

Topias Alasalmi

HOW CHINA CHANGED U.S. LATIN AMERICA GEOSTRATEGY?

Analytic Narrative of the U.S. Geoeconomic and Geopolitical
Strategies in the 21st Century in Latin America and the Caribbean

ABSTRACT

Alasalmi, Topias: How China Changed U.S. Latin America Geostrategy?

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For the first time United States declared its hegemonic ambitions in the Western hemisphere in 1823. In his State of the Union Address President Monroe called upon the European powers to suspend their colonial ambitions on the American continent. He warned that any intervention in the region would provoke a strong military reaction by the United States. Since then the entire Latin American and the Caribbean region became the red line zone for extra-hemispheric powers to assert their influence. After the WWII United States had achieved its hegemonic ambitions set by President Monroe and the United States levied vast influence on the hemisphere; it had constructed large network of bases to Central American and Andean region, played a central role in creation and operation of the hemispheric multilateral organizations, and was the number one trading partner of the region. All leading to the '90s when United States began to promote more integrated and cooperative hemisphere by promoting democracy and market liberalization. In this spirit, NAFTA free trade area was created, and the governments of Western Hemisphere met regularly at the Summit of the Americas to discuss the issues concerning the hemisphere. United States also started to promote hemispheric wide free trade agreement which would have reached from Canada to the southern tip of Chile. This hemispheric liberal dream, however, was soon put on hold when the terrorist attack to New York changed the United States' threat perception to non-state actors. Since then, the "War on Terror," global financial crises, regional integration and disintegration, rise of anti-U.S. governments, rise of China, COVID-19 pandemic, and Russia's war of aggression have affected its policies toward the region.

In this thesis I evaluate the United States geostrategy toward Latin America and the Caribbean region in the 21st century by using the Analytic Narrative (AN) method. While using the analysed narrative scheme of the method, in the first stage of the research I formulate a narrative of United States' Latin America and the Caribbean policies over the period 2001–2022. The narrative is formulated by using secondary literature, policy documents, news articles, and foreign economic aid data focusing on United States military and economic policies. In the second stage, the narrative is analysed through the comparative framework of geopolitical and geoeconomic strategy. Here, my first research task is to recognize which geostrategy explains better the United States geostrategy toward the region during the period. To address this question I extract the factors of each strategy from the narrative and compare the factors against the comparative framework. My second research task is to expose the shifts between the strategies and to identify the factors which have caused the shifts. To expose the factors AN method comes particularly practical as it allows researcher to identify the shifts from one institutional equilibrium to another. In this part I focus on perceived threats, but also other factors rising from secondary literature such as regional development. Special focus is given to China, because the increased influence of extra-hemispheric actors is particularly interesting in the case of Latin America and the Caribbean due to its strategic meaning to United States, but also because Edvard Luttwak in his seminal article argues that importance of military power and military alliances are declining, and the logic of conflict is moving into the realm of commerce. The final research task is to test how well the assumptions of these strategies work in U.S. foreign policy. This is also a characteristic of AN method as the last stage of study revises both the model and the original narrative.

The key finding of the study is that the United States strategy toward Latin America and the Caribbean region in the 21st century has been threat-based military oriented geopolitical strategy. Whether the threats have been narcoterrorists, anti-U.S. governments, or extra-hemispheric actors the answer has been increased military approach. This especially concerns the Central America and the Caribbean region, where keeping the "line of defense" has been the number one priority. Geoeconomic strategy have been mainly used to support this geopolitical strategy although specific geoeconomic strategies have also been used when United States aimed at countering the Venezuelan oil strategy and blocking China's dual-use infrastructure investments in Central American and the Caribbean region. The most interesting recent development to geoeconomic direction in the United States' strategy has been the "nearshoring" initiative which seems to be changing the perception of Latin America and the Caribbean region from the "source of threats" to the "region of possibility" which can replace the Chinese manufacturing. This supports the view of geoeconomic shift of strategic competition, although still accompanied with military component. Concerning the Wigell's and Vihma's framework my study found that geoeconomic strategy can produce a similar type of balancing behaviour as geopolitical strategy when it comes to strategically important region of the Great Power.

Keywords: geopolitics, geoeconomics, geostrategy, strategy, United States, Latin American and the Caribbean, China, Monroe Doctrine, analytic narrative, analysed narrative,

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ABBREVIATIONS

ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America
AN	Analytic Narrative
APEP	American Partnership for Economic Prosperity
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
B3W	Build Back Better World
CAC	Central America and the Caribbean
CELAC	The Community of Latin American and Caribbean states
CESI	the Caribbean Energy Security Initiative
CSL	Cooperative Security Location
DCA	Defense Cooperation Agreement
DoD	Department of Defense
ECPA	The Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
FTAA	Free Trade Agreement of Americas
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IDFC	The United States International Development Finance Corporation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
MERCOSUR	The Southern Common Market
NAFTA	The North American Free Trade Agreement
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NSS	National Security Strategy
OAS	Organisation of American States
OPIC	The Overseas Private Investment Corporation
PGII	Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment
SOUTHCOM	The United States Southern Command
UNASUR	Union of South American Nations
U.S.	United States
USAID	The United States Agency for International Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Before the Russia's war of aggression toward Ukraine it was thought that the great power competition was no longer taking as much place in the battlefields but increasingly in the tightly networked global economy (Gertz & Miles 2020, 117). This form of thinking was the result of late 20th century economic integration and the rise of new powerful economic actors such as BIRCS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) -countries (Güneylioğlu 2022, 550). In the field of IR research this more liberalistic world order and less confrontational form of international politics gave space for new analytical frameworks to study international affairs. As a result new concepts such as *complex interdependence*¹, *soft power*², and *geoeconomics*³ appeared in research papers which allowed to understand power in international politics during the liberal era. Now however, the tide seems to be turning back to the world which emerges more confrontational and divided. In this context the old concepts and theories such as geopolitics and political realism are coming back in style and to be truthful, also affected the subject of this thesis research. In this thesis I add my small contribution to the discussion and understanding of contemporary geoeconomics and geopolitics, more specifically their understanding as strategic concepts.

The concept of geopolitics has a long history dating back to 1800s to Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen who observed that the territorial factors are important in shaping the political life of state. After Kjellen geopolitics has been associated with different meanings and understandings, but most often the different geopolitical theories have concentrated on to analyse the political and strategic significance of geography, focusing on the distribution of political and military power. (Haas, Tibold & Cillessen 2006, 9; Raza 2020, 20–21.) In the field of geopolitics the strategic dimension of the concept has been linked with the concept of geostrategy which in the literature is most often understood as a form of foreign policy which is guided by geographical factors; how these factors apprise, restrains, or affects the planning of state's political and military domains (Raza 2020, 18). However, while geopolitics and geostrategy have concentrated on geographical factors and military power Edvard Luttwak in his seminal article on geoeconomics debated that the importance of military power and military alliances are declining. He argues that the logic of conflict in international relations is moving into the realm of commerce. (Luttwak 1990, 19.) Hence, the subsequent development of the concept of geoeconomics has become to be associated with state's

¹ Robert O. Keohane & Joseph S. Nye Jr (1973) Power and interdependence, *Survival*, 15(4), 158–165.

² Nye, J. S. (1990). Bound to lead - the changing nature of American power. In *Bound to lead - the changing nature of American power*.

³ Luttwak, E. (1990). From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics. Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce. *The National Interest*, 20, 17–23.

use of economic power. In example Wigell (2016, 135) argues that geoeconomics is a “geostrategic use of economic power” and Scholvin and Wigell (2018b, 4) argues that geoeconomics is state’s foreign policy strategy to achieve strategic objectives. However, the theory of geoeconomics is still in its early phase of development as is its relationship with the concept of geopolitics.

In this thesis research I utilize the framework developed by Wigell & Vihma (2016) in which they separate the workings of geoeconomic and geopolitical strategy. However, I also complement their framework by using Kim’s (2021) identified attributes for geoeconomic strategy as he argues that the current geoeconomic theories have not done enough to separate geoeconomics from other forms of economic power. His recognized attributes are suitable to complement the original framework of Wigell & Vihma as they do not overlap with each other. The attributes also make the strategy more recognizable and thus brings analytical precision to the framework. In addition to the attributes recognized by Kim, I use his definition of geoeconomics as he brings the concept closer to traditional geopolitics which is more strongly associated with geographical factors. I also argue that geographical factors are important to take into consideration while analysing the geoeconomic strategy as many current researchers make connections to geopolitics while defining geoeconomics. For example Blackwell & Harris (2016, 20) have defined geoeconomics as “the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations’ economic actions on a country’s geopolitical goals.” Whereas Csurgai (2018, 39) argues that geoeconomics “is an interdisciplinary analysis that includes geopolitical factors, economic intelligence, strategic analysis, and foresight.”

By using this refined framework of geopolitical and geoeconomic strategy I study the strategic dimension of United States (U.S.) Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) policy over the period of 2001–2022. To study the subject I rely on the method of analytic narrative (AN) which according to Sloan (2017, 22) is an essential tool to understand the strategic element of the geostrategy as the strategies are made by policymakers, and they attempt to engage with their opponents’ intentions, capabilities, and goals. In its original form AN is a case study method where researcher utilizes the method of narrative together with rational choice theories to build an explanation to a specific problem or a puzzle (Levi 2004, 205). However, in this thesis research I use AN method which is suitable to test the comparative theoretical framework, and for that reason I follow the application of method by Hallerberg & Weber (2002). In their study they created a comparative framework of integration theories to explain the unification process of Germany in the 19th century to see which integration theory explained the unification more credibly. In a similar manner I utilize the AN method to study the geopolitical and geoeconomics strategy in the case of U.S. foreign policy toward LAC in the 21st century. However, while Hallerberg & Weber and others have relied more on

historical secondary literature I utilize more contemporary literature, focusing on the descriptive literature of U.S. foreign policy. The application of method to more contemporary cases is possible as Sloan (2017) in his edited book has shown.

As my approach in this study is more theory-centric, my first and foremost research task is to recognize which strategy better explains U.S. foreign policy toward LAC in the 21st century. To answer this question I identify the main tools, their usage, and their respective weight in the U.S. foreign policy during the time. As my first research task is quite straightforward, my second task is to expose how the usage of different tools, geographical focus, and the use of strategies have shifted during this period. My aim is to recognize which factors have affected the strategic shifts and how. This is where AN method comes particularly suitable as it allows to identify “the reasons for the shift from an institutional equilibrium at one point in time a different institutional equilibrium at a different point in time” and to recognize the key variables which have caused the shift (Levi 2004, 205). Here, I especially focus on the perceived threats, but also other factors rising from the secondary literature such as regional development. Special focus is given to China as the Sino-U.S. competition has steadily increased both in global and in regional context during the 21st century. The increased influence of extra-hemispheric actors is particularly interesting in the case of LAC policy as for the U.S. the region has always been strategically important in this respect (Smith 1996, as cited in Leogrande 2007, 355–356). Moreover, as China’s influence is mostly economic, one should expect strategic choices which would counter these activities. As Luttwak argues, the importance of military power and military alliances are declining, and the logic of conflict in international relations is moving into the realm of commerce (Luttwak 1990, 19).

This thesis research is comprised of five main parts: an introduction to analytic narrative methodology, the narrative of U.S. foreign policies toward Latin America and Caribbean in the 21st century, comparative framework of geoeconomic and geopolitical strategy, analysis of the narrative, and finally the conclusions. The first part begins by introducing the analytic narrative (AN) methodology, its application in this thesis research, and the presentation of research data. In the second part the narrative of U.S. foreign policies toward LAC region over the period of 2000–2022 is formulated according to presidential eras. The narrative is already built with the comparative framework in mind focusing on the U.S. economic and military policies. In the narrative relevant actors, actions, events, institutions, tools and other appropriate factors are presented to achieve rich and thick descriptive narrative. In the third section I present the short theoretical discussion to contemporary geopolitics and geoeconomics, and I introduce the comparative framework of geoeconomic and geopolitical strategy based on the contemporary literature. In the fourth section this

comparative framework is applied to analyse the narrative, and in the last section the results and conclusions are presented.

2. ANALYTIC NARRATIVE METHOD

Analytic narratives (AN) method refers to studies which move on the borders of “history, political science and economics.” The AN research has usually focused on to study historical events with aim to explain these with rational choice theories. (Mongin 2016, 13:1, Hédoïn 2020, 391.) According to Levi (2004) AN is a case study method where researcher utilizes method of narrative together with rational choice theories to build an explanation to a specific problem or a puzzle. The aim of the narrative is to define the principal actors, their goals, preferences, constraints, effective rules of the game, and the incentives which affects actors’ behaviour in a given case with aim to create a thick descriptive narrative. With the narrative researcher explains the strategic interactions between the actors by creating an equilibrium which limits some of the actors’ choices and actions while facilitates others. The description of the narrative should be detailed and textured in which researcher takes into consideration the sequence and the temporality of the events. (Levi 2004, 205–209.)

Due to this detailed interest in one case AN method should be a problem driven method and not a theory-led practice (Bates et al. 1998, 11). According to Levi (2004) when applying AN method it is important to appropriately understand the context and build an explanatory model which fits best for that particular case. According to her when building the model to explain the narrative, researcher should avoid using any “ready-made” -models unless these improve the explanatory power of the research. In addition, applied model should be parsimonious in which the number of exogenous variables is kept small. Levi argues that in this way researcher can identify how changes in their value affect the equilibrium, which makes it possible to identify and to recognize the key variables what caused the shift to another equilibrium.⁴ While analysing the equilibrium it is also important to take into consideration the historical path dependence because the past actions create a setting between the actors which is harder to change. (Levi 2004, 212–213.)

While Levi (2004) and Bates et al. (1998) take more negative approach to the use of “ready made” theoretical models in the analytical part Falleti’s (2006, 3) view on purpose of the theory in AN method diverges from theirs. Falleti equates AN method to theory-guided process tracing methods

⁴ Levi (2004, 205) understands the equilibrium in the game-theoretic sense; where the choices are coordinated, stable, patterned and regularized. Hédoïn (2020, 392–393) further elaborates that these mechanisms observed are complex arrangements of individual, collective, and structural features. He adds that the “rules-in-equilibrium” view in AN typically emphasizes the role of derived, non-directly observed intentional states such as preferences, intentions and beliefs.

and argues that AN method’s epistemological purpose is to illustrate the workings of existing and deductively derived theories and models in the real world rather than generate new ones (Falleti 2016, 456). By that Falleti supports the use of “ready-made” theories and models while viewing them more as tools which guide the analysis. In this thesis research I take a similar approach to theory as Falleti as I use the already developed theories of geoeconomics and geopolitical strategy to study the U.S. foreign policy. But, according to Bates et al. if researcher decides to apply more formal models in analysis, the narrative should not rely heavily on the factors outside the model and research should proceed with iteration (Bates et al. 2000, 687). Iteration between theory and data is indeed an important part of any AN research with formal and informal models alike. With the process of inductive iteration researcher starts with a basic knowledge of the case and/or initially deduced hypothesis. Then researcher collects the data which is assessed between rivalling arguments and initial propositions. Once the robust explanation has been discovered researcher can stop iterating. If the explanation is not satisfactory to explain the case, then researcher should revise the hypotheses or collect new data to find the robust explanation. This process is repeated as many times as the robust explanation for the outcome has been achieved. (Yom 2015, 626–627; Levi 2004, 217.)

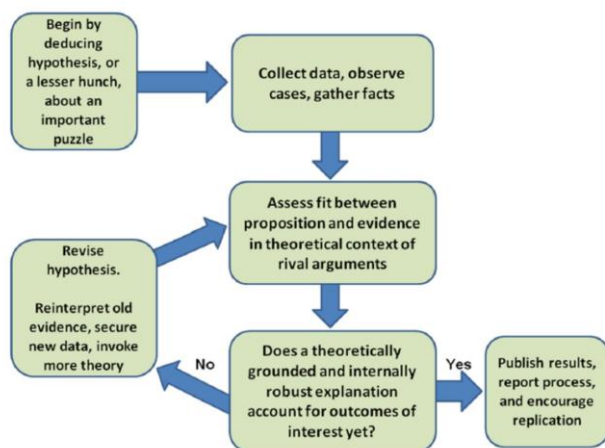


Figure 1 The process of inductive iteration. (Yom 2015, 627)

The final evaluation of AN study is done through a variety of criteria and one of the criteria is formal logic; do the conclusions follow the premises? If the formal line of reasoning in the study is incorrect or inaccurate, the study instantly lacks credibility. Also if the data or process of iteration reveals different possibilities for the explanation, researcher should be ready to change the explanation to meet the credibility criteria. The strongest explanation should be chosen, but occasionally also equally strong competing alternatives can occur. The straightforward generalizability of the results is small, because the model and theory are tailored to time and context, but reliance on rational choice theories can leverage the generalizability of findings on some level. The context of the narrative has a consequence for the outcome of the study, but it is not in totality determinative and thus also some

level of generalization is possible beyond that particular case. According to Levi a critical part of evaluation is also to produce “testable implications from the model and then subjecting them to disconfirmation.” (Levi 2004, 216–218.)

2.1 Schemes in Analytic Narrative

According to Hédoin (2020) Mongin (2016) classifies AN studies mainly in two types of exposition schemes: an *alternation scheme* and an *analysed narrative scheme*.⁵ The scheme of *alternation* has three stages. First it begins by introducing a narrative which produces “an explanatory hypothesis about the causes of the outcome.” Second, researcher constructs a game-theoretical model according to the relevant features of the narrative “to capture the produced explanatory hypothesis.” In the last stage of the study researcher produces a revised narrative in which coordinates the game-theoretical model and the narrative together by bringing additional evidence into the revised narrative. This means that at the end, the model and the narrative should be in line with each other. The *analysed narrative* scheme differs from the alternation scheme by stating the “theoretical hypothesis separately” according to chosen rational choice or game-theoretical model. Here, researcher then proceeds to compare the theoretical hypothesis against the facts rising from the narrative. In addition to these two ideal-type schemes there exists studies which mix both of these schemes in the same case. Apart from the schemes, the last stage of the study in which the refined narrative (alteration scheme) or the comparison between the narrative and the model (analysed narrative scheme) is produced has two-fold function. First, the last stage of study revises the model as well as the original narrative. This occurs if there exists large discrepancy between the original and revised narrative (alternation scheme or if there exists inconsistency between the model and the narrative (analysed narrative scheme), or if a surprising finding appears during the research process. Second, the last stage of study can encourage for a limited generalization beyond the studied case. (Hédoin 2020, 394–395.)

Hédoin does not clarify what he means by presenting the narrative and the game-theoretical hypothesis separately in analysed narrative scheme. In my view, in the alternation scheme researcher does not use any ready-made models but the model is constructed according to the produced narrative, thus aiming to create (a new) theoretical model to explain the behaviour in a given case as originally proposed by Levi (2004). Whereas in analysed narrative scheme researcher utilizes the already known models or theories. Hence, in analysed narrative scheme there can exist two possible explanations;

⁵ Referring to Mongin (2016) Hédoin (2020) calls the schemes alternation and analysed narrative, but Mongin (2016) brings up also a third scheme called local supplementation and does not mention the scheme of analysed narrative.

the one (or several) which arises from the narrative itself, and the other which arises from the chosen model(s). This is why in analysed narrative scheme researcher should use the inductive iteration process as the originally chosen model(s) may not actually explain the outcome or some other theory can explain it better. In this thesis research I use the application of method comparable to Hallerberg's and Weber's (2002) study which is close to what Hédoin described as analysed narrative scheme. However, their AN method differs from Hédoin's ideal type in respect to analysis. In their analysis Hallerberg and Weber used the comparative framework of two integration theories and compared their strength to explain the unification of Germany in the 19th century. In a comparable manner I utilize the AN method to study the geopolitical and geoeconomics strategy in the case of U.S. foreign policy toward LAC in the 21st century.

2.2 Analytics and Assumptions of Rationality

The analytic part of the AN study is often achieved by utilizing models derived from the rational choice theories. To achieve the rationality assumption several researchers have especially relied on the theory of extensive form of games (Bates et al. 1998, 9; Levi 2004, 208). But using a game-theoretical model or rational choice theory is just one approach to achieve analytics in AN as Schiemann (2007) argues. However, according to Levi (2004, 207) relying on "rational choice analytic narrative" method promises to explain how some structured choices arise in complex historical situation. At the same time it also aims at explaining why and how some choices were made, and what are the possible consequences for actors and institutional arrangements. Hédoin (2020, 394–395) further clarifies that while the narrative part of AN study relies ideographic (thick) reasoning, the analytic part of the rational choice aims for nomothetic (thin) reasoning by extracting the relevant outcomes from the narrative. This way AN study also enables for a limited possibility to generalize. While Hédoin and Levi highlights the usage of game-theoretical models to achieve the nomothetic reasoning in the AN case studies, there are also other ways how analytics has been achieved using other rational models or other theories.

One way of utilizing AN method was presented by Hallerberg & Weber (2002) as in their study they used the comparative framework of neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism to study the unification process of Germany in the 19th century. Theories of intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism enabled them to do cross-comparison of the theoretical explanations. They came up with the conclusion that even though there were elements from both theories the unification process in the 19th century was more supported by the theory of intergovernmentalism. In addition to Hallerberg's and Weber's study, another approach to AN method was presented in the book written

and edited by Sloan (2017) in which five analytical narratives were presented to study the interaction of geography, strategy, and history. In his book Sloan argues that analytic narrative approach is an essential tool to understand the strategic element of geostrategy as the strategies are made by the policymakers and they attempt to engage with their opponents' intentions, capabilities, and goals. In his research Sloan utilized different classical geopolitical theories in four historical cases and in one contemporary case to show how the geography was mutable and how the classical geopolitical theories still had analytical value. By using AN method Sloan argues that he developed an explicit and formal line of reasoning, which aimed at exposition and explanation even though the studies did not apply the formal game-theoretical models. His argument is in line with the view of Bates et al. (1998, 10), as they have stated that analytical narrative is analytical because it extracts the formal line of reasoning aiming to exposition and explanation.

Hence, if the researcher is not using any game-theoretical model she should use another type of rational choice theory to call it "rational choice analytic narrative." According to Beach and Pedersen (2020, 144) in foreign policy analysis researcher can take the theoretical assumptions to rational actor analysis from the nature of the international system (IR theories) and/or from the goals of a state. They state that in foreign policy analysis the use of the theory is a crucial part of the rational actor model because it creates the base for the assessment of the costs and benefits of different choices for the actors. According to Raza (2020) while the concepts of rationality, power, and threats are subject to one's perception and understanding, in many IR theories such as realism and traditional geopolitics researcher relies on the objective understanding of causes and processes which arises from the global or regional structures. When relying on these theories it is thus "rational" for the researcher to assume that the political leaders and state officials act according to interests of the state. For example in realism, the assumption is that the most important interest for the state is a self protection from the threats arising from outside. The state acting as a rational actor then objectively assess its threats and accordingly mitigates those threats. The state interests are hence thought to be obvious and evident as they are means to preserve the state from the external threats. Those threats are assumed to be assessed by the rational objective assessment, and they are believed to be mitigated by following the most appropriate course of action which is decided upon the basis of power realistically and rationally. (Raza 2020, 31.) According to Kelly (2006) this type of thinking is based on the premise of positivism in which the results are thought to be value-free and objective. Here, it is assumed that the human beings including the political leaders act according to "expected utility" -assumption when choosing the best course of action. The rational actor assumption is included into my theoretical framework as the theoretical approach which I have chosen assumes the rational behaviour of the state. (Kelly 2006, 34.)

2.2 Application of Method on U.S. Foreign Policy and the Research Data

According to literature review done by Bertucci (2013) the academic research of U.S.-Latin America relations focus mainly on U.S. foreign policy. Between the period of 1989–2008 341 published research articles and books on U.S.-Latin America relations, 94.6 percent of them were U.S. foreign policy analyses. According to the review 51.4 percent of these foreign policy analyses focused on U.S. and other LAC country or a subregion. Whereas 37.5 percent focused solely on U.S. foreign policy toward the region, 12.3 percent concentrated on U.S. foreign policy toward LAC in general, 7.9 percent toward Central America, 5.9 percent toward the Caribbean, and 2.6 percent toward South America (minus Brazil). According to the review most of the research in the field is using qualitative methods (98.1 percent) and in total 77.3 percent of the books and articles are descriptive, focusing on historical trajectory and policy substance. The objective in these analyses were divided into empirical analyses and theory generation, but the literature review discovered that although every publication aimed to empirical analysis, only 4.6 percent contributed also to theory generation. According to Bertucci some articles and books utilized concepts or theories aimed at offering some analytical perspective on the subject, but there were less efforts to assess theoretical constructs or develop new theoretical approaches. According to Bertucci the field lags in theory building, and thus he highlights the need to theorize and explain more. (Bertucci 2013, 121–131.)

Because of the already existing rich descriptive literature of the U.S. foreign policy toward LAC region, AN method is especially suitable for theory-centric approach. In this thesis research I follow the usage of the AN method, structure, and exposition scheme comparable to Hallerberg's & Weber's (2002) study as I found their application of method especially useful for the purpose. Their AN study scheme can be counted what Hédoïn (2020, 395) described *analysed narrative scheme* in which narrative is analysed through a game-theoretical model. However, their use of AN method differs from Hédoïn's ideal type in respect to analysis. In their analytical part Hallerberg & Weber do not use game-theoretical model to analyse the narrative, rather they compare the strength of integration theories which is more in line with Falletti's view of the purpose of theory. Like Hallerberg' & Weber' research I first begin the study with thick descriptive narrative of the U.S. foreign policies toward LAC region between 2000–2022, and then I evaluate the narrative through the comparative theoretical framework. The main body of the narrative is collected from the field's descriptive literature. However, the importance of secondary literature decreases as closer the narrative gets to the present, due to obvious reason of the declining amount of descriptive literature written. Thus, while approaching the present time I rely more on supplemented research data, which is also used in earlier phases to supplement the secondary literature. The supplemented data is chosen according to earlier research, but it also includes other sources such as news articles.

According to Pastor (2001, as cited in Buxton 2011, 29–30.) the key factors shaping the U.S. policy toward LAC region are the personality and interests of the U.S. president, while also domestic opinion, business sector, lobbyist, staff, and the U.S. Congress affect the formulation of policy. In addition, external interests and ideologies such as “War on Terror” have been principal factors shaping the U.S. strategy. Concerning LAC region Ellis (2011, 38) adds that the official level statements of U.S. interests in LAC region comes from the U.S. Secretary of State with elaboration from the State Department Bureau of Western Hemisphere. While Milani (2021) in her study utilised research data which included military and economic aid, arms transfers, speeches of SOUTHCOM commanders, official documents, and diplomatic cables. (Milani 2021, 121.) Hence, in this thesis research as a supplemented research data I use the relevant government documents concerning the Western Hemisphere/LAC and SOUTHCOM’s position, U.S. foreign aid “Greenbook” statistics, speeches and statements made by the politicians and SOUTHCOM military commanders, and news articles. Also the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the National Defense Strategy (NSD) documents are utilized mostly on those parts which concern the Western Hemisphere or LAC or SOUTHCOM.

The NSSs are the primary documents in this research as the NSS proposes the use of all facets of U.S. power which are required to achieve its security goals. The NSS is published by the executive branch, and it is hierarchically the highest strategic document. It is sent from the President to Congress, and it presents “the discussion of U.S. international interests, commitments, objectives and policies along with defense capabilities necessary to deter threats and implement U.S. security plans.” (Historical Office 2020.) The NSSs are formulated separately for every presidential term. The language of the document is mainly general, but it also includes specific description of goals, threats, and the planned course of action. The document naturally reflects the context of its time of publication and hence the contents vary between the abovementioned factors. The NSS also reflects the changes in geographical focus as the perceived threats are located in different geographical locations. The length of the document varies between 30–50 text pages. The NDS document, on the other hand, “focuses on the Department of Defense’s role implementing in the NSS.” It includes the discussion of “the global strategic environment, force posture, and the role of the U.S. in global security.” (Historical Office n.d.) The length of the public versions of the NDSs are between 15–30 text pages and it describes the strategic environment in general, but also explicitly identifies threats and general course of actions to deter those threats.

The “Greenbook” statistics, or formally known as the “U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants” is an annual report concerning the U.S. foreign aid. It is sent to Congress and the reporting is required by the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (U.S. Agency for International Development 2023.) According to

Brown & Morgenstern (2022, 3) it is currently the most comprehensive foreign aid data available. The Greenbook data currently consist of foreign aid data from 1945 to 2019. The Greenbook data was processed by using IBM SPSS software and it was divided by the region (1=Central America and the Caribbean, 2=Northern Latin America, 3=Southern Cone, 4=not specified) and by the individual Latin America countries. The chosen data included the years from 2000 to 2019. In the narrative the data is presented in graphs. In addition to NSSs, NDSs, and foreign aid data, other supplemented data was gathered during the formation of narrative, and it included among others the publications from the Congressional Research Service, the Congressional Hearing of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, the White House documents concerning the initiatives, the White House press releases, interview of SOUTHCOM General, SOUTHCOM's posture statement, and various news articles.

The narrative starts with a brief history of U.S.-LAC relations, but then it focuses on the period of 2001–2022. The narrative is formed according to presidential eras as the personality and interest of president are recognized to be the key factors shaping the U.S. policy toward LAC region. For every presidential era, the narrative devotes two subchapters⁶ which aim to expose the main actors, issues, events, institutions, constraints, opportunities, incentives, and path dependence as demanded by the AN method to bring thick description of the events. The first subchapter focuses on the U.S.-LAC bilateral relations and policies (general events, military policies, and foreign aid) whereas the second subchapter focuses on the Sino-U.S.-LAC trilateral relations (mostly on the economic policies). The narrative also highlights the meaningful global context, events, and engagement of extra-hemispheric actors while giving special attention to China due to its increasing role globally and in LAC. The aim of the narrative is to expose the utilized foreign policy tools, geographical focus of the tools, and the factors that have shaped the U.S. strategy toward LAC during the period. However, as it is impossible to include every level of interactions and policy dimension to the narrative it is already built with the analytic framework in mind. For that reason, the narrative largely concentrates on the U.S. economic- and military/security policies and initiatives concerning LAC region and on the factors which have mostly affected the U.S.-LAC relations during the period of 2000–2022. This has been done due to suggestion made by Bates et. al. as they recommend not rely heavily on the factors outside the model when applying more formal models in analysis (Bates et al. 2000, 687). As this thesis research approaches the method with the formal theoretical framework, other possible theoretical explanation will be taken into consideration through inductive iteration process.

⁶ Excluding the era of President Joe Biden as the presidential term is still ongoing, but it is included as it is important to show the recent developments on policies.

In the second part of this thesis research the analytical framework is introduced to analyse the produced narrative. In this thesis research I use the analytical framework of geoeconomic and geopolitical strategy which are applied to analyse the U.S. LAC policies in the 21st century. This comparative framework of geoeconomic and geopolitical strategy are derived from the secondary literature and will be introduced more closely after the narrative. The theories utilized in the analytical framework include the rational actor assumption as required by AN method and as recommended by Beach and Pedersen (2020, 144) who suggest that in the foreign policy analysis researcher can derive the theoretical assumptions to rational actor analysis from the nature of the international system (i.e. IR theories) and/or from the goals of state. The main purpose of this thesis research is to evaluate the workings of the chosen theories in the context of U.S. LAC policy, but also to analyse the sources of change.

2.3 Research Questions

By using the analytical framework of geopolitical and geoeconomic strategy my first research task is to recognize which strategy better explains the U.S. geostrategy toward LAC region in the 21st century? To answer this question the foreign policy tools, their usage, their relative weight, target region, actors and institutions are extracted from the narrative in the analysis section. Once extracted, they are analysed through the comparative framework of geoeconomics and geopolitical strategy to answer the first research question.

As my first research task is quite straightforward, my second research task is to expose the shifts in strategy; how the usage of different tools, geographical focus, and strategies have shifted during this period. My aim is to recognize which factors have affected the choices of their use. This is where AN method comes particularly suitable as it allows to identify “the reasons for the shift from an institutional equilibrium at one point in time to a different institutional equilibrium at a different point in time,” and to recognize the key variables what caused the shift (Levi 2004, 205). To recognize the sources of change in the U.S. foreign policy toward LAC, I mostly focus on perceived threats, but also other factors arising from secondary literature such as regional development. However, the special focus is given to China as the Sino-U.S. competition has steadily increased during the 21st century both in global and in regional context. The increased influence of extra-hemispheric actors is also particularly interesting in the case of LAC policy as for the U.S. the region has always been strategically important to counter rival Great Powers (Smith 1996, as cited in Leogrande 2007, 355–356).

Last but not least, my final research task is to illustrate the working of geoeconomic and geopolitical strategy in the real world. And by using this framework I can test how well the assumptions in these strategic theories work in U.S. foreign policy. This is also a characteristic of AN method as the last stage of study revises both the model and the original narrative if there are discrepancy between the model and the narrative (Hédoin 2020, 395).

3. THE NARRATIVE: UNITED STATES-LATIN AMERICA RELATIONS 2000–2022

U.S. and LAC countries have a long-shared history due to their location in the same continent but also because they all were once colonized by the European powers. The first country to break the colonial rule in the continent was the U.S. as it gained its independence from Great Britain in 1783. This gave to it unique geopolitical and historical position to maximise its own influence in the Americas. Slowly, by purchasing land and waging war it was able to gain growing influence in the hemisphere while the influence of colonial powers started eroding. (Grass 2021, 475.) This led to aspirations for the regional hegemony which was for the first time declared by President James Monroe. In his State of the Union Address in 1823 President Monroe called upon the European states to suspend their colonial ambitions on the American continent. In his address he made it plain that any foreign intervention in the region would be perceived as an act of aggression and would provoke strong military reaction by the U.S. (Beckmann 2019, 85.) And since the announcement made by President Monroe LAC region became considered to be the red line zone for outside powers to assert their influence.

Due to later historical developments, the region also became strategically one of the most important arenas to U.S. national security against rival Great Powers (Smith 1996, as cited in Leogrande 2007, 355–356.) Due to this development LAC also became one of the most critical regions in the U.S. foreign and security policy. And most of the time these policies reflected the wider global developments such as the Cold War when the U.S. used economic initiatives, covert operations, and military interventions to contain Soviet communism and to defend its regional hegemony (Grass 2021, 478; Hakim 2011, 63.) To support the military interventions and its hegemonic position in the hemisphere U.S. built over time a large network of military bases which created a “line of defence” in the Central America and Caribbean (CAC) region. From there it defended itself against the rival Great Powers, but also activated military campaigns against LAC countries to protect its hegemonic interests. (Bitar, 2016, 13–14, 30.)

But in addition to keep the region aligned with its interest by using military interventions U.S. also utilized its hegemonic position in the regional developments. It played a leading role in creation and

operation of the hemispheric multilateral organizations such as Organization of American States (OAS) which was founded in 1948 and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) which was founded in 1959. Through these inter-American institutions it was able to exert its soft power influence in the region. While for the most part U.S has considered LAC region as its neighbourhood and referred the region countries as its partners (Hakim 2011, 63.) the relations since the WWII have experienced many phases from engagement to confrontation and from cooperation to neglect (Scott & Carter 2016, 299–300). And despite the rhetoric coming from the U.S. region's countries have most of the time felt being less than equal partners or partners at all. (Hakim 2011, 63).

During the '90s it was a turn to more friendly engagement as the U.S.' foreign policy was directed to more integrated and cooperative Western Hemisphere. At the time, this goal was also shared by most of the states in the hemisphere. In the economic domain President George H.W. Bush initiated free trade negotiations with Mexico in 1990 which ended up creating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993 with Mexico and Canada. Furthermore, U.S. started promoting the regional wide free trade agreement called "the Enterprise of the Americas Initiative," which aimed to include every hemispheric country (excluding Cuba). In the political domain the countries met periodically to discuss regional issues at the Summit of Americas. Countries also agreed to draft the Inter-American Democratic Charter which codified the democratic principles of the hemisphere and committed the countries to defend these principles collectively. (Hakim 2011, 70–71.) The hemispheric development during the '90s and in the beginning of the 21st century thus seemed positive for the U.S. as the democracy and liberal market policies begun to spread in the hemisphere. However, after the terrorist attacks in 2001 the relationship with LAC started to change due to the U.S. own neglect toward region, but also due to the rise of new regional and extra-hemispheric actors.

After the terrorist attacks the U.S. overall strategy shifted to Middle East and cooperative development with rest of the hemisphere began to slowdown. The historically moulded hegemonic status of the U.S. in the hemisphere started to face challenges due to the rise of new regional anti-U.S. actor of ALBA and regional institutions which explicitly excluded the U.S. In addition, the extra-hemispheric actors of Russia, Iran, and especially China started to engage more with the region eroding the principle of Monroe Doctrine. Furthermore, while there were significant changes in the hemisphere, the strategic importance of the region remains (Campos & Prevost 2019, 22). According to Ellis (2011, 39) the core interests of U.S. with respect to LAC are that it does not pose a threat to U.S. security or to its citizens, it supports commercial interactions which are consistent with U.S. economy, and it follows the values of democracy and human rights. How has the U.S. defended its national interests and its strategic position in the region in the 21st century? In the upcoming chapters

we look at the development of U.S.-LAC relations, U.S. foreign policies, and the factors that have shaped the policies in the 21st century.

3.1 Bush and the Logic of War on Terror

During his presidential campaign in 2000 George W. Bush decided to put the hemispheric relations at the top of his foreign policy agenda with a particular emphasis on Mexico. In his full-fledged foreign policy speech during his campaign Bush criticized previous Clinton administration that it had neglected the region by not giving enough substance to cooperation. (Valenzuela 2004, 1–2.) Thus, when Bush entered the presidential office in January 2001 there were high hopes in LAC states that their problems would be given a higher priority in the U.S. foreign policy during his upcoming term (Hakim 2011, 72; Valenzuela 2005, 59). These hopes got boosted at the beginning of his term when President Bush visited at the third Summit of Americas in Quebec. At the summit he gave a speech in which he promised to promote democracy further and to work toward the hemispheric wide free trade agreement (FTAA) which would be implemented “no later than in 2005” (Bush 2001a). To highlight the importance of bilateral relations with Mexico and with the rest of the southern neighbourhood in his upcoming term Bush made his first state visit to Mexico (Emerson 2010, 37) and invited Mexican President Fox also as the first guest to the White House in early September 2001 (Erikson 2008, 102; Bush 2001b). However, not long after the visit of President Fox, on September 11th the terrorist attacks targeted New York city and dramatically changed these initial plans and the whole orientation of U.S. foreign policy for upcoming years.

After the terrorist attacks LAC countries expressed strong solidarity and support to the U.S. and even the U.S.’ long term adversary Cuba offered assistance in seizing those who were responsible for the attacks. Convened session of OAS unanimously adopted the resolution which was based on the Rio Treaty⁷. In statement it was stated that an attack on one country was an attack against all the countries in the Western Hemisphere. This initial strong solidarity of LAC countries, however, was not completely unconditional. This became evident when Mexico issued communiqué which warned the U.S. relying on possible unilateral intervention. (Shifter 2002, 52.) The reluctance of LAC states to support the military action came also evident in 2003 held UN Security Council meeting at which the U.S. long term regional partners Chile and Mexico decided to oppose the resolution which endorsed the invasion to Iraq (Hakim 2006, 41). In the end, only seven out of 34 LAC countries supported the military intervention in the Middle East, and most of those who were in favour were either in the middle of trade negotiations with the U.S. or were huge recipients of U.S. foreign aid (Encarnación

⁷ The Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (so called Rio Treaty) (Shifter 2002, 52).

2008, 100). The opposition against military intervention was not surprising as many surveys made in LAC have shown considerable nervousness about the unilateral use of force by the U.S. (Shifter 2002, 52). However, the attacks changed the whole U.S.' view of security threats from state actors to non-state actors causing its strategy to move swiftly to the Middle East (Ellis 2011, 39). Ignoring the warnings from its neighbourhood U.S. forces began the operation in Iraq in March 2003 with coalition of willing (Council on Foreign Relations 2022).

The beginning of the “War on Terror” eventually meant substantially reduced attention toward LAC region and changed the perception toward its regional policies after the promising start of the Bush administration. However, while attention to Western Hemisphere was reduced, the strategic shift did not mark the end of all U.S. policies in the region, rather they changed their status and quality according to the new threat perception. (Ellis 2011, 39). At first many of the planned high-level bi- and multilateral initiatives with LAC states were halted and the first obvious policy victim of the terrorist attacks was the termination of Bush’s initiative on migration of Mexican temporary workers (Valenzuela 2004, 4). Second, as the U.S. saw non-state actors being the primary national threat, LAC policies were formulated to better counter these actors and the longstanding social problems of the region which could develop these threats in the long term (Ellis 2011, 39). In the NSS 2002 drug trafficking was seen to be one of these problems and a source of potential future conflict. Particular attention was given to Colombia where the narco-traffickers were financing the extremist and terrorist groups. (NSS 2002, 10.) Thus, while the high-level and wider engagement were mostly put on hold, set of security policies was expanded and initiated to counter the threat caused by narco-trafficking groups, especially in Central America and the Caribbean (CAC) region. One solution by the Bush administration was to expand Clinton’s Plan Colombia drug war initiative to Mexico and Central America through the Mérida Initiative. These initiatives provided security training as well military and economic assistance to counter the narco-trafficking⁸ problem. (Grass 2021, 480–481; Buxton 2011, 35–36.)

In addition to expanding the security oriented “War on drugs” -policies Washington continued to influence LAC region also in several other ways. The main tools to defend U.S. soft power were the United States Agency for Development (USAID) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (Grass 2021, 480–481). Through these institutions U.S. focused providing the democracy assistance to the region although the countries in the centre of drug war operations were the largest recipient in this category (Scott & Carter 2016, 306–308). And as seen from the U.S. foreign assistance “Greenbook” statistics, foreign aid went mostly to geographical areas of CAC and Andean region where the countries of Colombia, Peru and Bolivia were the largest recipients. To lesser extent foreign

⁸ After the September 2001 attacks the narco-traffickers were often relabelled as narco-terrorists (Milani 2021. 122).

economic aid was offered to Southern Cone countries which were not the source of direct threat (figure 2). Similar geographical pattern is recognizable in the security assistance category as the largest recipients of security related aid were the Andean region countries and to lesser extent Brazil and to the rest of the Southern Cone (Milani 2021, 126–128).⁹

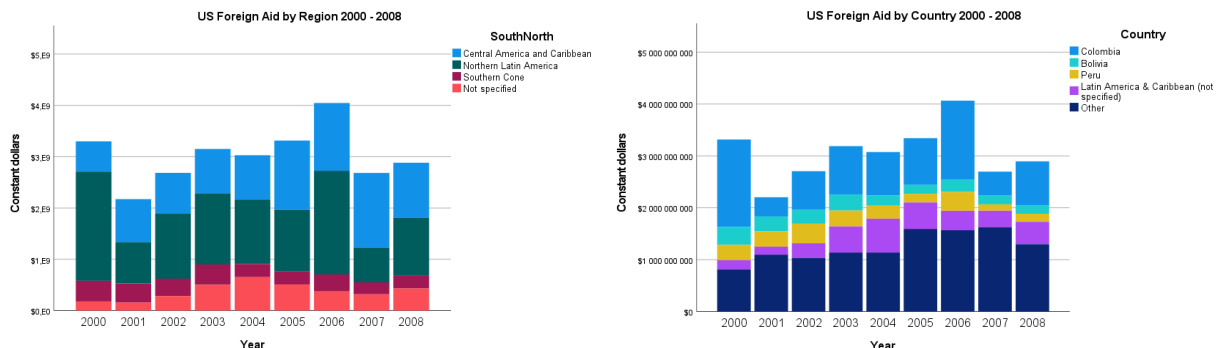


Figure 2 U.S. foreign aid to LAC by country and region in constant dollars during 2000–2008. Figures made by author.

In addition to anti-drug initiatives and financial assistance Bush relied more on coercive forms of economic power. These actions included the continued economic embargo of Cuba, threat to cut foreign assistance from Bolivia and Nicaragua, threats to suspend remittances to Nicaragua and El Salvador, and inducement to reduce tariffs for the CAC and Andean region countries (Leogrande 2007, 356). U.S. also assisted Venezuelan opposition to exercise coup d'état in 2002 against Venezuelan President Chavez. U.S. assisted Venezuelan opposition to plan the coup and provided logistical and financial support to it (Foster 2007). In addition to support for the regime change in Venezuela, relations with Bolivia deteriorated when Bolivia expelled the U.S. ambassador in 2008. The ambassador was expelled on the grounds that Washington was trying to affect Bolivia's internal affairs by using the Peace Corps¹⁰. Bolivian government also had received information that the U.S. ambassador had met with Bolivian opposition leaders at the time when the opposition tried to destabilize the government. Thus, it was suspected that the U.S. was supporting Bolivian opposition against the central government. Earlier, the U.S. had already temporarily removed Bolivia's preferential trade treatment which were created under the Andean trade Preference Act.¹¹ The official explanation was that Bolivia was not cooperating with U.S. in anti-drug policies, which was the

⁹ Milani (2021) uses the data from Center for International Policy, but she does not clarify which categories have been included in the data.

¹⁰ "The Peace Corps is an independent agency within the executive branch of the United States government. The Peace Corp's core mission is to promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals: (1) to help the people of interested countries in meeting their needs for trained men and women; (2) to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served; and (3) to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans." (Peace Corps 2020). Peace Corps was President Kennedy's initiative to counter similar Soviet Union's communist program. Peace Corps aimed to promote global democracy, peace, development, and freedom. (John F. Kennedy, Presidential Library and Museum, n.d.)

¹¹ "Andean Trade Preferences Act was enacted in 1991 to help combat against drug production and trafficking in Andean countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru." And in 2002 it was expanded to Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act. (Office of the United States Trade Representative n.d.)

prerequisite for the preferential treatment. During the deterioration of relations Bolivia decided to expel the Drug Enforcement Agency permanently out of the country, which led the Bush administration end also its foreign economic aid to Bolivia. (Emerson 2010, 9–10; Weisbrot 2011, 67.) These events showed that President Bush' initial aim for cooperation with the region was eventually replaced by coercive tactics. The goal was now the regime change in left-wing countries and further militarisation of policies through the anti-drug initiatives in CAC region.

According to Buxton (2011) the militarisation of LAC policies did not limit to the anti-drug initiatives as it also got new domestic forms when Pentagon's role was increased in U.S. foreign policy making which increased the U.S. Southern Command's (SOUTHCOM)¹² role producing the hemispheric policies. After this restructuring, SOUTHCOM was obligated to bring development issues such as poverty, corruption and social exclusion into its strategic planning. (Buxton 2011, 34.) In this new role SOUTHCOM was also assigned to additional missions in managing and supporting regional and global coalitions, developing training programs in the "internal security" field, assigned to increase the number of cooperative security locations (CSL)¹³ in the region, support the joint military unit initiatives, collaborating with LAC governments in the development of "national security strategies, and to improve DoD's role in "the political and socio-economical development processes" (Tokatlian 2015, 80). And in 2008, SOUTHCOM announced that it will start also acting as a coordinator for non-military operations (Emerson 2010, 10). SOUTHCOM's General James Hill also visited LAC region seventy-eight times during 2002–2004 and in his testimony before the Congress in 2004 he presented numerous emerging threats and told that he is the "watchdog" on regional developments and therefore responsible for identifying potential regional problems (Ciponline 2004, 3). In 2007 SOUTHCOM also published *U.S. Southern Command Strategy 2016: Partnership for the Americas* in which SOUTHCOM stated to be the leader of existing agencies in the region guaranteeing "security, stability and prosperity in the Americas" (Tokatlian 2015. 79).

The qualitative changes in SOUTHCOM's role reflected the needs stated in the National Security Strategy (NSS) 2002 in which states that "America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones." (NSS 2002, 1). Whereas the National Defense Strategy (NDS) 2005 states that the U.S. predominates the world, and it remains unmatched by the traditional military capability, but its challenges are a complex network of terrorists, extremists, paramilitaries, insurgents and criminals (NDS 2005, 2– 4). According to Emerson (2010, 42) Pentagon saw that LAC governments cannot effectively control their own territories and SOUTHCOM's General Hill stated

¹² The SOUTHCOM is responsible for the whole Latin America and the Caribbean region (excluding Mexico) (U.S. Southern Command, n.d)

¹³ Cooperative Security Locations (CSL) are U.S.' formal military bases in foreign territories.

narcotraffickers and terrorists to be a threat which grows in such “ungoverned” places. This change in threat perception, enforced drug initiatives, and SOUTHCOM’s increasing role led to steady increases of security and economic aid into the region (Figure 3) during the Bush administration. However, according to Long (2016, 505) the U.S. SOUTHCOM headquarters’ budget was not increased during the period of 2002–2007, until the more significant increase in 2008 and onwards. This coincides with relaunched Fourth Fleet on July 2008, which was originally disbanded after the World War II, but was now reassigned under the SOUTHCOM.¹⁴

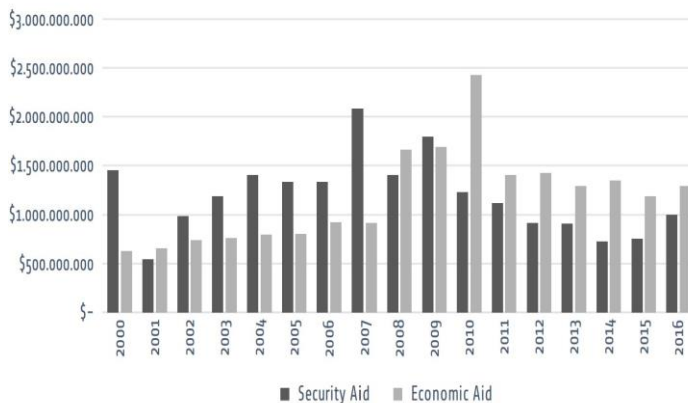


Figure 3 U.S. security and economic aid during 2000–2016. (Milani 2021, 127)

According to del Carmen (n.d.) and Sanchez (2016) the reactivation of Fourth Fleet in 2008 was a way to monitor the threats coming from anti-U.S. sentiment from the region, most notably Venezuela which had started to cooperate more closely with Cuba and Russia. Together with similar anti-U.S. attitudes Nicaragua, Bolivia and Ecuador gave a reason to U.S. to reactivate the fleet. However, Venezuela was the main target as Venezuela received loans from Russia which purpose were to purchase arms and military equipment, while at the same time the countries organized joint naval military exercises in the Caribbean Sea. According to Commander Stevenson the central mission of the Fleet is to enhance the political and military stability of the region and he stated that it “will send a message to the entire region, not just Venezuela.” (Santana, 2008). Thus, while the U.S. saw the non-state actors as a primary threat it did not forget the traditional security threats as it reacted quickly to Russia-Venezuela cooperation in the Caribbean Sea. This is also visible in the NDS 2005 which had not forget the traditional competing states (NDS 2005, 2–3). And before the reactivation of Fourth Fleet U.S. had already increased its preparedness in the Caribbean as it had initiated the new multinational military exercise called PANAMAX with Chile and Panama in 2003 and another multinational exercise SIFOREX in 2001. These were additional to other multinational exercises¹⁵ in which SOUTHCOM already participated in LAC region. (U.S. Army South 2018). However, the

¹⁴ Although it remained just an organizational fleet and no permanent ships were assigned to it. (COHA 2009)

¹⁵ UNITAS (since 1960) and Tradewinds (since 1980). (Casarano 2021).

reestablishment of the Fourth Fleet raised concerns and negative perception in LAC governments (Potter 2009). And also the U.S.' permanent military bases in the region started to face growing opposition as Ecuador did not agree to renew the basing agreement with the U.S (Bitar 2016, 44).

In the end, during the Bush administration LAC policies became to be seen from the perspective of security threats caused by the non-state actors which led to the expanded militarisation of "War on Drug" -policies and changes in SOUTHCOM's role in foreign policy making. Security and economic aid were offered to countries which were sympathetic to U.S. goals countering the drug trafficking issue while countries who refused to act according to U.S.' will found their funding or trade preferences terminated. Those countries which had turned left in their policies or started to collaborate with extra-hemispheric actors got pressure and support for the regime change, especially Venezuela and Bolivia. However, in these cases the U.S. actions backfired making the relations to deteriorate and more difficult for the U.S. to achieve its objectives to counter the drug-trafficking issue. However, not all policies of U.S. during the Bush administration were security oriented or confrontational as U.S. was devoted promote free trade.

3.2 Market Liberalism and Free Trade

Despite the threat caused by terrorist organizations the Bush administration was committed to strive open and free global trade (NSS 2002, 17–23; NSS 2006, 25–28). Administration's goal toward global trade liberalization through the bi- and multilateral treaties was imminent in the 2002 and 2006 NSSs' in which the aims of treaties were ambitious and extensive. The commitment to trade liberalization also concerned the Western Hemisphere in which the hemispheric wide Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) was targeted to complete at the latest in 2005 (NSS 2002, 18). During the Bush administration U.S. worked to advance on this objective and it was able to forge multiple FTAs and trade initiatives with the region's countries. The Caribbean Basin Initiative came into force in 2002 with the aim at increasing cooperation in trade and investment with countries in the Caribbean Sea (Kleszczyńska 2021, 127–128.) Administration negotiated bilateral FTAs with Chile (2004), Central American countries and the Dominican Republic (CAFTA-DR 2006)¹⁶, Peru (2009) (León-Manriquez & Alvarez 2014, 13), and trade promotion agreement with Panama in 2007 (U.S. Department of State, n.d.) The CAFTA-DR 2006 aimed at bringing enhanced economic growth, promote transparency and democracy, and lead to cooperation and integration in CAC which would

¹⁶ CAFTA-DR was signed with Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d.)

lead to peace and stability in the region. Furthermore, its aim was to enhance America's leadership on trade. (The White House 2002).

According to (Kleszczyńska 2021, 128) while the U.S. was capable to forge bilateral and smaller regional FTAs, the more comprehensive hemispheric wide FTAA began to face growing resistance in the region. Originally 1994 initiated talks to form the FTAA faced many blocked negotiations and rising dissatisfaction in LAC countries just to finally fail in the 2005 negotiations. Most markedly the U.S. was not able to find a common ground with Brazil (Hakim 2011, 73) while also other LAC countries were dissatisfied particularly with the U.S. government agricultural subsidies that favoured its own exports (Kleszczyńska 2021, 128). According to Foster (2007) the largest opposition against the trade agreement, together with other U.S. policies in LAC, arose from the new leftist governments who had been disappointed in Washington's for long promoted neoliberalism, which had not managed to bring the promised economic growth and economic stability to these countries (Foster 2007, 3). This broad dissatisfaction toward U.S. policies led the radical leftist governments of Cuba and Venezuela to form an openly anti-U.S. block called "Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America" (ALBA) in 2004, which was later supplemented by countries of Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Grenada and five Organization of Eastern Caribbean States countries (Grass 2021, 480–481). In addition to formation of anti-U.S. ALBA the discontent toward neoliberalism led to the rise of several leftist leaders in LAC, resulting to so-called "Pink Tide" during the Bush administration which brought leftist presidents Lula de Silva (Brazil 2003), Michelle Bachelet (Chile 2007), along with more radical leftist Evo Morales (Bolivia 2006), Rafael Correa (Ecuador 2007) into power (Ganchev 2020, 362). In addition to opposition coming from the leftist governments the reputation of U.S. and market liberalism was already on the fence as at the beginning of the millennium happened economic crisis in Argentina spread to other countries and the U.S. showed reluctant to offer any assistance to stabilise these economies even when the crisis began to spread in the region. (Encarnación 2003, 101; Valenzuela 2005, 61).

Despite opposition coming from the leftist governments the U.S. was committed to promote free trade globally. Hence, during the Bush administration U.S. endorsed deeper trading relationship also with large and growing economic powers such as China, India, and Russia among others (Kleszczyńska 2021, 126). The U.S. normalised its trading relationship with China in 2000, which paved the way for it to access the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d). Normalisation of trading relationship and the membership in WTO enabled China to achieve its explosive economic growth as it gained new trading partners and better exchange rates in the world markets (World 101, n.d.). With its new position in the global economy China began its deeper economic engagement also with LAC region. Before the Millennium China's engagement and trade

with LAC had been minimal, but since the Chinese government Going Global strategy in 1999 and its accession to WTO China's trade and foreign direct investments (FDI) to the region started to grow exponentially. During the Bush administration China-LAC trade grew at an average annual rate of 31 percent resulting to region's commodities boom. (Yang & Lee 2020, 587–588, Roy 2022) Between 2003–2009 Chinese foreign direct investments (FDI) in LAC climbed to \$24 billion dollars and in 2005 Chile became the first country in the region to sign the FTA with China (Wise 2012).

Soon the growing economic partnership with the region started to spill over into other realms and China's President Hu Jintao started visiting in LAC more frequently and was most often warmly welcomed by the local governments (Hakim 2006, 46). Especially the left-wing governments of LAC saw closer ties with China as mean to reduce their economic dependence on the U.S. and western dominated multilateral lending organisations such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Hurtado, Hurtado, Carlson 2022, 2; Hakim 2006, 46). The Brazilian President Lula de Silva started to seek deeper relationship with China as he said that Brazil wants to establish a strategic relationship with Beijing which would involve trade in high-technology and mutual support in international organizations (Hakim 2006, 46). This expanding engagement in economic and political realms led China in 2008 to publish its first policy document considering LAC. In the document China declared its interests developing the relations further but emphasized the “one China” principle. Other more significant sections of the document were devoted to economic cooperation, trade, investment, energy resources, agriculture, and tourism. (Katkova & Eremin 2022, 165.)

Although China's economic, political, and security activity in the region started to quickly grow, it did not go unnoticed. In fact, already since the '90s U.S. military planners had considered China to be the next significant security challenge to U.S. and the Defense Planning Guidance of 1992 aimed to “preclude any hostile power from dominating a region critical to our interests” including the LAC (Logan 2021, 175). And now Washington also started to organize congressional hearings which “aimed at assessing the regional presence of external actors in the Hemisphere” (Milani 2021, 122). At the first hearing of Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere before the 109th Congress in 2005, members made it clear that Chinese activity had increased concerns. China was described as the leading competitor of the U.S. seeking natural resources in the zero-sum game in the region. Its unfair trading practises and intended investments to the region were recognized, as was its engagement with anti-U.S. ALBA-states, which were described sliding toward totalitarian or authoritarian rule with China's assistance. During the hearing it was also pointed out that the SOUTHCOM had warned against China's increasing influence also in military-to-military affairs. Many subcommittee members saw China's engagement as something to counterbalance, and it was proposed that the U.S. should collaborate more deeply with LAC countries to create a strategy to maximise region's

economic competitiveness. However, at the end of the hearing it was concluded that China was not an immediate threat and its influence in the region was still minimal compared to U.S., but it could pose a serious threat to Monroe Doctrine in the future. (Committee on International Relations 2005.)

Even the requests made by some of the subcommittee members to collaborate more with LAC region to counterbalance Chinese activity, the U.S.-LAC relations deteriorated during the Bush administration due to its confrontational actions. But as Buxton (2011) states the Bush administration came also into power at the time when there were profound changes in the region as many governments started to lean left and become more unfriendly toward U.S. presence and its policies. The rise of leftist governments transformed the region providing political and economic alternative to the U.S. hegemony (Buxton 2011, 31.) While the U.S. was still counting on the regional institutions such as Summit of the Americas, OAS, the Defense Ministerial of the Americas, and IDB to bring security and stability to the Western Hemisphere (NSS 2002, 10, NSS 2006, 37). LAC states begun to seek stronger foreign policy autonomism and regional integration which excluded the U.S. (Eremin 2020 as cited in Katkova & Eremin 2022, 165). This search for stronger regional integration led twelve LAC leaders to sign a treaty in 2008 which created the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). And in 2011, 33 LAC nations formed even larger institution of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) which excluded the U.S. These both new institutions were an explicit challenge to the OAS which included the U.S. and headquartered in Washington (Reid 2015.) Together with stronger search for autonomism and regional integration LAC nations also sought to seek commercial relations beyond the Western Hemisphere and here the economic opening of the Pacific and South Asia region provided a great opportunity (Buxton 2011, 32).

At the end, during the Bush administration the U.S. itself backed down by putting the high-level initiatives on hold due to more urgent problems in the Middle East, but it was simultaneously pushed away by the leftist LAC nations and new regional organisations. For this reason, the early 21st century foreign policies of U.S. toward LAC have been described as “benign neglect”; the cooperation between U.S. and the region was limited, and the further development of relations beyond free trade remained marginal (León-Manriquez 2014, 13). These developments in the Western Hemisphere gave space for extra-hemispheric actors such China to engage more with the region especially in the economic domain while the region saw China as an alternative source of funding and partnership. In the meantime U.S. did not see China as immediate threat to its national security and it hoped that the normalisation of trading relations and opening China would speed it up to market economy and push it toward democracy (World 101, n.d.). And it was hoped that China’s engagement with region could bring economic prosperity into the region as the NSS (2006, 37) states that the countries in LAC should be helped toward economic development.

3.3 Obama's Latin America Rapprochement

Presidential candidate Barack Obama did not give as much attention to hemispheric relations during his presidential campaign. During the candidate debates Latin America was mentioned just once in reference to China's expanding activities and influence in the region. Still, when Obama won the presidential elections, every LAC president welcomed the win. (Erikson 2008, 101, 104.) At the time of the win, LAC governments were particularly hopeful because Obama had stated that he would engage with LAC countries as sovereign nations. He also had promised to double the amount of foreign aid to the region, open the relations with Cuba, and renew the approach toward U.S.' anti-drug policies in LAC. In addition, Obama's plan was to reform the regional trade in a way that environmental standards and good labour practices would be given a higher priority. Along with other promises, Obama wanted to enhance U.S. diplomatic presence in the region, appoint a special envoy to LAC, and expand the Peace Corps. (Buxton 2011, 35–36.) After the win Obama continued his engagement agenda and in his first months in presidential office, he visited the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago. At the summit he repeated his commitments to improve relations with the region. (Reid 2015.) At the summit he promised to reengage with Cuba and to eliminate the policies which limited travel or send remittances to the island, he also shook hands with Venezuelan President Chávez, and made statements previously unheard from U.S president by admitting that the U.S. had in times dictated their terms in relations (Vanderbush 2011, 43–44; Weisbrot 2011, 63). This rhetoric, behaviour, and promises raised hopes in the region countries and even the anti-American leftist governments seemed ready to work with Obama (Weisbrot 2011, 63).

However, the global financial crisis which began in 2007 had a major influence defining Obama's political calendar and in his first months Obama needed to stop the financial breakdown which threatened to disrupt the world trade, supply chains, and produce mass employment, and the whole U.S. power and authority internationally (Unger 2016, 4). In addition to acute financial crisis the policy priorities on top of Obama's list were the Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and the quest to secure America's energy independence. The financial crisis and the other more urgent matters indicated that the LAC relations would be a less immediate concern. (Erikson 2008, 105.) According to Vanderbush (2011, 43) Obama's appointments to foreign policy posts also signalled that U.S. LAC policies would remain the same. And not too long after the promising start, it became clear that the region's elevated expectations were premature. Obama's initial goodwill toward the region was severely hampered by incidents which made it again seem that Washington continued to produce its traditional style policies of regime change and military threat.

First incident happened on June 2009 after the Honduran military organized coup d'état against the leftist government of President Zelaya. In the first days after the coup Obama's administration made the decision not to condemn the coup or the human rights violations done by the Honduran military. Instead of condemnation U.S. continued to offer foreign aid to Honduras, train its soldiers in the School of Americas, kept the ambassador in the country, and simply asked Honduras to restore the constitutional order. This was an opposite approach to the rest of the hemisphere as most of the LAC countries demanded more decisive approach toward the illegal coup. Nevertheless, U.S. maintained its position and once the coup government began to organize elections in the country U.S. decided to block the resolution of OAS which would have condemned the Honduran elections carried under the military government. (Weisbrot 2011, 64–65; Vanderbush 2011, 44.) U.S. approach went in encounter to recently founded regional bodies such as UNASUR and Mercosur which issued statements in which they denounced elections as illegitimate (Main 2021). Thus, it was perceived by the region that the Obama administration did not follow its own democratic principles in which it had committed when it came to left-wing governments.

The second incident which increased the distrust between U.S. and LAC further, happened when it came to knowledge that U.S. was planning to sign a defense cooperation agreement (DCA) with Colombian government. The secretly negotiated ten-year defence cooperation agreement between the countries would have given U.S. military expanded access at seven Colombian military bases, from where it could conduct counternarcotics operations. However, one of these bases would have been the base in Palanquero which Department of the Air Force planned to use as a new CSL. The basing agreement with Colombia would have provided “opportunity for full spectrum operations in a critical sub-region” against number of threats including the “constant threat” caused by the anti-US governments as stated in press release published by the Air Force. The wording of the press release raised wide alarms in the hemispheric countries, and it was quickly withdrawn, but unfortunately the damage was already done (Weisbrot 2011, 65–66; Vanderbush 2011, 44–45; Emerson 2010, 45) In LAC it was perceived that the U.S. was once again protecting only its own national interests and preferences with no regard for the wishes of the region.

The information about the U.S.-Colombia DCA made the Venezuelan government accuse U.S. of creating a base network which would be used against its neighbours and not toward narcotrafficking issue as claimed. President Chavez also stated that U.S.-Colombian defense agreement “could be a step toward war” in the region (Mercopress 2009). Venezuela received support to its statement from its ALBA allies Ecuador, Bolivia and Nicaragua which joined to oppose the defence cooperation agreement together with Venezuela. However, the opposition of the agreement did not limit to just anti-American governments as the agreement was also opposed by Brazil and Chile, among others.

Although their rhetoric was less confrontational as Brazilian President Lula stated he does not like the American bases in the region (Bronstein 2009) and Chile's president said that LAC countries are "unnerved" about the plans to increase American troops in the region. (Barrionuevo 2009) The defence cooperation agreement was basically opposed by the whole region (Weisbrot 2011, 65). The reaction by the LAC governments once again demonstrated considerable nervousness about increased presence of U.S. military in the region. The perception was that the U.S. was ready to use the military bases against the hemispheric countries to defend its own interest as in the past.

The defence cooperation plan with Colombia never materialized as the Colombian constitutional court ruled the contract to be against the Colombian constitution (Weisbrot 2011, 66). For U.S., the DCA was about replacing the basing agreement with Ecuador, which was no longer renewed by the Ecuadorian government. For that reason U.S. had begun to seek alternative formal CSL bases in Peru, Panama and Colombia. However, all these new base initiatives failed in consequence of the local governments' opposition or as with Colombia, legal reasons. Domestic politics of LAC countries was making it difficult for the U.S. to maintain or open new permanent military bases in LAC region. But instead of retreating from the region U.S. military found new ways to operate and it started to expand its network of "quasi-bases," which still allowed it to operate in the hemisphere with necessary depth. (Bitar 2016, 25–26, 145–159.) For Colombia, the DCA with U.S. would have allowed to balance more with Venezuela as the Colombia-Venezuela relations had deteriorated when Colombia had killed the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) leader in Ecuadorian territory (Beech 2009). Due to incident, Chavez had ordered 10 tank battalions to the Columbian border and closed its embassy in Bogotá (Carroll and Brodzinsky 2008). So, as revealed by a Freudian slip made by the U.S. Air Force and recent development in the region, the DCA was about stabilizing the situation between Colombia and its neighbours. This was done by increasing the military pressure against Venezuela and Marxist FARC rebels by expanding the U.S. military presence, but again, this type of development brought major backlash to Bush' goal to improve hemispheric relations.

In other areas of foreign policy Obama's administration also repeated the policies of past. The largest recipients of foreign aid were still Colombia and Mexico (figure 4) where the drug programmes of Plan Colombia and Mérida Initiative were continued. Obama supported the war on drugs and kept the source-focused approach in policies, although he took a different rhetoric to the problem and accepted the shared responsibility of the drug problem (Buxton 2011, 37; Reid 2015). But because illicit trafficking still created challenges to the U.S. Obama's administration decided to dedicate additional funding for the U.S. military bases in Central America and it also suggested a new country plan for Honduras, similar to the Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative (Buxton 2011, 37). In 2013, these plans came to realization, although in wider regional context, as he introduced a new initiative

called “The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative” (CBSI) which further securitized the Caribbean region under the rubric of drug trade. Through the new CBSI along with other assistance programmes U.S. supported the maritime and aerial coordination by improving radar coverage and provided equipment and military training to the Caribbean governments (The White House 2013).

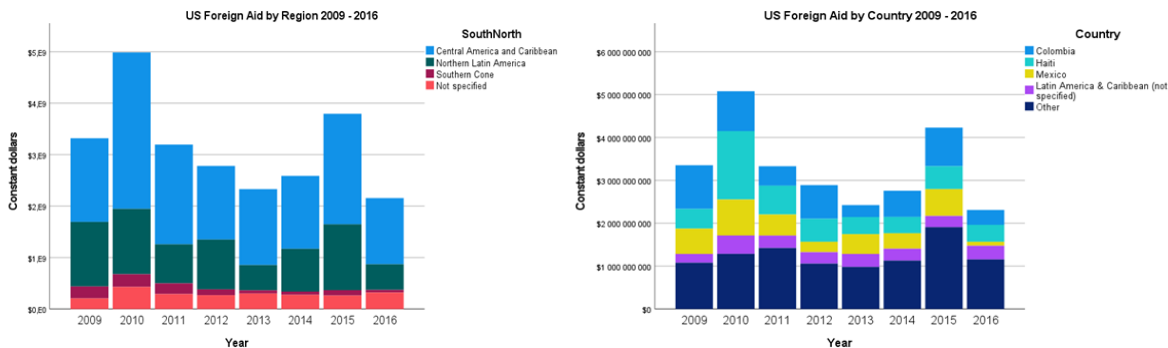


Figure 4 U.S. foreign aid by category 2000–2016 and by country between 2009–2016. Figures made by author.

In the area of economic aid no substantial changes were made despite the initial promises to double the amount (Figure 4). Without the peak caused by Haiti’s earthquake in 2010 foreign aid in constant dollars overall stayed in the similar levels with the previous Bush administration. The foreign aid increase, however, was not the only promise which was not fulfilled. During his first term Obama failed to appoint a special envoy to LAC region, until on his second term he appointed the Vice President Joe Biden to this position (Reid 2015). Moreover, no high-level initiatives were undertaken which would have renewed the relationship with states like Bolivia, Cuba or Venezuela despite the earlier rhetoric. Quite the contrary, administration continued the objective of regime change in anti-U.S. countries and in 2009, it provided around \$2 million to Venezuelan opposition groups which was twice the amount than during the last year of the previous administration. Obama’s government also continued to sponsor Cuban dissidents and designated Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism. (Golinger n.d, as cited in Vanderbush 2011, 46; Vanderbush 2011, 46). In June 2009, U.S. also permanently eliminated Bolivia's trade preferences which made the Bolivian president call Obama a liar. He saw that Obama had betrayed his promises which he had made in the Summit of the Americas. Obama’s Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also signalled that the State Department was ready to put pressure on LAC countries whenever it was necessary (Vanderbush 2011, 44). When Clinton got hints that Brazil was about to invite Iran’s president on a state visit, she stated that those countries who want to cooperate with Iran should think twice what the consequences might be (Vanderbush 2011, 44; Lowenthal n.d., 12).

Thus, in May 2010, the relations with Brazil deteriorated when Brazilian president visited Iran. In Teheran President Lula brokered an agreement with Iran concerning the nuclear energy. Lula claimed that the agreement would defuse Iran’s nuclear threat but also supported Iran’s right to peaceful

nuclear energy use. The Obama administration disagreed and declared the agreement being inadequate. In June 2010, the U.S.-Brazil relations deteriorated further because Brazil blocked the U.S. planned sanctions against Iran when Brazil had a rotational seat in the UN Security Council. Therefore U.S. levied tariffs for the Brazilian ethanol which lapsed only until 2011, when Brazil decided to distance itself from Iran under the new Brazilian president. But the relations deteriorated again when it came up that the U.S. government had monitored the new president's phone. (Reid 2015.) The U.S.-Brazil relations were complicated at the time because Brazil had begun to see itself in a bigger role globally and regionally. According to Lowenthal (n.d., 5) Brazil had taken a leading role in creating the regional organizations of Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the South American Defense Council. Furthermore, Brazil had formed a strategic alliance with India and South America, and it worked closely with other BRICS countries. It had also offered itself as an intermediary in the Middle East and with Iran. Brazil also played an increasing important part in the G20, the G8, and the Doha negotiations.

For all the above-mentioned reasons Obama's first term did not give much to hope for in improving the relations, but fortunately there were some improvements during his second term. In 2013, the Secretary of State Kerry held the speech in the OAS meeting in Washington, where he announced that "the era of the Monroe Doctrine is over" and he added that countries should engage with each other "as equals, sharing responsibilities, cooperating on security issues" (Kerry 2013). During the Obama's second term Vice President Joe Biden also started to focus more strongly on LAC as he visited the region fourteen times in the position of special envoy (Main 2021). Finally in 2014, President Obama and the Cuban President Castro revealed that the governments would restore the diplomatic relations and initiate easing the 50-year period of tension. Following the announcement U.S. loosened the travel and trade restrictions, removed Cuba from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, and countries reciprocally opened their embassies. In the last year of his administration Obama visited the island state and gave a keynote address to the Cuban people in which he advised both countries to develop the relations further. Obama also promised to Cubans that those who reach the U.S. territory would be granted a right to permanent residency. (Beckmann 2019, 91.) In addition to these improvements in relations with LAC Obama sought to further create trust with LAC nations in his last years of presidency. According to Beckman (2019, 91) Obama declassified the Cold War documents and records which he shared with Argentina, Brazil and Chile. The documents revealed that the U.S. had supported military dictatorships in all three countries during the Cold War.

While there was some light at the end of the tunnel in relations with wider LAC during Obama's second term, the relationship with Venezuela did not improve. In 2014, following the violent protests in Venezuela the U.S. government announced sanctions against the country. Moreover, in 2015

Obama's administration declared Venezuela to be a national threat to U.S. and announced additional sanctions against the Venezuelan government officials who had been responsible for the violence against the protesters. (The Guardian 2015.) Obama had already earlier tried to decrease Venezuelan influence in the region as in 2009 he had introduced the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA) initiative to assist CAC countries to overcome their dependence on oil. In June 2014, this initiative was expanded when U.S. Vice President Biden publicised another program of the Caribbean Energy Security Initiative (CESI) which goal was to reduce the Caribbean nations dependency on a single energy source through diversification of energy resources. (Creutzfeldt 2016, 33). Resources to this initiative came from the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). (Caricom 2014.) According to Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs the initiative aimed at boosting energy security and sustainable economic growth in the region. The U.S. development finance was also hoped to catalyse the private sector investments into the region by making it attractive for the well-prepared clean energy projects. (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, n.d.) Already during his presidential campaign Obama saw that the U.S. needed to wean itself off foreign oil provided by Venezuela (Erikson 2008, 104). U.S. has been for a long time dependent on oil produced by Mexico and Venezuela as it had obtained about one fourth of its energy imports from LAC, and because of that the cooperation in energy matters has been one of its central strategies toward the region. (Lowenthal n.d., 4).

3.4 Rebalancing the Indo-Pacific

During the Obama's presidency U.S. tried to improve its relations with LAC countries by engaging the region as a partner, but especially during Obama's first term it continued to repeat the policies of the past. Although, in his second term Obama was able to change the U.S. approach toward the region as the administration was able to denounce the historical policy of Monroe Doctrine, open the relationship with Cuba, and to regain trust. However, the biggest change in the U.S. overall strategy during Obama's administration was to rebalance the Indo-Pacific region and to engage more strongly in Asian affairs instead of Middle East. The announcement of "Asian Pivot"¹⁷ in 2011 was the first big step away from the "War on Terror" and non-state actors. Although, according to Unger (2016) the plan for the withdrawal from the Middle East had been already set by the Bush administration as it had agreed the full withdrawal of troops from Iraq by December 2011. Obama was initially committed to the plan, but still during his first term he managed to triple the amount of U.S. forces in Afghanistan thus leaving considerable number of troops into Middle East. The highest amount of

¹⁷ "Asian Pivot" was later renamed "Rebalance" (Ullman 2012).

U.S. troops in the Middle East during the Bush administration in 2007 was around 166,000 troops while the highest number of troops during Obama in Afghanistan was 100,000 in 2010. (Unger 2016, 2) Although, during his second term U.S. managed to reduce the number of troops to under 15,000 in Iraq and Afghanistan (NSS 2015, 7).

According to Unger (2016) with the “Pivot to Asia” Obama wanted to re-establish the strategic position in Asia-Pacific which had become an important strategic location for the U.S. due to its economic development. The region played an increasingly critical role in the U.S. economy, trade, and investment. (Unger 2016, 1.) As a part of the “Rebalance” strategy the administration announced that it would deploy 60 percent of its naval assets to the region by 2020 (Branigan et. al. 2012). This was in continuation to earlier development as already before Obama’s “Asian Pivot” announcement Bush’ administration had assigned additional military equipment to Pacific. According to Ross (2021) Pentagon had as early as 2005 stated that it would deploy 60 percent of U.S. submarines to Asia. In fact, the increased military funding for the Pacific region had remained at high-levels throughout the War on Terror and increased military resources were devoted to Indo-Pacific since 1997. (Ross 2012, 77.) But since the launch of the Rebalance strategy U.S. also began strengthening its alliances in the Indo-Pacific together with its improving defence posture. According to White House (2015) “the alliances remain at the heart of the Rebalance” and it is the central component of administration’s vision of the region’s future and the top priority to implement it. The engagement with the region was also stated to be “a critical step toward our strategic goal of revitalizing the open, rules-based economic system that the United States has led since World War II.” (The White House 2015.)

In addition to troop promotion and alliance building Obama’s administration also started to enhance its diplomatic presence in Asia. Administration deepened its partnerships with East Asian countries while also fostering stable and constructive relationship with China. The U.S. strived to strengthen the rules-based order in the region by sending the ambassador to ASEAN and by joining in the East Asian Summit. In 2015, Obama made already his ninth trip to Asia which demonstrated the importance of the region and aimed at advancing Obama’s administration Rebalance strategy. Together with these diplomatic enhancements, Obama started to promote Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) with eleven other Indo-Pacific countries and aimed at deepening the economic integration with the region. The U.S allies saw that TPP was designed to counter China’s economic power in Asia-Pacific and the U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter stated that the TPP trade pact was “as important to me as another aircraft carrier” (Perlez 2015, 3). NSS 2015 also reveals that the Obama administration saw economic power shifting the power dynamics in international affairs creating both opportunities and threats to cooperation (NSS 2015, 4). This implies that Asia was becoming most of all a place of economic balancing which the military component supported.

However, while rebalancing the Indo-Pacific region and recognizing the changing dynamics of economic power, Obama administration was not fundamentally concerned about China's economic engagement with LAC region. In fact, both Obama and the earlier Bush administration endorsed to work together in LAC with China in policies and initiatives in which the interests were shared by both parties. This cooperative approach was confirmed by Obama's Assistant Secretary of State Valenzuela as he stated that the U.S. did not see China's engagement with LAC as a threat, rather a possible cooperative partner to promote economic prosperity of the region which would create the benefits for all. Valenzuela stated that the U.S. even looks forward to Chinese investments and growing trade with LAC and saw it as a positive thing that China had joined the regional institutions of IDB as a member and OAS as an official observer. (Ting, 2010.) According to (Ellis 2011) also the DoD saw that China's investments would bring economic prosperity to the region which was important to the local governments so they can effectively govern their territories. The continuation of the "Latin America" sub-dialogue of the U.S.-China strategic dialogue also illustrated the need to prevent the possible misunderstandings and conflict which China's deepening engagement with LAC could cause. But, while the administration was mostly in favour of China's engagement with the region some of the U.S. political leaders in the executive branch and Congress expressed concerns about China's advancement, but they still avoided calling China as an opponent in the hemisphere. However, the officials from the Department of State and DoD stated that the U.S. was watching for signs of emerging threats to U.S. national security. (Ellis 2011, 37-39.)

And certainly there were a lot to monitor as since the Bush administration China's economic activity had expanded enormously. From the 2000 to 2013 China's trade with LAC had climbed from \$12 billion to over \$275 billion dollars (Reid 2015). This has led to a situation where the U.S. share of overall LAC trade declined from 53.5 percent to 37.1 percent (Ortiz Velásques & Dussel Peters 2016 as cited in Wigell & Soliz Landivar de Stange 2018, 165). Thus relatively reducing the economic importance of the U.S. to LAC region. However, there were significant differences in trade relations between the subregions of LAC as China was taking the number one position in Southern Cone and the U.S. maintained its position as the biggest trading partner in the CAC region (Wigell & Soliz Landivar de Stange 2018, 165). In addition to growing trade, China also increasingly acted as a major foreign investor and lender in the region. According to Reid (2015) China's funding and loans assisted leftist LAC governments to sustain their unsustainable economic policies in Argentina, Venezuela, and Ecuador, which welcomed the Chinese funding as an alternative to western-dominated financial organization such as IMF or the financial markets. The amount of its lending to LAC reached \$29 billion in 2015, which was nearly double than the total lending by World Bank and IDB (Wigell & Soliz Landivar 2018, 167). In addition, China had offered \$35 billion dollars for the region's countries

to build infrastructure projects and industrial cooperation (Gallagher & Sarmiento 2016). Consequently China became the one of the largest creditors of the region which gave it influence over the region’s governments and policies.

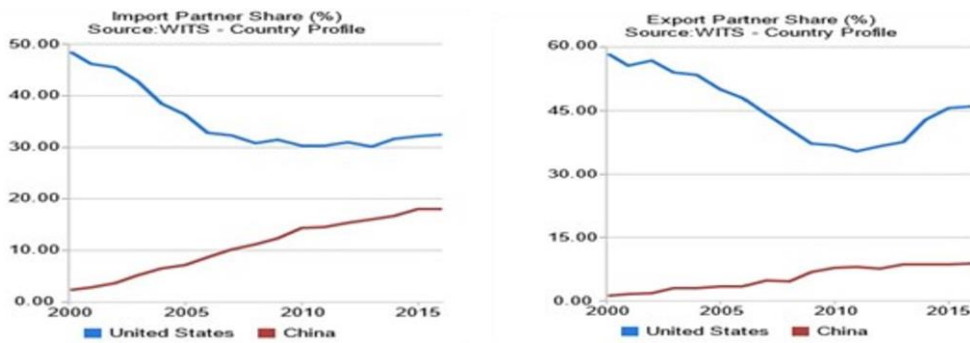


Figure 5 Import and export partner share (%) of LAC trade by China and U.S. (WITS 2023)

Besides growing in trade and financing China also began to show its other interest. The visits of the Chinese political leaders to the region started to grow, and in 2010 the Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs held its first China-Latin America and the Caribbean Think Tank Forum. And in 2014, this increasing cooperation between China and the region led to the establishment of China-CELAC Forum.¹⁸ (Creutzfeldt 2016, 30–31.) In 2015, at their first meeting the participant countries made a cooperation plan which aimed at doubling the annual trade between China and the region and aimed at increasing China’s investment amount in the next decade (Wigell & Soliz Landivar 2018, 169). The structure of the cooperation plan was defined as a 1+3+6 concept in which driving forces of cooperation were the investments, trade, and finance within the priority areas of infrastructure, energy, agriculture, manufacturing, scientific and technological innovation, and information technology (Pires & Nascimento 2020, 121–122). Furthermore, in 2016 China published an official White Paper concerning LAC in which it referred engagement with the region being strategically important to advance “multi-polarization, global governance reform, and the promotion of regional multilateralism.” (Peoples daily 2016, as cited in Wigell & Soliz Landivar 2018). So, the originally started economic engagement with LAC region began to create new possibilities to China advance its other global ambitions.

While China advanced upon its goals with its economic policies in the region, the Obama administration approach to cooperative trade and economic policies in LAC was lagging. In the beginning of his term Obama had rejected protectionism as a policy, but soon due to the ongoing economic crisis, he accepted a “Buy American” provision as a part of the economic stimulus package.

¹⁸ In 2011, 33 LAC countries formed the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which excluded the United States and Canada. CELAC explicitly challenged the traditional hemispheric diplomacy of OAS, which was headquartered in Washington (Reid 2015).

And while Obama administration signalled willingness to proceed the FTAs with Colombia and Panama initiated by Bush administration it started to postpone their implementation. Administration also discussed with Brazil about possible energy cooperation, but it kept the high tariffs on imported ethanol and maintained the subsidies for U.S. ethanol producers. (Lowenthal n.d., 12.) Later, the administration decided to finalize the FTAs with Colombia and Panama and signed a bilateral Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) with Argentina (OAS 2016), but at the same time it let the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPDEA) expire on July 31 2013 which permanently ended the trade preferences from Bolivia and Ecuador made under the act. The administration let the act to expire because the U.S. implemented the FTAs with Colombia (2012) and Peru (2007) whereas Bolivia and Ecuador had become ineligible for the preferential treatment (United States International Trade Commission 2021, 5–6). However, the result with new and expired agreements was that the region became divided largely into two economic groups. First was the group of countries in Caribbean Basin and on the Pacific Coast in which eleven countries had the FTA with US. In 2011, four of these Pacific countries, namely Colombia, Chile, Peru and Mexico created the Pacific Alliance block which based its policies on free market economics. On the other side was the Mercosur¹⁹ group which was more protectionist and included countries of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. (Reid 2015.)

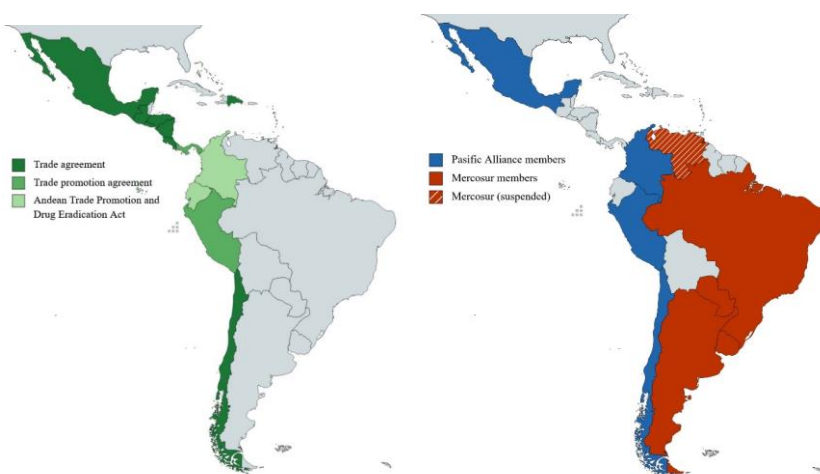


Figure 6 United State’ free trade agreements with LAC compared to Pacific Alliance and Mercosur trade blocs in 2016. Maps made by author with mapschart.net.

During the Obama administration China’s engagement with LAC region turned into high gear as deepening economic interdependence between China and LAC begun to spill over to other realms as China saw the region as a part of its growing global ambitions. This commitment led to involvement in bilateral partnerships and regional multilateral organizations which explicitly excluded the U.S

¹⁹ Mercosur is a regional integration process established by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay in 1991. Venezuela adhered the membership in 2006, joined the Mercosur in 2012, but was suspended in 2016. Bolivia is on the progress of joining to the block. (Mercosur 2022).

such as CELAC and China-CELAC Forum. (Yang & Lee 2020, 590.) However, Obama's administration was not concerned about the Chinese growing activity and its economic footprint in LAC region, moreover it was even encouraged. China and the U.S. even maintained the strategic sub-dialogue to avoid misunderstandings. Although, it was indicated that China's activities were closely monitored for any signs of emerging threats to U.S. national security. The U.S. was able to improve its relations with the region during Obama's second term while opening relations with Cuba and denouncing the Monroe Doctrine which was the symbol of U.S. hegemony. Obama also finalized the FTAs with Panama and Colombia which were initiated under the Bush administration. However, it did not pursue further trade liberalization with the region countries. Globally, U.S. started to balance Asia-Pacific region by adding troops to the Pacific theatre, increasing its diplomatic presence in Asia, and by strengthening its alliances. In addition, Obama started promoting the TPP free trade agreement which included LAC countries of Chile, Peru, and Mexico, which according to Milani (2021, 123) was a mean to preserve the U.S. hegemony.

3.5 Trump's Yearn for Hegemony

Under President Obama the U.S. did not have a consistent approach toward LAC region policies while its overall strategy began shifting gradually toward Asia. However, even if Obama was able to bring LAC region even a bit closer to the U.S. with his rhetoric and renewing the relationship with Cuba, the following Trump administration took a completely different approach toward the region. According to Beckmann (2019) already during his presidential campaign Trump used strong xenophobic language toward the Latino immigrants and called them rapists and criminals. His electoral promises went together with his rhetoric as he promised to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexican border to stop the immigrant flows and to make Mexico pay for the constructions. Moreover, Trump promised to deport all the immigrants without legal status from the U.S. He also criticized Obama's Cuba rapprochement policy and claimed that the U.S. had made too many concessions to Cuba. Regarding trade, Trump showed deep scepticism for further trade liberation and promised to renew the NAFTA agreement with Mexico and Canada, claiming that the U.S. had been taken advantage of in trade deals. (Beckmann 2019, 83–84, 92.) During his presidency Trump's actions also indicated that he did not really care to improve relations with LAC as he visited the region only once as president which was for the G20 summit. Trump was also the first U.S. president to ever cancel the participation to the Summit of the Americas. (Alegría 2021, 2)

While in office, Trump continued to use xenophobic rhetoric toward Latino immigrants, referred Haiti and El Salvador as “shithole countries,” and threatened to rely on military power to solve the

crisis in Venezuela. However, despite Trump's hostile rhetoric and threats toward region, many of the U.S. policies in LAC region demonstrated continuity, just in more repressive tactics. (Avilés 2020, 286) These tactics were especially targeted against the anti-U.S. governments and as NSS 2017 stated the priority actions in the Western Hemisphere is the political isolation of governments which refuse to act as responsible partners, namely the leftist authoritarian countries of Cuba and Venezuela. (NSS 2017, 51). In this respect, at the beginning of his presidency Trump immediately reversed Obama's Cuba policies and imposed tighter restrictions on travel for the U.S. citizens to the Cuban island, prohibited doing business with companies controlled by the Cuban military, and returned Cuba to the list of countries sponsoring terrorism. However, Trump also kept a few of Obama's changes on Cuba policy and upheld the renewed diplomatic relations between the nations. Although after the alleged sonic attacks to the U.S. embassy in Havana Trump reduced the embassy staff to half and ordered similar reduction in the Cuban embassy in Washington. (Beckmann 2019, 93.) In 2020 Trump imposed additional sanctions against Cuba by restricting imports of Cuban rum and cigars, and banned Americans staying at properties which were owned by Cuban government. (Al Jazeera 2020, Krivolákov & Stepánova 2020, 35.) On Venezuela U.S. imposed several sanctions after the 2018 re-election of Nicolás Maduro and U.S. started officially recognizing the opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the Venezuelan legitimate president, aiming to pressure for a regime change. (Krivolákov & Stepánova 2020, 35; Campos & Prevost 2019, 21.) The imposed sanctions on Venezuela also included prohibiting Venezuela profiting from oil sales within the U.S., thus cutting important source of revenue from the Venezuelan government. This move was an action which was long avoided because the U.S. has been a major user of Venezuelan oil. (Gill 2020, 9; Campos & Prevost 2019, 21.)

The threats and repressive tactics by Trump did not limit only to Cuba and Venezuela as he threatened also other countries in the southern neighbourhood including its long-term allies of Colombia and Mexico with warnings that he would stop the foreign aid to these countries. However, when Trump tried to cut the foreign aid assistance including the funding for the anti-drug programmes, the Congress rejected these cuts. In the end, anti-drug operations funding was actually increased by \$230 million dollars which were allocated through DoD programs. The funding increase through DoD made the department for the first time as a primary source for military and police aid to LAC. In addition to increased funding for the anti-drug programmes the DoD increased its funding to the Mexican military and 1500 Mexican Marines were brought to U.S. to receive training from the U.S. military. (Avilés 2020, 294, 297–298.) These decisions were in line with NSS 2017 as in the military and security domain the main priorities in the Western Hemisphere were to support local efforts to professionalize police and security forces, improve information sharing, and disrupt the illicit

trafficking (NSS 2017, 51). The increased funding by DoD once again strengthened the security-oriented and threat-based approach toward LAC region.

However, in March 2019 Trump was able to suspend most of the aid for Central American (northern triangle) countries of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. The aid was cut because Trump was not pleased with the countries' ability to control the immigration flows. Trump's administration threatened to suspend the foreign aid until those governments are able to implement the actions to stop the immigration flows to U.S. However, in October 2019, the governments of the northern triangle and the U.S. reached an agreement with Washington leading to allocation of \$705 million of new and previously suspended funding to the region. Similar bargaining tactics were used against Mexico as Trump threatened to impose tariffs on Mexican imports unless Mexico does not reduce the migration flows through the Mexican border. (Bilotta 2020.) Overall, the foreign aid in constant dollars stayed slightly under the levels of Obama's second term (Figure 7), but during the Trump administration it was openly used as a coercive tool against the recipient countries.

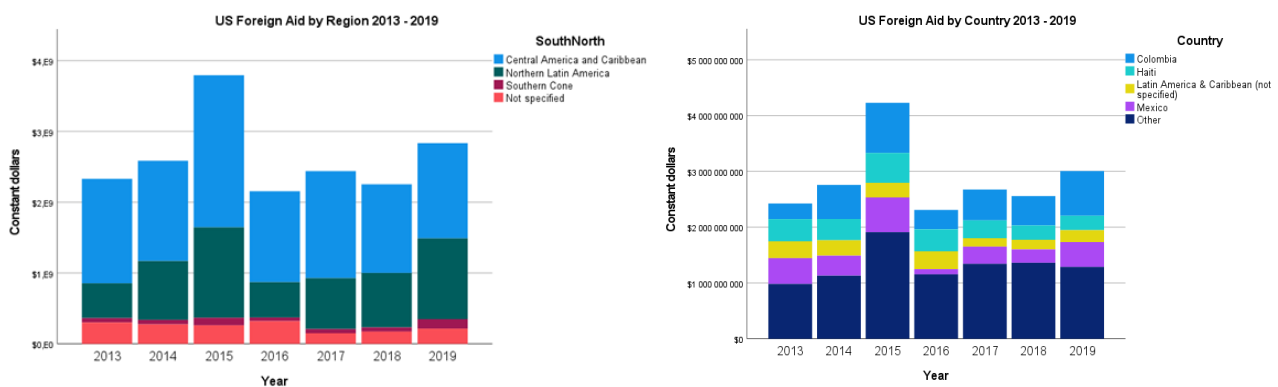


Figure 7 U.S. foreign aid by category 2009–2019 and by country between 2013–2016. Figures made by author.

In spite of major harms being avoided in the question of foreign aid, Trump's rhetoric and actions were quite harmful for the U.S. goals in the region as the political environment in LAC had recently become more politically friendly to it; the right-wing political parties and presidents came into power, and they started to oppose the previous search for regional integration and foreign policy autonomy. This rise of the right-wing parties was also one of the reasons why the main LAC integration structure of UNASUR began to lose its influence and eventually break down in 2018 due to divisions over ideology and Venezuela policy. (Katkova & Eremin 2022, 165; Long 2021, 123, Yang & Lee 2020, 597.) UNASUR was not the only regional structure which began to crack down as Ecuador and Bolivia withdrew from anti-U.S. ALBA organisation as Honduras had already done in 2010, although Bolivia re-joined the organisation later (Shabeer 2018, Xinhua 2019, Americas Quarterly 2010, Telesur 2020). The regional division and rise of the right-wing political parties made it possible to Trump administration to increase the pressure for a regime change in Venezuela as the U.S. was able to get the new conservative governments of Brazil and Argentina to break up LAC's unity. The

relations between U.S. and Brazil overall improved after Jair Bolsonaro won the Brazilian presidential elections as he was openly anti-China and pro-U.S. with his rhetoric, and he even visited Taiwan in 2018 making China furious. (Katkova & Eremin 2022, 166; Campos & Prevost 2019, 14, 21.) In the end, despite Trump's hostile rhetoric toward its neighbourhood he was able to find like-minded allies from Argentina's and Brazil's conservative governments (Gill 2020, 6).

The Trump administration did not use the aggressive rhetoric only toward the southern neighbourhood as the administration also started confronting China more strongly and it raised the Sino-U.S. relations on the level of strategic competition. Trump administration's trade advisor accused China of policies and practices of economic aggression and the administration's Secretary of State declared China being hostile to U.S. and its values (Nathan 2021, 388). In 2018, Trump started a trade war with China which included tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminium. Later the trade war expanded to consider the technology, and the administration decided to ban the U.S. exports to Chinese smartphone company ZTE. In addition Trump issued an executive order which banned Huawei from the U.S. markets and included the prohibition of component exports to the company. Later, the tech war between countries slightly eased as the sanctions against Chinese technology companies were lifted. However, the trade war between the countries continued and issues on technology remained tense. (Pires & Nascimento 2020, 124).

The negative perception of Chinese influence in the Western Hemisphere also intensified and according to Milani (2022, 1–2) SOUTHCOM's official documents show that the U.S. began to see the Western Hemisphere as rife with geopolitical conflict. This was in reversal to earlier Bush and Obama administrations as they had only raised some concerns about China's growing influence in the region and viewed China's economic engagement with LAC nations mostly as a benefits-for-all (Congressional Research Service 2022). Trump's administration, on the other hand, began to see that China's economic practices of state-led investment and loans was about pulling LAC states under its influence. Moreover, the NSS states that with its actions China is supporting the dictatorships in the region, and in Venezuela China is seeking to expand its military linkages together with Russia. (NSS 2017, 51.) This perception of China's influence in LAC led Trump to revive the Monroe Doctrine, which Obama had just five years ago denounced. The revival was made in 2018 when Trump gave a speech in UN General Assembly where he declared that "It has been the formal policy of our country since President Monroe that we reject the interference of foreign nations in this hemisphere and in our own affairs." (Trump 2018). In 2019, Trump's former National Security Advisor Bolton also confirmed that the Monroe Doctrine was alive and well (Bilotta 2020). China's actions were now seen as a threat to U.S.' hegemony in the region after the period of "benefits-for-all" approach by the Bush and Obama administration.

According to Milani (2022) even the Trump administration began to see LAC region from the perspective of strategic competition and geopolitical contest, it did not dedicate any additional military resources to the region. However, while the U.S. military power was kept in similar levels there was a clear change in DoD's perception of China's activities in the hemisphere. SOUTHCOM's policy documents began to label China as a "malign actor." And the idea of China's "malign influence" also appeared during the nomination of Lt. General Richardson. SOUTHCOM's Admiral Kurt also described the threat posed by China stating that "the larger strategic challenge posed by China in this region is not yet a military one. It is an economic one." (Milani 2022, 7–8.) In the SOUTHCOM's posture statement Admiral Faller described the Western Hemisphere as "a critical space in the global competition" – a challenge posed by China and Russia. In the posture statement it was recognized that with its infrastructure investments through "One Belt One Road Initiative" (BRI) China had bring total of nineteen countries under its influence. In the posture statement it was stated that the most serious threats caused by China's investments concerned the deep-water ports and telecommunication systems. The deep-water port investments could pose a serious threat to the movement of U.S. forces near the Panama Canal while its telecommunication systems could intercept the valuable information which is shared with partner governments. Making remarks to the NDS, Faller noted that the goal of the U.S. is to keep the hemisphere stable, peaceful, and to maintain a favourable regional balance of power. This goal according to Admiral Faller would be achieved by strengthening the partnerships in the region and interagency cooperation with the State Department, USAID, Department of Homeland Security and the intelligence and law enforcement communities. (Faller 2020, 1, 3–5.) According to Milani's research (2022, 9) SOUTHCOM's commanders saw that from the SOUTHCOM's perspective deepening the military-to-military ties with the region was an important mean to maintain U.S. leadership in the region.

The SOUTHCOM's aim for military-to-military cooperation to strengthen the U.S. regional position in LAC and Trump's friendship with the right-wing Brazilian president Bolsonaro led Trump to designate Brazil as a major non-NATO ally (MNNA) in 2019. In his letter to the Congress Trump stated that he is making "the designation in recognition of ... Brazil's recent commitments to increase defense cooperation with the United States, and in recognition of our own national interest in deepening our defense coordination with Brazil." In March 2019, Trump had also considered offering Brazil also a full membership in NATO, although this plan did not materialize. (Vandiver 2019.) However, by designation Brazil came the second state in LAC region to receive MNNA status, as Argentina had been nominated in 1998 by the Clinton administration (Sims 1997). In addition to deepening mil-to-mil cooperation between Brazil and the U.S. in July 2019 Trump's administration was also able to extend Comapala basing (CSL) agreement with the government of El Salvador to

2024 which otherwise would have ended in 2020. (U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command n.d.). In addition, U.S. was able to return to bilateral military cooperation with Ecuador in 2018. The cooperation included training and assistance which aimed at improving Ecuador's ability to combat against shared threats. (U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Ecuador 2018.) However, during the Trump administration it was recognized by the SOUTHCOM that the sole military power was no longer suitable to counter China's activities and influence in LAC region. SOUTHCOM understood that U.S. needs to adopt an approach that takes a whole-of-government approach in which military power is just one tool to counter China (Milani 2022, 9).

3.6 Countering China's Economic Influence

Since 2005, China's policy banks had made \$136 billion dollars in loans to LAC, and since 2001 its companies had made more than \$160 billion dollars in investments to LAC region. Moreover, China-LAC trade had increased already to \$330 billion dollars. (Ellis 2021, 3.) In addition, in 2013 China had launched its massive economic BRI project, and despite fact that LAC was not originally part of the BRI things started to change. In 2017 China's President Xi Jinping praised LAC region as an important participant in the construction of the BRI during the official visit of Panamanian President Varela to Beijing. And soon after the visit, Panama became the first LAC country to officially join the BRI by signing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with China. (Kung 2019, 193–194.) But the real turning point to wider LAC participation in the BRI was the 2018 Santiago China-CELAC Ministerial Forum when special memoranda on BRI was signed concerning the region (Pires & Nascimento 2020, 122). And by May 2019 already nineteen out of 33 LAC countries had joined China's BRI (Kung 2019, 193).

Trump's administration became to be the first U.S. government which only condemned China's international investment strategy. In 2018, Trump's former Vice President accused China's investments and loans being "debt-trap diplomacy" and accused it offering hundreds of billions in infrastructure loans, which benefit overwhelmingly Beijing. (Widakuswara, 2021.) U.S. saw that by offering BRI projects to LAC countries China's investment strategy was aimed at expanding its influence (NSS 2017, 38). This was because the BRI participant states needed to recognize Beijing over Taipei due to China's "One China" -principle. When the U.S. found out that the smaller CAC states of Ecuador, Panama, and Dominican Republic decided to switch the recognition to Beijing State Department assembled the ambassadors in Panama, Santo Domingo, and San Salvador for consultations to demonstrate its discontent with changing the recognition. Moreover, on September 2018, U.S. Senate decided to approve the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement

Initiative (TAIPEI Act) which states that the State Department may downgrade the U.S. relations or suspend the U.S. assistance with any government which decides to move away from Taiwan. (Pires & Nacimiento 2020, 127.)

However, while it was widely recognized by different U.S. departments that the challenge posed by China was largely economic, Trump's economic countering of China was mixed. Trump administration's NSS 2017 (2017, 18) states that the U.S. "will pursue an economic strategy that rejuvenates the domestic economy, benefits the American worker, and revitalizes the U.S. manufacturing". NSS 2017 also states that the U.S.' priority actions concerning the Western Hemisphere is to modernize the trade agreements and to "deepen our economic ties with the region and ensure that trade is fair and reciprocal" (NSS 2017, 51). This wording of the NSS 2017 and Trump's deep scepticism toward interdependent global economy and free trade implied that he would not care to improve free trade with the region. In fact, Trump criticized multilateral trade agreements such Obama's promoted TPP and NAFTA and expressed his concerns about trade deficits with the countries such as China and Mexico and pledged to counter against every country that cheats by using tariffs and taxes. (MacDonald 2018, 410–411.)

This scepticism toward free trade led Trump at the first day of his administration to sign a decree that ordered the U.S. to leave the TPP negotiations (Krivoláfov & Stepánova 2020, 33). Later, Trump's administration also started to renegotiate the NAFTA agreement between Mexico and Canada by eventually replacing it with "the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement" through which U.S. gained some small concessions which served American industries (Bilotta 2020). The retreat from the TPP agreement, however, created backlash to the Trump administration as the LAC participant states Chile, Peru, and Mexico reacted to the announcement by signalling that they would seek deeper trade relations with China instead. China also saw its opportunity in the situation and invited these nations to its promoted Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) -grouping. (Wigell & Soliz Landivar 2018, 175). However, Trump's administration still saw the free trade agreements harmful for the American workers and U.S. businesses but concerned about China's rising influence it started to counter China's economic activity in the region in another way, more suitable for American industries.

In 2018, U.S. Senate approved the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act "Build Act" which created a new U.S. governmental institution: the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (IDFC) (Runde & Bandura 2018). The act proposed to "facilitate the participation of private sector capital and skills in the economic development of countries with low- or lower-middle-income economies" and one of its statements is "to provide countries a robust alternative to state-directed investments by authoritarian governments and United States strategic

competitors.” The IDFC combined the old foreign aid institutions of OPIC and USAID into a joint institution which doubled the amount of U.S. foreign economic development financing to \$60 billion dollars. In addition, the IDFC institution was given new capabilities such as technical assistance and equity financing for the recipient governments. (Gowling WLG 2018.) In the Reorganization Plan (White House 2019) it was stated that this new institution would bring a “robust alternative to the Chinese state-directed, debt-heavy model.” In 2019, together with this new investment tool the U.S. announced to do cooperation with Australia and Japan to create the Blue Dot Network (BDN) which aims at building and financing quality infrastructure investments around the world (Arha 2021).

The NSS 2017 recognized LAC being one of the regions in the world which wanted to have more investments and financing which would develop their infrastructure and boost economic growth. According to NSS American-led investments into the region represents “the most sustainable and responsible approach to development” than the authoritarian ones. NSS also stated that partnering with these countries would boost the U.S. economy as countries would buy more U.S. made goods. (NSS 2017, 39, 51.) In this spirit, Trump’s administration launched an economic initiative called “América Crece.” The goal of the América Crece or “Growth in Americas” aimed at facilitating private sector investments in energy and infrastructure projects in LAC. With the whole-of-government approach the América Crece initiative aimed at supporting economic development, promote market diversification, energy security, and continued growth connecting the U.S. private sector to opportunities in the region. (U.S. Department of State, n.d.) The América Crece initiative was well received in the region and fourteen countries agreed to sign Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. concerning the initiative. However, the initiative did not receive any additional federal funding and money for the initiative was allocated from the IDFC budget. There is also a lack of information what projects the initiative have supported, but those major loans which are known, have focused on fossil fuel projects. These projects include \$1 billion dollar loan to Ecuador for gas power plant and liquid natural gas import terminal and \$300 dollar loan to Argentina for shale gas projects. (Youkee 2020.) But in addition, the initiative has a funded hydroelectric project in Honduras and infrastructure projects in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (Abbot 2020).

In total the IDFC investments was not able to bring alternative to BRI as the investments done by the IDFC have funded different sectors than China’s initiative. Planned infrastructure investments have been only a small part (10 percent) of the total funding made by the IDFC. (Roberts & Schaefer 2021, 7–8.) But in addition to reorganizing the foreign aid institutions and founding the new initiatives to counter China’s economic influence in the region, U.S. decided to instigate a diplomatic information campaign against China in which it warned developing countries of Chinese “debt-trap diplomacy” (Pires & Nacimiento 2020, 127). In Panama, U.S. diplomatic push became successful as Panama

decided to frozen trade talks with China and disqualify its companies before the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no information what the discussion with U.S. delegation and Panama's President has included, but when U.S. National Security Advisor later gave a speech in Panama, he stated that "True friends are there for each other when times get tough...thanks to China, unfortunately, these days are very tough." (Youkee 2020). And as the Trump started to confront China in LAC more aggressively with its economic and diplomatic manoeuvres, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this process further.

The disruption to supply chains and to global economy caused by the COVID-19 pandemic got the U.S. government to push the dependence away from Chinese supply chains and production more strongly. As one official from the Trump administration stated, "This moment is a perfect storm; the pandemic has crystallized all the worries that people have had about doing business with China." Trump administration's official stated that the U.S. has been working to reduce its dependence on China already for a few years, but now the government is "turbo-charging" this initiative. In 2020, U.S. announced that it is collaborating with its trusted partners of "Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam to move global economy forward." In this respect the government. started promoting its "Economic Prosperity Network" which included the discussions how the participant states can restructure their supply chains. Recognizing the U.S. restructuring goals, some of the LAC countries saw also their possibility; Colombian Ambassador in the U.S. encouraged a discussion with the White House, National Security Council, Treasure Department and the U.S Chamber of Commerce that U.S. companies should move supply chains closer. (Pamuk & Shalal 2020.) The Colombian proposition became to be successful as when the U.S. delegation later visited Colombia, it announced that Colombia will participate U.S.' "Back To America" or "Regreso a América" program to secure government's "nearshoring" initiative. In this respect U.S. promised to support the program through "Colombia Crece" by \$5 billion dollars. (Semana 2020.)

The most intriguing thing, however, happened on the last days of the Trump administration. The U.S. made agreement with the Ecuadorian government that the IDFC pays Ecuador's loans back to China. In exchange for this hospitality Ecuador agreed to exclude Chinese telecom companies for constructing its national telecom networks. In the agreement Ecuador signed up for the U.S. "Clean Network Initiative" which aims at excluding China's telecom service providers and services in partnering governments. The agreement between the countries also aimed at boosting Ecuadorian economy by private sector-based investments which IDFC would help to allocate. The investments were about to buy Ecuadorian oil and Ecuador's infrastructure assets. (Sevatopulo 2021; Bruni 2021.) However, in the end Trump's administration Clean Network Initiative was not very popular among

LAC nations as only Dominican Republic joined the initiative in addition to Ecuador (U.S. Embassy in the Dominican Republic 2020).

During President Trump U.S.-LAC relations were seen through xenophobia, countering immigration with threats and building walls, "America First" approach to trade and foreign aid, and reviving the Monroe Doctrine together with harder stance against Cuba and Venezuela. Trump neglected multilateral engagement with the region by not attending to the Summit of Americas and pressuring allies like Mexico to make concessions for the good of U.S. manufacturing jobs. But despite the xenophobic rhetoric and threats, U.S. was able to hold on to its traditional policies and Trump was able to find some like-minded allies from the newly elected right-wing presidents. He was even capable creating cooperation in military and economic spheres as he began countering Chinese economic influence in the region more actively. At the global context, Trump's administration recognized China officially as its strategic competitor, which influence it began to counter through trade war, tariffs, and harder diplomatic rhetoric. In LAC region China's economic practices were countered through the América Crece initiative and IDFC funding. The economic initiatives and investments, however, did not successfully targeted China's investments as they relied more on private sector and allocated funding mainly to energy projects.

3.7 Biden's Latin America Reset

Already before his presidency Joseph Biden had considerable experience in LAC policies. Biden had received his first experiences of LAC policies already when he was a U.S. senator during Clinton's term. At the time he was a member of the Foreign Relations Committee in which he helped to secure funding for the Plan Colombia. Later, during Obama's administration Biden acted as Vice President and was nominated for a special envoy to the region. In the position of special envoy he visited the LAC region on several occasions and worked particularly on the migration crisis in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador to help stem the migration at its source. (Main 2021.) During his LAC tour as a special envoy Biden presented his personal vision for the region while visiting in Guatemala in 2016. In his speech he envisioned of the hemisphere which "was secure, middle class and democratic, from the northern reaches of Canada to the southern tip of Chile." Moreover, his plan included to deal with the root causes of migration in the northern triangle countries and rely on multilateralism. (Paz 2020.) Due to his considerable experience in LAC policies, and knowing the region's attitude toward Trump era policies, President Biden promised in his campaign to give more attention to LAC region and roll back the restrictions what Trump had implemented. Moreover, he promised to "re-engage with the world, working to uphold democracy, human rights, and the rule of

law through cooperation and alliances.” (WOLA 2022.) In the NSS 2022 Biden recognized that the Western Hemisphere impacts to U.S. national security more than any other region in the world and thus it is vital for the U.S. to deepen its partnerships with the region countries. (NSS 2022, 40.)

Hence, already during his first year Biden showed a major shift in rhetoric and approach toward the region. In his first year Biden showed that administration’s goal was to concentrate more on partnerships and cooperation instead of “America First” approach of the previous administration. Against its adversaries U.S. placed sanctions which targeted the individual leaders instead of the sanctions which would have punished the entire population. Biden also extended the temporary immigration law which gave eligible immigrants protection in the U.S and he also added this right to concern Venezuelan citizens. While having more humane approach to migration overall, he also developed a strategy which began to tackle the root causes of migration from Central America. (WOLA 2022.) The strategy includes \$4 billion dollar aid in the next four years to the northern triangle countries. As a result the foreign economic aid to the region has seen already a significant increase compared to previous administration. The foreign aid request for the full year 2023 has also been the biggest in decade. (Congressional Research Service 2023, 4–7.) Biden’s administration has also donated over \$55 million COVID-19 vaccines to LAC and provided \$614 million dollars to support the pandemic response (WOLA 2022). Thus, it seems that for the first time in the 21st century the U.S. is seriously taking the whole-of-government approach to LAC region after the extended period of militarization.

Even though Biden has taken overall more humane approach toward LAC policies it has not, at least to date, filled all his electoral promises. It also seems that the Biden administration will hold on to some of the traditional U.S. policies especially concerning the anti-drug initiatives and anti-U.S. regimes. Concerning the anti-drug programmes of Plan Colombia and Mérida Initiative administration has continued the traditional approach of supply reduction. Although, it has showed some shift to more holistic direction as the new agreements with Colombia and Mexico concerning the programmes have included sections on rural governance, justice promotion, enforcement of rule of law, and environmental protection. However, toward the anti-U.S. governments the administration policy approach has not seen any major shifts. In 2021, the administration made clear that the improvement of relations with Cuba is not a priority. Later the administration confirmed that the improvement of relations was put on hold due to large social unrest on the island and subsequent violent response by the Cuban government (WOLA 2022). On Venezuela Biden has also continued to keep the Trump administration’ stance not to recognize or negotiate with Maduro’s regime while it keeps recognizing Guaidó as the legitimate Venezuelan president (Alegria 2021, 5). The approach toward these governments has been described in his administration’s NSS in which states that the

administration “will support *democratic*²⁰ self-determination for the people of Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua” (NSS 2022, 41). Thus, while different in rhetoric, the historical policy of containment and the goal for a regime change in anti-U.S. governments continues.

The aim to separate these governments from rest of the hemisphere became particularly clear when Biden’s overall “reset” of U.S-LAC relations was supposed to start in the Summit of Americas in Los Angeles in 2022 (Reuters 2022). The organization of the summit which aimed at focusing on pandemic recovery, democracy, climate change, equitable growth, and effective technology utilization became a diplomatic nightmare to the U.S (WOLA 2022). Biden’s administration announced that it will not invite Cuba, Venezuela, or Nicaragua to the summit as these governments do not respect the democratic principles which Biden has promised to endorse during his presidency. This decision to leave these anti-democratic countries out of the summit faced a strong disapproval in LAC governments leading to threats to boycott the whole summit. Leaders of CARICOM, Mexican, Bolivian, and Honduran presidents announced that they would not participate in the summit if U.S. plans to exclude any hemispheric country. The Brazilian and Argentinian presidents also hinted that they might cancel the participation. Due to pressure, Biden’s administration eased off and announced that it will relief the sanctions imposed by President Trump, which were the legal obstacle to invite these countries to the summit. However, the Nicaraguan, Cuban and Venezuelan presidents announced that they would not participate in the summit even if invited. (Montoya 2022.) Thus, it seems that improving the relations with these governments can be challenging task also for the Biden administration which increasing strategic competition with China does not make it any easier.

According to Nathan (2021) the Sino-U.S. relations during the Biden administration has not shown any major signs of shifts and it looks like that administration will continue confronting China; Biden has retained the tariffs on Chinese imports, upgraded Taiwan’s protocol status, increased patrolling in South China Sea, and continued to define China as U.S. strategic competitor. However, the strategy of current administration differs from the previous as now the focus of has been to improve U.S.’ own competitiveness both domestically and internationally. According to Nathan Biden’s strategy against China includes stronger cooperation with partners and allies; partial hedging of economic and technology relationship, but also search for areas of cooperation. (Nathan 2021, 387–389.) However, concerning the Western Hemisphere Biden saw already during his presidential campaign that China’s growing influence in LAC is a danger to the U.S. national security (Walter 2021). This form of approach is also reflected in his administration’s NSS as it states that the Sino-U.S. competition in LAC is geopolitical and geoeconomical in nature and China is seeking a stronger military- and intelligence foothold in the region. And as the Western Hemisphere impacts to U.S. more than any

²⁰ Emphasis added.

other region in the world the Biden administration will continue to deepen partnerships to advance economic resilience, democratic stability, and citizen security in the region. (NSS 2022, 41.) This approach, as SOUTHCOM's general Richardson (2023) has it called, is a strategy of "integrated deterrence".

The U.S. SOUTHCOM's General L. Richardson sees that the main threats in LAC for U.S. national security are China, Russia, and transnational criminal organizations. In an interview organized by the Atlantic Council she described how especially malign state actors have become highly active in the region at the time of strategic competition. According to her, region's transnational criminal organizations are enabling these state actors to work in LAC more efficiently. She described how Russia is working with states like Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua by providing them military equipment. Although the cooperation has now decreased as Russia needs its own resources in its war of aggression toward Ukraine. But while Russia's regional influence has decreased, Richardson raised worries about Chinese infrastructure investments. She showed particular concern about Chinese investments to deep water ports and telecommunication networks. According to her, the threat caused by these investments are that they can have dual-use possibility which for example can threaten the vital sea lines of communication as Panama Canal. She stated that SOUTHCOM makes a lot of effort that partner countries know these threats caused by the Chinese investments and SOUTHCOM cooperates and helps the partner governments to protect their critical infrastructure. However, she saw that while many countries acknowledge the dangers dealing with China, they do not have any other choice than to rely on Chinese investments and loans as nobody else is making the bids. According to her many countries in LAC are still suffering from the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic making many governments desperate for funding. According to Richardson U.S. is not investing in the region as much it should be. She also stated that the investments done by the U.S. should be targeted especially to critical infrastructure while stating that the goal is to keep the threats twenty yard away from the U.S. borders. (Richardson 2023.)

And while U.S. has not been able to offer serious increased economic cooperation in the form of trade and investments China has been making the effort. According to Congressional Research Service (2022) Chinese trade with LAC had grown already to more than 430 billion in 2021. In 2022 it was the biggest trading partner in countries of Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentine, Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Cuba and the second biggest trading partner of the whole region. Since 2005, it has loaned over \$140 billion to region's governments, mainly to Venezuela, Ecuador, Brazil, and Argentina. China has signed MoUs already with twenty countries concerning the BRI and through the initiative it has sent billions of sovereign FDIs to infrastructure projects which have targeted highways, bridges, hydroelectric dams, and port facilities. China's state-owned businesses also

continue to recruit and bribe government officials in the region to expand its political, economic, and military influence. These activities include investments in strategic infrastructure, systematic technology theft, disinformation and propaganda campaigns which all have the goal of expanding its long-term access and influence in the Western Hemisphere. (Congressional Research Service 2022.)

The growth of Chinese economic activity shows that the U.S. has not been able to decrease China's economic ambitions even though it started to offer option to LAC governments in the form of América Crece initiative during the Trump administration. And while the U.S. created the new IDFC institution and increased the U.S. development capacity, it seems that these changes have not been effective enough to allocate investment and to inhibit Chinese growing investments. As stated above by General Richardson U.S. has not been able to do enough in this domain. The same kind of statement came from Colombia's President Iván Duque soon after the U.S. designated Colombia as a MNNA²¹ in 2022: "We haven't seen that much American companies participating. They have to be more present, not only in Colombia but in the rest of Latin America." (Laco, Trulio, Evansky 2022). These statements by Colombian President and General Richardson shows the unpleasant fact that the U.S. has not been able to drive the private sector-based investment to the region as has been its goal. However, while the earlier strategic economic tools have not yet functioned properly Biden administration has shown that it is really trying to make an effort in this field.

In addition to increased foreign economic aid, COVID-19 support, and \$4 billion root causes strategy Biden administration launched a new economic initiative together with G7 partners called "the Build Back Better World" (B3W) which aimed at "creating a values-driven, high standard, and transparent infrastructure partnership to help finance projects in developing countries." Through the B3W initiative G7 partners targeted to facilitate massive \$40 trillion dollars to development projects. (Widakuswara 2021) The initiative concerned the regions reaching from LAC to Africa to the Indo-Pacific while different G7 partners had their separate geographical priorities. In U.S. the B3W initiative also included the domestic version which aimed at increasing domestic infrastructure investments. (The White House 2021.) However, the domestic version of B3W failed as it was not able to get bipartisan support in the Congress, and thus the administration decided to rebrand the whole B3W initiative completely (Ahlman 2022). The initiative was rebranded to Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), and it was promoted slightly differently. While the initiative still addressed the need for the infrastructure investments in developing countries the description of new PGII points also several times to U.S. and its allies' national security. The initial \$40 trillion target was also reduced to \$600 billion of which the U.S. aims to mobilize \$200 billion

²¹ U.S. designated Colombia as the Major Non-NATO Ally in May 2022 (The White House 2022c), making it the third Latin American country to receive that status.

over the next five years in grants, federal financing, and leveraging private sector investments. (The White House 2022a).

The PGII has not been the only economic policy initiative which the Biden administration has promoted. In the Summit of Americas in 2022 the administration announced a new economic initiative especially concerning LAC region; the America Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) Initiative. Through the APEP initiative administration aims at mobilizing new investments, fortify supply chains, creating clean energy, promote decarbonization and biodiversity, facilitate inclusive trade, and update “social contract” between the governments and their people by allocating funding through the hemispheric regional economic institutions such as IDB (The White House 2022b). Concerning the APEP initiative Biden administration announced in January 2023, that it will start to negotiate with eleven LAC governments to promote regional economic cooperation, namely with Chile, Canada, Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, and Barbados. A government official stated that with this initiative the administration is trying to create new rules by which American workers can compete while establishing a new global code of conduct. (Lynch & DeYoung 2023.) But, according to Lynch & DeYoung (2023) the APEP initiative reflects the administration’s attempt to create stronger regional cooperation in times when the Congress opposes further trade liberalization, as many Congress members blame the free trade to be a cause for loss of millions of American jobs. Biden APEP initiative also seems to target those countries which are mostly locating in the CAC region and where the U.S. is still the number one trading partner.

According to NSS 2022 (NSS 2022, 40) the APEP initiative aims at securing the supply chains in the Western Hemisphere. Biden thus continues the initiative started by the previous administration as Trump promoted his “Back to America” nearshoring initiative with LAC governments to hedge the dependence on Chinese supply chains. This continued nearshoring plan can be tempting opportunity for LAC countries as according to recent calculation done by IDB (2022) nearshoring can add \$78 billion dollars of annual exports from Latin America and the Caribbean. While all the countries in the hemisphere will benefit from nearshoring, Mexico and Brazil would see the biggest gains. Moreover, the APEP initiative has not been the only economic policy development to secure supply chains which concerns LAC region. As COVID-19 pandemic still threatened the U.S. economy and strategic competition with China remained tense, Biden made an executive order to governmental agencies to prepare strategies against possible vulnerabilities. In February 2021, he ordered to identify risks to supply chains and highlighted the importance of “reshoring” which aims at bringing jobs back to the U.S. (Wood 2021.) In January 2023, Biden administration’s request was answered as a new bill was introduced to Congress. In the bill the plan for “nearshoring” in the Western Hemisphere was

introduced and its aim is to decrease dependency on China's manufacturing while at the same decrease migration from LAC due to lost regional economic opportunities. (Congress 2023.)

In addition to economic initiatives to counterbalance Chinese economic influence in LAC the Biden administration has enacted series of laws that include the supervision of Chinese activities in the region. In December 2021, Congress enacted the National Defense Authorization Act for the Fiscal Year 2022 which requires reporting on China's efforts to expand its presence and influence in the region. In 2022, Congress enacted the NDAA which requires reporting of the activities undertaken by China to increase influence in LAC as well China's infrastructure and port investments which are critical to U.S. interests and national security. Senate has also approved the United States Innovation and Competition Act and the Americas COMPETES Act which both require to form a strategy to strengthen the U.S. economic competitiveness and promote good governance, human rights, and the rule of law in the region. Acts also require reporting on China's engagement in international organizations and in the defense sector and to support U.S. defense cooperation in LAC. (Congressional Research Service 2022).

Now it seems that during the Biden administration the strategic competition with China in regional context has evolved meaningfully. The competition has expanded into different domains as the nature of competition has been recognized to be geopolitical and geoeconomical in nature. The foreign policy tools used by U.S. are becoming more economy-focused while military-to-military cooperation between nations is also strengthened. The perception of the LAC's geography has also shifted, while the earlier administrations saw the region as a source of threats Biden administration has seen it now also a possible location to reduce the U.S. dependency on Chinese manufacturing. The old threats are of course still existing, but the threat coming from Asia is now the number one priority.

4. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOECONOMICS STRATEGY

In the chapter three I have introduced a thick narrative of U.S.-Latin America relations in the 21st century as a first part of my AN research. The narrative consisted of four presidential eras starting from President Bush and ending to the current administration of President Biden. While constructing the narrative I have relied on the descriptive literature on U.S.-Latin America relations while also added complementary information from the relevant government documents, news articles, foreign aid and trade statistics, and information from the NSS' and NDS'. In the narrative I have presented how different foreign policy tools were used by the U.S. government toward LAC region and how the emphasis on different tools have varied over time. The narrative has also exposed the regional

focus of different foreign policy tools and the reconfiguration and foundation of new ones. In addition, the narrative has presented how different LAC governments have reacted to the U.S. policies and how different policies have affected the relations. The narrative has also exposed how the new regional and global state actors and organizations began arising on the hemisphere creating new challenges and threats to the U.S. national security in the region. But before I start analysing the narrative more thoroughly, in this chapter I introduce the analytic framework of geopolitical and geoeconomic strategies which are built on the earlier research considering these analytical tools. The analytical framework is based on the framework created by Wigell & Vihma (2016) considering these strategies. Their original framework is complemented with the geoeconomic strategy attributes recognized by Kim (2021) and with tools recognized by other literature. However, before I get to the framework itself, I briefly introduce the analytical concepts of geopolitics and geoeconomics and their ontological and epistemological presumptions in the next two subchapters. By introducing the concepts I illustrate the need to complement the original framework introduced by Wigell & Vihma (2016) to include factors concerning geography more strongly.

4.1 Geopolitics

The concept of geopolitics is very old, and the credit of the word goes to a Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen. To Kjellen geopolitics meant that territorial factors are especially important in shaping political life of state. However, since the times of Kjellen the meanings attached to the word have kept changing and different theories of geopolitics have been presented. (Raza 2020, 20–21.) One of the earliest geopolitical theorists was a British geopolitician Mackinder. He developed his theory of “heartland” considering the landmass of Eurasia which he referred as the “world island.” According to his theory the one who controls the Eurasian heartland, controls the Eurasia, and the one who controls the Eurasia, controls the entire world. This Mackinder’s version of geopolitics was the first theory to give considerable attention to the relationship between military power and the control of physical environment. Later, building on Mackinder’s thoughts, American geopolitician Spykman developed his theory of “Rimland.” Contrary to Mackinder’s “Heartland” -thesis, Spykman’s theory gave maritime power and control of the coastal areas a more pivotal role controlling the continents. (Sloan 2017, 46.) In addition to Mackinder and Spykman theories, another earliest geopolitician Mahan also highlighted the importance of geography to the global balance of power which centre was Eurasia. Mahan saw that naval power of Anglo-American nations was the key to ensure the geopolitical pluralism in Asia which was subsequently key to global dominance (Sempa 2014).

Unfortunately, during the WWII the concept of geopolitics started to become associated with Nazi-German idea of “Geopolitik” which badly discredited the whole concept for awhile. However, the concept of geopolitics did not get forgotten and the interest toward the concept started again during the Cold War and its aftermath, while the collapse of the Soviet Union and the terrorist attacks to New York city also opened new areas of geopolitical study. (Raza 2020, 25–26.) Overall, from Kjellen to contemporary traditional geopolitics, different theories of geopolitics have concentrated on the political and strategic significance of geography. The aim of the geopolitical theories has been to analyse the links and causal relationship between politics and geographical space. More specifically, geopolitics has comprised the distribution of political and military power. (Haas, Tibold & Cillessen 2006, 9.)

According to Kelly (2006) there are two main approaches to geopolitics in contemporary academic research: the positivist oriented classical/traditional approach and the modern critical one. However, the concept as a whole has lacked unified approach, and according to Kelly this is due to inherently inexact nature of IR theories and due to the different views of the purpose of theory; should the theory be “descriptive/explanatory or interpretive/expository, whether problem-solving or critical.” For this reason contemporary geopolitics has evolved into different theoretical approaches and perceptions, while also the theoretical approaches themselves are not definitive. This also considers the classical theory as the approach has various description and definitions considering the concept. However, usually they focus on the certain geographical features and how these affect foreign and strategic policies. The common feature of the classical approaches is that they rely on modernist ontological thought which finds a reality that could be observed, and which is distinct from the observer. Kelly states that this type of approach favours “empirical, logical and intuitive formulation of facts into theory based upon probability” and according to him researchers who favour this approach often rely on the use of “rational actor” or “expected utility” assumption, which means that the political leaders are thought to make decisions and actions based on state’s best interests which correspond with geographical realities. These spatial generalizations are then utilized by the foreign affairs experts who apply these to policies. (Kelly 2006, 24–27.)

In classical geopolitics the perception is that geography effects to a state’s foreign policy and this connection is observable. According to Kelly the epistemological relationship between foreign policy and geographical position can be presented by using theories which are “based on observations, intuition, and statistical examination.” While studying the impact of geography to foreign policies researchers can study for example history and geography which are connected to strategy and diplomacy. In this way researcher can formulate an explanation how geographical factors affect foreign policy choices and actions. Here, researcher can cite to objective reality and explain what she

is observing so others can repeat the observations and test the conclusions. Researcher may visualize for an example the strategic areas, relative positions, and resources of the world. According to Kelly classical theory aims “to simplify, to reduce to the obvious, and to work toward probability where it might exist.” Here, researcher is forced to assume the premise of rationality of political leaders who make decisions in the best interests of the state, and to assume that the geographical features affect to these decisions and subsequent actions, at least in some degree. (Kelly 2006, 38–39, 41, 44–45.) However, while analysing foreign policy with a theory of geopolitics it should not be understood as geographical determinism. As Sloan (2017, 44) argues the use of geopolitical theory does not mean that geography determines the entire state’s foreign policy and subsequent strategy of a state. According to Sloan geography rather presents the opportunities and constraints for policymakers and politicians. He argues that in addition to geography, there are many other factor that affect state’s foreign policy, for example state’s strategic culture.

As we have seen in the brief discussion above geopolitics and different geopolitical theories (especially classical theories) take a strong approach to geography and/or things firmly attached to it, for example military power or natural resources. Special attention in many geopolitical theories is particularly given to distribution of political and military power with aim to analyse the causal relationship between political power and geographical space (Raza 2020, 20). Geopolitics thus assumes that geography affects, at least partially, states’ foreign policies and this factor can be observed. However, this does not mean that geography determines the whole foreign policy as also many other factors influence on the choices and decisions of the state. And due to advancement of technology the importance of geography itself can also change (Raza 2020, 18). But while geopolitics have concentrated mostly on military power projection, Edvard Lutwakk (1990, 19) argues that the importance of military power and military alliances is declining and argues that economic power is replacing military power in international affairs. Also Negut (2016, 9) argues that state’s geostrategy is no longer simply tied to military rationale which reflects the evolution of society and complex environment of contemporary states where the use of military power can lead to a political defeat or where military weapons can be impractical against economic ones. In the next subchapter I introduce the contemporary understanding of the concept of geoeconomics and how the concept differs and coincides with the concept of geopolitics.

4.2 Geoeconomics

Economic statecraft and the use of economic tools as a form of foreign policy is not a very new phenomenon as already the imperialistic powers used economic policies to achieve their strategic

objectives (Gertz & Evers 2020, 118–119). But the first who introduced the term “geo-economics” was an American military strategist Edward Luttwak. In his article Luttwak argues that the importance of military power and military alliances is declining, and that the logic of conflict in international relations is moving into the realm of commerce. In his article he calls this new conflicting logic of commerce as “geo-economics.” However, at the time of its publication Luttwak’s geoeconomic paradigm was not very popular in academia as it was not very useful framework to study the liberal era politics of economic cooperation and integration. (Scholvin & Wigell 2018a, 75, Luttwak 1990, 19.) However, in the last few years the concept of geoeconomics has become more prominent which can be due to rise of new economically powerful states such as China (Mattlin & Wigell 2015, 126). But despite the rising popularity of the concept, there does not exist a commonly agreed definition of the concept while some are just using it as a “catchword” without making any clear definitions what it means or includes (Scholvin & Wigell 2018a, 74). The understanding of the concept also diverges between the researchers and research disciplines, but according to Scholvin & Wigell (2019, 4) the current understanding can be divided roughly in two camps: those who are close to the original Luttwakian idea of geoeconomics, and those who are far from it or do not consider it at all the same.^{22 23} In the Luttwakian approach the term is often associated with the use of economic power advancing state’s interests in international affairs. For example Wigell (2016, 135) argues that geoeconomics is “geostrategic use of economic power” while Scholvin together with Wigell (2018b, 4) argue that geoeconomics is state’s foreign policy strategy to achieve strategic objectives.

While the concept of geoeconomics is still in its early stage of development, so is its relationship with concept of geopolitics, which has led to the debate that are these concepts the same. However, there are authors who have developed the theory of geoeconomics further and clarified also its relationship with geopolitics. For example Blackwill & Harris (2016, 20) have defined geoeconomics as “the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations’ economic actions on a country’s geopolitical goals.” With their definition they argue that geoeconomics stands as a method of analysis and as a form of statecraft. But as one can observe from their definition, the concepts of geopolitics and geoeconomics have a link between them in which geoeconomics works as a mean to achieve geopolitical goals. Similar type of linkage is made by Csurgai (2018) as he argues that “geoeconomics

²² For more deeper discussion about the different perspectives see Scholvin, S & Wigell, M. (2018). Power politics by economic means: Geoeconomics as an analytical approach and foreign policy practice. *Comparative Strategy* 37(1), 73–84.

²³ For different interpretation of geoeconomics one can visit i.e.: Sparke, M. (2007). Geopolitical Fears, Geoeconomic Hopes, and the Responsibilities of Geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97(2), 338–349. OR Moisiu, S. (2019). Re-thinking geoeconomics: Towards a political geography of economic geographies. *Geography Compass*, 13(2)

is an interdisciplinary analysis that includes geopolitical factors, economic intelligence, strategic analysis and foresight.” In his study Csurgai argues that geoeconomics is not a substitute for geopolitics, but because the contemporary power rivalry is increasingly economic, he advises to examine both dimensions. By both, meaning the military and economic dimensions. He argues that between their logic there exists differences, and as an example he mentions that unlike geopolitical (military) rivalry, geoeconomic (economic) rivalry is even possible between the military alliance members. (Csurgai 2018, 39, 41.) On the other hand, Blackwill and Harris (2016, 9) argue that geoeconomic and military dimensions can be mutually reinforcing as China and Russia have shown in their behaviour.

As aforementioned authors and their definitions of the concept illustrates, the logic of geoeconomics and geopolitics are closely related in a way that geoeconomics follows the geopolitical logic. There can be differences as Csurgai argues, but still in his analysis geopolitics is needed to explain the working of geoeconomics. In a similar manner, when Wigell (2016, 135) argues that geoeconomics is a “geostrategic use of economic power” he implicitly takes an assumption about the geopolitical logic as the concept of geostrategy is in the literature often linked to foreign policy practice which is guided by geographical factors (Raza 2020, 18). Thus, abovementioned concepts and definitions are not making the concepts of geopolitics and geoeconomics perfectly differentiable. Fortunately, in their article Wigell and Vihma (2016) make solid arguments about the differences of geopolitical and geoeconomics strategy. In their article they separate the institutions, means, logic, behavioural tendency, and function of the strategies, making the separation of the concepts clearer. Their framework is presented in the next subchapter as it works as a base for my analytical framework in this thesis research. However, Scholvin & Wigell (2018b, 6–7) argue that while some contemporary scholars see geoeconomics as a foreign policy practice which is *an alternative to geopolitics to pursuit geostrategic objectives* many of them fail to take into consideration the geographical factors. For that reason the original framework is complemented by Kim’s geoeconomic strategy attributes and his definition of geoeconomics.

While Wigell & Vihma have been able to differentiate the geoeconomic and geopolitical strategy from each other Kim (2021) advises researcher to separate geoeconomics from other concepts which are currently used to study economic power and economic rivalry. According to him geoeconomics is currently mixed with other economic power concepts which are used to describe economic strategies and rivalries. I agree with Kim and this failure to separate geoeconomics from these concepts has sometimes led to reasoning which could have been done with other more developed concepts. As an example Kim points out that one needs to be careful to consider economic initiatives such as China’s BRI and Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) free trade

agreement as geoeconomic instruments, because they can be also viewed as foreign economic policies. Kim suggests that while theorizing geoeconomics we need to reinstate “the assumptions underlying traditional military force-based analysis of great power strategy.” (Kim 2021, 323–336.) Due to Kim’s suggestion in this thesis research I take the theoretical assumptions of traditional geopolitics (especially geography) more strongly into the analysis which is missing from Wigell’s & Vihma’s (2016) original framework.

However, in this thesis research I take a similar theoretical approach to geoeconomics as Wigell and Vihma as they understand geoeconomics as it was introduced in Luttwak’s original article; a “challenge to the liberal interdependency paradigm by underscoring the strategic interests – zero-sum interests that do not function in the logic of commerce.” According to the authors understanding geoeconomics in this way is about advancing state’s “geostrategic goals, not mutually beneficial trade relations.” (Wigell & Vihma 2016, 606) In the next subchapter I introduce my comparative analytical framework which is based on Wigell’s and Vihma’s (2016) work but is complemented by Kim’s definition of geoeconomics and his suggested attributes for geoeconomic strategy. The characters of each strategy are collected to the table (Figure 8) and the attributes of geoeconomic strategy are presented at the end of the chapter.

4.3 Framework of Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Strategy

According to Wigell & Vihma (2016) geopolitical power projection is an offensive foreign policy operation which is conducted by military means or by credible threat to use these means. However, the geopolitical strategies which goal is the “containment or deterrence” do not require an actual territorial invasion and can be conducted without direct warring. Nevertheless, the logic of geopolitical strategy is “confrontation” as the tools applied are predominantly military based. And due to this logic, the geopolitical strategy is usually overt, which means that the strategy or its purpose is not easy to hide. The authors argue that due to these characters, geopolitical strategy produces effects of “centripetal forces, high threat perception, and counterbalancing or bandwagoning behaviour” in the target country or coalition. However, whether the counterbalancing or bandwagoning behaviour occurs depends on the perception of power balance. The authors argue that states may choose to balance in a situation in which they perceive that together they can deter the common geopolitical aggressor. But in a countervailing situation if the states perceive the geopolitical agent to be too strong to counterbalance that may choose to bandwagon with it. (Wigell & Vihma 2016, 605, 609–610.)

Contrary to geopolitical strategy an offensive geoeconomic power projection is more covert, which means that the strategy or its true purpose is easier to hide. The geoeconomic strategy is usually conducted by economic means and its logic is “selective accommodation.” The idea of offensive geoeconomic power projection is not to confront the target directly, but to “weaken its resolve” and “undermine its internal cohesion.” This tactic can be described as a selective accommodation strategy in which a state uses economic instruments to lure the target away from its adversary. But geoeconomic operation can be also used as a “wedge strategy” in which economic inducements are selectively offered to some actors but not to others. The goal here is to divide the coalition or the target country and thus weaken its counterbalancing potential. If the geoeconomic strategy is applied successfully, due to its covert nature, it generates different and more dispersed threat perception than a geopolitical strategy. Because of these differences geoeconomic strategy “creates centrifugal forces, low or medium threat perception and underbalancing behaviour.” (Wigell & Vihma 2016, 610–612.)

Wigell’s and Vihma’s framework already provides a good starting point to separate the strategies, but for more specific analytic purposes I also introduce the most general tools named in the literature for each strategy. This listing, however, is by no means exhaustive and should be considered as examples of tools for each strategy. According to Blackwill & Harris (2006, 29–30, 40–41) the economic techniques of geoeconomic strategy can involve tools of coercive trade measures, economic aid, development assistance, foreign investments (FDI), sovereign lending, and asset buying. But it can also include manipulation of supply and demand mechanisms by targeting adversary’s productive output or causing supply shortages. Blackwill & Harris also counts economic military aid as a part of geoeconomic strategy, but I instead categorize it to the strategy of geopolitics, because as I see it, its purpose is to directly increase the military capabilities of an ally or allies. Blackwill & Harris also includes “trade policy, investment policy, economic and financial sanctions, cyber, aid, financial and monetary policy, and energy and commodities” to geoeconomic strategy tools (Blackwill & Harris 2006, 49).

In geopolitical strategy the military power is the most essential. The most apparent forms of military power tools are the deployment and the use of armed forces (Sloan & Gray 1999, 2) or credible threat to use these tools (Wigell & Vihma 2016, 609). Furthermore, Labban (2009) lists different means which Great Powers have used in the Transcaspian region during their geopolitical rivalry, and these included foreign military bases, direct military presence, military aid, arm sales, and military training. In addition, geopolitical strategy can include formation of strategic alliances and different forms of military cooperation agreements as he has in his research demonstrated (Labban 2009, 4, 16–19). In addition to above-mentioned Clem (2018) adds that joint military exercises are also an important part of geopolitical strategy.

In addition to Wigell’s and Vihma’s (2016) framework and the tools provided by other literature I use Kim’s definition of geoeconomics because it better describes the strategic purpose of geoeconomic strategy and makes direct points concerning geography. This is an important part of the analysis as according to Kim we need to reinstate “the assumptions underlying traditional military force-based analysis of great power strategy” when theorizing geoeconomics. These geographical points in his definition are added to the table (Figure 8). According to Kim (2021, 328–329) geoeconomics is “the use of economic policies to advance a great power’s mid- to long-term strategic interests in a geographical region of the world.” He elaborates that economic actions can take many types of forms and “geoeconomics can utilize promise or imposition of economic gains or losses in order to manipulate the mid- to long-term calculation of the states in strategically important locations” and “it can also attempt to encroach on a strategic competitor’s important interests in certain regions of the world.” He concludes that geoeconomics “can be considered to be a component of grand strategy.” By his definition Kim takes a strong position that geoeconomics is state’s strategic behaviour which has a certain geographical scope which makes it more connected to traditional military-based geopolitical thinking. In a comparable way Möttölä (2018, 90) argues that as a part of the grand strategy both geopolitics and geoeconomics have a spatial dimension. However, according to Scholvin & Wigell (2018b, 4) in geoeconomics the power and security are not simply tied to physical control of the territory as in geopolitics. This assumption of physical control of the territory in geopolitics is added to the table below on the side of the geopolitical strategy (Figure 8) and because the control can also be done by an ally or partner government it can be “indirect”.

Geostrategy		
	Geoeconomics	Geopolitics
Means	Economic	Military
Tools	Market manipulation Economic aid Economic sanctions Lending/financing/investing Asset capturing Development assistance Trade tools	Deployment / use of military power Base rentals and basing agreements Military aid (economic) Military alliances Military cooperation Military training Joint military exercises Arms sale
Visibility	Covert	Overt
Logic	Selective accommodation	Confrontation

	Weaken / wedging	
Geography	Encroach the control of adversary's strategic territory Manipulate the strategic locations	Physical direct or indirect control of the strategic territory
Goal	Fulfil the objectives of state's national interests (grand strategy)	
	Effects on target:	
Threat perception	Low/Medium	High
Action-reaction force	Centripetal	Centrifugal
Behavioural tendency	Underbalancing	Counterbalancing/bandwagoning

Figure 8 Comparative framework of geoeconomic and geopolitical strategy based on Wigell & Vihma (2016)

In addition to abovementioned characters of geoeconomic and geopolitical strategy Kim (2021, 329) argues that geoeconomic strategy should also fulfil four attributes simultaneously before we can recognize it as such. In my view these attributes are also applicable to geopolitical strategy, excluding the third attribute that considers the means of the strategy. These attributes are important to separate the other economic forms of power from geoeconomics.

The first attribute of geoeconomic strategy is that the strategic action should be imposed by national government. This is because geoeconomics is a state's strategic behaviour and state holds the economic resources to organize the strategy. Kim does not downplay the interest of other actors in international realm who can affect the geoeconomic strategies stating that private sector is an important actor to implement the strategy, but the purpose of the government is to deliberately direct the economic measures in geoeconomic strategy. *The second attribute* is the time period for the strategy. Kim explicitly excludes the short-term interests, and according to him the aim of geoeconomic strategy is to advance state's mid- to long-term goals. According to Kim (2021) Art (2003) describes this type of long-term goals being for example homeland security, stable access to raw materials, prevention of proliferation weapons of mass destruction, and stability of neighbouring countries. By citing Gilpin (1981) Kim adds that one another long-term strategy of great power also can be "the ability to organize international order in its favor". *The third attribute* which is also recognized by most of the literature on geoeconomics, is that the economic actions work as means and not as ends. Kim discards the view that geoeconomics can be something in which military means are used for economic ends, which is usually understood as imperialism or military coercion. *The fourth attribute* of geoeconomic strategy is that it must have a clearly recognizable geographical scope. State's interest is "to increase its presence in a geographical region that is important for

protecting its mid- to long-term strategic interests,” but it also can include undermining others influence in that strategic region. (Kim 2021, 329–330.)

5. UNITED STATES’ STRATEGIES IN LATIN AMERICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In the chapter three I have written a thick narrative of U.S. foreign policy toward LAC in the 21st century covering full presidential eras of George W. Bush, Barack H. Obama, Donald J. Trump, and half of the presidential era of Joseph R. Biden. The aim of the narrative is to present the main actors, institutions, and tools which have been used in the U.S. foreign policy toward LAC, and to present the choices, reactions, and strategic interactions which have shaped the policy. In this chapter I narrow down the focus as I evaluate the narrative through the comparative framework of geopolitical and geoeconomic strategy. To analyse the narrative I extract the factors from the narrative which explains these two strategies in the U.S. foreign policy. Here, my first research task is to recognize which of these two strategies better explain the U.S. foreign policy toward the LAC region. Second, I identify how the use of the tools, geographical focus, and strategies has evolved during the 21st century and which factors have caused the shifts in their strategic use. Last, my aim is to evaluate how well the assumptions of these two geostrategies hold in the case of U.S. foreign policy toward LAC.

This chapter is divided into four subchapters which coincide with presidential eras. The separation is done due to three reasons: first, it coincides nicely with the original narrative; second, according to U.S. foreign policy literature president’s interest has great influence on LAC policy and thus shapes the approach toward policies; and third, it helps the reader to follow the analysis and the logic. But even the eras are evaluated on their own, the past policies and continuity are taken into consideration in the final evaluation. The final conclusions concerning the research questions are presented in the last chapter of study together with suggestions for further investigation.

5.1 The Threat of Narcoterrorism and Left-Wing Governments

In the beginning of the Bush administration position of the U.S. in world affairs was dominant both in military and economic domain. The NSS 2005 recognized that U.S. does not have a global peer and it remains unmatched by traditional military capability. In the Western Hemisphere the position was even more so as it was the only true great power in the region and no other extra-hemispheric or regional actor had such influence in the continent. The U.S. was the largest donor of foreign assistance and the largest trading partner of the region as its partner share of imports was almost 50% and its export partner share was almost 60% of the region’s total trade at the beginning of the century. The

U.S. also had a strong military presence in the form of CSLs concentrated on CAC and Andean region which foundation dates back to construction of Panama Canal and eviction of Spain from Puerto Rico and Cuba (Bitar 2016, 13). Due to its hegemonic position it was also the only great power influencing regional development through the regional institutions of OAS and IDB.

As the U.S. did not have any global peer in traditional state-system the terrorist attacks changed the threat perception to non-state actors which became to be the main threat to its national security. The change in the threat perception in LAC policies meant that the U.S. began to see the region as a possible seeding ground for the terrorist organizations as the drug-traffickers had a strong foothold in the area. The drug traffickers presented the social problem that could cause a terrorist threat in the future. To counter the threat caused by drug trafficking groups Bush relied mostly on security initiatives. He expanded the Plan Colombia (Colombia) and initiated the Merida Initiative (Mexico and Central America) to enhance the security capacity of the recipient governments to control their territories. Together, and through these initiatives the foreign security- and economic aid was mostly targeted to these same countries to enforce the effect. In addition to capacity building of partner governments, Bush increased the role of U.S. SOUTHCOM in regional foreign policy making and aimed to expand U.S.' network of military bases in the region. Through the SOUTHCOM DoD became one of the top departments conducting and managing the U.S. LAC policy. The overall answer to threat caused by the non-state actors was largely security/military oriented geopolitical strategy which goal was to gain control of the territory of "ungoverned spaces" in the CAC region. The aim was to inhibit any terrorist organization arising in the hemisphere and to keep the threat away from the U.S. borders. Geoeconomic strategy in the form of economic aid was used in limited manner to enforce the effect.

As the strategy was targeted against the non-state actors, I cannot evaluate the behavioural tendency of the actors as their means to "counterbalance" are different, and thus not directly suitable for my framework of analysis. Nevertheless, even the strategy was not meant against any traditional state actor this does not exclude the fact that the strategy was imposed by the U.S. national government, it was security/military oriented, it had specific geographical focus, and it aimed to improve territorial control, thus making it geopolitical strategy in the framework of analysis. But as the initiatives were not targeted against any traditional state actors, they did not produce a strong opposition in the region. On the contrary, those countries which received the security related aid welcomed the U.S. funding. Although, it should be noted that the aid and initiatives were offered to the countries which were already sympathetic to U.S. goals, hence making the U.S. regional allies stronger vis-à-vis its regional adversaries. The increased anti-drug capacity helped especially Colombia to operate against the FARC group which used also Venezuelan and Ecuadorian territory in its operations. Thus the capacity

enhancement of the partner governments also weakened the possibility of Venezuela or Ecuador affect through the FARC. This then questions the assumption that the geopolitical strategy would always be overt as this kind of increased (“covert”) military cooperation can be used to weaken the influence of adversary.

The capacity building of the partner governments in the form of anti-drug initiatives and foreign aid was not perceived as a threat by the U.S. adversaries. But what became more problematic was U.S.’ own military capacity in the form of CSLs in the region. The existing U.S. military bases started to face resistance especially in the anti-U.S. governments thus making it harder for the U.S. to enlarge or maintain its formal CSLs network. However, despite the resistance toward its military presence U.S. found the way to keep its network of bases through different quasi-base arrangements. The opposition against the U.S. increased military capability in the region became even more evident when U.S. relaunched the Fourth Fleet. The relaunch of fourth Fleet raised concerns and negative reaction in LAC governments. The CSLs and the relaunch of Fourth Fleet were thus perceived entire differently than the cooperative anti-drug initiatives. Moreover, the relaunch of Fourth Fleet was stated publicly as a direct message to Venezuela (and the whole region) not to cooperate with Russia, thus making it direct confrontational measure against the U.S. adversaries.

In addition to relaunch of the Fourth Fleet U.S. also used other instruments which were particularly targeted against the anti-U.S. governments, some of which aimed for a regime change in countries which had turned left in their policies. This was especially visible in the case of Venezuela (and lesser extent Bolivia) where the U.S. helped the opposition group to plan and organize the coup against the central government. In the case of Bolivia the plan had no time to materialize, but in the case of Venezuela the information that the U.S. government gave direct material and logistical support for the opposition group shows a strong indication for geopolitical strategy in which U.S. used domestic proxies. The clear aim in these cases was to replace the anti-U.S. leftist governments and to replace them with more U.S. friendly option which would have granted U.S. more friendly “territory” to engage with. These actions together with continued embargo of Cuba coincides with the Cold War era approach when the U.S. aimed to contain the Soviet influence all around the region. These developments with U.S. and its regional allies increased military capability have a strong support for geopolitical strategy which was aimed against the leftist anti-U.S. governments.

All the policy developments in the security and military domains indicate that the U.S. wanted to hold the direct control of territory especially in the CAC and Andean region either by controlling the territory itself through the CSLs or by enhancing the capacity of partner governments who were sympathetic to its goals. The main threat to U.S. national security was the non-state drug-trafficking groups, but where it seemed possible, U.S. aimed at replacing the anti-U.S. governments with more

sympathetic ones. When these plans failed, and these governments started to cooperate with Russia and with each other more strongly (in the form of ALBA) U.S. decided to increase its own military capability by relaunching the Fourth Fleet. Hence, during the Bush administration the U.S. strategy toward LAC region in this framework was certainly a military oriented zero-sum geopolitical strategy, which aimed to keep the territory benign to its goals and to keep the threats away from U.S. borders. Geoeconomic strategy in the form of economic aid was used to enforce the effect by enhancing the capacity of regional allies. And as Wigell's & Vihma's original framework expected the confrontational geopolitical strategy in the cases of relaunch of Fourth Fleet and regime change support produced a strong counter reaction as many governments, especially the anti-U.S. governments, started to oppose U.S. policies more strongly. The past actions of U.S. also strengthened the development as many governments were already disappointed in Washington's promoted policies.

In the domain of trade policy the Bush administration did not show any particular geostrategy as the policy was not targeted to any specific geographical location or against any specific actor. The U.S. was committed to trade liberalization in several fronts globally and tried to forge also the hemispheric wide FTAA with the whole region. However, FTAA was blocked due to developments in the region and due to U.S. own protectionist policies concerning agriculture. Of course, the FTA would have secured these countries to market liberal development which the U.S. strongly promoted at the time, but overall there are no signs of strategic use of trade. Although the inducement to reduce tariffs for Central American and Andean countries indicates that the U.S. used some trade policies as a part of the strategy package to encourage the governments to work with its goals, but promoting FTAs were mostly benefit-for-all type of progress and no one was particularly excluded or targeted. Moreover, Bush' administration did not see the economic engagement of extra-hemispheric actors such as China as a negative thing nor did the subsequent Obama administration. The economic engagement was actually encouraged while the U.S. itself expanded free trade with growing economic centres. In the realm of trade, Sino-U.S.-LAC trilateral relations were perceived also as a benefits-for-all type of development, not causing threat to U.S. national security. Even the opposite, the economic development of LAC countries was suitable for the U.S. goals in the region as the current poverty in region's countries created the fertile ground for transnational criminal organizations to grow.

5.2 Venezuela and the Regional Energy

While Obama administration took a different rhetoric and aimed for closer relations with the region there were no tremendous changes in the strategy toward LAC. The continuity of past policies was

prominent as the cases of Bolivia and support for the Nicaraguan coup government illustrated. Obama's administration also showed that the U.S. was ready to put pressure if the countries go against its national interests. During his second term, Obama made some diplomatic manoeuvres to regain trust while opening the relations with Cuba, revealing the Cold War documents, and denouncing the Monroe Doctrine. However, as important as these developments were in diplomatic sense, they did not produce any significant material developments to U.S. policies. U.S. still controlled the Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and maintained its network of formal and quasi-bases also elsewhere in the CAC and Andean region. In fact, the number of the host countries of its base network increased and additional funding was allocated to them. Obama also kept and further expanded the security oriented anti-drug initiatives through the "Caribbean Basin Security Initiative" implicating that the threat caused by the drug-trafficking groups was still the priority. However, the defense cooperation plan between Columbia and the U.S. and statement released by the Air Force implied that the anti-U.S. governments had become a second serious threat to be countered in the CAC region. The centre of the threat caused by anti-U.S. governments was still Venezuela which oil U.S. was dependent on.

Thus, during the Obama administration U.S. begun countering Venezuela more strongly. Obama wanted the U.S. to wean itself from foreign oil, especially from oil which was produced by Venezuela. To counter the Venezuelan influence in energy matters the economic initiatives came into picture. The geoeconomic development in the U.S. strategy during the Obama administration was the ECPA and CESI initiatives which were aimed to reduce the CAC nations dependency on oil. The implicit aim was to reduce the Venezuelan geoeconomic influence over the CAC nations and to reduce its incomes while also enhance energy security of the U.S. These initiatives had a clear geographical scope, and their purpose was to weaken Venezuelan energy strategy in the CAC region, an important geographical location to U.S. national security. To further lessen the Venezuelan influence, Obama levied sanctions against Venezuela and declared the country being a national threat to U.S. Together with rapprochement with Cuba Obama tried to put a wedge between the ALBA-countries and lure them apart, where the diplomatic and geoeconomic tools became convenient. The initiatives did not raise any alarm in the region or counterbalancing action which supports Wigell's & Vihma's (2016) assumptions concerning geoeconomic strategy.

However, as the policy toward the region mainly continued the same, the biggest change in the U.S. overall strategy during Obama's administration was the shift toward Indo-Pacific to balance against the growing influence of China and to restore U.S. strategic position in Asia. Together with the rebalance strategy military power was slowly withdrawn from the Middle East while additional troops and equipment were assigned to Indo-Pacific theatre. As a part of the strategy U.S. also engaged diplomatically more in Asian affairs. This rebalance of Indo-Pacific, however, did not lead to any

change to U.S. strategic position considering LAC region. China's investments, trade, and engagement in regional institutions were encouraged while maintaining the position of benefits-for-all. The U.S.-China sub-dialogue on LAC was maintained to avoid any possible misunderstandings. Although it was stated that China's actions were closely monitored in the case of emerging threats to U.S. national security. Here, however, it is important to note that China's engagement was mainly concentrated on Southern Cone while the U.S. maintained a stronger position in CAC region, although China's economic practices also helped the anti-U.S. governments maintain their policies in that subregion. However, China's activity overall at the time was not yet considered to be a threat to U.S.

Nevertheless, as a part of the rebalance strategy U.S. trade policy got some geoeconomic dimensions when Obama started to promote the TPP agreement. Even though it was not explicitly targeted against any specific actor, the U.S. allies and some of the state officials saw it as a tool to counter China's economic influence in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. Defense Secretary also indicated that the agreement would be an essential part of the rebalance strategy as he stated the agreement being as important as another aircraft carrier. The TPP agreement would have also included LAC countries of Chile, Peru, and Mexico which indicates that the U.S. could have been protecting its "economic sphere influence" in those countries which had started to trade more with China but had a free market-based economy. Thus, it would suggest a logic of selective accommodation to lure these countries away from the adversary. However, if we interpret Kim's geoeconomic strategy attributes strictly, the TPP did not have an extremely clear recognizable geographical scope and it is also hard to argue how the TPP would have advanced U.S. long- to mid term strategic interests in regional context of LAC. That is because the U.S. already had the FTAs with these countries and good relations with them. Hence, because we must be able to link the geographical scope and interests with the strategy, it does not indicate being a geoeconomics strategy in the context of LAC. However, according to McBride, Chatzky & Siripurapu (2021, 7–10) it would have been the world largest trade agreement covering about 40 percent of the global economy and according to its defenders it would have advanced U.S. strategic interests in Asia-Pacific. Also some of the officials from the Obama administration saw it from a geopolitical perspective. Thus, the TPP agreement could had have strategic meaning in Indo-Pacific or Asia region, but it is out of the scope of this thesis study.

Excluding the promotion of TPP agreement, the Obama administration was not a free trade enthusiastic as the development of free trade with LAC region was no longer particularly strong. Obama implemented the FTAs with Panama and Colombia, but they were already designed under the Bush administration. Other than that, the only improvement in the domain of free trade was the TIFA agreement with Argentina. This suggests that the free trade overall was not in the centre of strategy

to engage with LAC states when compared to the administration of Bush. This can be due to the global financial crisis at the time which caused huge financial breakdown globally; the free trade would have increased the competition which could have caused harm for the American jobs which Obama tried to protect with its economic stimulus package and “buy American” provisions. Excluding the free trade, U.S. strategy overall toward LAC region demonstrated continuity, but in addition to counter the drug-trafficking groups Obama administration begun to use geoeconomic tools concentrating to reduce Venezuela’s power in the region. Even China’s growing economic footprint in the region did not manage to get changes to U.S. policies as it was most likely seen as a complement for the U.S. strategy to keep the region developing.

All the abovementioned continuities and developments in the foreign policy tools implies the prominence and continuity of geopolitical strategy which centre of focus was still the drug trafficking groups, but also increasingly the threat caused by the anti-U.S. governments. The U.S.’ network of bases and SOUTHCOM’s already enhanced position in the CAC region maintained a strong military capability. However, the military power was not enough to lessen Venezuela’s and its ALBA-allies influence. Quite the contrary, U.S. military power in the region was the main thing which was opposed by these governments as the leakage of Colombia-U.S. defense cooperation plan demonstrated. Thus, geoeconomic tools became to be less confrontational option also in front of the rest of the hemisphere, which already had begun to show some wider resistance against U.S. policies. At the same time trade promotion with region was lacking and China’s engagement with the region was encouraged.

5.3 The America First and the Strategy of Denial

While the Obama administration tried to use “smart strategies” to break up the anti-U.S. coalition and to lessen the influence of Venezuela, Trump administration took a more traditional approach toward region policies. Trump restored the Monroe Doctrine and more confrontational approach toward anti-U.S. governments with a specific focus on Cuba and Venezuela. Cuba was returned to the list of state sponsors of terrorism and several trade restrictions against the island state were restored. On Venezuela, Trump toughened the U.S. stance by imposing harder sanctions and officially recognizing Juan Guaidó as legitimate Venezuelan president, thus trying to push for the regime change. The sanctions against Venezuela also included oil with aim to dry out the funding for the government. Moreover, Trump increased the pressure on Venezuela further, as he kept the possibility of military intervention open. The economic tools toward Venezuela and Cuba were part of the larger coercion package which does not suggest any new geoeconomic strategy in this context.

In the other areas of foreign policy Trump tried to use similar type of coercive tactics. But when he threatened the anti-drug programmes of Plan Colombia and Mérida Initiative with funding cuts together with other foreign aid, Congress rejected his plans. Moreover, the DoD increased its own funding for these programmes and even provided additional funding for the Mexican military. The funding increases made the DoD the biggest donor of security related aid to the region, and thus further expanded the security-based approach toward LAC policy. These events also demonstrate that the Congress and the DoD create a certain level of institutional stability when it comes to security related U.S. policies. These institutions recognize how important these tools are for promoting the U.S. national interest in the region. Later, however, Trump was able to make some temporarily assistance cuts from the northern triangle countries when pressuring to stop the immigration. In addition, he used trade policy against Mexico openly as a coercive tool with similar aims. The use of economic aid and trade as an instruments of short-term coercion tactics, however, does not support neither geopolitical nor geoeconomic strategy, as they were targeted to produce short-term interests. In addition, these did not have any clear strategic logic other than just to get concessions in the policy areas of trade and immigration. The coercion was used against anyone that Trump saw necessary, including its regional allies. Trump simply used these tools where the U.S. had leverage to use them and not in a very strategic manner.

The development of free trade overall during the Trump administration was even less important than during Obama's administration. Trump showed deep scepticism toward free trade and his first actions as president was to cancel U.S. participation in the TPP agreement. However, something interesting strategic development happened in the other areas of economic policy during Trump administration. While the U.S. began to see LAC region from the perspective of strategic competition with China it created the IDFC, an institution which combined the old foreign aid institutions of USAID and OPIC into one larger institution. This new institution doubled the amount of foreign development aid capacity and brought new capabilities such as technical assistance and equity financing for the recipient governments. It was also explicitly stated in the reorganization plan that the IDFC was seen as an alternative for the Chinese model of development aid. But concerning geography, the IDFC as an institution was global in scope and its funding was not aimed for any specific location. However, later the administration announced the América Crece initiative which targeted specifically LAC region and its funding came from the IDFC. The América Crece initiative aimed at boosting the private sector investments to developing countries by helping these countries to create a better economic environment for the private companies.

Concerning the América Crece initiative there is a lack of information how much and which projects it has eventually funded. Those projects which are known have concentrated on fossil fuel ventures.

This can be seen from the perspective of competing over energy resources, but due to lack of information about the investments overall it cannot be argued such. The investments in fossil fuels projects could as well be aimed to overcome the dependence of Venezuelan oil, boost the energy security of the U.S., or simply they may have followed the private sector interests. Although, the most intriguing thing concerning the IDFC happened in the last days of the Trump administration. U.S. announced that the IDFC funding was to be used to help Ecuador to pay its loans back to China. In the same agreement Ecuador agreed that it excludes Chinese telecom companies from constructing the Ecuador's telecom networks. With the agreement Ecuador joined in the U.S. clean network initiative, which aim was to keep Chinese network providers out. A definitive example of zero-sum situation targeted against Chinese infrastructure investments. This supports the view that IDFC would be used against Chinese economic practices in LAC where it is in the strategic interest of the U.S. This is also a prime example of use of economic tools in geostrategic manner as the IDFC financing was used selectively to block adversary to achieve strategic position in a certain geographical area. However, the clean network initiative was not very tempting for the LAC governments as only Ecuador and Dominican Republic joined the initiative. The other IDFC funding for the region did not manage to counter China's economic activity as the funding has targeted different sectors of the economies.

In addition to IDFC, the other interesting development in the economic domain against Chinese influence which concerned LAC region was the idea of "nearshoring." The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted the global economy and revealed the U.S. dependency on Chinese supply chains, which led U.S. to reduce its dependence on China more strongly. In this respect U.S. long term regional ally Colombia became a partner of choice as the U.S. announced that Colombia will be participating in its "Back to America" program to secure nearshoring. This demonstrates that when it comes to countering China's economic power over supply chains the geography of LAC become more important due to its proximate location. The Sino-U.S. strategic competition in economic domain thus suggest that geoeconomics can really affect the strategic importance of geography as Vihma and Wigell (2018) argue. However, in my framework the initiative of nearshoring cannot be counted yet as a full geoeconomic strategy as the initiative has been working only for awhile and later plans are still developing. But if the development in this direction continues this can be the first serious attempt to lessen China's economic influence globally and regionally. The nearshoring seems also change the U.S. perception of LAC region from "source of threats" to "geography of possibility" to reduce the China's economic influence on U.S.

While the development of economic tools and initiatives started to occur, the military posture of SOUTHCOM did not change. SOUTHCOM did not receive any additional funding even China was

observed being the strategic competitor of U.S. in LAC. However, during the Trump administration SOUTHCOM started to warn about Chinese growing economic influence in the region, considering it being a threat to U.S. national security. SOUTHCOM suggested that China should be confronted on multiple department levels, but in military domain the most important thing was to preserve and deepen ties with the region's militaries to maintain the U.S. leadership. Hence, during the Trump administration U.S deepened its security cooperation with LAC countries: the U.S. gave Brazil MNAA status, renegotiated an extend to Comapala base in El Salvador, and returned to military cooperation with Ecuador. These developments suggest that the U.S. was aiming for Colby's (2021) described geopolitical strategy of denial in military domain. According to Colby (2021) the multiple threats globally causes that the power of U.S. is no longer solely sufficient to counter these threats and U.S. needs to rely on cooperation. In LAC it indeed seems that during the Trump U.S. began to move on to that direction in the military domain. The security cooperation over the years in CAC region had proven to be an efficient way of keeping the countries in line with U.S. interests and now the region importance was rising again due to China. In the military domain the scope of geography expanded from the sole CAC region to also include the Southern Cone. This implies that even the Monroe Doctrine did not anymore include the economic domain, in the military domain its goal was still relevant. But there was also opportunity at hand; Trump's close relations with right-wing governments and dissolution of region's unity improved the possibility to increase the cooperation.

Overall, due to maintained and developed security related policies, U.S.' strategy toward the region continued to be geopolitical, but now it also got some new dimensions. Administration maintained its network of bases, SOUTHCOM's position, increased funding for security related anti-drug initiatives, contained the anti-U.S. regimes of Venezuela and Cuba, but now it also enhanced the more formal security cooperation. The increased military cooperation with LAC governments aimed to deny China to do the same. This is interesting as some researchers (i.e. Negut 2016, 9) argue that the use of military tools may not been efficient against economic ones. But here the case is different; while creating the military cooperation between nations the U.S. aims to prevent that the economic tools used by China does not lead to stronger military ties. However, the approach toward region policies also changed to more economically oriented, and the economic tools were reformed to better counter China. In critical areas, where it became possible, China's infrastructure investments were confronted directly (case Ecuador). But overall U.S. began formulating more economically oriented foreign policy, but it still relied mostly on private sector interest which was not sufficient to bring alternative to Chinese investments.

This development in economic tools also suggest some small reconfigurations to geoeconomic strategy framework of Wigell and Vihma (2016) as they have observed that the geoeconomic strategy

cause typically low threat perception which leads to underbalancing. The development and usage of foreign economic tools to counter China during Trump's administration, however, suggest the opposite. The similar kind of case occurred against the Venezuela's oil strategy which started during Obama's presidency. The U.S. balanced the situation by offering CAC states an alternative to reduce the dependency from Venezuelan oil while also enhancing its own energy security in the region. But especially in the case of Ecuador the approach to deny access from China was quite fast and strong. These events implies that the region or resources which have strategic value to U.S. are specifically targeted to reduce the adversaries influence and will be balanced accordingly.

5.4 Strategy of Integrated Deterrence

Even the Biden's presidential term is still on-going the observation of its initial policies gives hints about the U.S. strategic continuities and potential future developments. For now, it seems that the Biden administration has continued many of the Trump era policies, but in the policy areas of immigration and foreign economic aid it has taken an opposite approach. Concerning the anti-U.S. government of Cuba and Venezuela the aim for the regime change is still apparent as the administration has not eased any Trump administration's set restrictions or sanctions. The administration keeps recognizing Juan Guaidó as legitimate Venezuelan president and stated that development of relations with Cuba can wait. This approach toward these governments comes in time when there has been a crisis or protests against the current anti-U.S. regimes. Thus indicating that the U.S. is hoping that the current governments will fail. Furthermore, keeping the countries out of the Summit of the Americas implies that Biden's administration wants to contain these governments also from the rest of the hemisphere (although some modest changes to policies were made after strong regional opposition). In addition to continued approach toward the anti-U.S. regimes Biden has continued a similar approach toward the anti-drug programmes, although some improvements to more holistic direction has been made. To my knowledge there has been no changes concerning the U.S. military bases in the region or SOUTHCOM's posture during the Biden administration. So, the already recognized approach of geopolitical strategy is still on-going which now has taken the (economic) dimension of Sino-U.S. strategic competition. Due to China's growing influence the geoeconomic strategy has developed further.

The Biden administration has continued to recognize China as U.S.' strategic competitor and the current administration has been the first to recognize the geoeconomic dimension of the competition in LAC. Mentioning the geoeconomic nature of the competition in NSS means that now it has been recognized officially in the highest strategic level. Moreover, the speech by SOUTHCOM

commander Richardson supports the view that economic activity of China in LAC region has become one of the main threats to U.S. The biggest threats caused by China's economic activity are the physical infrastructure investments which are made through the BRI to deep water ports and telecommunication networks, through which China could gain a permanent foothold in the region. The threat caused by these investments is that they can have dual-use possibility which can have serious consequences for the U.S. national security. In the context of strategic competition Biden's administration has continued to strengthen the security cooperation with LAC governments, but also due to geoeconomic dimension of competition it has strengthened the different economic tools in its LAC policies. SOUTHCOM's General Richardson called this strategy as "integrated deterrence."

In the spirit of integrated deterrence Biden has promised to allocate \$4 billion more of foreign economic aid to northern triangle countries in next four years "to tackle the root causes of migration". In addition, Biden launched his economic initiative B3W together with G7 partners in 2021. The initiative targeted to increase the development financing for infrastructure investments to developing countries and aimed at facilitating massive \$40 trillion worth of investments globally. The B3W initiative had also the domestic version which would have improved U.S. own infrastructure investment, but the Congress did not pass the domestic initiative and the administration needed to rebrand the whole initiative. The rebranded initiative took a stronger rhetoric concerning the U.S. national security and decreased the amount of development financing to \$600 billion. Despite the rebranding and decreased amount of funding the initiative is still large and implies stronger shift to economic competition. While the PGII initiative is global in scope it is not directly compatible to our framework. Although in the original B3W initiative there were references that every partner country has their own areas of interests they were not specified. But in addition to PGII, the Biden administration launched the new APEP initiative concerning mostly those LAC countries where U.S. still the number one trading partner. The APEP initiative aims to facilitate trade and investment, promote decarbonization, mobilize investment and continue the Trump era initiative to fortify supply chains. Taking into consideration the earlier development in Sino-U.S. competition and Trump era policies, the APEP initiative fulfils the attributes of geoeconomic strategy. However, in this strategy the adversary is not located in the LAC region, but the region itself has become part of the strategy.

Moreover, concerning Sino-U.S. competition the SOUTHCOM's part in this integrated deterrence is to create military cooperation with LAC countries and to inform partner governments about the threats dealing with China. To deepen the mil-to-mil cooperation between LAC governments the Biden administration gave MNAA status to Colombia. In this manner Biden continues the aim of Trump administration's geopolitical strategy of denial in the military domain. In this respect the Biden administration continues the threat-based view of LAC region, but now the view is changing to more

cooperative hemisphere instead of unilateralism. There is also interesting dimension in MNAA status as it strengthens also the commercial and investment aspect and increases the access to financing by U.S. entities (Onofa 2022). Thus, the MNAA status has not simply military aspect as it also creates economic possibilities to countries.

6. CONCLUSIONS

U.S. strategy toward LAC region in the 21st century can be considered to be mostly geopolitical; the large network of formal and quasi-bases, relaunch of Fourth Fleet, increased role of the SOUTHCOM in foreign policy making and execution, foreign security aid, increased number of military exercises, security oriented anti-drug initiatives, and increased cooperation in military spheres all suggest that the approach toward LAC region has been threat-based and military/security oriented geopolitical strategy. This especially concerns the subregion of CAC, where keeping the “line of defense” has been the number one priority together with stable access to region’s energy resources. Inside this subregion the security cooperation, economic policies, and the goal for regime change have mostly aimed at countering the perceived threats to U.S. national security, whether they have been the narcoterrorist groups, anti-U.S. governments, or extra-hemispheric actors. As SOUTHCOM General Richardson described, the aim is to keep the threats “20 yards away” from the U.S. borders. Inside the CAC region many of the policies could be also concerned zero-sum; either you were willing to work with U.S. or you were against it and get nothing. The zero-sum logic was particularly visible during the presidency of Trump, when almost all foreign policies were perceived in this manner. This was especially in the case of Ecuador when U.S. bought the Chinese network out of the country and in the case of Venezuela when U.S. also sanctioned the Venezuelan oil. But this logic has also been visible during other presidents when U.S. has countered the anti-U.S. governments or extra-hemispheric military activity (Russia) or potential future military activity (China) in the form of dual-use infrastructure.

However, while the U.S. strategy in the 21st century has mostly focused on geopolitical strategy there has been also development in economic policies which support the use of geoeconomic strategies. During the Bush and Obama administrations the geoeconomic strategy worked through the foreign economic aid which was mostly used to strengthen the U.S. geopolitical strategy to keep the CAC region free from threats caused by non-state actors. The aim was to offer partner governments effective economic support together with security-related aid to control their territories. Most of the economic aid was allocated to countries of Colombia and Mexico. Colombia’s position in between the ALBA-nations was also critical to keep the region stable. Later however, economic policies

started to get new forms when new threats began to rise in the region. Geoeconomic strategy was visible especially as a counter strategy to Venezuelan oil policies when U.S. wanted to wean itself from Venezuelan oil, but also at the same time lessen its influence in the CAC region where anti-U.S. ideology had spread. Obama resorted to geoeconomic strategy because the earlier military-based policies such as activation of Fourth Fleet and Colombia-U.S. defense agreement were perceived confrontational which increased the anti-U.S. sentiment even more as Wigell's & Vihma's behavioural tendency of geopolitical strategy suggests. So, the better option became to covertly weaken Venezuela's influence and not directly threaten it. In the same time Obama used strategy to pull the Cuba and rest of the region closer to contain Venezuela from others.

Another (geo)economic strategy began to formulate during the Trump administration when U.S. labelled China as its strategic competitor. The Sino-U.S. relations in LAC region changed from cooperation to confrontation at the time when China started to invest more heavily into physical infrastructure through its BRI and promote its "One China" principle. As the U.S.' old foreign aid institutions were targeted to enhance partner governments capacity, they were not suitable for countering China's economic tools. This led to the decision to reform the old foreign aid institutions combining them into one. The new IDFC institution received more financial power and new abilities to better drive the private sector investments into the region and to offer better option to counter China's activity. However, during the Trump administration this strategy was not yet fully functional as the investments done by newly founded IDFC were not able to offer option to China's loans and investments, except in the case of Ecuador. The other investments done by the IDFC followed the interests of the private sector as was the purpose of América Crece initiative. But as observed by Colombia President Duque and General Richardson the private sector investments have been lacking and have not targeted the locations of strategic importance. Thus, during Trump administration the economic strategy overall cannot be described as geoeconomic strategy as it followed the interests of private sector, not targeted strategic locations, and in addition, it did not require stop working with China (except in the case of Ecuador's network).

The case of Ecuador, however, illustrated where the red line for the U.S. goes concerning Chinese economic influence in the region, and it became to be the infrastructure investments. As opposed to normal trade relations which were not considered as a threat, infrastructure investments started to raise concerns in the SOUTHCOM. This view was later confirmed by General Richardson as she saw that Chinese investments to deep water ports and telecommunication networks is one of the biggest threats to U.S. national security as they could have dual-use possibility. So, the change in perception of Chinese economic activity in LAC region occurred once the economic cooperation started to have possible military implications. For a long time the U.S. encouraged China to increase its economic

cooperation with LAC countries which supported its own goal of regional economic prosperity, but once the investments started targeting the critical infrastructure of military importance it became perceived as a threat.

However, another geoeconomic strategy with zero-sum logic started to formulate during Trump administration. This strategy is not produced against any hemispheric state, but it definitely concerns the geography of LAC. This strategy is the process called “nearshoring.” During the Trump administration nearshoring became to be known as “Back to America” initiative. The process of nearshoring was accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic as it caused the global economic downturn and disrupted the supply chains which made U.S. to realize its strong dependency on China. The aim of nearshoring is to bring supply chains closer to U.S. and to reduce the influence of China to U.S. economy. This process has been further advanced during the Biden administration as he has made the executive order to U.S. government agencies to identify risks to supply chains and emphasised revitalizing the economy by bringing the jobs back to U.S. Biden APEP initiative which concerns mostly CAC region can also be a part of this strategy as it makes references to fortify supply chains. However, the nearshoring strategy is still in its initial phase, but it seems that it could be the next long-term geoeconomic strategy against Chinese economic influence. Here, the LAC and especially the subregion of CAC would play a central role. Initiative is a win-win situation for the U.S. and LAC as at the same time it weakens China’s regional influence and fortifies U.S. position in the Americas. Biden’s increased economic aid to northern triangle countries creates the base for this strategy by enhancing the economic capacity of these countries, thus making it part of the strategy.

The nearshoring initiative is one the most interesting changes from LAC’s geographical perspective. While earlier the U.S. has considered LAC mostly as the source of different threats, with nearshoring initiative this perception is changing toward “geography of possibility” to counter China’s growing influence. This is close to the view of Wigell & Solis Landivar (2018, 165) who argue that geoeconomics can shape the strategic environment of geographical location. However, I argue based on this observation that geostrategic competition between Great Powers can shape geostrategic importance of a certain geographical location. As in the case of the U.S. Latin America policy it seems that there is a possibility for even larger paradigmatic change in the future if the strategic competition with China increases. This also concerns the U.S. military approach toward the region as since the Trump administration U.S. has been more focused to build more formal military cooperation in the form of MNAs which are now granted for Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia. Forming the mil-to-mil cooperation with the region inhibits China to do the same and thus more probably prevents the

further escalation of conflict in the continent. Thus, the strategic competition with China has already changed the U.S.' perception and approach toward the region.

Concerning the framework of geopolitical and geoeconomic strategy developed by Wigell & Vihma (2016) the only assumption that did not quite hold in this thesis research is the assumption of behavioural tendency of "underbalancing" in geoeconomic strategy. In the case of Venezuela and in the case of China, U.S. has showed quite fast and strong balancing behaviour in the LAC region when it comes to areas of strategic significance, energy security, or infrastructure of dual-use possibility. These observations, however, do not cancel the original assumption, but advices to study further why in some cases it has led to underbalancing behaviour. According to this thesis research the reason could be that earlier studies have not considered fully the strategic meaning of geography, which I have considered more strongly by recognising the geographical scope of U.S. policies, initiatives, foreign aid, cooperation, and SOUTHCOM's position. Based on this thesis research I encourage to study further the strategic meaning of geography in the context of geoeconomics, as well as the tools that are used by an adversary as some may be more easily balanced than others. In example in this study it seems that trade policy in form of FTAs has not been the tool of choice as the domestic opposition against free trade has grown due to economic crises and it has been accused to be one of the reasons for loss of American jobs. The trading relations between LAC and China has not either raised the threat perception in the U.S. as it has been favourable to U.S. strategy and economy while the U.S. itself has acted quite protectionist in this respect after the Bush administration. Based on this thesis research I also encourage further investigation of cases where economic cooperation of countries has turned into a competition or confrontation, the special attention could be given to cases in which the investments could have military-strategic significance.

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