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# **The rise and fall of the Inter-American System**

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## **Abstract**

This paper proposes to look back at the evolution of the so called Inter-American System since its first manifestations in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to shed some light on current developments. Some explanations that may have led to the current atmosphere of deterioration of this system are proposed. Additionally, it intends to assess what this deterioration means and what practical consequences it may bring. The conclusion is that the recent events are in fact symptom of a broader historical phenomenon of increasingly decline of the Inter-American System and if the present posture is maintained this decline tends to get steeper overtime.

# The rise and fall of the Inter-American System

Carlos Gustavo Poggio Teixeira

*“As to an American system, we have it; we constitute the whole of it; there is no community of interests or of principles between North and South America” - John Quincy Adams.*

## Introduction

The closing years of the first decade of the 2000s will probably not be remembered as a very positive one when it comes to Inter-American relations. The creation of a Latin American bloc in February of 2010, with the explicit aim to serve as an alternative to the Washington-based Organization of American States (OAS), is just the most recent example of a silent deterioration of the relations between the United States and the Latin American nations. Three other examples from the last year of the Bush administration may serve to show that the creation of a Latin American bloc to replace the OAS seems to represent more a continuity of a process of gradual deterioration than a new development.

In April of 2008, the United States Navy announced the reestablishment of the U.S. Fourth Fleet to, according to the Department of Defense, “address the increased role of maritime forces in the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) area of operations, and to demonstrate U.S. commitment to regional partners” (U.S. Department of Defense 2008). The Fourth Fleet, which was operational during World War II and had been deactivated in 1950, is a naval command responsible for the South Atlantic area. The reestablishment of this command is essentially an administrative rearrangement and does not mean any new ship deployments to the region. Nevertheless, although the reestablishment of the Fourth Fleet went largely unnoticed on American press, it sparked incensed reactions throughout South America amid fears of increase American military presence in the region. The June 2008 edition of “Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil” gave it the cover story under the headline: “The Empire Strikes Back” (Bava 2008). The Venezuelan president called the reestablishment of the Fourth Fleet a “threat” to Venezuela’s oil

resources, while the Bolivian president called it “the Fourth Fleet of intervention” (Wagner 2008). The Argentine president manifested her “concern” to U.S. officials (Globo.com 2008). The Brazilian president suggested that the reestablishment of the Fourth Fleet could be related to recent oil discoveries on Brazilian coast and demanded “explanations” from the U.S. government (Carmo 2008), and the Brazilian Senate, amid references to the 1964 military coup, urged the fleet “not to go to the region” (El Pais 2008). Regardless of their validity, these reactions suggest at least two things. First, they make obvious the lack of consultation between South American nations and the United States, as the first seemed to respond with great surprise, forcing American officials to provide post-facto explanations. Since consultation among partners is a fundamental attribute of any political regional arrangements that aspire to have some relevance, this evident lack of consultation is an indication of the deterioration of the Inter-American System. The other thing these reactions seem to make apparent is that the fears of American “imperialism” remains a factor in the foreign policies in Latin America countries, even in a post-Cold War setting. And, as will be shown below, the Inter-American System reached its apogee when Latin American fears of American imperialism had been assuaged.

While the example above is more symbolic and serves to show the general mood in the region, another development seems to have more concrete implications. In May of 2008, the member states of the recently created Unasur (Union of South American Nations) signed a pact to create a South American Defense Council. A crisis between Ecuador and Colombia earlier in the year gave the impulse to put forward this proposal. The creation of this mechanism was spearheaded chiefly by Brazil with strong support from Venezuela, the latter being the loudest anti-American country in Latin America. Colombia, the currently staunchest American ally in the region, was the only South American country not to sign the pact back then. Nevertheless, after intense negotiations and possibly worried about a diplomatic isolation in the region, by July President Uribe eventually decided to join the Council. This means that, if created, the South American Defense Council would include all twelve countries in the region and, most significant, would exclude the United States. The Brazilian Defense Minister, when asked how the United States could help, said that the best way the U.S. can help the council is “watch from the outside and keep its distance” (Garcez 2008). Expectedly, President Chavez went further and described the United States as the Unasur’s “number one enemy” (BBC News 2008). Chavez’s rhetoric is less important than the fact that Venezuela is one of the leading countries in the

process of establishing the Unasur and the Defense Council, which is regarded originally as a Brazilian proposal (Gandra 2008). As a matter of fact, the first trip the Brazilian Minister of Defense did to discuss the council was to Venezuela. The debates surrounding the creation of a South American Defense Council are even more relevant in light of what has been considered an arms race among the powerhouses in the region: Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Venezuela. For instance, while Venezuela has spent billions of dollars on Russian weaponry since 2005, Brazil signed in January 2008 a “strategic military alliance” with France aiming at the modernization of Brazilian armed forces (Fernandes 2008).

Finally, in early September of that year, Venezuela announced it would engage in joint military exercises with Russia. By the end of that month Russia had already sent strategic bombers for exercises over the Caribbean Sea and a squadron from the Russian navy, including a nuclear powered missile cruiser, sailed to Venezuela and arrived in the port of La Guaira in November. This kind of Russian military deployment in the region is unseen since the end of the Cold War and many analysts consider this a response to U.S. involvement in the conflict in Georgia and to U.S. proposals for an enlargement on NATO. If the Russian presence in Latin American waters becomes significant, this could represent an important hindrance to American interests in the region. The clash between Washington and Caracas became even deeper as both countries expelled their respective ambassadors and the United States named two Venezuelan officials as FARC backers, with the prospect of Venezuela being placed on the U.S. “terrorist list”. Chavez justified his decision to expel the American diplomat as a support to the Bolivian government which had just expelled its American ambassador, followed by the expulsion of the Bolivian representative in Washington.

Therefore, what the summit in Mexico in February of this year demonstrates is the existence of centrifugal forces acting in the Western Hemisphere that goes beyond particular U.S. administrations. An optimist would probably say that maybe these events are just isolated cases of a generally bad year for inter-American relations, and relations will eventually get back to some level of normality. An alternative perspective would hold that these recent events marked a new era of political fragmentation in the American continent. A definitive answer to this can only be provided some years from now when historians and political scientists look back at it under a historical perspective. But if we cannot foresee what will happen in the future, we

can look at the past history of inter-American relations in search for patterns in order to better comprehend the events mentioned above. Particularly the creation of South American Defense Council is perhaps the most important and, if successful, the most capable of having lasting effects in the fragmentation of the Inter-American System.

This paper proposes to look back at the evolution of the so called “Inter-American System” since its first manifestations in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to shed some light on the current developments within this system. By doing so, it intends to put the proposal for the creation of the South American Defense Council under historical perspective and therefore analyze its degree of novelty and whether this represents a radical departure in terms of Latin American policies. As I argue, the events of 2008 are in fact a symptom of a broader historical phenomenon of increasingly decline of the Inter-American System and if the present posture is maintained this decline tends to get steeper overtime. In fact, what 2008 may suggest is that we may be witnessing not only a process of fragmentation through enhanced autonomy, but a fragmentation that has the potential to lead to an explicit hostility towards the interests of the United States in the region. Therefore, I intend also to advance some explanations that may have led to the current atmosphere of deterioration of the Inter-American System. Additionally, this paper intends to assess what does this deterioration mean and what practical consequences it may bring. The way to do this is by pointing out what does the Inter-American System mean to the United States and what does it mean to Latin America. Again, looking back at the historical development of the system will be of assistance in this task.

### **The Inter-American System and South America**

The first thing that is obvious when looking at the events mentioned above is the fact that they are not related to all Latin America in general but specifically to South America. As a matter of fact, if a process of fragmentation of the Inter-American System is at sight, its first signs are to be located in South America. In order to understand the reason for that, we need first to understand what the concept of an “Inter-American System” means. As Connell-Smith puts it, the term “Inter-American relations” refers predominantly to the description of “the relations

between the United States and the countries of Latin America” (Connell-Smith 1966, xvi). Hence, the relations among the Latin American countries themselves, while important, are not the main concern of the study of inter-American relations. The unique nature of the system is characterized thus by the management of the relationship between an extremely powerful country and several weaker countries. Therefore the historiography of the Inter-American System is generally not the historiography of the relations among the individual countries in the continent, but of the relations between one country, the United States, and the Latin American countries. The Inter-American System is called a “system” because of the relatively high degree of institutionalization of inter-American relations, notably through the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (which predates NATO).

Therefore, if there is a process of fragmentation of the Inter-American System this means both a process of distancing between Latin America and the United States, and a decline of the relevance of inter-American institutions such as the OAS. And if these processes are to occur the first place they will manifest won't be in Mexico, Caribbean and Central America, but in South America. This is because the economic, political and security links between South America and the United States are considerably weaker than the links between the United States and the other countries in Latin America. While the Caribbean region has been described as "part of defense perimeter of the United States" (Tokatlian 2006, 242), South America is characterized by "its relatively geopolitical and strategic marginality" (Mercado Jarrín 1989, 4) and therefore historically has had relatively little strategic importance in U.S. foreign policy. Geographic proximity has been a crucial factor – while Mexico shares a large border with the United States, the distance between some of the main capitals in the U.S. and South America are about the same as to Europe. This, along with a thicker web of free trade agreements, is also one of the reasons why economic ties between the United States and Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean are far more important than between the United States and South America. 76% of Mexican exports go to the United States, compared to Colombia's 28.5%, Brazil's 14%, Chile's 12.5% and Argentina's 7.4% (CIA 2008). As a matter of fact, although the United States remains one of the most important trade partners in the region, no country in South America ships more than 50% of its exports to the United States, which is the rule for several Central American and Caribbean countries. Thanks to their oil exports, Venezuela and Ecuador are the countries in the region with higher U.S. participation in their exports – around 40%. Paradoxically, these are

currently two of the loudest critics of the United States in the region. Most of the topics of the Latin American agenda in Washington – such as immigration, security and trade – are much closer related to Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean than to South America. Perhaps the only major topic that South America might share in importance with the rest of Latin America in Washington's agenda is the issue of drugs. Hence, South America gather several conditions that the other countries in Latin America lack in terms of room for maneuvering when it comes to distancing themselves from the United States. Obviously, the degree of such separation are limited by the realities of power, but there is no doubt that compared to South America, the other countries in Latin America have more limited options, and if a process of fragmentation of the Inter-American System is in operation, its first symptoms are to be found south of Panama. But in order to explore the putative reasons for the current environment of fragmentation, a closer look to the past is indispensable.

### **From Bolivar to Bin Laden**

As noted above, the term “Inter-American System” is generally applied to the relations between the United States and Latin American countries. Nevertheless, when investigating the origins of the system, one should look to a period when the United States was for the most part uninterested in any formal arrangements with its American neighbors. Mecham (1961) classifies this first phase before 1889 as the “Old Pan Americanism”. This pre-Inter-American phase counted only on former Spanish colonies and goes from their independence until 1889 when the United States and the other countries in Latin America got together for the first Pan-American Conference in Washington. The initial date for the founding of the Pan-American idea is 1826, when Simon Bolivar convoked the Panama Conference, attended by Peru, Colombia, Central America and Mexico. Although only these four states participated in the conference they represent today eleven states in Latin America. Albeit Bolivar did not extend his invitation to the non-Spanish speaking countries as United States and Brazil, both countries ended up being invited to participate by other participants. President Adams, interested mainly in commercial opportunities, decided to accept the invitation but the U.S. Congress appointed representatives

too late to participate. Other countries in South America declined the invitation and Brazil, although accepted it, didn't send any representative. The Bolivarian idea in calling the conference was to form "a league of former Spanish colonies, now sovereign states, and dedicated to confederation for their common defense" (Mecham 1961, 30). The enemy that Bolivar had in mind when proposing such an alliance was primarily Spain and it is noteworthy that he invited Great Britain for the Panama Conference. This was also the reason why he didn't invite the U.S. and Brazil, which didn't share the same fears toward Spain. The outcome of the Panama Congress was the Treaty of Perpetual Union calling for common defense among the signatories. However, the only country to ratify this treat was Bolivar's Colombia. As Sicker notes:

Even before the congress formally convened the attitudes of the delegates had undergone significant change. The idea of establishing a federation with broad political authority delegated to a general assembly ran afoul of local and separatist interests and was rejected. [...] The harsh reality was that, despite the common experience of colonial subjugation, there was no real sense of identity among the Latin American states. (Sicker 2002, 26)

Taken aback by the obvious obstacles, Bolivar became disenchanted with the idea of a union of the Spanish-American states and started to work on the narrower idea of a federation restricted to the Andean states: Great Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. As even this more modest goal seemed far from reach, as early as 1828 "Bolivar became the advocate of an extremely isolationist Colombian nationalism" (Sicker 2002, 27). As Mecham puts it: "It is somewhat ironic that the man who is honored as the 'father of Pan Americanism' disavowed his brain child in its infancy" (Mecham 1961, 40). Regarded as the first "inter-Americanist", Bolivar experienced first-hand the difficulties inherent to such enterprise. Nevertheless, as Mecham points out, although the Panama Conference didn't produce any concrete results, its significance lies in the realm of "intangible" achievements, as it gave stimulus to the idea of Inter-American conferences to discuss mutual problems in the continent, even if "for a number of years, interest in the movement was confined to only a few of the Spanish American republics" thereby making more sense the use of the term "Hispano-Americanism" to denominate this period (Mecham 1961, 40). Although Mexico called for another conference 4 times between 1831 and 1840, the next meeting of American states would only take place 21 years after the Panama Congress.

The Second Pan American Conference was held in Lima, Peru between 1847 and 1848. The United States was then formally invited, but did not participate, “for it did not regard the meeting seriously” (Mecham 1961, 41). The states participating in the Lima Conference regarded U.S. participation both as an important factor in convincing European powers not to interfere in American affairs and as a “reminder to this country, then engaged in a war with Mexico, of the prime object of the conference – respect for territorial integrity” (Mecham 1961, 41). This initial attempt to engage the United States led Mecham to suggest that "it appears that the desire to include the United States in an association of American states was much stronger in Latin America than in the United States" (Mecham 1961, 42).

By the time of the third meeting of Spanish-American states in Santiago in 1856 the mood in Latin America had changed considerably. The outcome of the Mexican-American War made Latin American states aware of the great power of their neighbor of the North and wary about whether this power would be used to further North-American incursions in Latin American territory. As a result, this was the first conference explicitly inspired by fear of the United States. The Santiago Conference witnessed for the first time a proposal for a South American Alliance put forward by the government of Peru which, together with Chile and Ecuador, actually signed a “Continental Treaty” of common defense. The treaty however was never ratified, but it set an important precedent. The last major conference of the “old Pan Americanism” era was held in Lima, Peru between 1864 and 1865. As had happened with the previous conferences, treaties of mutual defense were negotiated but never ratified. Still, as Mecham points out, even though during the period of the “old Pan Americanism” no treaties were ratified and no permanent institutions were created, they "were important in that they incorporated fundamental rules of national behavior destined later to become basic features of inter-American cooperation" (Mecham 1961, 46).

Even though the United States didn't participate in any of the pre-1889 conferences, it evidently watched them with interest. The predominance of security issues during the conferences held before 1889 was one of the major reasons the United States remained aloof. Being the most powerful country in the region and having unilaterally proclaimed the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, the United States “had little reason to pursue collective arrangements with its southern neighbors for purposes of enhancing its own security" (Sicker 2002, 47). Therefore,

when the Garfield administration decided it was time to consider a conference with its Latin American neighbors, the focus shifted from security to commerce. In 1881, all the countries in American continent had been invited for a conference in Washington, but the assassination of President Garfield postponed it to 1889. When The International Conference of American States convened in Washington, on October 2, 1889 a new era began for the Western Hemisphere. All the countries in the region participate in that conference, with the single exception of the Dominican Republic. Contrary to the Hispanic-American conferences of the “old-Pan Americanism”, this “new Pan Americanism” was all-inclusive and laid the foundations of the Inter-American System (Mecham 1961). As the United States wanted explicitly to avoid political matters and because there was no credible outside threat to the hemisphere, the first four conferences of this new phase before World War I dealt little with security issues and focused mainly on matters of commerce. Security was only an issue in the sense that the United States viewed the maintenance of peace in the hemisphere as a pre-requisite for trade. Even though by time of the Second Conference of American States in Mexico City in 1901 some Latin American states were deeply concerned about Theodore Roosevelt policies in the Caribbean, the United States managed to exclude controversial political issues from the agenda. Latin American attempts to propose a hemispheric arrangement to constrain U.S. unilateral actions during the Third Conference in Rio, 1906 and the Forth Conference in Buenos Aires, 1910 got no support. As Sicker argues, the “United States was not prepared to entertain seriously any proposals that might hamper its flexibility in dealing with its regional interests as it saw fit” (Sicker 2002, 62). Therefore, the first tangible achievement of these conferences was the International Union of American Republics (later renamed Pan American Union) which was a customs union not directly related to security matters. Additionally, these conferences also created a relatively robust web of legal framework for the settlement of inter-American controversies. In terms of outside threats though, by 1914 little had been achieved.

Consequently, the outbreak of World War I “found the nations of America without any agreed-upon plan of action” (Mecham 1961, 77) and with “no inter-American machinery for dealing with possible external aggressions” (Connell-Smith 1966, 53). As a result, World War I saw no functioning “Inter-American System”. Only 8 countries in the continent declared war on Germany and all, with the important exception of Brazil, were in the Caribbean or Central America. Brazil was also the only Latin American country to have an active role in the conflict,

justifying its participation in terms of friendship and similarity of political opinion in defense of interests in Americas, with constant mentions of continental solidarity. According to Mecham, “the war policy of Brazil was probably the most truly reflective of the Pan American ideals of unity and cooperation” (Mecham 1961, 82). Mexico and Argentina, on the other hand, were the countries most clearly opposed to the United States.

The inter-war period, which many analysts of American foreign policy regard as “isolationism” witnessed one of the most interventionist periods in Central America and the Caribbean. Thus, when the Fifth Conference of American States met in Santiago, in 1923 - one hundred years after the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine - Latin American states pushed harder for the inclusion of political subjects aiming to restrain the United States, indicating a strong resistance to the idea of an inter-American system deprived of controversial political issues. During the Sixth Conference in Havana, 1928, countries in Latin America pressed hard for the formalization of the principle of non-intervention, which the United States was determined not to accept. But by now it seemed difficult to simply ignore such subjects, and the participant countries decided to refer to this issue on the next conference, which would witness a new posture in U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America that would inaugurate a new era in inter-American relations – the “Good Neighbor” policy.

An important effect of the Havana Conference was that it made clear to U.S. policy makers that a change in attitude was necessary in order to achieve collaboration in the hemisphere. The Good Neighbor policy of the United States, which had actually begun by 1928 but was better elaborated by Franklin Roosevelt since 1933, created the environment for the establishment of a stronger inter-American system. The policy did not remain on the rhetorical level and actions such as the abrogation of the Platt Amendment in 1934, the withdrawal from Haiti in the same year and the treaty with Panama in 1936, gave credibility to it. As a consequence of the new posture of the United States since 1928, the atmosphere of the Seventh Conference in Montevideo, 1933, was notably friendlier. The United States was now open to discuss issues that had been explicitly avoided in the past conferences and, surprisingly, it accepted the formalization of the principle of non-intervention, although it had its own interpretations for what “intervention” meant. An extraordinary conference was convoked to meet in Buenos Aires in 1936 after the end of the Chaco War and, with the prospect of a conflict

in Europe, the seeds of a collective defense machinery were at the table. For Mecham, the Buenos Aires Peace Conference is a landmark because “for the first time in a Pan American conference, at least since the inauguration of the 'new' Pan Americanism, the delegates were being urged to consider security measures against a non-American aggressor” (Mecham 1961, 125). Sicker argues that the Buenos Aires Conference set the stage “for further step towards collective security for hemisphere” through an attempt to “transform the Monroe Doctrine into a multilateral hemispheric security doctrine” (Sicker 2002, 93). The mechanisms of consultation proposed in Buenos Aires were advanced in the Eight Conference in Lima, 1938, when the growing fears of an extra-continental challenge led the United States, in conjunction with Brazil, to propose a mutual defense pact, which was a clear signal of how far the United States had gone from its original idea of an inter-American system merely related to economic matters. However, as Child (1980) points out, the Latin American nations were not as alarmed by the Axis threat and showed no willingness to accept an outright mutual defense pact and a broader pact was agreed upon.

At this point, even though its instruments were still “largely inoperable” (Connell-Smith 1966, 108), the Inter-American System started to develop its definitive configuration as the major objectives of establishing such machinery began to make itself clear for both Latin American countries and the United States. For Latin America, which had been insisting on the theme of “non-intervention” since the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the main reason for the existence of a regional arrangement in the continent was to manage the power of the United States by restraining its freedom of action through legal mechanisms, thereby safeguarding their territorial inviolability. The United States, on the other hand, gradually started to perceive the system as a way of institutionalizing the Monroe Doctrine idea of hemispheric denial toward European powers, and, eventually, as an instrument that would yield institutional legitimization to its actions in the hemisphere thereby effectively “institutionalizing U.S. dominance” (Lowenthal 1990, 29) in the Western Hemisphere at the same time American power reached its zenith. Kurth describes the institutionalization of the Inter-American System after World War II as a “great bargain” between the United States and Latin America:

On the one hand, nonintervention meant that the United States would not intervene in the internal politics of Latin American states (a repeal of the corollary of the first Roosevelt). On the other hand, collective security meant that the Latin American states would join

with the United States to exclude from the Americas the threat of a dominant European power (which was now the Soviet Union)" (Kurth 1990, 16)

Moreover, World War II would bring a significant shift in positions when compared to the first years since the advent of the "new Pan-Americanism" – the United States, which initially wanted to limit the discussions to commercial matters, would now be focused mostly on security issues. Conversely, the Latin American countries, whose main concern in the first years of the "new Pan Americanism" was related to security, after the end of the war would insist on the importance of economic factors. One major indication of the United States' concern with security matters is the development during 1938 and 1940 of what Child (1980) describes as the "Inter-American Military System", initiating a period of cooperation among the United States and Latin American militaries, which initially began with activities such as the training of Latin American officials in U.S. military academies, and ultimately led to a flow of arms and military supplies to several countries in the region, most notably Brazil, who had been a key ally long before the war. Argentina, on the other hand, which had consistently been the most problematic country when it came to cooperating with the United States and the strengthening of the Inter-American System, obviously received a very different treatment. This was a major factor in upsetting the balance of power in South America toward Brazil in the early 1940's.

Thanks to the Good Neighbor Policy and the international setting, the period of the Second World War and its aftermath is generally referred to as the apex of the Inter-American System. During this time, the system took its current institutional configuration with the creation of the Inter-American Defense Board, in 1942, the Rio Treaty in 1947 and finally, the establishment of the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1949. The successes of the German army in the spring of 1940 awakened the consciousness of American countries about the possibility of Germany taking control over European possessions in the Western Hemisphere. To deal with this issue, a Consultative Meeting of Foreign Ministers was convened in Havana in July, 1940. The resulting "Act of Havana" provided the right of one or more American states to take over a territory threatened by any non-American state. As Sicker mentions, "there was little question in anyone's mind that this provision meant the United States, the only hemisphere country with the necessary military power to carry it out" (Sicker 2002, 98), therefore the "United States was now recognized by the American states as the guarantor of hemispheric security" (Sicker 2002, 99). In Mecham's analysis, the Act of Havana meant that "Latin

American nations were formally endorsing the United States' implementation of the no-transfer principle of the Monroe Doctrine. It would be difficult to present more convincing evidence of Latin America's new confidence in the integrity of the United States" (Mecham 1961, 188). Moreover, Resolution XV adopted at Havana, the "Declaration of Reciprocal Assistance and Cooperation for the Defense of the Nations of the Americas", contemplating any act of aggression by a non-American state, provided the principles of collective regional security. Mecham observes the innovation of Resolution XV, since it was "the first inter-American security instrument aimed specifically at such powers [non-American]" (Mecham 1961, 189).

The December 7, 1941 attacks on Pearl Harbor would put to test the "entire complex of agreements on hemispheric solidarity in the face of outside aggression" (Mecham 1961, 210). A couple days after Pearl Harbor, the Chilean government invoked Resolution XV of the Act of Havana and the foreign ministers of the region convened in Rio de Janeiro, at the beginning of 1942. The United States wanted all the Latin American countries to break relations with the Axis, but the opposition of Argentina and Chile resulted in a milder declaration merely "recommending" a break. One of the most important outcomes of the Rio meeting though, was the creation of the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB) which was conceived to be an advisory body to study and recommend measures for collective defense in the hemisphere. Even though the IADB would have little practical utility, it was "symbol of hemispheric military unit" for the U.S. State Department (Child 1980, 37) and gave "Latin America a sense of participation in a joint effort to ensure security of the hemisphere" (Connell-Smith 1966, 122).

The next fundamental part of the system machinery was incorporated during another conference in Rio, in 1947, at the "Inter-American Conference for Maintenance of Continental Peace and Security". The only purpose of the Rio meeting was to prepare an inter-American treaty of reciprocal assistance. The outcome of the meeting was the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (IATRA), also known as Rio Treaty, which stated that an attack on an American state, from any country, American or non-American, is an attack on all American states and collective measures should be taken. The Rio Treaty has been the cornerstone of collective defense in the Western Hemisphere. It must be noted, however, that the Rio Treaty provides only a political framework for collective defense and, contrary to NATO (which would be established only two years after the Rio Treaty), is not an outright military alliance since it did

not provide for the establishment of a permanent multilateral armed forces. As Child accurately observes “while the Treaty establishes the political framework for collective security, it is silent about the military means for enforcement” (Child 1980, 97). One important reason for this lies in the unique characteristic of the Inter-American System and the ambivalent Latin American view of the United States at the time “both as protector against outside threat and as menace in her own right” (Child 1980, 99) which led to a reluctance in “militarize” the system.

The following year, in occasion of the Ninth Conference of American States held in Bogota, 1948, the modern design of the Inter-American System was completed with the establishment of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Treaty of Pacific Settlement, also known as the Pact of Bogota. These instruments basically meant the incorporation of several principles that were already in place given the accumulation of more than 50 years of inter-American interaction. These principles can be summarized by the notions of sovereignty equality, nonintervention and consultation. As Mecham points out, the OAS and the Pact of Bogota represented thus the formalization of the existent procedures, therefore “the Charter produced at Bogota was not merely the work of the Ninth International Conference of American States, it was the cumulative result of fifty-eight years of Pan American endeavor” (Mecham 1961, 304).

During the Rio Conference, that took place a few months after the announcement of the Marshall Plan, the emphasis on economic development by the Latin American nations was becoming evident, even though it wasn't part of the agenda for that meeting. Taking notice of the massive financial assistance that would be headed to Europe, including to former wartime enemies, the idea of a “Marshall Plan for Latin America” became a common theme in the mouths of several Latin American officials. The fact that the head of U.S. delegation in Rio was Secretary of State George Marshall himself only gave more impetus to the Latin American delegations. Indeed, as Smith points out, “between 1945 and 1952 Belgium and Luxembourg received more direct financial aid from the United States than all twenty nations of Latin America combined” (Smith 2005, 114). Conversely, to Latin America the policy of the United States was to prioritize private investments. By 1951 the Brazilian President, for example, claimed that “we fought in the last war and were entirely forgotten and rejected in the division of spoils” (Smith 2005, 114). Therefore, the first relevant signs of divergence within the system

began to appear as soon as it was effectively established. Seven months after the Rio Conference, the Bogota Conference “openly revealed a sharp U.S.-Latin divergence for the first time since the implementation of the Good Neighbor Policy” (Child 1980, 104). While the United States stressed the politico-military alliance, Latin America felt that economic measures should take priority. Moreover, while the United States was “obsessed with the Soviet Union in a Cold War context”, Latin America was, as usual, “primarily concerned over United States military and economic intervention” (Child 1980, 105).

Thus, during the first years of the Cold War Latin America would remain as a low priority for the United States. This situation would only change after the Cuban Revolution and the growing fears of communist infiltration in the hemisphere. The long reclaimed theme of the need for economic development would take the form of the Alliance for Progress during the Kennedy administration as a way to solve the communist threat beyond the military perspective. Even though the Alliance for Progress was a failure, it signaled an attempt to change the approach to Latin America during the Cold War. Because of the developments in Cuba, the 1960's also saw the “historic apogee” of the Inter-American Military System (Child 1980, 143) with the growth in funds for Military Assistance Programs (MAPs) and in the number of U.S. military personnel in Latin America, and with the creation of new mechanisms such as the Inter-American Defense College founded in 1962, offering training for high level ranking officials. Also during this period, Central American countries created the Central American Defense Council (CONDECA), but it could hardly be considered an entirely autonomous organ since it had links with the Inter-American Defense Board and, most importantly, the United States participated and gave logistical support for military exercises within the organization.

By the end of the 1960's, evidences of a decline of the Inter-American System started to become more apparent. It is true that the CIA-led intervention in Guatemala in 1954 and the Bay of Pigs failure in 1961 had left some noteworthy scars, but when more than 20,000 American troops actually landed on Dominican Republic in 1965 to “prevent another Cuba” it was clear the “Good Neighbor Policy” was over for all practical matters. As Lowenthal remarks, “the Dominican invasion ended this country's prolonged adherence to Franklin D, Roosevelt's 1934 pledge to end unilateral U.S. military intervention in Latin America” (Lowenthal 1990, 33). Connell-Smith regarded the actions in Dominican Republic, which had no previous consultation

to the OAS, as a “severe blow” to the Inter-American System (Connell-Smith 1966, 345). Atkins stresses that the impact of the Dominican Republic invasion to the Inter-American System was such that “a decade later, when threats to peace and security again arose, security collaboration in the IAS were virtually irrelevant” (Atkins 1997, 170). On the brighter side, the impact of the Dominican intervention was the creation of the Inter-American Peace Force (IAPF) under the aegis of the OAS. However, the creation of the IAPF was regarded mostly as a post-factum multilateral cover for what was clear a unilateral intervention. It must be noted that the IAPF was composed by the United States, Brazil, Honduras, Paraguay, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and El Salvador and, besides the United States, the only significant contribution was Brazil’s. Therefore, without Brazil, the IAPF would not differ much from a unilateral force, a fact that didn’t go unnoticed in Latin America. Atkins argues that Latin American states were “especially resentful that the United States in 1965-66 forced the creation of an OAS peacekeeping force in the Dominican Republic as a post-hoc legitimization of its unilateral intervention” (Atkins 1997, 170).

Moreover, changes in the international system and in the domestic situation of Latin American countries contributed to an unfavorable environment for the maintenance of the Inter-American System as it had been designed in the 1940’s. On one hand, Latin America was less politically significant for the United States. On the other hand, Latin American countries experienced a period of higher economic growth and diversification of trade partners, including on the issue of arms sales. According to Lowenthal, “by the time Allende was toppled in 1973, U.S. preponderance in the Americas was already substantially diminished” (Lowenthal 1987, 35), and this reduced influence were especially true in the case of South America. By the 1970’s the United States had lost its monopoly on arms sales in Latin America to countries such as France, Great Britain, Soviet Union and Israel. Jimmy Carter’s policy of focusing on human rights didn’t do much to strengthen the relationship between the United States and Latin America. As a matter of fact, as Child notices, many countries in the region that were governed by military regimes saw the link between human rights performance and economic assistance as a “betrayal”, unleashing “the feeling that Latin American nations were being discriminated against as other flagrant violators of human rights such as Iran, the Philippines and South Korea” which, for being areas of greater strategic interest to the United States, “seemed not to get the same treatment” (Child 1980, 212). Given the growing divergences between the two components

of the Inter-American System – the United States and Latin America – Child identifies the end of 1960s and the 1970s as a period of “fragmentation and dysfunction”.

If the 1960s and the 1970s have been described as a period of “fragmentation and dysfunction” the 1980s would receive even less encouraging designations. In fact, Munoz (1987), for example, describes the events of the 1980s as leading to a “collapse” of the Inter-American System. Mercado-Jarrin (1989) regards the 1980s a period of “decadence” of the system and argues for the creation of a purely “South American defense and security system”. Two events in particular are generally referred to as having a resounding impact in inter-American relations: the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War and the 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada. Grenada, like the Dominican Republic in the 1960s, was a case where U.S. actually sent the Marines to topple the government, instead of supporting opposition groups, as was the case in Nicaragua for example. Moreover, it was an action that had been taken “entirely ignoring the inter-American System” (Atkins 1997, 170), seeking some sort of legitimization from the obscure Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. The Grenada invasion was even more magnified because it occurred just after what was perhaps the greatest blow to the Inter-American System in the 1980s: the Falklands/Malvinas War. This conflict put the United States for the first time since the creation of the Inter-American System before the delicate question of choosing to support its steadfast ally in Europe or to hold on to the idea of hemispheric defense in the very terms stated by the Monroe Doctrine. The fact that the United States chose the former over the latter is considered the “final straw for Latin American expectations for a common hemispheric defense” (Varas 1989, 54). Moreover, as Sicker (2002) notices, since the position of the OAS was clear on the issue (voting 17-0 that Argentina had sovereignty over the islands, with the U.S. abstaining), the United States reversed its traditional position of keeping the United Nations outside security affairs in the region and agreed in dealing with the matter under the Security Council. Munoz regards the war as a “fatal blow” to the Organization of American States as instrument of collective security (Munoz 1987, 108). Mercado-Jarrin (1989) sees the Falklands/Malvinas War as a clear break of the Rio Treaty and an unambiguous demonstration that the United States values more its NATO allies than its Latin American ones. The author, a Peruvian General, concludes that “at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we do not count on interested and trustworthy allies for our mutual defense” (Mercado-Jarrin 1989, 162), thus the necessity of a “South American defense and security system”.

As a result, the 1980s witnessed the first attempts by Latin American nations to create regional political arrangements in the hemisphere outside the sphere of the OAS and therefore excluding the United States. Probably the most prominent of them was the Contadora Group led initially by the foreign ministers of Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela to deal with conflicts in Central America. The following year a Contadora Support Group reunited representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay thereby forming the so-called “Group of Eight”. Bloomfield regards the Contadora Group as a “sharp departure from traditional Latin American behavior” of passive approach to the conflicts in that region, since it “took the initiative to deal with a military conflict in an area that the United States has always regarded as vital to its national security and to do so in a way that ran counter to U.S. preferences” (Bloomfield 1990, 127). On December 1986, the Group of Eight reunited in Rio de Janeiro and created the Rio Group, which has been perceived as the most important challenge to the Organization of American States, in a certain way formalizing the fragmentation of the Inter-American System. The Rio Group has been meeting every year since 1987 and now counts on practically all countries in Latin America. These periodical meetings have an important socializing effect and are perhaps the most visible facet of the Latin American shift “from inter-Americanism to Latin-Americanism” (Mercado-Jarrin 1989, 17).

The end of the Cold War and the resulting elimination of communism as an external threat would bring an important shift in inter-American relations since, for the first time since the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine, there existed no credible outside threats to the hemisphere. With the disappearance of the external enemy, the United States turned to domestic problems in Latin American countries that could have the potential to affect its security, the most prominent of them being the question of drugs. As Loveman observes, “the only threats to US security in the Western Hemisphere worthy of specific mention in 1999 were drug trafficking and its spin-offs along with undocumented immigration to the United States” (Loveman 2006, 10). In consequence, in contrast with the previous policy of “hemispheric denial”, the United States would move toward what has been described as a policy of “benign neglect”. Whether benign or malignant, the fact is that the end of the Cold War and the changes in the international system, such as increased economic diversification, weakened “both the U.S. desire and its ability to dominate its traditional sphere of influence” (Downes 1997, 211). Despite of this neglect, or because of it, the 1990s was a period of relative optimism for the future of inter-American

relations. Schoultz reflects a widespread view at that time when he affirms that the end of the Cold War is “an era characterized by the absence of superpower rivalries, and this has opened the door to new opportunities for constructing a more mature relationship among the nations of the hemisphere” (Schoultz 1994, ix). Similarly, Tulchin remarks that

across the Americas, the early 1990s witnessed an unprecedented convergence of political and economic ideology. The spirit of Pan-Americanism was revived, and some policymakers proclaimed that the future of the Americas depended on further political and economic partnership and integration (Tulchin 2001, 11).

The decade opened with the “Enterprise for Americas Initiative”, launched by President George H. W. Bush, with the aim of creating a free trade zone in the American continent and including provisions for debt relief and funds for reform programs. When NAFTA was launched in 1994, the prospects for a broader Free Trade Area of Americas (FTAA) loomed on the horizon. However, the launching of NAFTA was followed by the Mexican crisis in 1995, which reduced the appetite in the U.S. Congress for further integration with Latin America as the failure of the Clinton administration in obtaining the “fast track” made clear. On the other hand, domestic debates in several Latin American countries, most notably in South America, seemed to indicate the lack of enthusiasm of the political elites in those regions for a free trade agreement with the United States. The result was the failure of the FTAA and the subsequent U.S. decision to make bilateral free trade agreements in the region, as in the cases of Chile, Colombia and Peru for example. As the decade ended, the initial optimism faded with it. The election of George W. Bush, who made clear during the campaign and in the first months in office that the relationship with Latin America would be one of the priorities of his administration, represented a new hope for strengthening inter-American relations. But then came the morning of September 11, 2001. As the new century began, the Inter-American System underwent yet another period of decline, in spite of the initial optimism of the 1990s. Some reasons for that are explore next.

### **The new century and the fragmentation of the Inter-American System**

Evidently, 9-11 was a watershed. The United States focused majorly on the Middle East, and in Latin America - as everywhere else - the main concern of U.S. foreign policy became transnational terrorist networks. Hence, the “war on drugs” melded with the “war on terror”.

Since the main stage for the “war on terror” is far away from Latin America, the region experienced a new and deeper level of neglect, therefore accentuating a vacuum of power that were already visible by the end of the Cold War, especially in South America. Writing before the terrorist attacks of 2001, Munoz (2001) argued that the South American countries were going through a process of “distancing from the United States” in what the author defines as a “delinking phenomenon”. According to Munoz, Latin America and the United States “have progressively grown apart”, in a “silence process of separation rather than an abrupt, purposeful rupture” (Munoz 2001, 76), in such a extent that

The United States is no longer the dominant variable in the foreign relations of most Latin American countries (...) Washington has stopped being the principal reference point in the foreign policy decision making process and in the external actions of Latin American countries" (Munoz, 2001: 73).

Although he mentions “Latin American countries”, Munoz stresses that it is in South America “where the tendencies toward distancing from the United States are more evident” (Munoz 2001, 74). Therefore, when the United States shifted attention and resources to the Middle East, this notion of distancing was even more evident, creating a strategic void that would be filled sooner or later. The Brazilian-led proposal for the creation of a South American Defense Council involving all countries in the region, as well as the presence of the Russian navy in Venezuela are some reflections of this new environment.

Moreover, the U.S. strategy for dealing with the terrorist threat around the world with the adoption of a bellicose rhetoric and a unilateralist strategy reinforced fears of the United States using its power in an unrestricted fashion. In Latin America, as pretty much in all over the world, anti-Americanism soared. This opened the door for populist leaders to explore the idea of “Yankee imperialism” and gave voice to anti-American sectors in several Latin Americans’ societies. To this extent, in Latin America 9-11 represented a shift in mood, the victory of the pessimism of the 1980s over the relative optimism of the 1990s. It made clear that, despite the apparent optimism of the previous decade, the tendencies that had been building up until the 1980s were crystallized and came back to haunt the Inter-American system as a new decade began. But while the events following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 explain a lot, they don’t explain everything. The other side of the coin refers to developments occurring in South America in the last decades.

With the failure of the Free Trade Area of Americas, countries in South America sought to reinforce regional arrangements among them, thereby creating the conditions for strengthening their relations without participation of the United States. The two most important of these arrangements are the Andean Community and the Mercosur. Although they are mainly trading blocs, the Andean Community and the Mercosur contemplate agreements in the political/security realm. Moreover they created a pattern of interaction among its members that is even more remarkable when one remembers the conflicts in the region in the previous two centuries. In the case of the Andean Community, Ecuador, Peru and Colombia for example had several problems like the Leticia Controversy between Colombia and Peru in the 1930's and the boundary dispute between Ecuador and Peru. The Mercosur, in spite of all its shortcomings, represents a landmark in the previous tumultuous relations between Brazil and Argentina, embodying the most marked signal of their rapprochement. Even though these arrangements do not imply that the countries involved in them are free of conflicts, they do provide an important institutional framework and have important socializing effects. In 2004 the Mercosur and the Andean Community signed a cooperation agreement linking those countries even closer together and in effect creating a single larger political body. During the ceremonies of the agreement, that created the so-called "South America Community of Nations", some South American leaders mentioned the possibility of a future bloc modeled on the European Union (BBC News 2004). Although it is hard to imagine a level of integration close to the European Union in the foreseeable future, these undertakings preceded the formation of the boldest proposal of South American integration, the Unasur (Union of South American Nations) in 2005. In May 2008, the Unasur countries met in Brasilia to sign its constitutive treaty, establishing its juridical and political components. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the most controversial proposal within the framework of Unasur is the establishment of a South American Defense Council.

Nevertheless, with or without the defense council, the creation of Unasur, while welcomed from the point of view of closer regional integration, represents an important drawback for the Inter-American System since the Unasur will deal in great part with the same issues that would otherwise be dealt under the aegis of the Organization of American States. Therefore, Unasur may replace with time the OAS as the main regional body in South America, further contributing to the disintegration of the Inter-American System and the alienation of the

United States in South American matters. The first evidence of this happened just four months after the signing of the Unasur's constitutive treaty, in occasion of the political and social conflicts in Bolivia in September of 2008, when the Unasur countries met in Chile to discuss proposals for the resolution of the Bolivian situation. The OAS had to content itself in sending an "observer" to the meeting, not without criticism from its Secretary General that the OAS should have played a bigger role. This fact hasn't gone unnoticed by leftist leaders in the region. President Morales said that it was "the first time in history that we South Americans are deciding to solve the problems of South America" and President Chavez echoed that "for the first time in our history, we, the South Americans, are demonstrating that we are capable of understanding each other and searching for common solutions" (Ishmael 2008). As a matter of fact, it wasn't exact the first time, since six months before the Rio Group met to discuss the conflict between Colombia and Ecuador, one of the most serious diplomatic conflicts of Latin America's recent history, thereby opening the precedent of the exclusion of OAS. The Colombia-Ecuador conflict gave the decisive push for the Brazilian proposal of a South American Defense Council, which if created, would overlap functions of the Washington-based Inter-American Defense Board, adding one important element to the estrangement of the inter-American machinery. In this sense, 2008 may in fact have represented a new break point in the decline of the Inter-American System.

### **Potential implications of the fragmentation of the Inter-American System**

Skeptics may conclude that the fragmentation of the Inter-American system is not such bad news. After all, they may argue, the OAS has had little practical influence in South American matters anyway. Furthermore, it is a good signal that South Americans countries are coming together to deal with their own problems, thereby freeing the United States from having to allocate resources and attention to the region, since its major interests lie elsewhere. For South Americans, the loss of power of the OAS may boost their self-confidence in asserting their autonomy in relation to the United States. Nevertheless, for both the United States and Latin America, the fragmentation of the Inter-American system may have undesirable negative consequences.

As shown above, the establishment of the Inter-American System was made possible when it became clear what would be the advantages of it for both the United States and Latin America, that is, the terms of the “great bargain”. For the United States, the system meant the institutionalization of the Monroe Doctrine and served to legitimize its action in the hemisphere, giving it a multilateral cover. To Latin America, the system served to constrain U.S. power in a web of legal mechanisms and eventually to count on the help or good will of the United States in dealing with its social and security issues. Therefore, the fragmentation of the Inter-American System may have consequences for both sides. Latin Americans lose both an important dispositive to constrain the United States and a forum where they can at least expose their grievances. This may lead to a reinforcement of American unilateralism in the region in the case it perceives a credible threat to its interests.

For the United States, the fragmentation of the Inter-American System, as indicated by the loss of power of the OAS, may make more difficult to legitimize its actions in the hemisphere and to persuade Latin American leaders in cooperating with U.S. interests in the region. If Gramsci characterized the exercise of hegemony as “a combination of force and consensus variously equilibrated, without letting force subvert consensus too much, making it appear that the force is based on the consent of the majority” (Bates 1975, 363), the events of 2008 seems to indicate that the United States is losing the element of consensus being left only with force and without credible mechanisms to make “it appear that the force is based on the consent of the majority”. Unilateral action would always remain as an option, but an irrelevant Inter-American System may increase its costs. Moreover, important effects on the “public image” of the United States throughout the world may occur as it is seen as losing control in a region considered its exclusive sphere of influence. As Connell-Smith points out, one effect of the creation of the Inter-American System was “to bolster the self-image of the United States, now emerging as a world power but wanting to seem to herself as well as to others to be behaving differently from the traditional great powers with their spheres of influence and empires” (Connell-Smith 1966, 318). Therefore, the fragmentation of the Inter-American System, at the same time Europe deepens its integration including weaker countries in the process, may reverse this American ideal and have effects on its self and public image since the United States will be pushed towards acting as a “traditional great power” in the hemisphere

while Europeans will be able to argue that the rules of the exercise of civilized power now lie on the other side of the Atlantic.

## **Conclusion**

The Inter-American System, formalized with the creation of the Organization of American States, is the “oldest regional group of institutions” (OAS) in the world. The Rio Treaty, for example, establishing rules for collective defense in the hemisphere, predates the formation of NATO. Sharing the same past of European colonialism but profoundly different both in cultural and, particularly, in terms of capabilities, Latin American countries and the United States succeed in establishing a remarkable robust machinery regarding the management of their mutual interactions. The main factor stimulating the formation of the Inter-American System has historically been the defense from outside threats. Right after their independence, during the phase of the “old Pan-Americanism”, Spanish-speaking countries got together to secure an alliance against Spain. The “new Pan-Americanism” meant to the United States, and even to many Latin American countries seeking to use American power in their favor, the institutionalization of the Monroe Doctrine shielding the hemisphere from outside threats coming from Europe. Whenever these threats seemed more relevant, the countries in the continent sought to strengthen the system. The best example is World War II, which witnessed the apex of the Inter-American System with the establishment of its paramount institutions: the Inter-American Defense Board in 1942, the Rio Treaty in 1947 and the Organization of American States in the following year. Nevertheless, given the diverse interests between the United States and the other countries in the hemisphere, their definition of what constitutes a threat has often diverged. This was especially evident during the Cold War that followed World War II. While the United States became focused on the communist threat, Latin Americans were worried about internal social-

economic conditions. These divergent points of view led in one hand to the United States sponsoring the Marshall Plan in Europe aiming, among other things, to impede the advance of communism in Western Europe and, on the other hand, to the Latin American critique of the necessity of a Marshall Plan for the region. The United States would only react to these claims when the communist threat in Latin American seemed more relevant with the advent of the Cuban Revolution, and the failed Alliance for Progress as a result.

Moreover, during the Cold War, Latin American States revived their concerns about U.S. interventions, which had been strong during the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but had receded after the Good Neighbor Policy. The Dominican Republic invasion in 1965 was a turning point that made clear for Latin Americans that the policies put in place by Franklin Roosevelt had ended for all practical matters. During the Dominican Republic invasion, the Inter-American System was used only to give a multilateral cover to what was clear a unilateral action. Since then, the Inter-American System went through a period of gradual decline until the 1980s, when the forces of fragmentation became clearly dominant. The fact is that the system seemed not adapt itself to the changes occurring in the broader international environment of 1970s, which translated into a relative loss of U.S. influence, especially in South America. By the mid-1970s therefore, the pattern of interactions between the United States and Latin America had become considerably different than during the 1940s when the main mechanisms of the Inter-American System were created.

The 1980s confirmed the fragmentation tendencies of the previous years as the United States first ignored it in the invasion of Grenada, and eventually explicitly antagonized it in occasion of the Falklands/Malvinas War. To many Latin American analysts those events meant that the system had in fact become meaningless. As a result, the 1980s witnessed the first attempts by Latin American states to create regional arrangements to deal with conflicts in the region outside the framework of OAS, thereby excluding the United States. The most prominent of these arrangements is the Rio Group created in 1986 and counting today on practically all Latin American and Caribbean countries. Likewise, several analysts started to consider the possibility of a security system in Latin America excluding the United States. The Peruvian general Mercado-Jarrin (1989), for example, wrote a whole book arguing for a “South American security and defense system”. David Mares claimed that, as South America seemed to be

“slip[ping] out of the shadows of U.S. hegemony”, the region “may find this to be a particularly opportune moment” for the creation of a South American security system (Mares 1994, 273). Falkoff also points out to the possibility of “a generalized withdrawal from the Rio Treaty and its replacement by a purely Latin American security organization” (Falkoff 1989, 72), but he emphasizes that at least three prerequisites would have to be met: a “community of interests”, the “allocation of resources to defense” and “overcoming the inertia that sustains the old system”. In the South America of today, these prerequisites seem to be much closer to being achieved than when Falkoff wrote those lines. First, the process of economic and political integration that has taken root since the 1990s makes the achievement of a “community of interests” more feasible. Second, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Venezuela have been making significant investments in their militaries over the past years. Finally, the 2008 decision to establish a South American Defense Council may signalize a disposition to “overcome the inertia that sustains the old system”.

The end of the Cold War brought mixed feelings to the region. At the same time that the danger of an outside intervention receded, the Inter-American System lost an important part of its *raison d'être*. The “Enterprise for Americas Initiative” launched as the decade began generated a mood of relative optimism for relations in the hemisphere. This optimism diminished as the negotiations for a Free Trade Area of Americas failed while South American countries sought to strengthen their own regional arrangements. In that manner, the 1990s was a period of transition and adaptation to the new rules of the game that would definitively lead to a revision of inter-American relations after the tumultuous period of the previous decade. Nevertheless, it wasn't clear what form this revision would take – if a closer relationship would follow or if the tendencies of fragmentation that took form in the 1980s would predominate. The events following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 reaffirmed the latter, as the United States shifted its focus and resources to the Middle East and anti-Americanism soared.

As the first decade of the 2000's comes to a close, the Inter-American System finds itself in a poor condition. The closing years of the decade have been especially significant in reinforcing this trend which, because of its relative detachment from the United States in comparison to the rest of Latin America, is more evident in South America. As mentioned earlier, three events that happened in 2008 are emblematic here. First, the widespread reactions

of surprise among some countries in South America regarding the reestablishment by the U.S. navy of the Fourth Fleet on one hand makes clear the current low level of consultation between the United States and those countries, on the other hand it shows their wariness in relation to anything that resembles an explicit military forward presence. Second, the decision to discuss the establishment of a South American Defense Council under the framework of Unasur indicates that the inter-American machinery created at the end of World War II may become largely irrelevant. As shown earlier, the idea of creating a purely South American defense arrangement is at least as old as 1856, when the Peruvian government proposed a “Continental Treaty” for the region. The significance of the current proposal is the fact that, with the late acceptance by Colombia, it has been for the first time agreed among all the countries in the region. Finally, the presence of the Russian navy in South American waters was at the minimum a symbolic indication of the current fragility of the Inter-American System as the year of 2008 ended and a new administration was inaugurated in the White House.

At the present time, the prospects for the future of the Inter-American System are not sanguine. As a matter of fact, the present level of fragmentation may lead to a vicious circle that could deepen it even further, since that, as the OAS moves to irrelevance, this could accentuate the lack of consultation between the United States and Latin American countries and reduce the opportunities for interactions thereby weakening an important element of socialization of common rules in the region. Moreover, the United States, who pays the biggest share of the OAS budget, may become less willing to support the organization weakening it even further and, at the limit, leading to its actual disappearance. As a result of the obliteration of the Inter-American System, the United Nations would absorb its functions, which has actually already been happening at least since the 1980s with the Falklands/Malvinas war. In 1994, for example, the United States went to the United Nations to ask for authorization to intervene in Haiti, and a U.N. peacekeeping mission remains in that country until today. As a new decade begins and a new administration takes over the White House, a reevaluation of the Inter-American System in particular and of inter-American relations in general is required. This reevaluation will necessarily have to take into consideration the new reality of North-South relations in the Americas.

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