# A WORLD FOR ALL

## New Visions of US Foreign Policy

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# 1. Latin America

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Two centuries after the Monroe Doctrine,[1] the relationship between the United States and the rest of the Americas is still trapped in a false dichotomy of dominance or disengagement. Many remain stuck in Cold War thinking. While the right views Latin America through the narrow prism of counternarcotics, migration control, and resource extraction, the Left has often defaulted to disengagement as the answer to past US imperialism. But disengagement is not a solution—it simply leaves a vacuum to be filled by others. Solidarity should be with people, not regimes, and it must be expressed through a lawful, rights-based policy, not economic coercion that amounts to collective punishment or fantasies of regime change. There can be no return to gunboat diplomacy or neocolonialism.

Latin America and the United States are bound together by geography, trade, migration, and culture. Western Hemisphere governments could benefit from continued US engagement, but on fairer, more respectful terms. Such cooperation is especially important given that many of the pressures facing the United States and its neighbors are shared: democratic backsliding, economic uncertainty, trade shocks, polarization around migration, and climate crises—from hurricanes in the Caribbean to wildfires in California.

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These interconnections create opportunities. The hemisphere can drive a global green transition with its renewable resources and critical minerals; build resilient and fair supply chains that enhance shared competitiveness; and harness migration as a source of talent, soft power, and innovation. Recognizing both the risks and the opportunities is essential. A progressive US foreign policy must start from the premise that the hemisphere's challenges are common ones, and that durable solutions will come from solidarity, cooperation, and respect for sovereignty, rather than hierarchical impositions.

Current US policy is shaped by interventionist reflexes carried over from the era of the Cold War. Under the second Trump administration, the US seized Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro while leaving the Chavista regime in place, imposed a full oil blockade on Cuba, has threatened unilateral military action in Colombia and Mexico, and killed over two hundred people in airstrikes on boats in the Caribbean. Under administrations of both parties, Washington has underestimated Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)'s increasingly diversified partners and options. Washington continues to treat Cuba as a Cold War bogeyman while overlooking the strategic significance of Brazil as the hemisphere's largest democracy and climate powerhouse. Mexico remains our most consequential bilateral relationship, and Colombia a longstanding security partner.

An effective, people-first foreign policy is not optional but urgent. It must move beyond reactive security frameworks and embrace sustainable, multi-actor models of cooperation that do not rely solely on US leadership. Such an approach would build on the talent and dynamism of migrants, the innovation of local governments and civil society, and the cultural as well as economic interconnections that bind the region together. A progressive agenda would propose solutions that meet people's real needs in the United States and abroad: access to services, care, a healthy environment, decent jobs, and safety.



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An effective policy would also prioritize strengthening democracy by ensuring it delivers inclusion, dignity, and opportunity—especially for the historically marginalized. By protecting past gains, scaling promising models, and piloting new forms of partnership based on dialogue, solidarity, and mutual respect, the United States can help build a hemisphere rooted not only in resilience but also in creativity, prosperity, and shared purpose.

## The economic and digital future

The now-discredited "Washington Consensus" was centered on globalization—but it was a selective globalization, prioritizing the free movement of capital over labor and environmental standards. Autarky is not the solution. Rather, there must be a globalization of rights, particularly labor rights. Unions, a bedrock of economic prosperity as well as democratic resilience, must be strengthened throughout the hemisphere. Some of this work is already being done through coordinated campaigns within global union federations and, in the United States, through the Solidarity Center and the Bureau of International Labor Affairs in the Department of Labor. It is in the interests of US workers that Latin American workers have and exercise their rights to organize. This is especially important for collective bargaining power as companies and supply chains are multinational; US and Latin American workers share common employers and common interests.

During the "Pink Tide" of the 2000s, Latin America's new left governments learned from mistakes of the past and prioritized anti-inflationary monetary policies, recognizing that hyperinflation hurts poor people the most. Since then, however, governments have deprioritized inflation and lost elections as a result, punished by their traditional working-class bases. Collapsing economies are fertile ground for autocrats; to reduce the risk of both, the United States should endeavor to be a source of economic stability (including price

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stability) in the region, whether by providing periodic support for shaky national currencies or by regulating currency speculators.

Latin America, like the United States, is grappling with the challenges of disinformation, social media regulation, and the rise of artificial intelligence in politics. Brazil's stalled "fake news" bill—which would require online platforms to proactively remove illegal material and link user accounts to other forms of identification—highlights the need for cooperative regulation, as calls for greater oversight of US-based tech companies will be nearly impossible without US buy-in. A joint US–LAC agenda could focus on election integrity, platform transparency, and standards for synthetic media. Holding tech firms accountable for anti-democratic disinformation is in our mutual interest and can help build goodwill across the region. The United States can work with regional innovators in regulating digital governance, such as Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, which are currently considering transformative legislation. Washington cannot credibly address insecurity in the Americas without confronting its own contribution to it: the "iron river" of US-sourced firearms flowing south and strengthening criminal groups and transnational organized crime.

Economically, nearshoring to Mexico has accelerated, repositioning it as the United States' top trading partner. Yet resilient supply chains require rule-of-law reforms, labor rights enforcement, and environmental safeguards. Expanding beyond Mexico to include Brazil, Chile, and Colombia would prevent overconcentration while aligning supply chains with climate goals.

## Security and rule of law

Security is among the top concerns for Latin American voters, but US strategies have often reinforced militarization rather than the rule of law. *Mano dura* (an "iron fist," tough-on-crime approach) is not an



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effective strategy on its own, but it can appeal to voters who see no other alternative. Effective security policy needs to address the root causes of insecurity, replacing the "War on Drugs"—whose perverse incentives empower criminal actors—with an approach that provides safety for the working-class people most victimized by criminals.

Today, the most notorious model for law enforcement is El Salvador's state of exception: President Nayib Bukele's suspension of civil liberties for the entire population. This model is draconian—more than ninety thousand people have been jailed, the vast majority without trial—and concentrates absolute power in the executive. It is also undeniably popular. American policymakers should understand the appeal of the approach, to citizens as well as would-be autocrats, while also exposing its injustices: from gross human rights abuses to the corrupt deals with criminal gangs that undergird a system that seeks to manage crime more than to prevent it. We should also offer something better. Instead, the United States has advanced its own version of mano dura in its extrajudicial lethal strikes on vessels in the Caribbean and is pressuring countries to accept similar US military strikes within its borders, enabling a security model of state lawlessness.

A criminal justice system must be both just and effective. Justice cannot be arbitrary. Journalists, non-governmental organization (NGO) workers, and opposition politicians must not be arrested as "terrorists." And crime cannot be swept under the rug. Tackling the penetration of police and other state institutions by organized crime while ensuring that governments have the resources to investigate and solve crimes are mutually reinforcing aims that can improve public trust in the criminal justice system. Prioritizing citizen safety by protecting witnesses and strengthening public defender systems will encourage citizen cooperation with law enforcement. Most ambitiously, transnational efforts against corruption (detailed below) are necessary, even as they at times challenge the interests of entrenched elites. Organized crime is increasingly transnational; addressing it will serve both the United States and its partners and require their cooperation.

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## Authoritarianism and corruption—smarter tools

Crime prevention cannot be effective without rule of law, and rule of law requires a sustained commitment to anti-corruption. The security challenges outlined above—organized crime, "mano dura" populism, weak institutions—are all enabled and exacerbated by corruption. The region's most powerful criminal actors are not drug gangs but corrupt public officials. Most corruption looks more like Odebrecht than Tren de Aragua—that is to say, more like procurement fraud than drug gangs. And it is this elite crime that most corrodes public trust.

The most effective anti-corruption body in Latin America to date—the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG)—was too successful for its own good: the UN-sponsored office investigated and convicted a president and vice president, along with numerous other officials of fraud and corruption, before being shut down by another president for investigating him. Two similar bodies, the International Commission Against Impunity in El Salvador (CICIES) and the Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH), were likewise shut down by autocrats. Elites' fear of such bodies attests to their public utility—and the need to protect them from similar shutdowns in the future. A region-wide approach to anti-corruption, through a supranational CICIG-like investigative body that is not beholden to any president and thus cannot be shut down by one, is one potential way to raise the cost of corruption throughout the hemisphere, including in the United States.

In the meantime, anti-corruption efforts must not be naive. Corrupt autocrats do not fear the Inter-American Court of Human Rights; they fear the Southern District of New York. Many white-collar crimes involve money laundering, and nearly all money laundering passes at some point through the United States. This means the United States can play an important enforcement role in investigating not just the drugs but also the money, recovering embezzled assets and holding to



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account those leaders who are immune from their own institutions. The prosecution of ex-president Juan Orlando Hernandez of Honduras was one example of this approach, albeit undone by a presidential pardon.

At the same time, support for independent media and civic watchdogs can strengthen democratic accountability and expand civic space in authoritarian contexts. Other tools that have been wielded effectively include personal sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act, which focuses pressure on corrupt officials and human rights abusers while avoiding the widespread humanitarian consequences associated with comprehensive sanctions regimes. Greater transparency and oversight over these tools can prevent them from being weaponized for partisan purposes.

By contrast, broad sectoral sanctions and embargoes imposed on authoritarian governments such as those in Cuba and Venezuela have repeatedly failed to produce the political transformations their advocates promised, while imposing significant costs on ordinary citizens, straining relationships with regional partners, and undermining US credibility.[2] The Trump administration's de facto oil blockade and broader campaign of economic pressure deepened the island's economic and humanitarian crisis, contributing to energy shortages, declining living standards, including a rise in infant mortality rates. Whatever political and economic changes may emerge in Cuba in the coming years, there is little evidence that broad economic coercion is an effective mechanism for producing democratic reform.

Sectoral sanctions and embargoes must be lifted—unilaterally, not as a bargaining chip—if the United States is to ever be trusted as a partner for democracy and prosperity.

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## Human mobility: From crisis management to regional cooperation

Migration is where progressive foreign policy is truly tested, not in abstract principles but in how the United States concretely responds when millions of people move across borders seeking safety, work, and dignity. If progressives cannot articulate a coherent, effective migration strategy for the hemisphere, they cede the issue to policies that offer only walls, deportations, and demagoguery. Often, Latin America is rarely or never a foreign policy priority until a crisis forces our attention—by which point, it is too late for anything other than reactive, punitive responses.

This neglect is strategic malpractice. Migration has become a defining feature of life in the Americas. The region now hosts 85 percent of the world's 8 million displaced Venezuelans, alongside large Haitian, Cuban, and Nicaraguan diasporas—some 20 million people forcibly displaced across the hemisphere. This is not an aberration; it reflects intertwined structural crises of persistent inequality, endemic insecurity, and accelerating climate stress that will further intensify. A stable and predictable US border is impossible without regional cooperation to address these challenges at multiple levels—from mitigating the root causes of instability, of which US foreign policy is often a contributing factor, to providing safe pathways for reception and integration.

The United States cannot wall itself off from hemisphere-wide displacement any more than it can wall itself off from climate change, inflation, or organized crime. These are shared challenges that require shared solutions. Yet US policy has consistently treated migration as a problem to be contained rather than a reality to be addressed, lurching between enforcement crackdowns and emergency humanitarian responses while underinvesting in the regional cooperation, legal pathways, and host community support that reduce irregular flows and build stability.



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There is another way. Latin American countries have already demonstrated what works: ambitious regularization programs, municipal integration models, and regional cooperation mechanisms that stabilize borders while protecting rights. Brazil's Operation Welcome has relocated Venezuelans across the country. Colombia maintains a temporary protection status for Venezuelan migrants—one of the world's most ambitious regularization efforts. These are not small pilot programs; they are large-scale governance models that reduce irregular flows, support economic integration, and contribute to regional stability.

This dynamic is evident at the local level. Local governments are increasingly acting as incubators, implementers, and advocates for migration solutions—designing innovative tools such as local identity cards, facilitating access to regularization and services, and advocating for expanded pathways at the national and international levels. The common thread is political will paired with adequate funding and coordination. Tackling migration requires addressing local needs by investing in host communities. US development assistance that helps countries absorb and integrate migrants is crucial in easing pressure on the US border while promoting regional and economic stability.

The United States should build on lessons from regional models such as the one started through the Los Angeles Declaration for Migration and Protection (LAD), which has been effectively dismantled. While implementation was uneven and commitments often fell short of ambitions, the Declaration represented an important attempt to frame migration as a shared regional challenge requiring shared regional solutions. Reimagining a standing mechanism with transparency, civil society participation, and predictable funding could transform regional cooperation on migration. The United States can also mobilize innovative financing by leveraging remittances as development tools and supporting diaspora entrepreneurship through the Development Finance Corporation. At a base level,

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US assistance to the region must increase dramatically to address the extremely harmful impacts of recent aid cuts and to reduce earlier funding gaps, while also reforming how assistance is delivered to emphasize local and community-based solutions and effective programming.

Yet, the lessons of the LAD also point to what regional cooperation should not become: a mechanism for outsourcing US responsibilities to neighboring countries. In recent years, Washington has increasingly relied on third-country deportation agreements, transit-country enforcement arrangements, and pressure on regional governments to absorb displaced populations while offering limited financial support and shrinking legal pathways into the United States. This is not genuine burden sharing, it is burden shifting. A sustainable regional migration strategy requires the United States to assume its share of responsibility by expanding protection pathways, refugee resettlement, family reunification, and labor mobility programs, and by providing predictable financial support to host countries and communities.

In fact, the past few years have demonstrated the true power of expanding legal pathways, family reunification, seasonal labor schemes, and sector-specific work visas, all of which require clear pathways to long-term status. The available data shows that when people can access regular protection pathways, irregular border crossings decline substantially.[3]

The evidence is clear: migration contributes significantly to both economic dynamism and demographic renewal. In the United States, migrants are essential to the labor force and drive entrepreneurship, contributing tens of billions in net federal tax revenue.[4] In Latin America, remittances far exceed foreign direct investment in many countries and are a critical source of household income. Venezuelan migrants have added $2.7 billion in consumer spending, investment, and tax revenues to Colombia's economy, while Haitian workers have filled critical labor gaps in Chilean agriculture and construction.[5]



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Addressing migration seriously benefits everyone. A regional migration mechanism grounded in shared responsibility and expanded pathways would strengthen democratic governance, reduce irregular flows, and build prosperous labor markets—securing the orderly, humane system that most people in the United States and across the region want.

## Rebuilding climate partnership in the hemisphere

Climate challenges are reshaping the hemisphere, but corporate interests have reinforced extractivism over a global green transition. Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) contain roughly one-quarter of the world's critical minerals, one of the largest concentrations of renewable energy potential, and one-third of the planet's remaining tropical forests. Climate policy needs to address both the region's legitimate development needs and the reality of climate vulnerability.

The United States should take a page from the successes of regional leaders in the climate space, such as Brazil and Barbados. Brazil's hosting of COP30 presents a vehicle for a Green Hemispheric Partnership. Its 50 percent reduction in Amazon deforestation shows what is possible with political will, though in danger from new oil drilling and the Ferrogrão soy railway project, recently approved. Ecuador's recent debt-for-nature swap freed $323 million for conservation while reducing debt burdens. These models work, but they remain underfunded and underutilized.

A renewed US approach must move beyond symbolic commitments and fragmented initiatives. For example, US contributions to the Amazon Fund lag far behind those of European partners while our Caribbean climate assistance focuses on emergency response rather than what the countries concerned have indicated they most need: resilient infrastructure.

A better strategy would reverse this pattern by centering climate cooperation in US diplomacy, trade, and development finance. It would

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create a Green Hemispheric Partnership grounded in justice, co-governance, and shared prosperity. Such a partnership would include debt relief tied to climate action, pooled finance through regional trust funds, expanded access to early warning systems and climate-resilient agriculture, and long-term investment in clean energy infrastructure and community-led adaptation. It would also link industrial policy at home—including leveraging the domestic momentum unleashed by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)—to value-added production in the region, rather than to extractive supply chains that externalize environmental and social costs.

The United States should strengthen its regulatory systems to ensure that companies are complying with deforestation and labor standards. Cooperation and coordination in green energy transition across the region would benefit from Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs)-style agreements to scale renewable energy projects while protecting workers and communities, building on successes in Southeast Asia. Critical minerals compacts with Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil should link supply chain cooperation to in-country processing, Indigenous land rights, and enforceable environmental standards.

US climate strategy must be both just and effective. Justice means Indigenous peoples controlling their territories, not just managing them on behalf of outside interests. It means that environmental defenders are protected from violence, not merely celebrated after being murdered. Effectiveness means debt relief tied to climate action, climate-contingent debt clauses that pause payments after disasters, and development finance that prioritizes resilience over fossil fuel infrastructure.

Tackling climate change requires addressing its intersection with corruption and illicit finance—illegal mining, land grabbing, and deforestation are increasingly transnational crimes. The United States should join the Escazú Agreement, expand Global Magnitsky sanctions to cover environmental crimes, and revitalize Treasury-led efforts to



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counter illicit finance in the Amazon. Trade policy should align with our climate goals, for instance by ensuring that commodities are deforestation-free and labor-safe.

In short, climate action in the hemisphere is inseparable from democracy, economic justice, and human rights. The global energy transition will shape the hemisphere's political and economic architecture for decades. Whether that transition reinforces old hierarchies or creates new pathways for shared prosperity depends on the choices we make now. A bold United States strategy, grounded in partnership rather than extraction, can help build a hemisphere that is not only more resilient but also more fair, creative, and inclusive.

## Conclusion

For too long, left-right politics in the Western Hemisphere have been mired in outdated paradigms. They have revolved around states and not people: declarations of support for ideologically co-partisan governments with little regard for the ordinary people who live under them. In a region with extensive experience of US imperialism, gunboat diplomacy, coup plotting, and support for military regimes, the default progressive stance on US Latin America policy has often been *the less, the better*. But disengagement is not a policy solution, nor does it guarantee the sovereignty of Latin American countries. It simply leaves a vacuum to be filled by others, such as China and Russia, with imperialist ambitions of their own: China through debt-financed infrastructure tied to extractive supply chains, Russia through arms sales and disinformation. Disengagement also goes against the expressed preferences of most people in the region, who, despite the shameful history of US aggression and domination, feel a kinship with Americans. What most people in Latin America desire is not neglect but a mutually respectful and beneficial relationship.

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A progressive foreign policy for the hemisphere must therefore move beyond both domination and neglect. It should reject the false choice between intervention and disengagement and embrace a partnership grounded in mutual respect, democratic accountability, and shared responsibility. That means supporting people rather than regimes, investing in labor rights and economic opportunity, treating migration as a regional opportunity and shared governance challenge rather than a security threat, combating corruption through targeted accountability rather than collective punishment, and placing climate cooperation at the center of hemispheric relations.

The Americas possess extraordinary assets: abundant renewable energy, dynamic cities, entrepreneurial migrant communities, vibrant civil societies, and some of the world's youngest and most innovative populations. The question is not whether the United States will remain engaged in the hemisphere, but what kind of engagement it will pursue. A foreign policy rooted in solidarity, dignity, and shared prosperity would not only advance US interests; it would help build a hemisphere that is more democratic, resilient, and equitable for everyone.



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