolute in preserving their values, both are strong in their resistance against hegemonic powers, and both share stands at the international scenes.”<sup>295</sup> Evidence suggests that they remain willing to improve their cooperation in several areas, such as medicine, trade, and tourism. If the deal between Cuba and the US manages to withstand the blows dealt by Cuba’s involvement with Russia, the Cuban government will then have to decide how it will deal with Iran in the future, beyond the simple consideration of retaining or abandoning its long-cultivated alliance with the Middle East nation. If Cuba continues its relations with Iran and learns from the example of those nations that brought it to the negotiation table with the US, Cuba might be uniquely positioned to mediate between Iran and the US, should the recently-signed nuclear agreement between the two nations encounter setbacks or enforcement difficulties.<sup>296</sup>

Cuba’s largest trading partner, China, should now be considered. Last September, the two countries celebrated the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic ties.<sup>297</sup> Despite an initial phase of minimal or non-existent trade between the two countries, the amount of commercial exchange between them has soared since the 1980s, thanks to the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Economic and Commercial Relations (see chart 6.2.2).

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<sup>295</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>296</sup> See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/11729176/Iran-nuclear-deal-live.html>

<sup>297</sup> See: <http://thediplomat.com/2015/06/china-cuba-seek-economic-and-defense-cooperation/>



Chart 6.2.2: Trade Balance for Cuba to China (1962-2013).<sup>298</sup>

Cuba falls into the area toward which the Chinese government is willing and committed to expand trade and investments ties even more. In fact, the “Leap East” strategy, referred to in section 3.3, aims to enlarge Chinese interests in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to counter the US economic initiatives in Southeast Asia. Since this enterprising policy has already led China to obtain many important results in the area and it is likely to continue this way, Cuba again stands poised to play a pivotal role in US policy with an enemy nation. If the US does not want to cede a further portion of the Latin American market, expanding its investments in Cuba, where the gradual opening of the economy is rife possibilities, seems strongly advisable.

However, Cuba’s most significant foreign ally, from politics and ideology to its economy, is undoubtedly Venezuela. By virtue of Venezuela’s influence on Latin America in general, as well as its historical ties to Cuba and the considerable weight it continues to exert on the island nation, the next two chapters of this thesis will be

<sup>298</sup> Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity. See: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/line/sitc/show/cub/chn/all/1962.2013/>

devoted to this country. I will consider the origin of the enduring alliance between Cuba and Venezuela and its peculiarities. Furthermore, Venezuelan ties with the US, its strategic importance in the region, and its foreign relations ties to other countries, like the rogue states, will all be analysed.

## **PART III**

### **VENEZUELA AND ITS STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE**

Even before the advent of the Bolivarian Revolution with Chavez, the fundamental strategic importance of Venezuela has been defined by the incredible amount of its oil resources, which were traded mostly with the U.S. In the pre-Chavez era, Venezuela was still considered as a reliable democratic partner by the U.S., and it proposed itself as an ally both for the intermediation with third parties and for the promotion of the cooperation within the regional environment.<sup>299</sup>

After the launch of the Bolivarian Revolution and throughout the years of Hugo Chavez's Presidency, the primary source of Venezuelan income remained invariably oil, and unaltered were its aspirations toward the regional leadership, but something actually changed. The ideological orientation of the country curbed in an anti-imperialist and

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<sup>299</sup> See Romero C. A., Kelly J., *United States and Venezuela: Rethinking a Relationship*, Routledge, (2013), p.3.



anti-American sense, and Venezuela started to act on the regional scenario as a booster of the regional integration at U.S. detriment, because it promoted many initiatives that were meant to exclude the northern neighbour from the processes undertaken in the area. Also, Chavez began to weave close relationships with the other countries that opposed the U.S. global leadership, but on the other hand, he also carried on the deep economic exchanges that his countries had had with the U.S, thus appearing ambiguous in his attitude.

Hence, the aim of this part will be to describe more in-depth all these elements and the peculiarities of Venezuela that make it strategically relevant for the U.S. In doing this, I will start from its closest ally, Cuba. A country that, as it has been showed, has much in common with Venezuela and with its former leader.

## Chapter 7: The “special relationship” with Cuba

“Hoy, 16 de abril de 2011, [...] se celebra el 50 aniversario de la proclamación del carácter socialista de la Revolución Cubana. [...] Desde entonces, el camino hacia el socialismo, iniciado heroicamente por Cuba, no ha cesado de recorrerse en este continente, al punto que hoy las esperanzas de un socialismo a las alturas del siglo XXI cristaliza cada día más fuerte y vigorosamente en cada uno de los países que conforman la Alianza Bolivariana para los pueblos de Nuestra América, ALBA. [...] Estos acontecimientos memorables de la Revolución Cubana coinciden con el año en que Venezuela celebra el bicentenario de su independencia, lo cual no es una mera coincidencia, pues la gesta cubana se inscribe en el espíritu de aquel resonante grito de nuestros primeros libertadores, por la construcción de la patria grande, nuestra América.

Por todo ello, gritamos una vez más con orgullo junto al pueblo cubano: Patria socialista o muerte. ¡Venceremos!”<sup>300</sup>

With these words, Hugo Chavez congratulated Cuba and the Cuban people on 50 years of their socialist revolution. His words demonstrate the strong ideological affinity between the Cuban model and the Bolivarian Revolution that Chavez carried out in Venezuela, as well as the powerful inspiration the younger Chavez found in the older Fidel Castro. This bond between the two former leaders of Cuba and Venezuela served as the solid foundation on which they built the resilient alliance between their two countries. The sections of this chapter are devoted to analysing the various dimensions of this tie, starting with the ideological affinity of the Bolivarian

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<sup>300</sup> “Today, April 16, 2011, [...] we are going to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the proclamation of the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution. [...] Since then, the path toward socialism, heroically started by Cuba, has not been ceding to go through this continent, to the point that today the hopes for socialism at the beginning of the XXI century, are crystalizing each day stronger and more vigorously in each countries belonging to the Bolivarian Alliance for the peoples of Our America, ALBA. [...] These memorable events of the Cuban Revolution coincide with the year in which Venezuela is going to celebrate the bicentennial of its Independence, which is not mere coincidence, because the heroic Cuban deed are inscribed in the spirit of that resonant cry of our first liberators, for the construction of the great homeland, our America. For all these, we proudly shout once more together with the Cuban people: Socialism or death. We will win!” For the whole text, see: <http://www.psu.org.ve/portada/chavez-felicita-al-pueblo-cubano-por-el-50-aniversario-de-la-victoria/#.VrXS0fnhDb0>

Revolution.

### 7.1. The Bolivarian Revolution

Even before Hugo Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution linked itself to Castro's Cuba, there were moments when Cuba and Venezuela seemed to take the same historical trajectory, most notably true at the end of the 1950s, when both countries saw uprisings against their contemporary pro-US governments. This was just a moment, though, for while the Cuban revolution succeeded, the Venezuelan one failed, and a new democratic course was charted with the signing of the "Punto Fijo" Pact in 1958. This document, an agreement between the three major parties in Venezuela, sought to ensure both equal participation in government by each group and the stability of the democratic system by accepting the results of each election.<sup>301</sup> The signing of this pact, therefore, marks the divergence of the revolutionary history of the two countries.

A few decades later, the advent of Chavez brought revolution back to Venezuela. Although Chavez proclaimed the socialist ideology of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela only in 2005,<sup>302</sup> he had underscored its similarity to and affinity with the Cuban Revolution, saying Venezuela and Cuba were undergoing "one and the same revolution,"<sup>303</sup> from the very beginning. The similarity and affinity stretched beyond abstract ideals to *ad hominem* esteem, at first as Chavez finding inspiration in the figure of Fidel Castro and later as reciprocal, reflected in remarks Castro made after Chavez's death: "We have the honour of having shared with the Bolivarian leader the same ideals of social justice and of support for the exploited, [...] until victory always, unforgettable

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<sup>301</sup> See Galgani P. F., *America Latina e Stati Uniti: dalla dottrina Monroe ai rapporti tra GW Bush e Chávez*, Milano, Franco Angeli Editore, (2007), p.194.

<sup>302</sup> See: [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/30/world/americas/chavez-restyles-venezuela-with-21stcentury-socialism.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/30/world/americas/chavez-restyles-venezuela-with-21stcentury-socialism.html?_r=0)

<sup>303</sup> See: [http://directaction.org.au/issue14/venezuela\\_and\\_cuba\\_one\\_revolution](http://directaction.org.au/issue14/venezuela_and_cuba_one_revolution)

friend."<sup>304</sup>

Among the things held in common between the two men, from an ideological point of view, is finding inspiration in the iconic figure of a national *libertador* from the history of their respective nations: for Castro and the Cubans, José Martí,<sup>305</sup> while for Chavez and the Venezuelans, Simón Bolívar.<sup>306</sup> The two socialist leaders considered these two personalities and their struggles the forefathers of their own revolutions, guided by a shared desire, especially on Chavez's part, to create a common great country, a notion which corresponds to deeper and stronger regional integration in more modern terms. The battles for independence from the old motherlands faced by the two historical *libertadores* parallel the struggles the two revolutionaries underwent with the imperialist powers, and especially with the US.

Furthermore, both revolutions were inspired by the principles of humanism, mutual aid, and solidarity, enshrined later in the Preamble to the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, adopted in 1999.<sup>307</sup> It is in those fields, in fact, that each nation has achieved much. Plans and initiatives to redistribute the wealth among the lower and poorer brackets of the population were numerous in both countries. During their respective periods of revolutionary consolidation, the Cuban and Venezuelan governments guaranteed completely free education and health services for everyone. When the two leaders widened and strengthened their cooperation, these achievements improved even more, thanks to the exchange of Cuban medical professionals and educational personnel for Venezuelan oil. As time passed, the younger Venezuelan revolution and the consolidated Cuban One became increasingly inextricably linked, the former converging ideologically and stylistically with the latter

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<sup>304</sup> See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-chavez-castro-idUSBRE92A0FU20130311>

<sup>305</sup> See footnote 216.

<sup>306</sup> See: <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/simon-bolivar/>

<sup>307</sup> For the full text of the Constitution see:

<http://www.venezuelaemb.or.kr/english/ConstitutionoftheBolivarianingles.pdf>

while the latter tightening its economic relationship with the former.

Cuban economic reliance on Venezuelan oil exports notwithstanding, Chavez never interpreted his alliance with Cuba as a means for exercising power over the Castro government or for influencing the course of domestic affairs; “if anything, the opposite is the case.”<sup>308</sup> Chavez esteemed Fidel Castro’s depth of experience, considering it a grounded and valiant support. On several occasions, Chavez relied upon advice and political and diplomatic skills that Castro, or his skilful and expert staff, lavished on him generously. During the US-backed *coup d’état* in Venezuela in 2002, after Pedro Carmona took the power, Fidel counselled Chavez over the nearly 48 hours in which he vacated the presidency, advising advised him to ensure his safety first,<sup>309</sup> lest the opposition immediately profit by his death and fill the power vacuum. The coup ultimately failed when the Carmona government acquiesced both to popular protests in the streets of Venezuela and to international reactions to its illegal challenge to Chavez as a democratically-elected leader, with Carmona’s resignation and the fortification Chavez’s role and leadership. In fact, his ties with Castro grew even stronger as for his relationship with the people, and moreover, it allowed to embitter Chavez’s anti-Yankee rhetoric.

Castro’s years of experience together and Chavez’s new energy were not only fruitful in achieving the ideal of a common great country in the old sense, but also in the more modern one noted above. These components helped fuel the creation of the aforementioned Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). This regional alliance seeks to strengthen the political and economic ties among already left-leaning governments [e.g., those Correa in Ecuador, Ortega in Nicaragua, and Morales in Bolivia, as previously noted] and to facilitate or support potential candidates aligned

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<sup>308</sup> See footnote 169, p.200.

<sup>309</sup> See footnote 169, p.202.

with this ideology in other countries now and in the future. In essence, this initiative is a sort of improvement and extension of Cuba's past direct political and military commitment to spread the revolution throughout Latin America.<sup>310</sup>

Since their asynchronous beginnings, the Cuban and Venezuelan revolutions have had many affinities, which have been strengthened even more over time. While their ideological and political ties have already been discussed so far, the economic and social relations between the two countries will be the topic of the next section of this chapter.

## **7.2. Economic and social links**

The intense ideological affinity between the revolutions in Cuba and Venezuela, described in the previous section, paved the way for similarly intense economic and social cooperation. The conclusion of the first comprehensive agreement between the two nations on October 30, 2000 nearly coincided with the first anniversary of Hugo Chavez's election as president. The so-called *Convenio Integral de Cooperación Cuba-Venezuela* (Integral Cooperation Agreement between Cuba and Venezuela) was the solid ground upon which Castro and Chavez continued building their bilateral alliance, hoping to extend it to other neighbouring nations considered friendly. The aim of the agreement was to promote the exchange of goods and services on the basis of the principle of friendship and solidarity between the two parties, "conscious of their common interest to promote and encourage the progress of their respective economies and the reciprocal benefits resulting from cooperation, which provides effective results in regards to the economic and social progress of their respective countries and the

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<sup>310</sup> See footnote 169, p.199.

integration of Latin America and the Caribbean.”<sup>311</sup> In essence, the agreement established a fixed, preferential price, from 2002 onward, for 53,000 barrels of Venezuelan oil, traded to Cuba,<sup>312</sup> in exchange for more than 13,000 Cuban professionals, especially in the areas of health, education, and sports, sent to Venezuela.<sup>313</sup>

The benefits of this agreement were bilateral, extending beyond the obvious terms. Castro’s regime received a needed break from the oppressive effects of the US embargo on the Cuban economy, while Venezuelan obtained the technical staff it needed to implement the so-called *Plan Bolívar 2000* (launched on February 27, 1999) more efficiently and to expand it to the long series of the other Bolivarian missions started by Chavez. The Bolivar Plan consisted of sending thousands of Venezuelan soldiers to the poorest and most degraded areas of the country in order to conduct door-to-door distribution of food to the needy, as well as vaccines and medical care to the ill that could not afford them. The Cuban experts were necessary, since the scant ranks of the Venezuelan professional class were spread thin over more than 40 Bolivarian missions since 2003.<sup>314</sup> The most successful among these missions were the *Misión Barrio Adentro*, aimed at improving health conditions for the poorest; the *Misión Robinson*, an operation that saw Cuban and Venezuelan teachers committed to spread the alphabetization throughout the country; and finally *Misión Milagro*, a unique mission that provides free medical assistance to the people with eye problems. None of these initiatives, especially the last one, would have been possible without the Cuban experts.

In order to afford such a powerful and impressive system of the missions, the

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<sup>311</sup> See: <http://en.granma.cu/mundo/2015-10-30/cuba-venezuela-comprehensive-cooperation-agreement>

<sup>312</sup> See: Romero C. A., *South-South Cooperation between Venezuela and Cuba*, Special Report on South-South Cooperation, South-South Cooperation: A Challenge to the Aid System?, Reality of Aid Network, (2010), p.108.

<sup>313</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>314</sup> See: <http://gobiernoonlinea.gob.ve/home/misiones.dot>

Venezuelan government undertook a massive process of nationalization and expropriations similar to the one Castro carried out at the beginning of his regime in Cuba. The main sector Chavez felt was essential to control, both for its strategic economic role and for the political dissent expressed by its managers, was the national oil company PDVSA (*Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.*). In fact, following a 2003 strike organized by the business managers to protest against Chavez, the government, then running out of oil, fired the top seven PDVSA managers<sup>315</sup> and 19,500 workers as “enemies of the country.”<sup>316</sup>

The economic ties between Cuba and Venezuela were further strengthened in 2004 by the signing of a new trade agreement, which called for the elimination of tariffs and import duties, the promotion of investment, and technical and educational cooperation between the two countries.<sup>317</sup> The first provision of this agreement provided the nucleus of what would become ALBA, the wider alliance that encompassed not only Cuba and Venezuela, but also many other Latin American countries.<sup>318</sup> The agreement’s remaining provisions included sharing technologies, financing for some development projects in several sectors such as agriculture and infrastructure, and deepening energy and service sector cooperation from the foundation provided by the Integral Cooperation Agreement between Cuba and Venezuela in 2000. Six years later, in 2010, Chavez announced the extension of the 2000 agreement for another ten-year term, saying: “the decade from 2010 to 2020 will represent great progress towards the construction of socialism in Cuba and Venezuela.”<sup>319</sup>

Lest the depth and the strength of the ties between Caracas and Havana be

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<sup>315</sup> See Human Rights Watch, *A Decade Under Chavez: Political Intolerance and Lost Opportunities for Advancing Human Rights in Venezuela*, New York, NY, Human Rights Watch, (2008), p.175.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibidem*, p.182.

<sup>317</sup> See: <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/840>

<sup>318</sup> See footnote 8, p.86.

<sup>319</sup> See: [http://www.eluniversal.com/2010/11/09/en\\_pol\\_esp\\_comprehensive-cuba-v\\_09A4708579](http://www.eluniversal.com/2010/11/09/en_pol_esp_comprehensive-cuba-v_09A4708579)



characterized solely as the product of the personal relationship between Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez, I will now examine the most recent economic and social changes brought about by the many years of cooperation between the two countries. At the end of 2014, nearly two years after Chavez's death, the two governments signed 62 new agreements across 25 different dimensions of social and economic development for both countries.<sup>320</sup> The deals provided for the improvement of the health care system in Venezuela, thanks to a plan for the training of 518 professionals in Cuba,<sup>321</sup> as well as for cooperation in the fields of culture and sports.

The strength of the relationship between the two countries, analysed in this section and the previous one, has led not only to a deeper economic and political interdependence (consider, for example, that Venezuela ranks second among top export destinations for Cuba),<sup>322</sup> but also to common trends in the development of their respective social, economic and political systems. In the social dimension, the trends that unite the two countries the most are those concerning health and education. As has been said, both governments committed the largest part of their budgets to missions for equality and for the struggle against the miserable living conditions plaguing a great part of their people. The charts below show the effects of their cooperation: a sharp decline in infant mortality rates in Cuba and Venezuela (see respectively charts 7.2.1 and 7.2.2), indicative of the improvement in the health care system; and an increase in net enrolment rates for both primary and secondary education, linked to the advancement in the educational systems of both nations (see respectively charts 7.2.3 and 7.2.4).

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<sup>320</sup> See: <http://www.eluniversal.com/economia/141214/cuba-y-venezuela-firman-62-acuerdos-de-cooperacion-en-25-sectores>

<sup>321</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>322</sup> See: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/cub/>

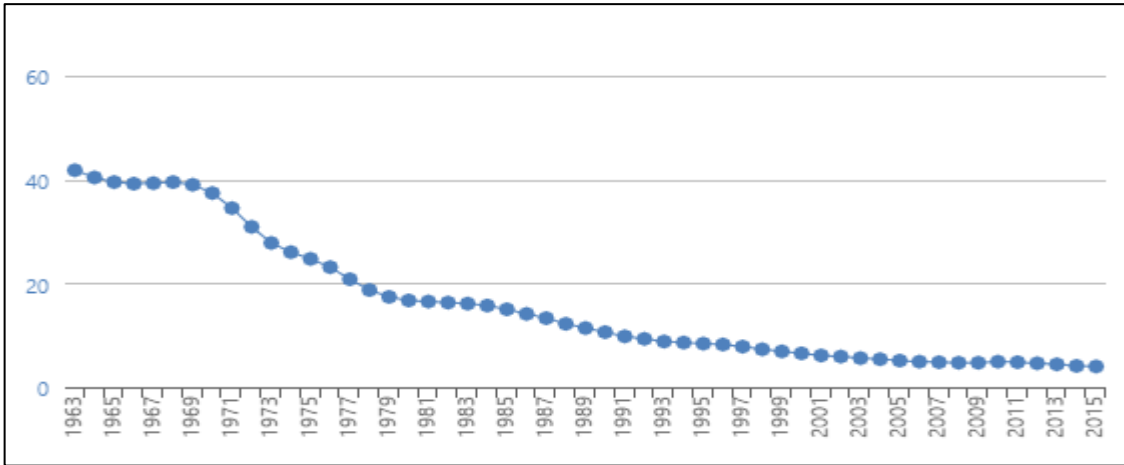


Chart 7.2.1: Cuban Infant Mortality Rate, 1963-2015.<sup>323</sup>

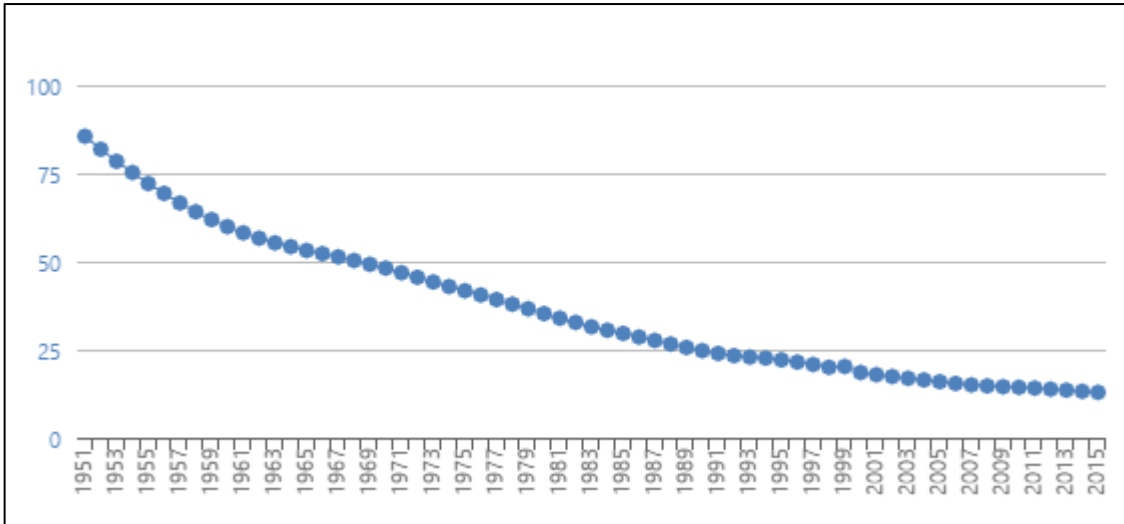


Chart 7.2.2: Venezuelan Infant Mortality Rate, 1951-2015.<sup>324</sup>

<sup>323</sup> Source: CEPALSTAT. See:

[http://interwp.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil\\_Nacional\\_Social.html?pais=CUB&idioma=english](http://interwp.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil_Nacional_Social.html?pais=CUB&idioma=english)

<sup>324</sup> Source: CEPALSTAT. See:

[http://interwp.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil\\_Nacional\\_Social.html?pais=VEN&idioma=english](http://interwp.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil_Nacional_Social.html?pais=VEN&idioma=english)

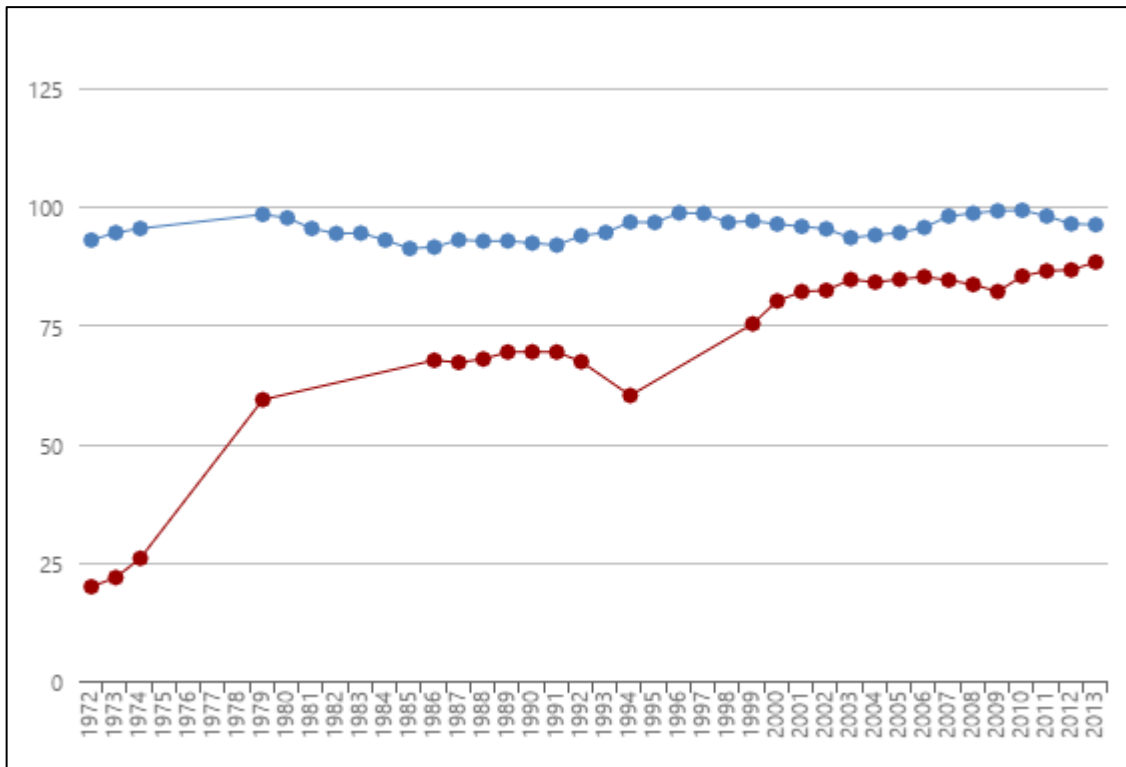


Chart 7.2.3: Net Enrolment Ratio in Primary (blue) and Secondary (red) Education in Cuba.<sup>325</sup>

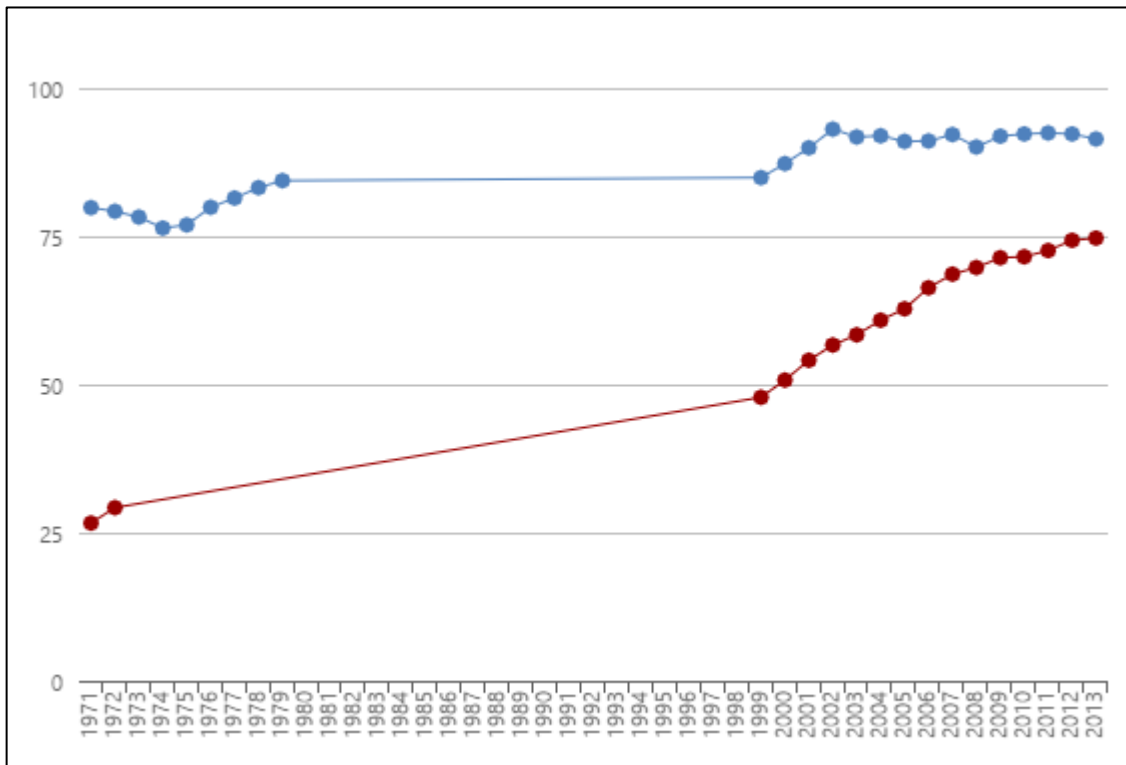


Chart 7.2.4: Net Enrolment Ratio in Primary (blue) and Secondary (red) Education in Venezuela.<sup>326</sup>

<sup>325</sup> See footnote 323.

<sup>326</sup> See footnote 324.

A further element worth highlighting is the issue of property rights. In chart 7.2.5, a line graph representing the average property rights across the nations of Latin America, as well as the same rights in both Cuba and Venezuela, the downward trend of Venezuela's internal policy on this issue over the years represented further underscores its ideological bond with Cuba, here represented by the convergence of their two lines. These lines reflect the internal policy choices of the two governments and the common practice of nationalization and expropriation observed in both countries.

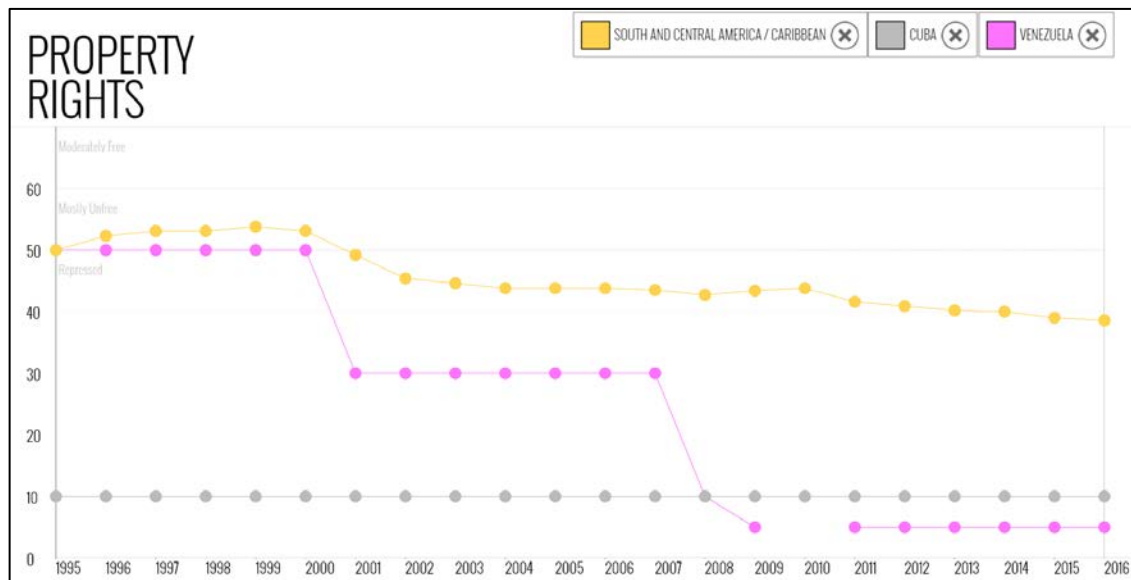


Chart 7.2.5: Property rights in Venezuela and Cuba compared to the Latin American average.<sup>327</sup>

Overall, the sharing of economic, political, and social choices and policies has led the two countries down similar development paths, both positive and negative. On the positive side, social aspects such as healthcare and education have benefitted greatly from this ideological synergy. On the negative side, economic and political dimensions of the two nations continue to reflect a strong repression of dissent and a disrespect for the basic human rights. It is of little surprise, therefore, that Venezuela and Cuba are

<sup>327</sup> Source: Index of Economic Freedom, The Heritage Foundation. See: <http://www.heritage.org/index/visualize?cnts=venezuela|cuba&src=country>

currently 176<sup>th</sup> and 177<sup>th</sup>, respectively, in the national rankings of the Index of Economic Freedom of the Heritage Foundation.<sup>328</sup>

Despite the confluence noted from the beginning of Chavez's presidency until after his death, something seems to be changing in the relationship between the two countries. Though cooperation between Cuba and Venezuela has demonstrably continued after Chavez's death in 2013, this event probably marked the end of an era, because Chavez's protégé Nicolás Maduro seems to lack his master's charismatic talent. Coupled with Fidel Castro's resignation in favour of his brother Raul and the economic crisis in Venezuela, these factors help to explain the new fragility in the equilibrium and the existing bond between the two revolutionary countries. The next section aims to analyse each of the factors that could endanger their long-standing alliance and to outline possible future scenarios, should the *rapprochement* between Cuba and the US continue apace.

### **7.3. The Current situation and future evolution**

“Cuba es el mar de la felicidad. Hacia allá va Venezuela.”<sup>329</sup> These words, spoken by Hugo Chavez on March 8, 2000 to welcome some of the Cuban co-operators arriving in Venezuela, are the best synthetic description of the intentions of the then-Venezuelan leader. Chavez sought to re-create in his own country what Fidel Castro had done in Cuba, across the social, political, and economic spectrum. Chavez's complete trust and esteem of the Cuban leaders and government was manifest until the end of his life: he spent his last month on the Caribbean island, undergo medical treatment, and also conducted Venezuelan government business, including holding cabinet meetings, in

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<sup>328</sup> See: <http://www.heritage.org/index/ranking>

<sup>329</sup> “Cuba is the sea of happiness. This is where Venezuela is directing towards.” See: [http://www.nacion.com/mundo/famosas-polemicas-frases-Hugo-Chavez\\_0\\_1327467377.html](http://www.nacion.com/mundo/famosas-polemicas-frases-Hugo-Chavez_0_1327467377.html)

Havana until his death.<sup>330</sup> As previously noted, reciprocal blind trust between the two former leaders of Cuba and Venezuela was the key of the success of their asymmetrical relationship. The imbalance does not favour one nation over the other: while Cuba is economically much more reliant on Venezuelan oil and commerce in general than the latter is on Cuban trade, the opposite is the case politically, since Venezuela has benefitted from the arrival of scores of Cuban professionals and military and political advisors, above all, since the beginning of this alliance. Any negative repercussions of this asymmetry were, in a certain sense, smoothed over by the charisma and the friendship of Chavez and Castro. With the changes in leadership in both countries—Chavez’s death and succession by Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, and Fidel Castro’s resignation in favour of his more pragmatic brother, Raul—the alliance could be in danger. In this section, I will first analyse internal challenges in Venezuela that could affect its the relationship to Cuba, then Cuban foreign policy decisions related to Venezuela that could potentially undermine their ties.

The political and economic situation in Venezuela has worsened increasingly since Chavez’s death. The former leader left a country stricken by inflation and choked by the excessive presence of the state within the economic system, discouraging private economic activity and investments. Evidence of sluggish productivity in the Venezuelan industrial section first appeared in 2013, the year of Chavez’s death, in the form of nationwide shortages of primary goods. As a counter-measure, the so-called *Plan Antibachaqueo*<sup>331</sup> was launched, in order to monitor the sale of rationed goods such as flour, sugar, rice, oil and toilet paper. Since then, problems of this kind have been occurring every day in the lives of the Venezuelans. In fact, at the beginning of 2014,

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<sup>330</sup> See footnote 249, p.1.

<sup>331</sup> See Pistone L., *Venezuela: il “Grande Fratello” bolivariano vigilerà sui carrelli della spesa*, «Atlas», June 5, 2013.

people took to the streets to protest against the living conditions in their country. The protests started as student demonstrations against the high crime rate and growing lack of security in Venezuela, soon thereafter expanding to encompass the lack of primary goods and soaring inflation, currently estimated by the Index of Economic Freedom as being at 62.2%,<sup>332</sup> the highest in the world.<sup>333</sup> During those protests, three people were shot and killed by the police, who were trying to contain the peaceful demonstration. Since then and until recently, many other rallies have been carried out by the population and the opposition. This month in fact, the drought brought by *El Niño* led Maduro's government to ration electricity and restrict the business hours of shops to just few hours a day.

To review, a few key factors have contributed to the current Venezuelan situation, including substantial budgetary commitment to Bolivarian missions by the government, a stagnant domestic economy, and the almost exclusive reliance of the Venezuelan export economy on its oil, with plummeting oil prices playing a major role. Since the Venezuelan economy depends on the sale of oil for 95% of its foreign earnings,<sup>334</sup> its extreme sensitivity to the oscillation in oil prices has catastrophic effects on the country's GDP, as shown in chart 7.3.1. As the chart shows, the steepest plunge began in 2008 as part of the first significant oil shock both domestically for Venezuela and internationally as part of the larger crisis. Another began more recently, and saw the oil prices fall by a further 17% in less than a month in 2015.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> See: <http://www.heritage.org/index/explore?view=by-variables>

<sup>333</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>334</sup> See footnote 249, p.6.

<sup>335</sup> See: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-12-22/as-opec-tries-to-squeeze-rivals-one-of-its-own-feels-the-pinch>



Chart 7.3.1: Venezuela GDP annual growth rate, 2006-2016.<sup>336</sup>

These economic difficulties for Maduro are accompanied by political ones. During the December 6, 2015 elections, the opposition factions gathered under the aegis of the MUD (*Mesa de Unidad Democrática*) managed to gain the majority in the Parliament, a first since the election that initially installed Chavez in 1999. With this unfavourable majority in the legislature, neither Maduro’s position nor the prospects for continued cooperation with Cuba seem rosy. In fact, opposition protests against the Cuban presence in Venezuela have also begun, the people perceiving it almost as an occupation, especially because of the integration of Cuban and Venezuelan military forces.<sup>337</sup> Furthermore, the protestors accuse Cuba of fostering socialism in their own country, thus worsening the effects of Chavez’s rule on the protection of human rights, above all when political and civil rights are concerned.<sup>338</sup> Opposition criticism of Cuba also includes an incisive look at the economic burden Cuba represents for Venezuela, since there is no clear economic correspondence between the worth of the Venezuelan oil shipped to Cuba and the number and value of Cuban professionals sent to

<sup>336</sup> Source: Trading Economics. See: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/venezuela/gdp-growth-annual>

<sup>337</sup> See footnote 249, p.7.

<sup>338</sup> See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/world/americas/prottesting-in-venezuela-with-antipathy-toward-cuba.html? r=1>



Venezuela.<sup>339</sup> According to critics, this imbalance, also noted in the previous section, constitutes a burden for the already shaky Venezuelan economy.

As I anticipated in the introduction, there is also another series of factors that could endanger the nucleus of the Bolivarian alliance, namely Cuba's new foreign relations.<sup>340</sup> First, the thaw with the US has confused and upset the government in Caracas, especially in light of recent measures taken by the US to compel Venezuela to endorse human rights protection. As noted above, Raul Castro and the Cuban government have sided with Maduro and their Venezuelan allies regarding the Obama Executive Order on this topic. That expression of solidarity notwithstanding, the thaw in US-Cuba relations, and especially the agreement between the two nations, constitutes a topic of concern for Maduro, as its outcomes could affect Venezuela significantly. Expanded discussion of the relations between the US and Venezuela appears below, in chapter 8.

The second Cuban foreign policy choice that goes against Venezuelan interests concerns Colombia. Recently, Cuba broke its usual posture of support for FARC, the armed guerrilla groups fighting the legitimate power for more than five decades, and proposed itself as a mediator between this militia group and the Colombian government. The peace talks, started in 2012 in Havana, seem to have produced the most progress since the beginning of the conflict,<sup>341</sup> thanks to the efforts of the Cuban government. This decision by Raul Castro must be considered within the new framework of his foreign policy, that is to diversify Cuba's ties with the world. As such, it constitutes an attempt to appear as a useful negotiator and mediator for peace and as a reliable partner for the democratic countries, as well.

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<sup>339</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>340</sup> See: <http://uk.businessinsider.com/cuba-making-friends-venezuela-enemies?r=US&IR=T>

<sup>341</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/07/colombia-farc-rebels-conflict-peace-talks>

Cuba has further diverged from Venezuela on foreign affairs by initiating friendly diplomatic relations with Guyana, a country with whom Venezuela shares a historically contested border. In fact, the Bolivarian Republic claimed more than half of Guyana's territory (see chart 7.3.2) as its own until a peaceful settlement was reached in 1899. Over a century of tense diplomatic relations between the two countries ensued, before a renewed embitterment last year, when the Guyana's government asked ExxonMobil to look for offshore oil in the area claimed by Venezuela. While this action obviously re-opened the old dispute, it is important to note that it was also a convenient and galvanizing issue for Maduro to seize upon as elections approached and he sought to reunite the country around him.<sup>342</sup>



Chart 7.3.2: Venezuelan claims on Guyana.

<sup>342</sup> See: <http://globalriskinsights.com/2015/08/are-tensions-with-guyana-venezuela-electoral-wildcard/>

The analysis carried out so far has highlighted all the main elements at stake in the Venezuela-Cuba alliance. Since all these factors could negatively affect the destiny of the relations between the two countries, a return to the splendour of the Chavez era for the Havana-Caracas axis seems unlikely. The relative age of each country's revolutionary movements might account for some of the drift. Where Cuba's revolution has had more than five decades to evolve and pass through difficult moments leaving it receptive to new undertakings and the opening of diplomatic relations across the world, the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution's relative youth suggests that it has many more growing pains in its future. As the Cuban government shifts toward more "liberal" economic policies and seeks to pry open its economy slowly, the Venezuelan economic system is increasingly statist.<sup>343</sup> The limited array of options available to these two allies as their political futures continue to evolve, seemingly away from one another, could be further restricted by the outcome of Cuba's approach to the US, especially if the island nation accepts some type of democratic clause, or something similar to it. In that case, unless Venezuela undertakes a sort of transition itself, a setback in the long-standing cooperation between Cuba and Venezuela seems imminent. A decrease in their heavy interdependence could be beneficial for both nations, leading Cuba to diversify its economic and political partners and thereby granting more stability to the country, while allowing Venezuela more political autonomy that might lead it to democratic concession of some kind to the opposition.

However the political future of these two nations unfolds, the US will play a crucial role. Since the re-conquest of Venezuela to democratic principles and to US friendship would be a decisive turning point for US foreign relations in Latin America, the next chapter will deal with US ties to Venezuela. It will provide an analysis of the

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<sup>343</sup> See footnote 249, p.7.

ambiguities between the two countries, long-time economic partners despite political and ideological antagonism, and describe the current situation of the Maduro Presidency as well as the changes in sight.

## Chapter 8: An Ambiguous Tie with the US

“Eres un ignorante, mister Danger, eres un burro, mister Danger; o para decírtelo en mi mal inglés, You are a donkey, Mr. George W. Bush [...] Tu eres un cobarde, ¿porque no te vas a Irak a comandar tus fuerzas armadas? Es fácil comandarla desde lejos. Si algún día, se te vas a ocurrir la locura de invadir a Venezuela, te espero en esta sabana Mr. Danger. Come here, mister Danger, cobarde, asesino, eres un genocida, eres un alcohólico, eres un borracho, eres un inmoral, eres lo peor, mister Danger, eres un enfermizo, lo sé personalmente. [...]Eres de lo peor que ha habido en este planeta. Dios libre al mundo de esta amenaza.”<sup>344</sup>

On March 19, 2006 during the transmission of his TV program *Aló Presidente*, Hugo Chavez used these words to address then-President George W. Bush and his decision to engage war with Iraq. This quotation, one of the most verbally violent speeches directed against the US and its presidents, clarifies fully the former Venezuelan president’s degree of opposition to his Yankee neighbour. This level of ideological antipathy between the two countries was not, however, reflected in their economic posture toward one another: Venezuela remained invariably one of the US’s main provider of oil, while the US occupied a relevant position within the commercial partners of the Bolivarian Republic. The perpetuation of such an ambiguous tie seems confusing at first sight, given the United States’ historic embargo of Cuba, a completely different reaction to a nation of deep ideological similarity to Venezuela, as has been discussed above.

Thus, this chapter will attempt to determine the reasons for the difference in US treatment and policy between the two Latin American nations, as well as discover and

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<sup>344</sup> “You are an ignorant, mister Danger, you are a donkey, mister Danger; you are a donkey, Mr. George W. Bush. [...] You are a coward, why don’t you go personally to Iraq to command your army? It’s easy to command it from afar. If one day you crazily decide to invade Venezuela, I will wait for you here in this savannah, Mr. Danger. Come here, mister Danger, coward, assassin, you committed a genocide, you are an alcoholic, you are a drunk, you are an immoral, you are the worst, mister Danger, you are a mentally ill, I know it personally. [...] You are the worst on this planet. God frees the world from this threat.” See: <http://noticias.terra.com/mundo/video-momentos-memorables-de-hugo-chavez,f2e5be32fa264990e331909023ed111a3s1sRCRD.html>

chart the origins, development, and expansion of the Chavist hatred toward the US. As the previous chapter did with Cuba-Venezuela relations, this one will provide a description of the current attitude of Maduro's government towards the US, and how it could evolve in the future.

### **8.1. Chavez and ALBA**

US reaction to Venezuelan election in 1998 was quite calm. Since Chavez's election was perceived as the continuation of previous democratic customs, the Clinton Administration was incapable of foreseeing the changes ahead. Neither his previous activity as the promoter and leader of an armed uprising in 1992 nor the passionate rhetoric used throughout his campaign to discredit the neo-liberal economic model and US imperialism managed to arouse suspicion in the US Administration.<sup>345</sup> The general feeling was that Chavez would change his attitude and dispense with the populist propaganda used during the election. This, of course, did not occur, and things began to worsen soon after, with his decision to call a constitutional assembly to re-write the Constitution. However, his first steps, especially in the economic sphere, were very cautious, because Chavez had to reconcile his aspirations for reform with his efforts not to alienate the US and the business community.<sup>346</sup> He first consolidated his political and military power, in order to count on a solid base of support, and only progressively did he proceed to introduce socio-economic changes.

On the US side, the attitude toward the Chavez regime necessarily started to change after the September 11 attacks. The reactionary process the US launched after those terrorist acts, described in the first part of this thesis, also led to a different

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<sup>345</sup> See: <http://dissidentvoice.org/2013/10/us-venezuela-relations-a-case-study-of-imperialism-and-anti-imperialism/>

<sup>346</sup> Ibidem.

perspective on Chavez, since his turbulent government could destabilize the area, especially nearby Colombia, already affected by the violent FARC Bush's decision to declare the war on terror, and to wage actual war in those countries harbouring terrorist cells, was deeply criticised by Chavez, who said "you can't fight terror with terror."<sup>347</sup>

Meanwhile, on the Venezuelan side, the real turning point occurred in 2002, when a general strike was organized by the trade unions against Chavez's appointment of his own allies to the high ranks of the PDVSA. Two days later, on April 11, a manifestation opposing the President arose, leading to the deaths of more than a dozen people.<sup>348</sup> However, the military leaders refused to repress the demonstrators further, and asked Chavez to leave the office. Pedro Carmona, the head of Venezuela's largest business association, replaced him and immediately tried to dismantle all the aspects of Chavez's rule by dissolving Congress and cancelling the constitution approved under his administration.<sup>349</sup> As previously noted in several places, this new government was not recognized by the international community, because it stood in conflict with the democratic election of Chavez and also because it was ostracized by the people that took to the streets to demand his return.

Not only was the coup a complete failure internally, Chavez returning to power stronger than before, but also externally, internationally embarrassing the United States as a backer. Although Bush reasserted US non-involvement in the coup, he also rashly recognized the manifestly illegitimate Carmona government, contradicting every democratic principle usually professed by the US. This move, suggestive of growing US imperialism, provided Chavez the perfect justification for introducing renewed vitriol into his anti-Yankee rhetoric, both the cause and the effect here helping polarizing the

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<sup>347</sup> See: <http://www.economist.com/node/1632905>

<sup>348</sup> See: <http://www.cfr.org/venezuela/venezuela-rise-chavez-background-discussion-paper/p9269>

<sup>349</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/15/venezuela.alexbellos>

masses. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the signs ignored during his election campaign and his long-avowed admiration for Fidel Castro should now join with his anti-American sentiments to propel Chavez into greater alliance with Cuba, as a fellow critic and victim of the US, resulting in a key collaboration: ALBA.

The Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our America (known with the Spanish acronym ALBA), as discussed in the section 7.2, stemmed from the Havana-Caracas alliance of 2004. It boasts eleven members currently: Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Venezuela, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Grenada. Originally, the bloc was called Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas,<sup>350</sup> in order to stress its opposition to the US initiative in the area, the Free Trade Area of the Americas. The definitive collapse of this program came during the Summit of Mar del Plata in November 2005, shortly after the creation of the Alliance. ALBA's alternative perspective was manifest also in the definition of its inspiring principles, the promotion of "solidarity, complementarity, justice, and cooperation,"<sup>351</sup> clearly opposed to the US-led initiatives marked by the intense spirit of competition and imperialism. Furthermore, in 2006, when Bolivia entered the Alliance, a further guarantee, the Peoples' Trade Treaty (TCP), was added, incorporating specialized tariff policies for the smaller economies that would have been integrated in the agreement.<sup>352</sup>

ALBA's achievements can be divided into four main areas: telecommunications, banking and finance, oil, and social programs. Under the auspices of the first area, in 2005 ALBA fostered the creation of TeleSUR, an alternative to the market dominance of the American cable news network, CNN. TeleSUR was launched to combat the US

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<sup>350</sup> See: <http://www.as-coa.org/articles/explainer-what-alba>

<sup>351</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>352</sup> Ibidem.



monopoly of the information system, to spread different news, and to stress alternative perspectives not contaminated by imperialism. In banking activities, Venezuela decided to found the ALBA Bank in 2008 with \$1 billion in capital.<sup>353</sup> This operation established a financing system different from US-dominated ones like the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The new bank mainly supports agricultural plans, social programs dealing health and education, and projects of energy cooperation. This financial support has been most successful in the area of social programs, as they attempt to extend the initial cooperation between Cuba and Venezuela, from 2000, to all ALBA member states. Of the four achievement areas listed at the start, however, the most successful is the oil sector. In 2005, Chavez established Petro-Caribe, an energy agreement linking the majority of ALBA members (Bolivia and Ecuador are the exceptions) with the Bahamas, Belize, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, and Suriname, to Venezuelan's energy infrastructure and reserves.<sup>354</sup> Essentially, Petro-Caribe is a trade exchange preferential area in which Venezuela supplies oil at favourable prices to its allies in the Caribbean. Furthermore, the initiative aims at removing the huge multinational leaders in the oil sector in the LAC region, making them less competitive, thus forcing them out of the market.<sup>355</sup>

Beyond ALBA, Chavez proposed two other initiatives to deepen ties within the Latin America and Caribbean region. The first, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), was created in 2008 and has a membership of twelve nations. Its charter objective is to "build, in a participatory and consensual way, a space for the cultural,

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<sup>353</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>354</sup> See: <http://www.cfr.org/latin-america-and-the-caribbean/bolivarian-alternative-americas-does-do/p24886>

<sup>355</sup> See: <http://www.limesonline.com/il-venezuela-di-maduro-punta-su-petrocaribe/46469>

social, economic, and political integration and unity among its peoples.”<sup>356</sup> The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) is the second of these initiatives. Begun in 2011 in Caracas, this larger forum of 33 states seeks to expand regional integration through a discussion of shared problems within a framework of solidarity for the achievement of “social justice and equality for the all the humankind.”<sup>357</sup> Alongside ALBA, these programs have neutralized the Organization of American States and other inter-American institutions that once sustained a hemispheric agenda.<sup>358</sup>

The commonalities between the initiatives discussed in this chapter stretch beyond similar geography and membership. Beginning with ALBA, each was created, or at least inspired by, the vision of Hugo Chavez, sharing a single objective: to obtain increased independence from the political approval and economic hegemony of Washington by further weakening the already frail political and ideological role of the US in Latin America. This mission is identical, both ideologically and politically, to the guiding ethos of Chavez’s years as president of Venezuela. Economically, however, Venezuela’s actions take the opposite tack by embracing the US as a trade partner. This economic partnership, hinted at in the introduction to this chapter, will be more fully outlined in the next section. The composite picture of relations presented in this section and the next will provide the contextual springboard for considering the current status of Venezuela’s relationship with the US and its possible future permutations.

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<sup>356</sup> See: [http://www.la-razon.com/index.php?\\_url=/opinion/columnistas/Hugo-Chavez-Alba-Unasur-Mercosur\\_0\\_1759024082.html](http://www.la-razon.com/index.php?_url=/opinion/columnistas/Hugo-Chavez-Alba-Unasur-Mercosur_0_1759024082.html)

<sup>357</sup> See: <http://www.celacinternational.org/celac-internacional-2>

<sup>358</sup> See footnote 249, p.2.

## 8.2. The First Commercial Partner of the Country

Since the end of Pérez's dictatorship in 1958 and the signing of the "Punto Fijo" Pact, one of US foreign policy's main priorities has been the expansion of its economic interests in Latin America. Given its role as the main oil provider in the region, Venezuela was positioned to be a perfect partner for US objectives, and relations between the two nations saw unprecedented improvement. This economic relationship was not only beneficial to the US, but Venezuela, too, as it augmented the nation's political prestige in the region, especially in light of US tensions with Cuba and its revolutionary government, as well as numerous revolutionary seeds in Central America, against which it functioned as counterweight. Economic ties to the US also had societal, financial, and industrial consequences. Massive privatization of natural resources, especially oil, prompted devaluations and austerity programs, improving profits for the multinational companies while impoverishing the Treasury and the majority of wage and salary earners as the upper and middle classes grew richer at the expense of the lower echelons of the population.<sup>359</sup> This deterioration of the living conditions of the poor necessitated action, which came in the form of Chavez's incredibly successful Bolivarian missions. Even so, the drastic lack of consideration for the neediest, coupled with the budgetary cuts in social programs, eventually led to diffused mass protests, urban riots, and a failed military coup.<sup>360</sup>

Despite the role its economic ties with the US have had in creating the social problems that led to Chavez's populist platform and rise to power, ideologically opposed to the US as they were, Venezuela has actually increased its economic relationship with the US, rather than diminished it, as the line graph in chart 8.2.1

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<sup>359</sup> See footnote 345.

<sup>360</sup> See: <http://www.voltairenet.org/article163455.html>

demonstrates.

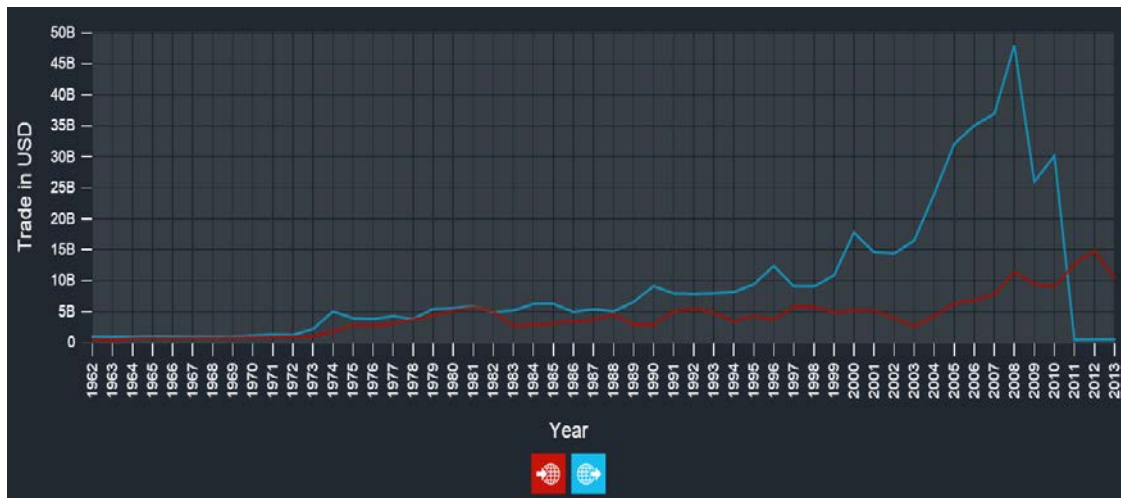


Chart 8.2.1: Trade Balance for Venezuela to the United States (1962-2013).<sup>361</sup>

While the United States remains Venezuela's largest commercial partner,<sup>362</sup> the Bolivarian Republic, on the other hand, is the 19<sup>th</sup> largest goods trading partner for the US, with imports limited almost exclusively to Venezuelan oil (see chart 8.2.2) while a wider range of goods are traded with the South American nation (see chart 8.2.3). At present, the tightness of the economic embrace between these two countries may be directly linked to Chinese forays into Latin America, since Chinese investment and commercial ties to Venezuela have grown exponentially yet have failed to exceed those of the US.

<sup>361</sup> Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity. See:

<http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/line/sitc/show/ven/usa/all/1962.2013/>

<sup>362</sup> Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity. See: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/ven/>

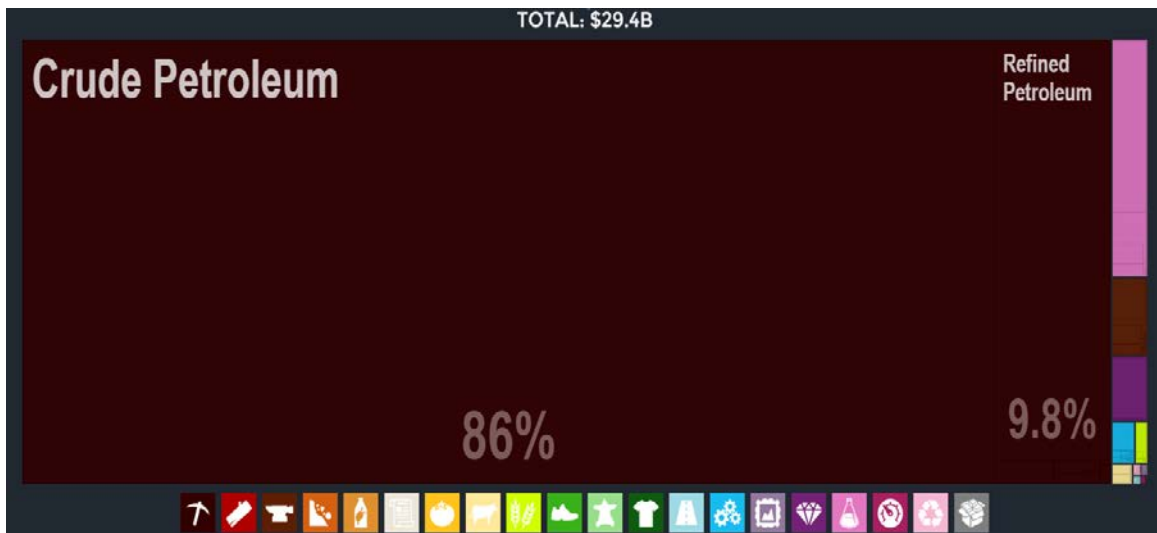


Chart 8.2.2: Venezuelan Exports to the United States (2013).<sup>363</sup>

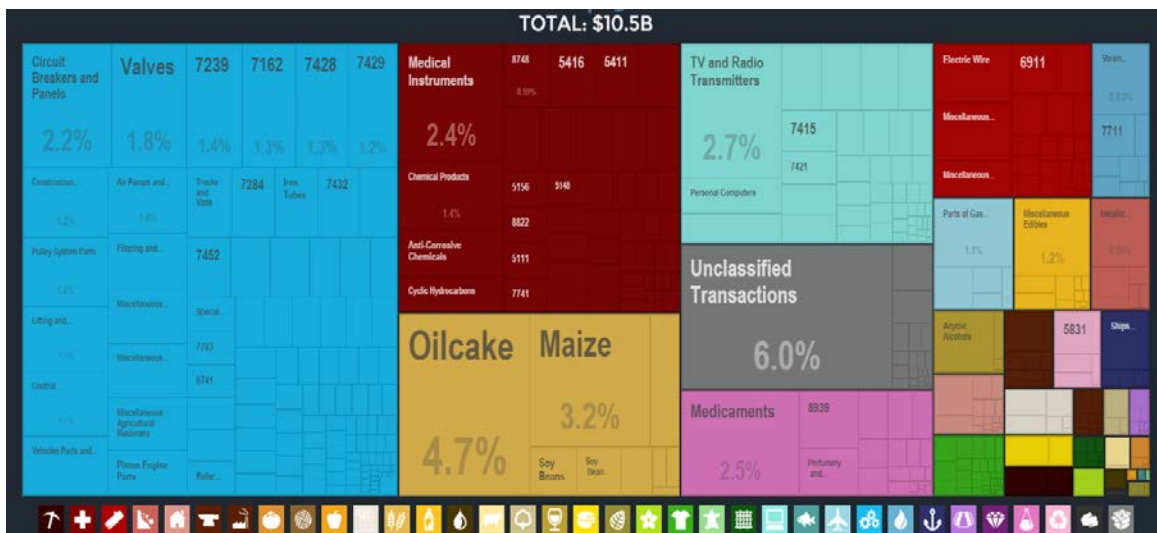


Chart 8.2.3: Venezuelan imports from the United States (2013).<sup>364</sup>

Despite the World Bank's classification of the Venezuela as an upper middle income developing economy on the basis of its relatively high per capita income,<sup>365</sup> the peculiarities of Venezuela's economic system make it a potentially unstable economic

<sup>363</sup> Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity. See: [http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree\\_map/hs92/export/ven/usa/show/2013/](http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/ven/usa/show/2013/)

<sup>364</sup> Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity. See: [http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree\\_map/sitc/import/ven/usa/show/2013/](http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/sitc/import/ven/usa/show/2013/)

<sup>365</sup> See Sullivan M. P., *VENEZUELA: BACKGROUND AND US RELATIONS*, Congressional Research Service, (2014), p. 18.

partner. As already demonstrated, the state-led economic model and the recent collapse in oil prices have caused significant economic problems, including recession, high inflation, and shortages of some goods,<sup>366</sup> yielding less than rosy perspectives for the country's economic development. These economic problems have also led to social and political instability, with the prominence of the oppositions in Parliament and among the people, rising crime rates, and corruption at every social level. Add to this a volatile regulatory framework, and it should come as little surprise that the US State Department has characterized Venezuela a really challenging climate for US and multinational companies.<sup>367</sup>

It would be an understatement to say that, currently, Venezuela is in a really delicate and dangerous economic and political position. Considering the strategic importance of this country for the US, many questions and possible paths remain. Might Venezuelan President Maduro begin a process similar to the Cuban one, entailing some kind of agreement with the Obama Administration, in order to drive the country out of its economic crisis? Is such a path too risky for the current government, already surrounded by the criticism of the opposition? Would the Obama Administration and its successor even be able, or willing, to manage such a possibility? The next section will deal with these questions as it seeks to outline a framework of the current Venezuelan internal situation and of Obama's approach to the country.

### **8.3. Maduro Presidency and the changes in sight**

Nicolás Maduro, chosen by Hugo Chavez as Vice President in 2012, was groomed as his natural successor in case of death. When that came to pass in March

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<sup>366</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>367</sup> See: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35766.htm>

2013, Maduro served as interim president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela until his election to the office on April 14, 2013. Throughout his term, Maduro has found himself in a very uncomfortable position, both domestically and abroad.

Internally, the social, economic, and political circumstances in Venezuela, both before and after Maduro's electoral victory, have been really harsh and challenging. As previously noted, at his death, Chavez left his country in profound economic difficulties that included a sharp ongoing recession, economic circumstances that did not bode well for Maduro. Before his election, he faced right-wing opposition stronger and more solid than ever, led by a young and determined lawyer, Henrique Capriles Radonski, who obtained 49.12% of the votes compared to Maduro's 50.61% during the presidential elections in 2013.<sup>368</sup> Right-wing opposition was not Maduro's only problem, however. Divisions within his own party, the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (PSUV), also arose, due to the decrease in electoral consensus from Chavez to Maduro. The challenge of stronger opposition that the *Mesa de la Unidad Democrática* (MUD) represented gradually induced the Chavista party to remain united around Maduro.

Unfortunately for the Maduro's government and for the Chavista party, things have worsened rather than improved. As presented in section 7.3, the economic recession has become even harsher, with the fall in oil prices and inflation soaring to the highest level in the world.<sup>369</sup> Due to the continuous shortages of primary goods from 2013 to the present, Maduro's government declared economic emergency status for 60 days this January, hoping that the period will restore the country's economy through reforms.<sup>370</sup> Indeed, mounting public discontent and violent crackdowns on dissent, best exemplified example in the recent arrest and imprisonment Leopoldo López, an

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<sup>368</sup> See: [http://www.cne.gob.ve/resultado\\_presidencial\\_2013/r/1/reg\\_000000.html?](http://www.cne.gob.ve/resultado_presidencial_2013/r/1/reg_000000.html?)

<sup>369</sup> See footnote 332.

<sup>370</sup> See: <http://it.ibtimes.com/venezuela-economia-ginocchio-maduro-decreta-lo-stato-demergenza-1434343>

opposition leader, have forced Maduro's already-low approval ratings to plummet to as low as 29 percent (see chart 8.3.1), well below 55% approval rating Chavez obtained during the 2012 presidential elections.<sup>371</sup>

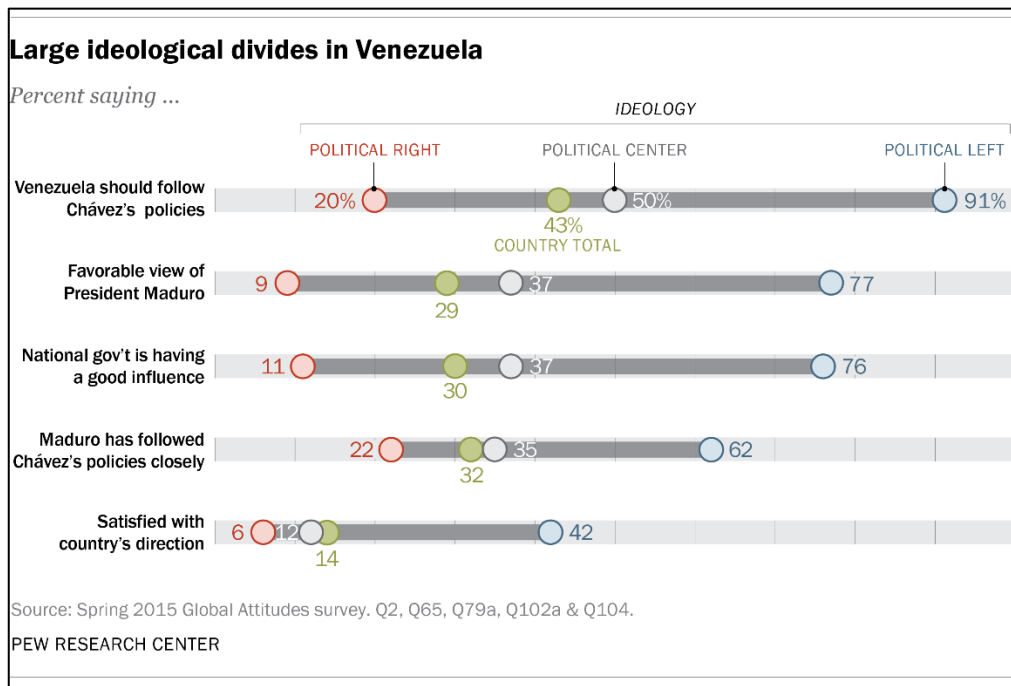


Chart 8.3.1: Large Ideological Divides in Venezuela, 2015.<sup>372</sup>

This growing discontent is also reflected in increased support for the unified oppositions of the MUD, which, at the recent parliamentary elections on December 6, 2015, gained 112 seats, for a total of 167, wresting the two-thirds majority<sup>373</sup> in Parliament from the Chavista party for the first time in 16 years and prompting speeches by Maduro in which he acknowledged his part in the defeat. This victory was brief, however, since three members of the opposition were recently suspended from the Parliament because of suspected electoral fraud in the Amazonas district, thereby

<sup>371</sup> See: [http://www.cne.gov.ve/resultado\\_presidencial\\_2012/r/1/reg\\_000000.html](http://www.cne.gov.ve/resultado_presidencial_2012/r/1/reg_000000.html)

<sup>372</sup> Source: Pew Research Center. See: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/12/03/wide-ideological-divides-on-most-major-issues-as-venezuelas-elections-near/ideology-graphic/>

<sup>373</sup> See: <http://www.internazionale.it/notizie/2016/01/08/venezuela-parlamento-maggioranza-antichavista>



depriving the MUD of majority.<sup>374</sup>

Internationally, things are hardly better. With the election of Macri in Argentina, the uncertain position of Cuba, and the imposition of the executive order by the US, Maduro must feel a little bit isolated. In March 2015, President Obama issued a new Executive Order (E.O.) declaring Venezuela as an “unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.”<sup>375</sup> This E.O., explained in section 2.2, exerts pressure on Caracas in order to improve human rights protection in the country through economic sanctions. These sanctions freeze the US economic assets and bank accounts of current or former members of the government of Venezuela who were either involved in the perpetration of human rights violations, accused of corruption, or both. The regional reaction, both within the upper levels of the Maduro government and among Venezuela’s remaining Latin American allies, has been indignation. When meeting for an extraordinary summit of ALBA in Caracas soon after Washington’s decision, Venezuela and its allies rejected the Executive Order “on the basis that [it] is unjustified and unjust, which constitutes a threat of interference that runs counter to the principle of sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states.”<sup>376</sup> Maduro used also the Seventh Summit of the Americas, held in Panama City on April 10-11 2015, to criticise the E.O. openly, to little effect, apart from a US clarification to the definition of Venezuela as a security threat as simple bureaucratic practice. No lift or reduction of these sanctions has yet occurred.

Despite the avowed support Venezuela received against the Executive Order, its economic instability and the political turmoil are a matter of concern for both its

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<sup>374</sup> The two-thirds majority is achieved with 110 seats, and with the suspensions within the MUD wing the opposition has just 109 seats. See: <http://www.internazionale.it/notizie/2016/01/12/venezuela-crisi-scontro-parlamento-governo>

<sup>375</sup> See footnote 99.

<sup>376</sup> See: <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Final-Declaration-from-the-Extraordinary-ALBA-Summit-20150318-0002.html>

regional and international trade partners, as these factors foster divisions within existing regional institutions, such as the MERCOSUR. In an interview,<sup>377</sup> Secretary of State John Kerry characterized the Venezuelan instability as a threat for all neighbouring countries, including and especially the US, Venezuela's largest trade partner, as discussed in the previous section. Kerry's statements reflect the variety of negative outcomes of the chaos into which the country could potentially descend. For this US, it might mean a limit or an end to the essential oil supply provided by Venezuela. If, in a worst case scenario, the Venezuelan Republic should become a failed state, the internal and external threats grow more grave. The country could become a safe harbour for regional guerrilla groups, chief among which is the FARC operating in nearby Colombia. This destabilization could also allow for terrorist cells that could threaten the regional security, forcing neighbours such as Colombia, Guyana, Brazil, and the nearby Caribbean states to increase border controls in response to potentially problematic issues in refugees, terrorist violence, and crime.<sup>378</sup> Terrorist threats to the national security of the United States would not be far behind.

Considering Venezuela's strategic importance in the region, a continuation of the brief talks Washington initiated with Caracas from March to July 2015,<sup>379</sup> to establish a constructive dialogue with the Bolivarian Republic, in order to support its economy and a desirable, if gradual, political transition, is advisable. Collaterally, the numerous regional institutions, some of whom owe their existence to Venezuela, could create a sort of solidarity network among all the countries of the area for helping the Venezuelan people in the event of bankruptcy, if not averting the possible fall entirely.

The Venezuelan crisis could be an extraordinary opportunity for the US. If it

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<sup>377</sup> See footnote 259.

<sup>378</sup> See Ellis R. E., *The Approaching Implosion of Venezuela and Strategic Implications for the United States*, Strategic Studies Institute, (2015).

<sup>379</sup> See: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-weisbrot/president-obama-should-ch\\_b\\_9040676.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-weisbrot/president-obama-should-ch_b_9040676.html)

commits itself to the establishment of renewed diplomatic links with Venezuela and assists its long-standing ideological enemy, the effort, alongside the historic agreement with Cuba, would indeed improve the Latin American perception of the US, and may perhaps be hailed as a brilliant success, restoring the United States to the role it previously enjoyed in the region. The next and final chapter of this thesis is devoted to an examination of the importance of such a success. Topics under consideration in more depth will include the strategic regional and global importance of Venezuela, especially its alliances with states in Latin America and rogue states around the world.

## **Chapter 9: Peculiarities of Venezuela's Regional and Global Roles**

The importance of Venezuela with respect to its ties with Cuba and with the United States has been discussed at length in the previous chapters. The sections of this final chapter will instead engage Venezuela's fundamental strategic leadership, particularly after the election of Hugo Chavez Frías in 1999. Before Chavez's election, Venezuela's leadership role was limited to regional interactions, though not in an autonomous way, since this important position was gained as a consequence of its close alliance and alignment with the US interests. When the Bolivarian leader arrived on the Venezuelan domestic scene, his vision for change was multilateral. For Venezuela itself, he envisioned an independent foreign policy free of US interference. For the region, he sought to obtain a fuller awareness of the potential that Latin American countries could have if they banded together in deeper and more regional organizations. In order to realize this vision, Chavez made some key choices in both domestic and regional contexts that were not fully democratic and respectful of human rights. On the international scene, his choice of political and economic partners was definitely questionable, as compared to general trends and customs in international relationships worldwide. Those ties were clearly in contrast with the U.S. stance on the global equilibrium of power, therefore they represent a manifest challenge to the U.S. Venezuela's main national asset, oil, and the imperative to find partners alternative to the US led the country to establish contacts with so-called rogue states, deepening the United States' concerns about the nation. Therefore, this final chapter will provide an outline of Venezuela's various ties, both regionally and internationally, and how the country managed to weave these links through oil, and what are the effects of these

relations on the already troubled affairs with the Northern neighbour.

### **9.1. Regional Ideological Leadership**

Known as the George Washington of South America, Simón Bolívar<sup>380</sup> is considered one of the most important and influential politicians in Latin American history. As one of South America's greatest generals and political leaders, his victories over the Spanish Empire led to the independence of Bolivia, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. Born in 1783 in Caracas, in the then New Grenada, Bolívar later entered the military academy, where he learned the technical strategies he would later employ in the fight for independence. He then visited Europe, where he absorbed the insurrectionary ideals of the French Revolution. Upon his return to the Americas in 1807, he was assigned military command in New Granada (modern-day Colombia) to fight against the rule of Spanish. He fought many battles in New Granada, whose independence was consolidated in 1819 under his command. From this victory, he went on to lead successful independence campaigns in Venezuela and Ecuador, eventually being made president of the new State of Gran Colombia, which consisted of present-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama. Continuing the drive for South American independence, he liberated Peru and was made its dictator. Attempting to save the newly formed state of Gran Colombia, he appointed himself dictator as a temporary measure. This attempt to preserve the Republic failed and Bolívar resigned just before his death in 1830.

Simón Bolívar's commitment to independence and the creation of Gran Colombia was inspiration to many people in Latin America, among whom Hugo Chavez ranks prominently for his attempts accomplish the Bolivarian dream,

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<sup>380</sup> For Simón Bolívar's biography, see: <http://nlcatp.org/17-incredible-simon-bolivar-quotes/>

readapting Bolívar's ideals to his contemporary background. The following quotation from Chavez perfectly expresses the roots of his ideology:

"Nacimos al calor de las doctrinas libertadoras y humanistas de Francisco de Miranda, Antonio José De Sucre, Simón Bolívar y Ezequiel Zamora ¡Esas son nuestras raíces militares, las raíces de nuestro pensamiento antiimperialistas, humanista y libertador!"<sup>381</sup>

Bolivarianism inspired Chavez's actions both domestically and internationally. At home, Chavez eliminated presidential term limits, thus aspiring to a sort of "dictatorship," just as Bolívar had attempted to do with Gran Colombia. Abroad, and perhaps more importantly, Chavez worked to achieve a tight alliance with some of the countries that formed Bolivarian Gran Colombia, as well as others willing to endorse those Bolivarian principles. ALBA, whose name derives from that of the Venezuelan *libertador*, ranks among the most successful of these efforts.

From the time he began cultivating a close relationship with Fidel Castro, Chavez aimed at attaining ideological leadership in the region. In the Latin American imagination, Castro, and by extension Cuba, represented the lone stronghold that dared counter US dominance and leadership in the area. In aiding Cuba and befriending the Cuban leader, Chavez staked his claim as Castro's natural successor in the fight against US imperialist interference in Latin American affairs. The coincidence of this attitude with the election of many left-leaning leaders in the LAC, the so-called "Pink Tide" discussed in the section 3.1 of this thesis, accounts for much of Chavez's success.

Beyond Venezuela's indisputable leadership within ALBA, amply treated elsewhere in this thesis, one of Chavez's great successes in foreign policy was Venezuela's participation in the *Mercado Común del Sur* (MERCOSUR). The Venezuelan admission represented for the U.S. a clear point in favour of Chavismo,

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<sup>381</sup> "We were born in the warmth of the liberator and humanist doctrines by Francisco de Miranda, Antonio José De Sucre, Simón Bolívar and Ezequiel Zamora. These are our military roots, the roots of our humanist, liberator and anti-imperialist thinking!" See: <http://lobonitodelahistoria.blogspot.it/2010/11/citas-de-chavez.html>

because it meant the regional acceptance of the Bolivarian Republic and its further integration with the other moderate left-leaning countries. MERCOSUR was an institution created on March 26, 1991 with the signing of the Treaty of Asunción by the governments of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. MERCOSUR's original plan was to create a common market to guarantee the free circulation of goods, services, capital, and labour, increasing economic efficiency and the degree of integration of the countries of the area. Venezuela first applied for the full membership in 2006, but doubts expressed by the Paraguayan Congress about the country's necessary democratic credentials postponed its admission, seemingly indefinitely. However, after Paraguay was suspended from the organization because of an alleged *coup d'état* and the violation of the Democratic Clause of MERCOSUR in June 2012, Venezuela's admission easily achieved the following month. Thanks to Venezuela's huge oil resources, MERCOSUR was "also positioning itself as a global energy power in renewable and non-renewable resources," said the then Brazilian Foreign Ministry, underscoring the importance of the new member.<sup>382</sup> In light of Venezuela's powerful position within the MERCOSUR immediately after its admission, Chavez attempted to use the institution as a further platform to spread his anti-American ideology, as reflected in these contemporary words from Venezuelan leader: "This is a historic day. We should celebrate. This will have a geopolitical impact. I have no doubt that behind that group of Senators of Paraguay is the hand of the empire, trying to prevent the creation of a true power in South America, [...] it is a defeat for imperialism and the grovelling bourgeoisie."<sup>383</sup> With Chavez's death and Venezuela's severe economic and political crisis, both previously addressed herein, the country's role in MERCOSUR could be in danger. Lacking his predecessor's

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<sup>382</sup> See: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19069591>

<sup>383</sup> See: <http://www.eluniversal.com/economia/120629/chavez-venezuelas-accession-to-mercosur-is-a-defeat-for-the-empire>

charisma and financially weakened by the fall in the price of oil, that key element Venezuela contributed to MERCOSUR, Maduro already has marks against him. Venezuela's membership in MERCOSUR is further threatened by challenges from the leaders of other nations within the organization. Argentina's newly elected president Mauricio Macri has called for democratic reforms, increased respect for human rights, and greater possibilities for political dissent in Venezuela, even demanding the immediate release of political prisoners.<sup>384</sup> If Venezuela fails to address these challenges from the leader of one of MERCOSUR's founding nations, it may be found in violation of the organization's Democratic Clause, and therefore be subject to suspension, as happened with its former critic Paraguay.

A further important regional framework that strengthen Venezuelan links with its neighbours to the detriment of the U.S.-led OAS, was created under Chavez's "visionary impulse,"<sup>385</sup> is the *Unión de Naciones Suramericanas* (UNASUR). Created on May 24, 2008 with the Treaty of Brasilia, this institution aims, both in its membership and in its scope, to build an integration much larger than the one achieved by MERCOSUR. UNASUR's members include Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela, countries either full or associate members of MERCOSUR. Aiming beyond the common market and patterning itself on an integrational model similar to the "functional" one of the European Union,<sup>386</sup> UNASUR aspires to encourage energy and communication integration among member countries. The organization also strives to extend its efforts into the political arena, functioning as a coordinating entity that can oversee the foreign policies of member nations, in order to position South America

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<sup>384</sup> See: <http://www.thedawn-news.org/2015/12/21/mercosur-summit-macri-attempts-against-venezuela-and-asked-to-agree-with-the-eu/>

<sup>385</sup> See: [http://www.el-nacional.com/mundo/Unasur-visionario-Hugo-Chavez-creacion\\_0\\_148787614.html](http://www.el-nacional.com/mundo/Unasur-visionario-Hugo-Chavez-creacion_0_148787614.html)

<sup>386</sup> See footnote 8, p.109.



more prominently and incisively on the international scene. In these ways, this institution's aims and those enshrined by Chavez in his Bolivarian Revolution, especially where deeper regional integration is concerned, are consonant. In contrast to the difficulties he has experienced within the context of MERCOSUR, Maduro has gained the support of UNASUR, whose Secretary General reaffirmed the organization's support for him and for a prompt solution to the economic and social crisis in Venezuela.<sup>387</sup> Here, Maduro has more successfully kept pace with Chavez's standards.

A final regional organization, created by the specific inspiration and strong commitment of Hugo Chavez, is the *Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños* (CELAC), mentioned briefly in section 8.1. CELAC was launched in 2010 as a successor organization to the former Rio Group. This institution, consisting of 33 states of Latin America and the Caribbean, is an extended reflection of the concept of regional integration the former Venezuelan President wanted to reach. The breadth of topics engaged by this forum of discussion, ranging from common problems to shared economic, social, and political interests, has positioned it as one of the main actors in the region, especially in the fight against hunger and the drive to improve the education status throughout the LAC.<sup>388</sup>

Despite an economic recession and a political crisis, Venezuela still aspires, and in some cases manages, to maintain an important role in the region, thus proceeding its campaign for discrediting the United States and its imperialism. However, it is also true that in the long-term such a demanding position could not be sustainable, especially if the oil prices remain at the current level, or worse, if they further fall

Since the Venezuelan economy relies almost entirely on the export of oil and its

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<sup>387</sup> See: <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/elmundo/unasur-esta-lista-apoyar-maduro-solucion-crisis-social-articulo-538847>

<sup>388</sup> See: <http://www.fao.org/americas/noticias/ver/en/c/340417/>

derivatives, and is therefore subject to changes in the commodity's international prices, if the oil prices remain at their current level, or worse if they fall further, the sustainability of Venezuela's role in the region will be seriously imperilled. Under Chavez, Venezuela's oil production was not just an issue of economics, but also of foreign policy, an issue that will be analysed in greater depth in the following section. A significant part of Venezuela's fate, both domestically and internationally, will depend upon oil, the trends in its prices, and Maduro's methods of adapting Chavez's so-called "oil diplomacy."

## **9.2. Oil: the fundamental resource in Venezuelan foreign policy**

Petroleum and its derivatives have been employed by Chavez as the first means to search for trading partners alternative, but likewise reliable, to the U.S. In fact, despite the predominance of the U.S.-Venezuela exchanges, the Bolivarian leader throughout his Presidency, has been looking for expanding the range of commercial partners, in order to diversify Venezuelan economic sources of income, indissolubly bound by its oil exports. Current estimates of the oil reserves of the Orinoco Oil Belt<sup>389</sup> suggest that Venezuela's oil reserves are the largest in the world, accounting for almost a quarter of the total reserves of the OPEC countries (see chart 9.2.1).

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<sup>389</sup> See: <http://www.eluniversal.com/economia/150822/oil-reserves-in-orinoco-oil-belt-estimated-to-last-for-several-centuri>

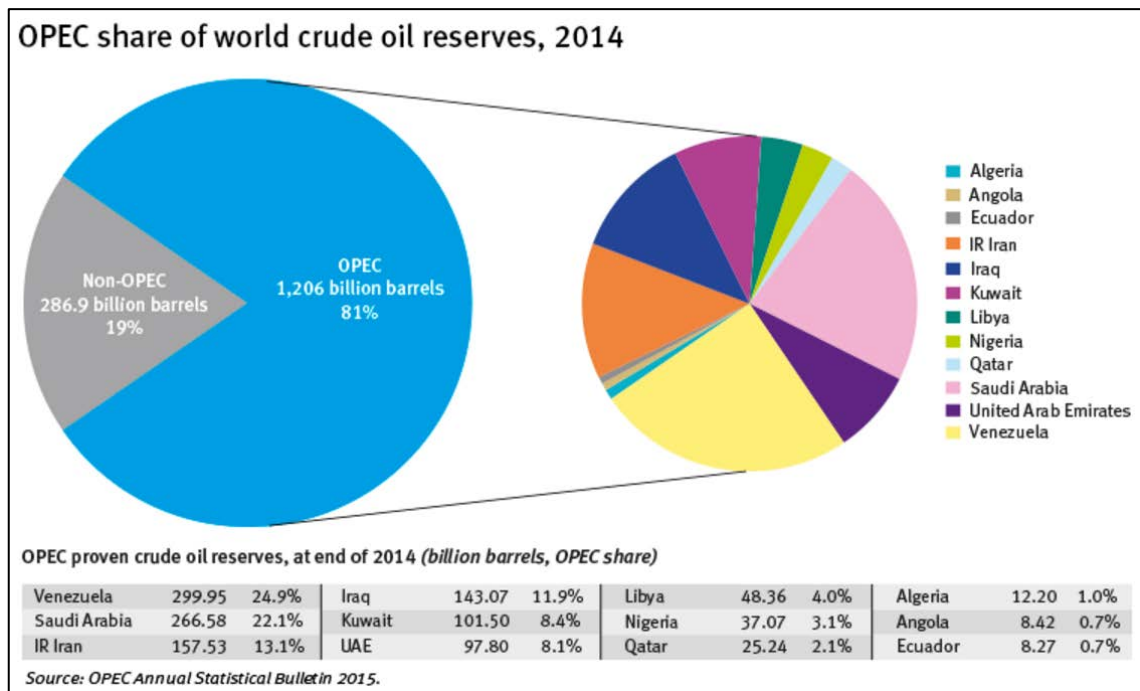


Chart 9.2.1: OPEC share of world crude oil reserves, (2014).<sup>390</sup>

In fact, Venezuela's economy relies on oil for 95%<sup>391</sup> of its total national export earnings. This huge dependency on petroleum and its derivatives makes the Bolivarian Republic especially sensitive to oscillations in oil prices internationally. Therefore, the immense Venezuelan natural reserves, which also include natural gas in smaller measure, are a double-edged sword. When prices steadily increase or stabilize at an acceptable standard, the reserves are an incredible blessing and boost for the economy. Conversely, when they plummet, as they did last year when they reached their lowest point since 2003,<sup>392</sup> the Venezuelan economy suffers dramatically, as the charts below attest.

<sup>390</sup> Source: OPEC. See: [http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/data\\_graphs/330.htm](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/data_graphs/330.htm)

<sup>391</sup> See: [http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/about\\_us/171.htm](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/171.htm)

<sup>392</sup> See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-opec-venezuela-idUSKCN0UZ2NL>

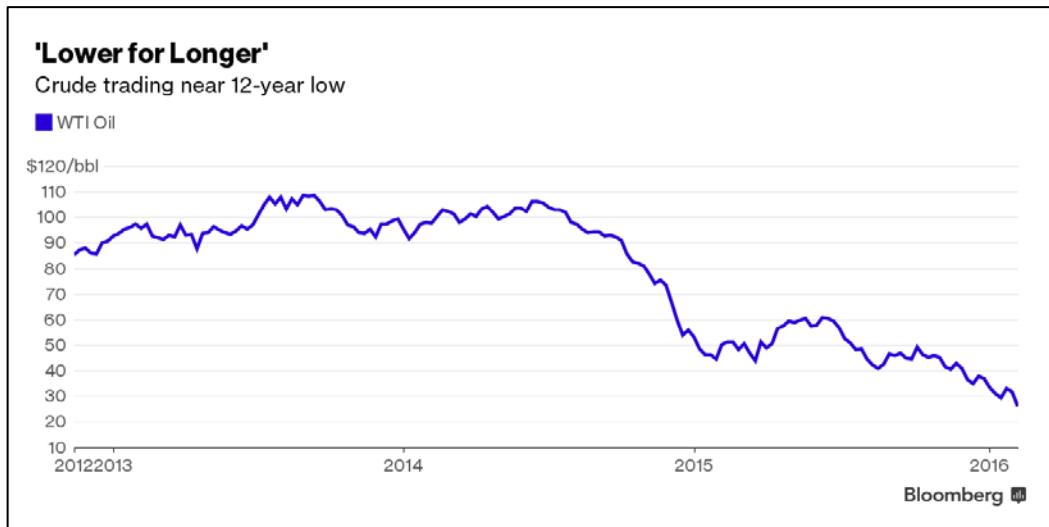


Chart 9.2.2: Crude Oil Price Trends, 2012-2016.<sup>393</sup>

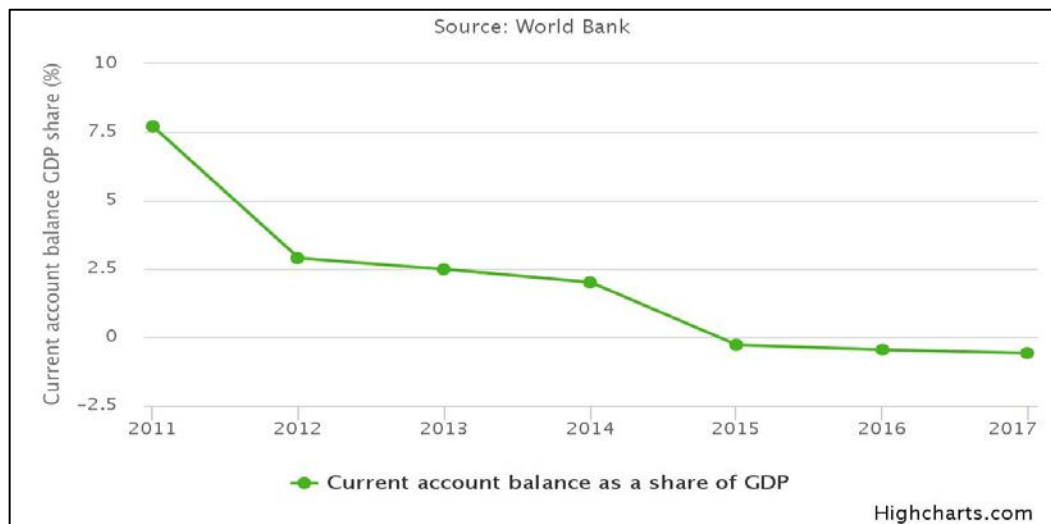


Chart 9.2.3: Outlook of Venezuela's economy, 2011-2017.<sup>394</sup>

As mentioned in the previous section, besides serving as its main source of income, oil has always been used by the Venezuelan government to foster its international role, both regionally and worldwide, and increasingly since Chavez first came to power in 1999. Venezuela's foreign policy at the regional level, and especially with its near

<sup>393</sup> Source: Bloomberg. See: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-02-12/the-oil-industry-got-together-and-agreed-things-may-never-get-better>

<sup>394</sup> Source: World Bank. See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/southamerica/venezuela/11385055/Seven-charts-showing-why-Venezuelas-economy-is-a-basket-case.html>

allies, such as Cuba and the countries of the Petro-Caribe, has been already described. Although the exchanges with these countries have been economically unfavourable, they have allowed the Venezuelan presidents, first Chavez and now Maduro, to spread their ideas and to find reliable allies throughout the region. These allies in turn have supported Venezuelan interests within regional forums of discussion and among the global international organizations as well.

At the global level, Venezuela's partners are much more difficult to handle. In terms of international organizations, proof of this difficulty comes in the form of the current disagreement within the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which Venezuela is a founding member. In an attempt to develop a common strategy to decrease oil sales and halt plunging prices,<sup>395</sup> the Bolivarian Republic and several other countries, including Iran, Iraq, Nigeria and Algeria,<sup>396</sup> have agreed upon and called for an emergency meeting of the organization. Venezuela even asked the Russian Federation, not a member of OPEC, to participate in the proposed summit. The move is a strategic one, aiming both to present a more cohesive front among oil-producing nations, OPEC or not, and to stem the tide of oil price freefall that ultimately damages all oil-exporting countries. Despite news of President Putin's positive attitude toward the collaboration, scepticism and distrust on Russia's part still exists, as in this quote from Igor Sechin, Chief Executive Officer of Rosneft, Russia's main oil company: "Tell me who is supposed to cut? [...] Will Saudi Arabia cut production? Will Iran cut production? Will Mexico cut production? Will Brazil cut production? Who is going to cut?"<sup>397</sup> The solution to the present oil crisis, establishing more confidence among the

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<sup>395</sup> See footnote 392.

<sup>396</sup> See: <https://www.forexinfo.it/OPEC-riunione-d-emergenza>

<sup>397</sup> See footnote 393.

OPEC countries, and between them and the Russian “wild card,”<sup>398</sup> remains distant, and requires more talks and cooperative strategies.

Oil not only binds Venezuela to OPEC, where it seeks to spur multilateral action, as we have seen, but also links the country bilaterally to both Russia and China. These trade relations make a certain amount of sense, given the notorious antagonism with the US each of the three countries has historically had. Bilateral trade between Russia and Venezuela, inaugurated by Chavez and continued under Maduro, has increased exponentially, thanks to numerous negotiations carried out by the respective leaders, especially in the field of military equipment sales. More recently, Maduro has indicated an increase in “investment and participation of Russian companies and their share of joint ventures in the Orinoco oil belt and other projects.”<sup>399</sup> Where China, Venezuela’s other preferential partner is concerned, a more complex story emerges. To sustain its soaring economic growth from its inception, the People’s Republic of China has directed its attention toward Latin American countries with abundant natural resources. Since 2012, it intensified these ties with the “Leap East” strategy, described in section 3.3, becoming one of the main trade partners of many of the countries of the area, including Venezuela. Chinese “hunger”<sup>400</sup> for raw materials and Venezuelan “thirst”<sup>401</sup> for monetary liquidity have been perfectly matched throughout these years, encouraging the deepening of their relationship across a broad spectrum of categories, including economic, cultural, political, military, and geopolitical dimensions. In 2015, Venezuela exported about 600,000 barrels of oil a day to China, nearly half of which functioned as repayment toward huge Chinese loans to the Bolivarian Republic, which Beijing has

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<sup>398</sup> See: <http://www.thenational.ae/business/energy/secret-opec-talks-that-raised-oil-price---will-it-happen-again#full>

<sup>399</sup> See: <https://www.rt.com/business/223231-russia-venezuela-oil-projects/>

<sup>400</sup> See footnote 8, p.174.

<sup>401</sup> Ibidem.

extended to \$50 billion since 2007.<sup>402</sup> Their alliance ensures that Venezuela has an economically reliable partner and an additional oil export market, achieving the diversification it so desperately needs as an alternative to the US, in order to improve its defences from the influence of American power.

Beyond its stated mutual benefits, the Sino-Venezuelan strategic partnership is also significant in the political and geopolitical spheres. Thanks to its immense loans to Venezuela and the other countries of the region, the People's Republic can foster its political interests, such as its policy towards Taiwan. Since the beginning of the Chinese presence in the LAC region, the People's Republic has sought to derail relations between countries there and the official Republic of China. In terms of its efforts to isolate the small island nation politically on the international scene and within international organizations, China can already claim some modicum of success in Latin America, as Costa Rica, Dominica, Grenada and St. Lucia have broken off their diplomatic relations with Taiwan.<sup>403</sup> Venezuela seems to be following a similar path also, characterized by tenuous relations with the island, like the Venezuelan decision, considered valid by World Bank arbitration, to nationalize the assets of CPC Corp, a Taiwanese state oil company. This increased alignment with Chinese international positions by Venezuela underscores the closeness of their relations. Such a strong tie with China in particular, is gradually driving out the U.S. economic presence in the country, thus reducing the influence that it has not only in Venezuela, but also in the whole region.

While these international trade relations, bound up with oil and ideological claims, have potentially volatile consequences, other, more extensive and controversial

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<sup>402</sup> See: <http://www.ibtimes.com/chinas-multi-billion-dollar-loans-venezuela-face-uncertain-future-oil-prices-slump-1974614>

<sup>403</sup> See footnote 8, p.177.

international relations undertaken by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are cause for greater concern. Throughout his presidency, Hugo Chavez pursued a foreign policy manifestly directed to the approach to former (in the case of Cuba) and current rogue states. These questionable ties are one of the main obstacles to a possible *rapprochement* with the US, and, given their importance, will be discussed separately, in the next and final section of this thesis.

### **9.3. Enduring Relations with Rogue States**

Before beginning, a clarification of the specific meaning of the term “rogue state” used herein is necessary. When employed here, the term “rogue state” here will mean those countries that are regarded as breaking international law and posing a threat to the security of other nations. Under the aegis of this term as used here are those nations contained in the official list of “State Sponsors of Terrorism,” compiled by the US State Department,<sup>404</sup> plus North Korea, which constitutes a threat to the global security on the basis of two recent episodes: Pyongyang’s fourth nuclear test (conducted in January), and the launch of a satellite that functions as a partial test of an inter-continental ballistic missile (in February).<sup>405</sup> Since Venezuela’s relations with Cuba, removed from the list of state sponsors of terror on May 29, 2015, have already been discussed extensively throughout the other portions of this thesis, I will not retread that ground in this section. With the remaining nations, namely Sudan, North Korea, Syria, and Iran, Venezuela has crafted a variety of alliances rooted in ideology and oil, some more provocative than others. In fact, this section aims to describe the position of Venezuela towards these states and the effects that it has on the relationship with the

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<sup>404</sup> See footnote 292.

<sup>405</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/why-north-korea-benefit-from-seoul-closing-kaesong-industrial-complex-south-korea>



U.S. Therefore, I will begin by presenting the degrees of cooperation that the Bolivarian Republic has with each one of those countries, and finally the section will end with a brief analysis of the ways in which those cooperation affects the potential dialogue with the U.S.

Venezuela began its diplomatic relations with the Sudan under the auspices of Chavez's desire to strengthen ties with the African continent. As a result of this project, "Venezuela has now become the third South American country, after Cuba and Brazil, in the size of diplomatic representation in Africa" said Anibal Marquez, the Venezuelan ambassador to Sudan during an interview for SudaNow Journal.<sup>406</sup> Though trade between the two countries was initially limited, Maduro's current aim expands the scope to include prosperous cooperation in the oil, agriculture and tourism sectors. Where tourism is concerned, the intent is to elaborate a tripartite Sudanese-Venezuelan-Russian partnership for boosting that industry to an even greater extent. This proposed partnership underscores the ideological proximity of Sudan and Venezuela, especially where the US is concerned. During the same interview, Marquez strongly affirmed the deep disapproval of US economic sanctions against Sudan, reasserted the similarities between the two countries on this issue, and ultimately appealed to the Sudanese people "to unite with us against those hostile powers which attempt to completely annihilate Venezuela like what they did for Iraq."<sup>407</sup>

Venezuela's relationship with North Korea began around the same time as its relationship with the Sudan, early in Chavez's presidency. When the former North Korean dictator, Kim Jong-Il, died, Chavez sent condolences to the North Korean authorities as an expression of his support.<sup>408</sup> The kind and degree of relationship

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<sup>406</sup> See: <http://sudanow.info.sd/interview-with-he-the-ambassador-of-venezuela-to-sudan-anibal-marquez/>

<sup>407</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>408</sup> See: <http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/111220/president-chavez-laments-the-death-of-kim-jong-il>

between the two countries was unclear for a long time, likely concealing secret contact and North Korean assistance in the military sector.<sup>409</sup> More public movement has occurred as recently as June 2015, when Venezuela authorized the establishment of a North Korean embassy in Caracas. Speculation about what may yet happen in the relationship between Caracas and Pyongyang is difficult, considering the scant information about it.

One of Venezuela's most contentious foreign relations ties is with Syria. The first official meeting between Chavez and Bashar al-Assad occurred in 2006, when the Venezuelan leader fled to Damascus to strengthen his ties with his Syrian counterpart.<sup>410</sup> On that occasion, Chavez claimed his complete support for the Syrian government and for the struggle of its people "against the imperialist aggressions and the hegemonic intentions of the US,"<sup>411</sup> a shared perception of American power that drew the leaders of the two nations closer together. Chavez and al-Assad concluded several economic deals, especially regarding in the Venezuelan leading oil sector, through the proposal of the construction of a refinery in Syria. Several other reciprocal visits followed, and the cultural, economic, and political relations between the two countries improved impressively. This process was eased and fostered thanks to the sizeable Syrian community in Venezuela, some prominent members of the nation's government coming from it.<sup>412</sup> The near-simultaneity of two events in 2012, the UN General Assembly's condemnation of al-Assad's violent repression of an uprising in his country and Chavez's decision to send a ship full of diesel fuel to Syria, served to underscore for the international community to the deep ties between the two allies and sparked a series of international protests, since the petrochemical provisions could have been used to

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<sup>409</sup> See: <http://rijock.blogspot.it/2013/02/connections-between-north-korea-and.html>

<sup>410</sup> See: <http://www.aporrea.org/venezuelaexterior/n82928.html>

<sup>411</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>412</sup> See: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/09/11/the-syria-venezuela-connection/>

implement repressive military operations. In response to these critical challenges, Chavez adopted his usual haughty tone, asking “have we by any chance asked the United States what it does with the fuel we sell to the United States?”<sup>413</sup> That tone has continued to resound even after Chavez’s death and Maduro’s succession to the presidency. On September 29, 2015, at the General Assembly meeting, the Venezuelan president urged the UN to address the ongoing crisis in Syria, saying that “there has been financing and arming from the West, and this has led to death and destruction in Syria.”<sup>414</sup>

The tenor of relations with Syria established by Chavez is not unlike that of the other great friendship he instituted with another Middle Eastern country, the Islamic Republic of Iran. His personal relationship with former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad led to the signing of many accords, dealing particularly with agriculture, energy initiatives, and oil exploration in the Orinoco Oil Belt, highlighting several common interest areas shared by these two countries. Venezuelan supports for Iran's nuclear program also began with Chavez, who sought to help it achieves its objectives. That support continues alongside similar sympathies from a number of other Latin American countries, such as Morales’ Bolivia. As allies within OPEC, Venezuela and Iran have also improved their oil cooperation. In 2010, they agreed to invest in each other's energy sectors, and Venezuela pledged to export 20,000 barrels of gasoline per day, the total value of which is \$800 million, to Iran.<sup>415</sup> Venezuela and Iran also announced a military collaboration for the training of their respective armed forces.<sup>416</sup>

Venezuela’s ties with Iran need to be understood within the context of the Islamic Republic’s overall desire to renew relationships with the countries of Latin

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<sup>413</sup> See: [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/23/world/americas/chavez-appears-to-use-venezuelan-fuel-to-help-syrias-assad.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/23/world/americas/chavez-appears-to-use-venezuelan-fuel-to-help-syrias-assad.html?_r=1)

<sup>414</sup> See: <http://www.ibtimes.com/venezuela-un-speech-2015-syria-hollywood-version-terrorism-2119717>

<sup>415</sup> See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-iran-idUSTRE8060DO20120107>

<sup>416</sup> Ibidem.

America. Geopolitically, the support of allied countries was a necessary precondition of Iran's emergence from the isolation imposed on it the US and the other Western powers, and its ability to circumvent international sanctions.<sup>417</sup> Given their shared ideological background aimed at weakening US influence and interventionist imperialism worldwide, Chavez and Ahmadinejad were natural partners. From this foundation, Venezuela played a key role in helping Iran to draw other LAC countries, such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Cuba and Nicaragua, into its foreign relations orbit. The alliance of two nations so ideologically opposed to it obviously aroused general concern in the US. This uneasiness became concrete when, in violation of international trade sanctions against Tehran, Venezuela sent approximately \$50 million worth of reformat, a gasoline blending component, to Iran between December 2010 and March 2011.<sup>418</sup> This action led to the imposition of some limited sanctions on Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA, which did not affect exports to the United States, a slap on the wrist that reflects American self-interest.

The array of diplomatic relations cultivated by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela with so-called rogue states since the election of the former President Hugo Chavez in 1999 is both considerable and compact. Chavez's successor, Nicolás Maduro, seems intent on continuing this kind of foreign policy, proving this conviction with actions discussed heretofore, namely a renewed commitment to improve cultural and diplomatic relations with the Sudan; establishment of the first North Korean embassy in Caracas; pursuit the resolution of the Syrian crisis and the re-establishment of Bashar al-Assad's regime; and ratification of the friendship treaty between Caracas and Tehran, accomplished in New York in September 2015.<sup>419</sup> These events suggest the difficulty of

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<sup>417</sup> See footnote 365, p.37.

<sup>418</sup> See footnote 365, p.38.

<sup>419</sup> See: <http://www.hispantv.com/newsdetail/diplomacia/58969/rohani-maduro-nueva-york>

opening peaceful and relaxed dialogue with the US in the near future. Unless a shift in the attitude of the current Venezuelan authorities occurs, it seems quite unlikely that Washington would accept such international and domestic behaviours, strong in the knowledge of the rise of internal forces that oppose the Chavista regime. Indeed, it is widely believed that the US would rather support the growing oppositions, whether openly or tacitly, in order to achieve the eventual fall of Chavism, than engage the current regime as is. If the first move toward a *rapprochement* with the US comes instead from the Venezuelan side, it would be accompanied by an acknowledgment on the part of Maduro and his staff of their uncomfortable status, their inability to cope with it, and their desire to minimize the side effects that a potential crumble of the economy and of the political system would have on the Venezuelan people.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the US foreign policy in Latin America presented in the first part of this thesis began with the description of the main attitude of the North American power toward the region during George W. Bush's presidency (2001–2009). In the course of this specific study, I highlighted the differences between Bush's campaign promises and his first months in office, on the one hand, and his actions during the remaining years of his two-term presidency, focusing particularly on what happened after the September 11 terrorist attacks. The differences between those two phases of American foreign policy led to a steep loss of consensus among Latin American countries.

Analysis then proceeded to the presidency of Barack Obama and the sudden improvement of US reputation in the area, achieved on an initial level through the contrast between the hopes that the election of a new president brought and the complete disappointment that the previous one had caused. Though coping with the same challenges faced by the preceding administration, Obama's adoption of a different stance on the area, namely attempting to elevate all the countries of Latin America to parity with the US and privileging bilateral ties with the countries of the area, has been more successful. Obama's commitment to reviving and renewing the discarded Organization of the American States (OAS), by being much more attentive to the demands of the other member countries, has also proven positive.

Outlining the current main challenges that the region as a whole poses to the US, I began by examining the so-called "Pink Tide," the wave of left-leaning governments sweeping over by the majority of the countries of the region. From this trend, focus shifted to immigration and the commercial policies, the two main issues between Latin

America and the US. The immigration issue, primarily contentious between the US and Mexico, the country of origin of the bulk of both legal and illegal immigrants in the US, is a much more specific case study. Commercial policies, by contrast, simultaneously engage more countries within the LAC region, as well as the Chinese and their attempts to outpace the US in commercial ties there.

Through the examination of these circumstances and the relevant data, the first part of my thesis demonstrated that an actual shift in US attention to the region is underway, having emerged during the Obama presidency. Apart from the aforementioned changes in approach initiated by President Obama, this new focus is also the result of many other factors, including changes in the political equilibrium of the area, economic growth undertaken by many countries, and the consequent emergence of new foreign actors, who are interested in the phenomenon and are increasing their presence in the LAC region.

Having concluded the description of the general challenges to the US, analysis shifted to consideration of the Republic of Cuba and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the two greatest challengers of US influence in Latin America, in my estimation, each of which was treated in its own separate unit. Cuba and the current thaw in relations with the United States was treated in the second part of the thesis. There, in order to offer the reader a more complete understanding of the issue, I began with historical background, discussing the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a key turning point for Cuba, both domestically and internationally. Then, I explained the contents of the agreement the two countries recently reached, giving special attention to the cancellation or reduction of some of the economic sanctions posed by the US against the island and the re-opening of the respective embassies. Thereafter, as a counterpoint to the positive contents of the agreement, I highlighted its

difficulties, obstacles, and enemies, both internal to each country and within the wider regional context, and their potential consequences for the *rapprochement* underway.

Next, the possible outlook for Cuban foreign policy was considered, and more particularly the ramifications of the US-Cuba agreement on relations between the two nations, as well as on Cuba's relationships with its neighbours in the LAC region and beyond. The evidence of the economic and political evolution of Cuba seems to indicate the strong likelihood of the successful continuation of the dialogue with the US, which could serve as the catalyst for an internal redirection of the country along more democratic and liberal pathways. In addition, I argued that improved relations between Castro's government and democratic states like the US, specific European countries (among which Spain is preeminent), and the European Union itself would gradually exert influence on Cuba's relations with some states that are not fully democratic, most especially Venezuela, and potentially engender a certain degree of separation.

Because of the importance of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Cuba, and also to the United States, the third and final part of this thesis is dedicated to its consideration. As a starting point in my analysis of the reasons why Venezuela may be considered one of the main challengers of the US, the close relations cultivated by former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez with Fidel Castro was presented as background. Their integral collaboration, which entailed a sort of "elective affinity" both for their ideologies and for the perfect complementarity of their interests, allowed for the survival of their respective domestic revolutions, as well as their continued anti-American actions. The dissolution of this ideological partnership, caused by Chavez's death and Fidel Castro's resignation in favour of his younger brother Raul, can be viewed as presaging a latent estrangement between the two countries, a process additionally fuelled by the Venezuelan economic recession and the measures Cuba has



taken to diversify its economic partners as a consequence. The role of the Caribbean island's *rapprochement* with the US also figures significantly in this process and my analysis of it.

Then, the analysis shifted to the kinds of relations that link Venezuela and the US, and the main obstacle to a pacific relation between the two countries, namely ideological differences. Since the election of Chavez in 1999, and with increased intensity after the failed military coup in Venezuela in 2002, the US has been taken as the object of continuous violent invectives by Mr. Chavez and his successor. Thanks to his fervent action in the region within international organizations such as ALBA, Chavez successfully spread these ideas throughout Latin America, contributing significantly to the worsening of perceptions of the US by those countries.

As the evidence shows, the ideological gulf that separated the Bolivarian leader and the various US Presidents did not prevent Venezuela from maintaining sizeable economic relations with its "Yankee" neighbour, ironically Venezuela's largest commercial partner. The continuation of Chavez's policies by his personally groomed successor, Maduro, both in domestic and in foreign affairs, has unsurprisingly resulted in little, if any, change. On the contrary, Maduro's comparatively meagre charisma, the drastic fall in the price of oil (Venezuela's main natural resource and source of income), and the resulting economic recession, have forced changes to the internal political equilibrium, culminating in a shift in majority in the Venezuelan Parliament from the Chavist party to its political opposition for the first time in 16 years. This evident shift in power and in Venezuelan political preferences is likely to incite a remodelling of Chavismo, if not the total demolition of the socialist apparatus established by Chavez. On the brink of chaos, the country needs urgent reforms and reliable allies to exit this crisis. Therefore, given the right domestic and international behaviour on the part of the

Venezuelan government, this could be the perfect moment for the US to launch a peaceful dialogue with Caracas. Unfortunately, attaining these preconditions will be a challenge. As the final section of the last chapter makes clear, Maduro is enforcing and improving the same principles and relations Chavez launched along four trajectories: maintaining Venezuelan leadership of the Bolivarian countries (the members of ALBA); deepening economic relations with China through the sale of Venezuelan oil; augmenting Venezuela's ideological alliance with Russia, already strong by virtue of their common vision of the United States; and continuing the alliances with "rogue states," all declared or sworn enemies of the United States.

Considering the renewed strength of the internal political opposition in Venezuela, a barometer for the increased likelihood of a potential change of regime, it is quite unlikely to think that Washington would accept such an international and domestic behaviours. In fact, should the possibility of definitive crumble of the Chavista party come to fruition, it seems more probable that the US would support the political and social oppositions, either openly or not, rather than opting to prevent that fall. Therefore, I concluded that the fates of Chavism and relations between the US and Venezuela depend on the reactions of Maduro and the other Bolivarian leaders. In order to adapt to the new features of their society and cope with the economic recession that Venezuela is facing, they may be forced, perhaps grudgingly, to cede something of the old integral Chavism, leaving Venezuela open to a certain degree of democratic and liberal reforms.

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## **Abstract**

The object of this thesis has been to understand changes in US foreign policy toward Latin America, by analysing its causes and its main challengers in the area. Following the long period of decreasing interest in the southern part of the Western Hemisphere, started with the *détente* of Cold War tensions, the United States of America is once again turning toward the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. Recent developments and potential changes in the political, economic, and social arrangements of the area are drawing the attention of US increasingly. The appearance, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, of a wave of mostly left-leaning governments in the region accounts for much of this renewed interest.

This new political framework in the LAC region, together with the unprecedented economic growth of countries like Brazil and Venezuela, brought incredible changes to the balance of the area. This economic growth has allowed the countries of the region to pursue greater independence and autonomy in both their economic and foreign policies. Additionally, this gradual shift has initiated a process of deeper regional integration, aimed at creating an alternative to extant US-led hemispherical institutions, such as the Organization of the American States (OAS).

The driving force behind this general spread of socialist or social democratic governments and values throughout the region was Hugo Rafael Chavez Frías in Venezuela, who came to power in 1999 and led the first of this array of governments. The former Venezuelan leader's quest, successful by many standards, was the extraordinary improvement of regional integration in pursuit of the Pan-American ideal,

inspired by the vision of the Venezuelan *libertador* Simon Bolívar and fuelled both by Chavez's incredible charisma and the incredible oil resources of his country. Through generous foreign aid grants to neighbour countries, Chavez acquired ever-increasing influence in the region. Using this leadership role in the region, both Chavez and his chosen successor Nicolás Maduro spread the former's anti-imperialist ideas and anti-American rhetoric. For these reasons, this thesis considers Venezuela as one of the greatest challengers to the US in Latin America, especially in light of recent developments in the country.

Any discussion of challengers to the US in the Latin American context must necessarily engage the Republic of Cuba, its principal antagonist in the region for more than fifty years and, by the estimation of some, the biggest threat to American values and hegemony. Perceived as a serious threat during the years of the Cold War, though isolated from the rest of the world since 1961, recently Cuba has begun opening itself up to the outside world in critical ways, mostly especially economic. This process, too, is linked to the changes in Latin America described above, since increased autonomy in foreign policy decisions has allowed those nations to engage Cuba anew or reinforce their existing relations with the long-excluded and isolated island nation.

Therefore, as I said, the aim of this thesis has been to understand the tone of United States foreign policy towards the whole region, the US plan for engaging with the emerging economies of Latin America in terms of diplomacy and economy, and its reactions or lack thereof to the ongoing leftist political trends in the region. Venezuela and Cuba, the aforementioned major challengers to the US in the LAC region, are the primary focus, allowing for discussion of the reasons why they represent such a challenge and what the US attitude, past, present, and future, toward them has been and might be.

To address these questions, this thesis is divided into three parts, each in turn divided into three chapters. Part one analyses US foreign policy in Latin America beginning with the description of the main attitude of the North American power toward the region during George W. Bush's presidency (2001–2009). In the course of this specific study, I highlight the differences between Bush's campaign promises and his first months in office, on the one hand, and his actions during the remaining years of his two-term presidency, focusing particularly on what happened after the September 11 terrorist attacks. The differences between those two phases of American foreign policy, despite then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's attempts to restore the image of the US, led to a steep loss of consensus among Latin American countries.

Analysis then proceeds to the presidency of Barack Obama and the sudden improvement of US reputation in the area, achieved on an initial level through the contrast between the hopes that the election of a new president brought and the complete disappointment that the previous one had caused. Though coping with the same challenges faced by the preceding administration, Obama's adoption of a different stance on the area, namely attempting to elevate all the countries of Latin America to parity with the US and privileging bilateral ties with the countries of the area, has been more successful. In fact, he engaged in closer relations with two countries considered strategic, by virtue of their economic growth, for the restoration of the US presence in the area: Mexico and Brazil. Furthermore, Obama's commitment to reviving and renewing the discarded Organization of the American States (OAS), by being much more attentive to the demands of the other member countries, and his attempts to involve the European Union as a neutral bridge between the U.S. itself and the Latin American countries, have also proven positive.

Outlining the current main challenges that the region as a whole poses to the US,

I began by examining the so-called “Pink Tide,” the wave of left-leaning governments sweeping over by the majority of the countries of the region, for example Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador and Bolivia. From this trend, focus shifted to immigration and commercial policies, the two main issues between Latin America and the US. The immigration issue, primarily contentious between the US and Mexico, the country of origin of the bulk of both legal and illegal immigrants in the US, is a much more specific case study. Commercial policies, by contrast, simultaneously engage more countries within the LAC region, as well as the Chinese and their attempts to outpace the US in commercial ties there.

Through the examination of these circumstances and the relevant data, the first part of my thesis demonstrates that an actual shift in US attention to the region is underway, having emerged during the Obama presidency. Apart from the aforementioned changes in approach initiated by President Obama, this new focus is also the result of many other factors, including changes in the political equilibrium of the area, economic growth undertaken by many countries, and the consequent emergence of new foreign actors, who are interested in the phenomenon and are increasing their presence in the LAC region.

Having described the general challenges to the US, analysis shifted to consideration of the Republic of Cuba and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the two greatest challengers to US influence in Latin America, in my estimation, each of which was treated in its own separate unit. Cuba and the current thaw in relations with the United States is the subject of the second part of the thesis. There, in order to offer the reader a more complete understanding of the issue, I begin with historical background, discussing the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a key turning point for Cuba, both domestically and internationally. Moreover, I carried out a

brief chronological study of the secret talks in which Cuba and the US engaged occasionally during the five decades of isolation, never to any concrete effect. Then, I explained the contents of the agreement the two countries recently reached, giving special attention to the cancellation or reduction of some of the economic sanctions posed by the US against the island and the re-opening of their respective embassies. Also, I identified the various international actors, such as the Holy See, the EU, and Spain, that helped the negotiation process and encouraged the achievement of the current result. Thereafter, as a counterpoint to the positive contents of the agreement, I highlighted first the presence of internal American opposition to the accord, primarily among Republican members of Congress; and second, extant difficulties and obstacles within the Cuban economic, social and political systems that might impede its full realization. Finally, the contrasting stances of the UN and of the countries of the region, mainly Venezuela, were examined, in order to understand their potential consequences for the *rapprochement* underway.

Next, the possible outlook for Cuban foreign policy was considered, and more particularly the ramifications of the US-Cuba agreement on relations between the two nations, as well as on Cuba's relationships with its neighbours in the LAC region and beyond. The evidence of the economic and political evolution of Cuba seems to indicate the strong likelihood of the successful continuation of the dialogue with the US, which could serve as the catalyst for an internal redirection of the country along more democratic and liberal pathways. In addition, I argue that improved relations between Castro's government and democratic states like the US, specific European countries (among which Spain is preeminent), and the European Union itself would gradually exert influence on Cuba's relations with some states that are not fully democratic, most especially Venezuela, and potentially engender a certain degree of separation from

them.

Because of the importance of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Cuba, and also to the United States, the third and final part of this thesis is dedicated to its consideration. As a starting point in my analysis of the reasons why Venezuela may be considered one of the main challengers of the US, the close relations cultivated by former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez with Fidel Castro was presented as background. Their integral collaboration, which entailed a sort of “elective affinity” both for their ideologies and for the perfect complementarity of their interests, allowed for the survival of their respective domestic revolutions, as well as their continued anti-American actions. The dissolution of this ideological partnership, caused by Chavez’s death and Fidel Castro’s resignation in favour of his younger brother Raul, can be viewed as presaging a latent estrangement between the two countries, a process additionally fuelled by the Venezuelan economic recession and the measures Cuba has taken to diversify its economic partners as a consequence. The role of the Caribbean island’s *rapprochement* with the US also figures significantly in this process and in my analysis of it.

Then, the analysis shifts to the kinds of relations that link Venezuela and the US, and the main obstacle to a pacific relation between the two countries, namely ideological differences. Since the election of Chavez in 1999, and with increased intensity after the failed military coup in Venezuela in 2002, the US has been made the object of continuous violent invectives by Mr. Chavez and his successor. Thanks to his fervent action in the region within international organizations such as ALBA, Chavez successfully spread these ideas throughout Latin America, contributing significantly to the worsening of perceptions of the US by those countries.

As the evidence shows, the ideological gulf that separated the Bolivarian leader

and the various US Presidents did not prevent Venezuela from maintaining sizeable economic relations with its “Yankee” neighbour, ironically Venezuela’s largest commercial partner. The continuation of Chavez’s policies by his personally groomed successor, Maduro, both in domestic and in foreign affairs, has unsurprisingly resulted in little, if any, change. On the contrary, Maduro’s comparatively meagre charisma, the drastic fall in the price of oil (Venezuela’s main natural resource and source of income), and the resulting economic recession, have forced changes to the internal political equilibrium, culminating in a shift in majority in the Venezuelan Parliament from the Chavist party to its political opposition, for the first time in 16 years. This evident shift in power and in Venezuelan political preferences is likely to incite a remodelling of Chavismo, if not the total demolition of the socialist apparatus established by Chavez. On the brink of chaos, the country needs urgent reforms and reliable allies to exit this crisis. Therefore, given the right domestic and international behaviour on the part of the Venezuelan government, this could be the perfect moment for the US to launch a peaceful dialogue with Caracas. Unfortunately, attaining these preconditions will be a challenge. As the final section of the last chapter makes clear, Maduro is enforcing and improving the same principles and relations Chavez launched along four trajectories: maintaining Venezuelan leadership of the Bolivarian countries (the members of ALBA); deepening economic relations with China through the sale of Venezuelan oil; augmenting Venezuela’s ideological, military, and economic alliance with Russia, already strong by virtue of their common vision of the United States; and continuing the alliances with “rogue states”, namely Sudan, North Korea, Syria, and Iran, all declared or sworn enemies of the United States.

Considering the renewed strength of the internal political opposition in Venezuela, a barometer for the increased likelihood of a potential change of regime, it is

correspondingly unlikely to think that Washington would accept such international and domestic behaviours. In fact, should the possibility of the definitive crumble of the Chavista party come to fruition, it seems more probable that the US would support the political and social oppositions, either openly or not, rather than opting to prevent that fall. Therefore, I conclude that the fates of Chavism and relations between the US and Venezuela depend on the reactions of Maduro and the other Bolivarian leaders. In order to adapt to the new features of their society and cope with the economic recession that Venezuela is facing, they may be forced, perhaps grudgingly, to cede something of the old integral Chavism, leaving Venezuela open to a certain degree of democratic and liberal reforms, in the respect of the basic human rights.