
Building “Nuestra América:” National Sovereignty and Regional Integration in the Americas*

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“It is the hour of reckoning and of marching in unison, and we must move in lines as compact as the veins of silver that lie at the roots of the Andes.”

José Martí, “Nuestra América,” 1891

José Martí, the Cuban intellectual and independence hero, published one of his most important essays in a Mexican newspaper while representing Uruguay at the First International Conference of American States in Washington DC in 1891. Titled “Nuestra América,” Martí’s call to action touched on a number of themes, including nationalism, imperialism, and racism. He urged his readers to discard

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their provincial mindsets, insisting that “hometowns that are still strangers to one another XX must hurry to become acquainted, like men who are about to battle together” (MARTÍ, 1977, p. 26). Martí warned that the United States had its sights set on its neighbors to the south: “The hour is near when [our America] will be approached by an enterprising and forceful nation that will demand intimate relations with her, though it does not know her and disdains her.” In order to protect themselves, the people of America had to join together, Martí argued, and resolve their differences in the “urgent, wordless union of the continental soul.”

But the question of how to, or even whether one should, unite the Americas has proven a constant challenge. One of the greatest obstacles has been the issue of sovereignty. Historian Daniel Philpott (2001, p. 16) defines sovereignty as “supreme authority within a territory.”¹ Regional integration, by its very nature, requires that participants relinquish some part of their sovereignty for the sake of cooperation.² As Manfred Mols (1996) observes, “A fully developed integration scheme always implies a concrete, though partial, transfer of national sovereignty to the regional community.” When nations integrate, some of the prerequisites of authority, especially control over foreign policy and trade, shift from national sovereigns to regional authorities.

Historically, the presence and power of the United States has both spurred and impeded regional integration in the Americas. As Martí warned, the United States has sought, and still seeks, various forms of dominion over its neighbors (SMITH, 2008). Regional integration has the potential to both aid and deter U.S. hegemonic tendencies, and has acted in both capacities in various moments in the past. What is more, the United States has played a role in nearly every attempt at regional integration, either as a participant or an external influence, and tended to have a significant impact on both the successes and failures.

This article explores the history of regional integration in the Americas, drawing lessons from the diverse ways that people have sought to unite the hemisphere. Though a history of regional integration could begin at any number of time and places—Olmec trading across Mesoamerica in 1000 BC, the Triple Alliance of city-states that led to the creation of the Aztec Empire in the early 1400s AD, or the European conquest of the Americas and the consolidation of the English, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies and empires—this analysis will begin at the point when most of the modern nation-states of Latin America came into being: the nineteenth-century wars for independence. From there, it will trace various attempts at regional integration, keeping in mind three fundamental questions: How does regional integration compromise sovereignty? Does it have to? Is it worth sacrificing sovereignty to increase integration?

Early Attempts at Latin American Integration

Even before Spanish colonies in the Americas began their struggle for independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were leaders who spoke out in favor of creating an integrated Latin American nation separate from Spain. The most notable was the well-traveled Venezuelan Francisco de Miranda (1750-1816), a veteran of the U.S. Revolutionary War and the French Revolution, who envisioned as early as 1783 the creation of a single Hispanic American nation named Colombia (after Christopher Columbus) that would unite all of Spain’s territories in the New World (BOHÓRQUEZ, 2006). When Miranda’s multiple attempts to realize his vision ended in imprisonment and death, his former collaborator, Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), assumed leadership of Miranda’s quest.

Bolívar was to become the person most associated with the idea of Latin American integration. He first began advocating for a Latin

American “confederation” in 1810 after meeting Francisco de Miranda in England (HART, 2005). In an article in London’s *Morning Chronicle*, Bolivar predicted that Venezuela would achieve liberation from Spain and advised independence leaders to “invite all the *pueblos* of America to unite in a confederation” (LEU; VIVAS, 1975, p. 27). Two years later, Bolivar referred again to the necessity of Latin American unity in his first major text, known as the “Cartagena Manifesto,” and again in his famous “Jamaica Letter” of 1815, but it was not until the end of the wars for independence that he was able to make a concrete attempt at integration.

Bolivar convened a great congress in the center of the Americas in order to bring to fruition his vision of continental integration. On December 7, 1824, two days before the Spanish lost the last major battle in the wars for independence, Bolivar issued a circular to the leaders of Gran Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Chile, and Buenos Aires, inviting them to attend the Congress of Panama.³ Later, he extended the invitation to the Federation of Central America, while other organizers, including the vice president of Colombia, Francisco de Paula Santander, attempted to include Brazil, Haiti, the United States, and England as well. By the time the congress convened in 1826, however, only Peru, Colombia, Mexico, and Central America had sent delegates, while Britain and Holland sent observers (LEU; VIVAS, 1975, p. 31).

Bolivar sought to use the Congress of Panama to unify and strengthen the newborn nations of Spanish America. He envisioned the creation of “the largest, most extraordinary, and powerful league ever seen on the face of the earth,” a confederation of “independent nations, bound by a common law that would regulate foreign relations and provide guarantees for their survival through a general and permanent congress” (BUSHNELL, 2003, p. 169). Unfortunately, the conference participants found more grounds for argument than agreement, but by the end of the meeting they managed to produce a Treaty of Uni-

on, League, and Perpetual Confederation among the Republics of Colombia, Central America, Peru, and the United States of Mexico. The treaty promised to unite the American nations "in peace and in war" and serve as a "perpetual pact of firm and inviolable friendship" (LEU; VIVAS, 1975, p. 36).

Internal and external factors combined to frustrate Bolivar's dreams of integration. Internally, the Congress of Panama took place at a time when Latin America was still experiencing extreme political instability and the boundaries of many of its nations remained in dispute; before the congress, Paraguay had separated from Argentina in 1811 and Bolivia from Peru in 1825, and after the congress Uruguay detached from Brazil in 1828, while Gran Colombia dissolved in 1830 and the Federation of Central America broke apart in 1838 (DABÈNE, 2009, p. 14). In this period of uncertainty, national leaders were more intent upon consolidating sovereignty through competition than relinquishing it through cooperation. Only Bolivar's own government, of Gran Colombia, ratified the treaty that the delegates had signed at the Congress of Panama. Externally, both the United States and Britain opposed the creation of a strong Latin American bloc that could challenge their own power. The United States, still following the Washingtonian and Jeffersonian policy of avoiding "entangling alliances," did not care to participate in a hemispheric confederation, nor did it wish to compete with one (MALANSON, 2006). British leaders, eager to expand their economic influence, worried that a Latin American confederation would endanger their efforts to establish a climate of free trade in the area (PAQUETTE, 2004). Lacking internal commitment and external acceptance, Bolivar's vision of a continental confederation was doomed. In despair, he concluded that "the Congress of Panama, an institution that should be admirable if it were more efficient, resembles that crazy Greek who tried to direct ships from a rock: its power will be a shadow, and its decrees nothing more than advice" (LEU; VIVAS, 1975, p. 33).

Though in the short term the Congress of Panama failed to live up to Bolívar's lofty expectations of unification, in the long term it helped lay the foundations for a number of tenets that have since become central to international law. The congress contributed significantly to establishing the validity of such concepts as the juridical equality of nations, conflict resolution through conciliation, and territorial integrity (LEU; VIVAS, 1975, p. 33). According to historian Greg Grandin, Latin America's intellectuals, jurists, and politicians—those who participated in the Congress of Panama and their contemporaries and successors—laid the foundations for current practices of multilateral cooperation and arbitration. “Based on principles of non-aggression, international arbitration, and economic justice, they developed a sovereignty-social rights complex [...] that would revolutionize the interstate system,” Grandin (2012, p. 72) explains. This “sovereignty-social rights complex” entailed prioritizing state sovereignty and the public good over individual rights, and asserting the absolute nature of territorial sovereignty. It contrasted directly with the legal system that was developing concurrently in the United States, which prioritized individual rights and predicated the state's sovereignty on its ability to protect those rights (GRANDIN, 2012, p. 70). The vast discrepancy between these two understandings of sovereignty would remain a constant source of tension as the United States became increasingly involved in the process of regional integration.

The Rise of Pan-Americanism

U.S. foreign policy has suffered from a constant vacillation between isolation, intervention, and participation, and its relations with Latin America highlight this strategic schizophrenia. In 1823, a few short years before the United States resisted attempts at regional integration at the Congress of Panama, President James Monroe asserted that, “the American continents, by the free and independent position

which they have assumed and maintained, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European Power.”⁴ This vision, which has become known as the Monroe Doctrine, saw the United States as the protector of a “separate hemispheric system of nations”—a role that U.S. leaders have continued to pursue ever since (SMITH, 2000, p. 20).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the controversial idea of “Pan Americanism” had come to represent Monroe’s vision of U.S.-led hemispheric solidarity. As historian Mark Gilderhus (1986, p. ix) observes, “Pan Americanism has always had more appeal in the United States than elsewhere.” Many Latin Americans, at least as far back as Bolivar, had preferred to exclude the United States from efforts at regional integration, in what could be called retroactively an ideology of “Pan Latin Americanism.”⁵ Popularized in 1881 by U.S. Secretary of State James G. Blaine, the term “Pan Americanism” immediately projected contradictory sentiments: “For some observers, it has connoted a more equitable system of association and partnership, a relationship based on courtesy, consideration, and justice... For critics, in contrast, it has meant an exercise in deception and disguise, a subtle method of hegemony and exploitation” (GILDERHUS, 1986). Critics of Pan-Americanism interpreted that version of regional integration as a thinly veiled effort to reduce Latin American sovereignty and increase U.S. influence.

These tensions over the idea of Pan Americanism and the role of the United States in regional integration were in evidence at the First International Conference of American States, which took place in Washington in 1889-1890. Seven years prior, the United States had issued invitations to all of its Latin American neighbors to attend a congress in the hopes of strengthening economic ties across the hemisphere (DABÈNE, 2009, p. 15). José Martí led the charge to resist what he saw as the imposition of U.S. hegemony; “From Independence down to today,” he wrote in November 1889, “never was a sub-

ject more in need of examination than the invitation of the United States to the Pan American Conference... The truth is that the hour has come for Spanish America to declare its second independence” (MARTÍ, 1977, p. 48).⁶ In a display of collective diplomacy, Latin American delegates managed to water down the U.S.-sponsored proposal to create a common customs union by instead approving the creation of an International American Union administered by a Commercial Bureau of American Republics (DABÈNE, 2009, p. 15).⁷ In doing so, they sought to find a middle ground where they could protect their sovereignty by encouraging cooperation and trade without integration.

The First International Conference of American States set a number of notable precedents for future efforts at regional integration. First, it signaled the U.S.’s intent to take the lead in integration, especially in matters of politics and commerce. Second, and related closely to the first, it illustrated Latin Americans’ concerns about U.S. dominance and desire to protect their national sovereignty, and was one of the first successful attempts to use collective diplomacy to resist U.S. designs for the region. Third, it established the practice of holding inter-American conferences on a regular basis in order to encourage cooperation and the exchange of ideas. Fourth, in forming the Pan American Union, delegates laid the foundation for the eventual creation of the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1948 (SHEININ, 1996).

These precedents helped ensure that the ideology of Pan Americanism would survive its somewhat rocky beginnings and thrive well into the twentieth century. Pan Americanism spread from the conference in Washington to become not just a foreign policy agenda but also a grassroots civic movement encompassing hundreds of organizations and clubs across the United States and Latin America. A shared dedication to building a hemispheric community drove this movement, while at the same time political and social activists across the

Americas used the ideology of Pan Americanism and the international reach of the Pan American Union to advocate for a wide variety of social and political causes, from women's suffrage to workers' rights to public health reform (BERGER, [n.d.], p. 3 e 6; STONER, 2000).

One of the most prominent proponents of Pan Americanism, Woodrow Wilson, believed that regional integration under U.S. tutelage would help Latin American nations achieve moral, political, and economic improvement. Unlike his Latin American counterparts, Wilson saw national sovereignty as a reward for good behavior, not an absolute right (GILDERHUS, 1986, p. 156). The man who famously boasted that he was "going to teach the South American Republics to elect good men" practiced an especially paternalistic form of Pan Americanism that prompted an angry backlash from Latin America (BETHELL, 1986, p. 107).⁸ Adding injury to insult, Wilson's method of "teaching" entailed a significant increase in the frequency and duration of U.S. interventions in the Caribbean Basin, demonstrating a complete lack of regard for Latin American sovereignty. It thus comes as little surprise that Latin American leaders, from presidents to revolutionaries, rejected Wilson's program for Pan American political and economic integration (GILDERHUS, 1986, p. 157).

The ideals of Pan Americanism—cooperation, equality, and partnership—finally found genuine expression in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy. After decades of dollar and gunboat diplomacy had engendered significant mutual mistrust, the pressures of regional opposition and the Great Depression combined to compel President Roosevelt to seek a new way of conducting relations in the hemisphere. In his inaugural address in March 1933, he made a vague promise to "dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others" (ROOSEVELT, 1998, p. 32). At the Pan-American Conference in December of that year, Secretary of State Cordell Hull gave substance to Roosevelt's words when

he agreed to Latin American demands that Washington renounce its right to intervene and recognize the principle of absolute national sovereignty (GRANDIN, 2012, p. 88). The Good Neighbor policy was not a set of hollow promises: Roosevelt oversaw the abrogation of the odious Platt amendment that had since 1903 justified U.S. intervention in Cuba, finished withdrawing the U.S. troops that had been occupying various nations in the Caribbean Basin, and opted for negotiation rather than intervention when Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas nationalized the holdings of U.S. oil companies in 1938 (DOENECKE; STOLER, 2005).

In addition to fulfilling the ideals of Pan Americanism, the Good Neighbor Policy also had a significant impact on both regional integration and national sovereignty. Whereas Wilson had failed to gain substantial Latin American support for either the Allied cause in World War I or the League of Nations, Roosevelt's respect for his neighbors' sovereignty had earned enough goodwill to convince them to both support the United States in the Second World War and, more importantly, play a key role in the construction of the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States after the war.

Integration for Security During the Cold War

Pan Americanism, the Good Neighbor Policy, and hemispheric cooperation during World War II laid the foundations for multiple efforts at integration throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. As members of the winning alliance, Latin American nations earned the right to play a significant role in constructing the postwar world order at the 1945 United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco. Out of the fifty countries represented at the meeting, twenty were Latin American, and they were able to use their numerical strength as the single largest regional bloc to insert human rights issues into both the agenda and the final UN Charter

(DABÈNE, 2009, p. 16). Latin American representatives also contributed the draft resolutions that built the foundation for the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and showed particular dedication to the issues of economic and social rights (CAROZZA, 2003).

Concurrently, Latin American and U.S. leaders were responding to and engaging in the mounting Cold War by constructing an inter-American system on the basis of military and political cooperation. In 1947, the nations of the Americas gathered in Brazil at the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace and Continental Security, where they signed the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, commonly known as the Rio Treaty or Rio Pact. The first of many such mutual security agreements, the Rio Treaty warned: "an armed attack by any State against an American State shall be considered an attack against all the American States" (LEU; VIVAS, 1975, p. 135).⁹ In agreeing to respond as a collective to any attacks, the signatories sacrificed some of their individual flexibility in foreign policy in exchange for increased security.

The treaty somewhat mitigated the loss of sovereignty by leaving it up to each individual nation to decide its own immediate response to any assault until a collective agreement could be reached.

After they took care of the military side of hemispheric cooperation, U.S. and Latin American leaders turned to politics. In March 1948, representatives of twenty-one nations met at the Ninth International Conference of American States in Colombia and signed the Charter of the Organization of American States and the accompanying "Pact of Bogotá," bringing to fruition, in many minds, Bolivar's original quest for hemispheric integration (SHEININ, 2000). The Charter explained that the American states were creating the organization in order to "achieve an order of peace and justice, to promote their solidarity, to strengthen their collaboration, and to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity, and their independence"

(ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES, 1948). The authors of the OAS Charter tried to minimize the tensions between integration and sovereignty by explicitly stating that the organization did not give any member country the right to intervene in the internal matters of other American states. Other principles that Bolivar had championed, such as the juridical equality of nations, the inviolability of territorial integrity, and the importance of hemispheric solidarity also made their way into the OAS Charter (LEU; VIVAS, 1975, p. 143).

While the Rio Treaty and the Organization of American States were in some ways the fulfillment of Bolivar's greatest hopes for regional integration, they were also products of the Cold War and frequently served to further one of his greatest fears: U.S. domination. At the insistence of the United States, anti-communist language pervaded the Rio Treaty and the OAS Charter (LÓPEZ-MAYA, 1995). Both documents gave justifications for defense against military and non-military "acts of aggression," a category of offense that was expansive enough to include communist infiltration and subversion. On numerous occasions, the Rio Treaty and the Organization of American States served as tools for U.S. leaders and their allies to coordinate multilateral opposition to real or perceived communist threats inside the hemisphere, from Guatemala's Jacobo Arbenz to Cuba's Fidel Castro to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua (SHEININ, 1996; RABE, 2012).

The fact that the United States used hemispheric integration as a weapon in the Cold War does not, however, mean that other American states stood idly by. The leaders of some Latin American nations participated enthusiastically in the fight against communism, even creating their own sub regional frameworks for cooperation, like Operation Condor (DINGES, 2004). Other countries, such as Mexico, complicated the United States' anti-communist crusade by maintaining relations with Cuba and sheltering political refugees from across the hemisphere (KELLER, 2012; YANKELEVICH, 2002). The so-cal-

led "Contadora Group," composed of the nations of Mexico, Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela, overcame strong U.S. opposition and initiated a peace plan for Central America in the mid 1980s. Eventually, under the leadership of Costa Rican president Oscar Arias, the Contadora efforts led to the Esquipulas II Accords, which helped bring to an end the decades of civil war that had plagued Central America (FARER, 1993).¹⁰ In Nicaragua, the UN and the OAS played crucial roles in helping resolve the long internal conflict by serving as mediators, proposing compromises that neither side could have suggested without appearing weak, and monitoring the implementation of the peace agreements (FARER, 1996, p. 13).

Another rare, though important, example of beneficial collective political action during the Cold War was the creation of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 1959 and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 1969 under the auspices of the Organization of American States. The commission has helped protect human rights by conducting investigations and compiling reports, while the court holds trials in cases where the commission has already exhausted its procedures. In creating these instruments of international oversight, the participating states "voluntarily relinquished sovereignty in the area of human rights and [...] made human right violations in their territory subject to international law and the oversight of regional enforcement organs" (PASQUALUCCI, 2000, p. 195). In spite of the unfortunate fact that some of the largest and most powerful countries in the hemisphere, including the United States, Mexico, and Brazil, have in some cases failed to accept the jurisdiction of the commission or the court, inter-American human rights organizations have still seen a number of successes. When the Commission on Human Rights made an investigation into Argentina's "Dirty War" in 1979, for example, thousands of people provided testimony about the torture, murders, and disappearances carried out by government agents; after the commission disseminated its report, the number of disappearances fell dramatically (PASQUALUCCI, 2000, p. 197).

Efforts at Economic Integration

Even during the Cold War, efforts to increase economic integration across the Americas received at least as high a priority as political integration, especially on the part of Latin American governments. Many of the United States' hemispheric allies from World War II were disappointed to learn at the 1948 Inter-American meeting that there would be no so-called "Marshall Plan for Latin America" (LÓPEZ-MAYA, 1995, p. 143). That same year, the United Nations created the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC or CEPAL), whose leader, Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch, argued in 1949 that Latin America needed to stimulate industrialization in order to escape its "dependent" position in the world economy. In the absence of aid from the United States, Prebisch contended, the only way to assemble enough capital for industrialization would be to abandon free market practices and unify the Latin American markets (DABÈNE, 2009, p. 16).

Thus began a first wave of regional economic integration efforts focused on industrialization that lasted into the 1960s. It was an extension of earlier state-led attempts at import substitution industrialization, with the added dimension of international cooperation (STALLINGS, 2001). According to Olivier Dabène, "an important dimension of this first wave of postwar regional integration was the policy of industrial complementarity, which was supposed to promote industrial specialization among the member countries of a regional grouping" (DABÈNE, 2009, p. 18). The formation of the Coal and Steel Community in Europe in 1951 gave further inspiration and impetus to Latin American attempts at economic regional integration. Products of this wave included the Central American Common Market (1960), the Latin American Free Trade Association (1960), the Andean Group (1969), and the Caribbean Free Trade Association (1969).

A number of factors combined to prevent such post-war integration efforts from succeeding. Member states argued over where to locate new industries and which markets should be opened or protected. Countries with different levels and types of economic development struggled to find common ground, while countries whose economies were based on the production of the same agricultural goods and raw materials as their neighbors were more disposed to competition than cooperation. The authoritarian governments that seized power throughout Latin America in the late 1940s and early 1950s fiercely resisted any reduction of their national sovereignty, at the same time that the United States opposed any challenges to the free market system that buttressed its own economy (MELCHER, 2002).¹¹

By the 1960s, U.S. leaders had recognized the need to encourage economic development in Latin America, but they attempted to support or provide methods of doing so that avoided sub-regional groupings. Vice President Richard Nixon took a disastrous tour of Latin America in 1958, during which he had to flee angry mobs that threw stones and threatened to overturn his car. That experience, combined with the Cuban Revolution less than a year later, convinced policy-makers that something needed to be done before inequality and poverty drove the entire continent to rebellion. In 1959, the Dwight Eisenhower administration approved Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek's proposal for the creation of the Inter-American Development Bank. According to the OAS agreement that established the bank, its purpose was "to contribute to the acceleration of the process of economic and social development of the regional developing member countries, individually and collectively."¹² In March 1961, John F. Kennedy launched the Alliance for Progress, a ten-year, \$20 billion dollar program of foreign aid that proposed to "modernize" Latin America. Kubitschek had also planted the seeds for this endeavor, in a letter to Eisenhower in 1958 in which he proposed what he called "Operation Pan America."¹³ As U.S. Secretary of Treasury C.

Douglas Dillon explained, the Alliance would help Latin Americans “understand that the United States was as boldly committed to the development of Latin America as it once was to the reconstruction of Western Europe” (RABE, 1999, p. 31).

The Inter-American Development Bank would turn out to be much more effective than the Alliance for Progress. The bank has become the greatest multilateral source of financing for Latin America; in addition to providing loans at favorable rates of interest, it has funded grants, technical assistance, and research (BREZINA, 1999). Its unique governing structure, in which the borrower countries are, as a collective, the majority shareholders, has helped avoid the problem of U.S. hegemony that has hindered many hemispheric efforts at cooperation. In contrast, the United States’ overbearing management of the Alliance for Progress helped ensure its failure. The fact that the United States “tied” Alliance loans to U.S. products and transporters meant that the recipients could not make maximum use of the funds by seeking out competitive prices. Administrative problems and poor planning within the Washington bureaucracy slowed everything down, while Latin American governments had their own agendas and resisted making the social reforms that the United States demanded. Fundamentally, the Alliance for Progress failed because Kennedy was trying to apply theories about modernization based on the European post-war experience to a part of the world with different circumstances and history (RABE, 1999).

As the optimism of the early 1960s waned, efforts at regional economic integration underwent a period of stagnation. International and internal obstacles, including skyrocketing oil prices and a new wave of dictatorships, discouraged attempts to seek development through cooperation. Regional organizations, including the Andean Group and the Central American Common Market, readjusted their strategies and reduced their expectations (DABÈNE, 2009, p. 19-20). The United States shifted from the Alliance for Progress policy of pursu-

ing linked goals of development and democracy to the so-called Mann Doctrine of encouraging economic growth with absolute neutrality on the questions of social reform and democracy (SMITH, 2008, p. 144). What was more, U.S. support for economic development in Latin America decreased as the war in Vietnam loomed ever larger in U.S. attention and budgets (TAFFET, 2007, p. 178).

The period of stagnation did not last long, however, and by the 1980s efforts at integration were once again picking up steam. The nations of the Americas found that they had to cooperate to solve two emergencies: the Central American civil wars, and the international debt crisis (DABÈNE, 2009, p. 20). While the United States had actively sought to thwart the peace process that resulted in the Esquipulas Peace Agreement, U.S. leaders played a more positive role in helping resolve the debt crisis that swept through Latin America beginning in 1982. The so-called “Washington Consensus” used neoliberal economic principles to rescue Latin American economies from astronomical debt and spiraling inflation—at least in the short term. Governments across the region bought into the consensus; they reduced the economic role of the state, supported the private sector, and reduced barriers to free trade (SMITH, 2008, p. 223-224). At the same time, the collapse of the Soviet bloc increased enthusiasm for free markets, and the transition away from authoritarian governance in Latin America removed an additional barrier to regional cooperation (MELCHER, 2002, p. 193).

This new wave of economic integration of the 1980s and 1990s was significantly different from the earlier one of the 1960s. It was less protectionist and less focused on industrialization and import substitution (DABÈNE, 2009, p. 22). Instead, the American states turned to free trade and pursued a policy of “open regionalism,” which the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean defined as “a process of growing economic interdependence at the regional level, promoted both by preferential integration agreements and by

other policies in a context of liberalization and deregulation” (CEPAL, 1994, p. 10). Two of the most important products of this wave were the Southern Common Market (Mercosur or Mercosul), created in 1991, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which took effect in 1994.

Mercosur has been the most successful attempt at regional economic integration in South America. In 1985, the governments of Brazil and Argentina announced their intentions for cooperation in the Declaration of Foz de Iguaçu; when Paraguay and Uruguay joined the effort and all four countries signed the Treaty of Asunción in 1991, Mercosur was born (MORALES FAJARDO, 2011). Following a policy of “open regionalism,” the treaty created a free trade zone that eventually became a customs union with a common external tariff; in addition, the treaty contained the political goals of advancing democracy and peace in the Southern Cone (SMITH, 2008, p. 286). The participants also hoped that creating a strong bloc could improve their negotiating position with third parties, including the United States and the European Union. In the years since Mercosur’s creation, two additional countries—Venezuela and Bolivia—have become members, and six other South American countries have become associated.¹⁴

Though Mercosur has seen notable, if uneven, success in encouraging economic integration and increasing trade among member countries, many tensions remain, especially over the issue of national sovereignty. The clause in the Treaty of Asunción that makes membership contingent on democratic rule limits the rights of member countries to determine their own form of government, which has been problematic for Paraguay on multiple occasions, for example (DREZNER, 2001, p. 332). There is also a great deal of tension and disagreement among Mercosur countries over the question of whether the arrangement limits members’ abilities to negotiate independently with each other or outside parties. Brazil and Argentina have signed a number of bilateral agreements that undermine the cohesion

of Mercosur, while at the same time they have blocked Uruguay's attempts to negotiate treaties with other countries (SCHELHAS, 2011, p. 181). What is more, in order for Mercosur's complex assortment of decision-making institutions to have any power, the individual countries have to cede some of their own authority (SMITH, 2008, p. 286-287).¹⁵ As a result of member countries' unwillingness to diminish their national sovereignty, Mercosur's common bodies lack the necessary ability to enforce their decisions (MORALES FAJARDO, 2011, p. 382).

While the other most important example of subregional economic integration attempt in the Americas, NAFTA, has grown alongside Mercosur and has many similar characteristics, it is not exactly identical. The governments of the United States, Mexico, and Canada signed the North American Free Trade Agreement in October 1992, and when it went into effect in January 1994 it created the second largest trading bloc in the world (SMITH, 2008, p. 225). The level of economic integration was much lower than that of the European Union, or even Mercosur, as it only created a free trade area rather than a customs union or a common market. NAFTA focused on reducing barriers to the free flow of goods and capital between the three countries, and avoided the controversial issue of labor altogether (CHAMBERS; SMITH, 2002, p. 4).¹⁶ The North American Free Trade Agreement also established fewer bodies for collective decision-making than Mercosur; as Robert Pastor put it, "NAFTA is a business contract among three governments that seemed more intent on affirming their separate sovereignties than in finding areas of common interest" (PASTOR, 2011, p. 17).

Like Mercosur, the North American Free Trade Agreement has had a mixed record of success. While trade and investment among the three member countries have increased substantially since NAFTA's implementation, the growth has been unequal among the three countries, inconsistent over time, and uneven across industries and regions

(CHAMBERS; SMITH, 2002, p. 11; PASTOR, 2011, p. 9). Unlike Mercosur, however, NAFTA has not caused nearly as many controversies over the issue of national sovereignty, for the simple reason that it is a much more limited undertaking and does not involve any significant sharing or delegation of authority. As Edward Chambers and Peter Smith observe, “the result might be inconsistency between the relatively “deep” level of economic integration envisioned by NAFTA—much of it already achieved—and its distinctly “shallow” level of political integration” (CHAMBERS; SMITH, 2002, p. 8-9). NAFTA has done an effective job thus far of encouraging integration while protecting its members’ sovereignty, but increased sharing of authority might be needed if the agreement is to evolve to meet new opportunities and challenges in the future.

Conclusions

While every attempt at regional integration in the Americas has required the participants to voluntarily sacrifice some measure of their sovereignty, the most successful efforts have been those that either kept the sacrifice to a minimum or offered significant enough rewards to offset the loss of sovereignty. Simon Bolivar’s Congress of Panama failed to unite the nations of Spanish America because the nascent governments were not yet confident enough in their sovereignty to be willing to share even the smallest part. Sixty years later, Latin American governments still proved resistant to the idea of regional integration at the First International American Conference, but for a different reason. By then, most governments had established sovereignty within their own territories, which removed one obstacle to cooperation; but a new threat had emerged with the growing power of the United States, and the Latin American participants in the conference feared that if they sacrificed any of their sovereignty they would leave themselves exposed to U.S. imperialist designs. The

U.S. organizers of the conference did little to allay these fears, and so their efforts at integration thwarted.

The United States needed to learn that in order to gain genuine Latin American cooperation in any process of regional integration, effective safeguards would have to be put in place to protect Latin American sovereignty against the threat of U.S. dominance. This lesson has not been an easy one; Woodrow Wilson struggled with it, as did many of the U.S. leaders who weakened the OAS and the Alliance for Progress by refusing to let their Latin American partners participate on equal footing. In each of the more successful examples of hemispheric cooperation—the Good Neighbor Policy, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the Inter-American Development Bank—all members have shared decision-making authority on a much more equal basis. The countries of Latin America have proven more willing to share power as equals than to sacrifice it to the United States.

What of recent efforts at economic integration? Again, the more successful attempts have either been limited ones like NAFTA that demanded little sacrifice of national sovereignty, or more ambitious ones like Mercosur that promised great rewards in exchange for reduced sovereignty. Each of these approaches does, however, have its drawbacks; NAFTA's restricted framework does not provide much flexibility for dealing with issues like immigration, that require a truly cooperative solution, while Mercosur's inability to deliver on some of its promises (for example, the member countries have yet to create their eponymous common market) has encouraged its members to back away from integration and reassert their own sovereignty in economic matters.

José Martí's vision is still a work in progress; the people of the hemisphere are still building "Nuestra América". Conflicts remain over issues of inclusion and possession: To whom does America belong?

Should Martí have written of many Americas instead of just one? He clearly saw the United States as separate from “Nuestra América,” but does that have to be the case? Is collective defense against the United States a better strategy than engagement and cooperation? Martí anticipated the tensions between sovereignty and integration, between the United States and Latin America, yet he still argued that the nations of the Americas could best defend their sovereignty by working together. His dedication to integration should serve as inspiration for today’s leaders.

Notes

1. Sovereignty is never absolute, never perfect; as Jeremy Adelman argues, it is “always contested, unstable, [and] equivocal.” Authorities face constant challenges to their sovereignty both from within their territories and from without. Revolution, war, and intervention pose obvious threats to sovereignty, but individualism, interdependence, and integration can be equally powerful in shifting the locus of power. See Jeremy Adelman (2006), Tom J. Farer (1996), and Greg Grandin (2012).
2. Political scientist Olivier Dabène (2009, p. 10-11) defines regional integration as “a historical process of increased levels of interaction between political units (subnational, national, or transnational), provided by actors sharing common ideas, setting objectives, and defining methods to achieve them, and by so doing contributing to building a region.”
3. At the time, Gran Colombia included the modern-day nations of Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela, while the country now known as Argentina had not yet finished consolidating.
4. *Annals of Congress*, 18th Cong., 1st sess., 14.
5. On Latin American resistance to Pan Americanism, see Gilderhus (1986) and Glinkin (1984).
6. See also Bill J. Karras (1974).
7. The International American Union later became the Pan American Union.

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- 8.** U.S. interventions in Latin America were nothing new; before Wilson, President James K. Polk had seized half of Mexico and President William McKinley had annexed Puerto Rico and asserted partial control over Cuba.
- 9.** The Rio Treaty predated the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) by two years and served as a model.
- 10.** Arias won the Nobel prize for his role in negotiating the Esquipulas accords.
- 11.** The Coal and Steel Community was the precursor of the European Union.
- 12.** Agreement Establishing the Inter-American Development Bank. Available at: <<http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=781584>>.
- 13.** Operation Pan America, as Kubitschek conceived it, would have been twice as grand, lasting twenty years and consisting of \$40 billion of assistance (SMITH, 2008, p. 136).
- 14.** See Mercosur. Available at: <http://www.mercosur.int/t_generic.jsp?contentid=3862&site=1&channel=secretaria>.
- 15.** These decision-making bodies include the Council of the Common Market, the Common Market Group, and the Trade Commission.
- 16.** In 1993, the three governments signed "supplemental," or side, agreements on the issues of labor and the environment, largely in response to the demands of domestic constituencies in the United States and Canada (SMITH, 2008, p. 226).

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Abstract

Building "Nuestra América:" National Sovereignty and Regional Integration in the Americas

This article explores the history of regional integration in the Americas, drawing lessons from the diverse ways that people have sought to unite the hemisphere. It begins at the point when most of the modern nation-states of Latin America came into being: the nineteenth-century wars for independence. From there, it traces various attempts at regional

integration, keeping in mind three fundamental questions: How does regional integration compromise sovereignty? Does it have to? Is it worth sacrificing sovereignty to increase integration? The article concludes that while every attempt at regional integration in the Americas has required the participants to voluntarily sacrifice some measure of their sovereignty, the most successful efforts have been those that either kept the sacrifice to a minimum or offered significant enough rewards to offset the loss of sovereignty.

Keywords: Regional Integration – Sovereignty – Latin American History – U.S.-Latin American Relations – OAS/OEA – NAFTA/TLCAN – Mercosur/Mercosul