

The Normalization of U.S. Policy Toward Cuba? Rapprochement and Regional Hegemony

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ABSTRACT

This article examines change and continuity in the United States' recent foreign policy toward Cuba. In the context of the posthegemonic regionalism of the Pink Tide and regional disputes over Cuba's position in the interamerican system, the Obama administration's rapprochement was driven to protect the institutional power and consensual features of U.S. hegemony in the Americas. The Trump administration reversed aspects of Obama's normalization policy, adopting a more coercive approach to Cuba and to Latin America more broadly. Against the emerging scholarly proposition that the international relations of the Americas have crossed a posthegemonic threshold, this analysis utilizes a neo-Gramscian approach to argue that the oscillations in U.S. Cuba policy represent strategic shifts in a broader process of hegemonic reconstitution. The article thus situates U.S. policy toward Cuba in regional structures, institutions, and dynamics.

Keywords: Cuba, U.S. foreign policy, hegemony, regionalism, Obama administration, Trump administration

Following dramatic announcements by President Barack Obama and President Raúl Castro on December 17, 2014, the United States and Cuba established diplomatic ties for the first time since 1961. The rapprochement was short-lived. President Donald Trump declared an end to Obama's "deal" during his first year in office. The changes Obama implemented were notable in scope, but Trump's reversal was consistent with the history of U.S. policy toward Cuba.

The swings in U.S. policy are best understood through a regional lens. Against the argument that the hemisphere has entered a "posthegemonic" era, contemporary U.S.-Cuba relations illustrate the fluidity of U.S. hegemony, which, in (neo-)Gramscian fashion, can incorporate challenges from below to readjust coercive and consensual forms of power at key moments of hegemonic reconstitution.

This article contends that neo-Gramscian theory can sharpen debates on the purportedly posthegemonic order that has been constructed in the Americas in recent years (Riggirozzi 2012; Chodor and McCarthy-Jones 2013, 211; Tulchin 2016). Scholarship in this area suggests a novel "posthegemonic regionalism"

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(Briceño-Ruiz and Morales 2017; Riggiozzi and Tussie 2012), related to the decline of U.S. leadership in Latin America (Crandall 2011; Sabatini 2013; Tulchin 2016). Neo-Gramscian theory posits hegemony as a dialectical and relational process (Cox 1983; Burges 2009; Rupert 2005; Robinson 1996), one that allows for the expressions of contingency that have characterized interamerican politics during and after Latin America's left turn (Biegon 2017; Chodor 2015; Robinson 2008, 288–94). Although the Pink Tide comprised an array of counterhegemonic actors, Cuba remained an important “historical referent” of Latin America's broad-based left forces (Oliva Campos and Prevost 2015, 155). As U.S. influence in Latin America declined, the Obama administration sought to reverse this decline by strengthening the consensual features of its institutional power. This required addressing Cuba's disputed status in diplomatic and multilateral arenas.

Much of the scholarship on U.S. policy toward Cuba has emphasized domestic factors; namely, the Cuban American lobby and the voting patterns of Cuban Americans in Florida (Arboleya Cevera 2016; Haney and Vanderbush 2005). Certainly, the Cuban exile community helped shape U.S. policy toward Cuba, particularly through the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), formed in 1981. In the 1990s, CANF led efforts to strengthen the embargo while deflecting calls for an alternate approach. Gradually, public opinion on the issue softened, and the Cuban American lobby began to lose influence. By 2014, key demographic groups (and the wider public) were generally supportive of normalized relations (Grenier and Gladwin 2014). This trend had been apparent for years before rapprochement, however. Undoubtedly part of the story, a fixation on domestic factors can obscure the wider context that gives the U.S.-Cuba relationship such importance.

In the conventional narrative, the embargo has damaged U.S. interests by excluding U.S. businesses from the Cuban market and preventing Washington from influencing social and political developments on the island. For Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser to presidents Gerald Ford and George H. W. Bush, “Cuba is not a foreign policy question. Cuba is a domestic issue. In foreign policy, the embargo makes no sense” (New America Foundation 2009). For Richard Clarke, adviser to Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, Cuba was kept on the list of state sponsors of terrorism “because of U.S. domestic political reasons” (New America Foundation 2009). Colin Powell's chief of staff described the embargo as the “dumbest policy on the face of the earth” (Haney and Vanderbush 2005, 167). Former President Jimmy Carter, a visitor to Cuba several times as an unofficial envoy, has referred to the embargo as a “serious mistake” (Kornbluh 2011). The belief that the embargo was a failure underpinned Obama's normalization push, William LeoGrande writes, but that failure was decades old, meaning that it cannot provide “an adequate explanation for the dramatic shift” (2015, 473).

In explaining his decision to engage Cuba, Obama stated that he aimed to “end an outdated approach” that “failed to advance [U.S.] interests.” Instead, the United States would “normalize relations . . . to begin a new chapter among the nations of the Americas” (Obama 2014). LeoGrande highlights the increasingly negative attitudes in Latin America toward “the U.S.-Cuba standoff,” as well as the dwindling

“threat Cuban foreign policy posed to U.S. interests” (2015, 473). These variables coalesced with domestic factors—the decline of the Cuban American lobby and the market-oriented reforms implemented by Raúl Castro—to set the stage for normalization (LeoGrande 2015).

The regional dimension was never the only driver of U.S. policy, nor was U.S. policy the only force behind normalization. Obama’s opening was part of a reciprocal process that depended on Havana’s willingness to negotiate with Washington via back channels in pursuit of its own goals (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2014, 402–17). With the Pink Tide losing momentum, Cuban agency in the normalization process was geared toward protecting the Revolutionary regime during a period of economic reform and leadership change. The move was very popular with the Cuban public; an independent poll conducted in 2015 showed that 97 percent of Cubans viewed normalization as “good for Cuba” (*Washington Post* 2015). As Raúl Castro acknowledged on the first anniversary of the December 2014 announcements, Havana had hoped that improved relations would lead to the end of Washington’s commercial and financial blockade (Castro 2015).

In a recent study drawing on neo-Gramscian theory, De Bhal argues that “changes in U.S. policy toward Cuba in the past few years have been fueled, at least in part, by considerations relating to its *hegemonic project* in Cuba” (2018, 438, emphasis in original). This includes opportunities presented by economic reforms implemented under Raúl Castro, who aimed to update the Cuban model in line with the experiences of China and Vietnam (Alzugaray Treto 2009; LeoGrande 2015, 484). According to Richard Feinberg (2016), who served as senior director of the National Security Council’s Office of Interamerican Affairs in the Clinton administration, Havana aimed to use normalization to consolidate the “new Cuban economy” by signaling to foreign investors that the country was open for business. Speaking at the Cuban Communist Party’s Seventh Congress in 2016, Raúl Castro reiterated that Cuba would continue to update its economy “without haste, but without pause” (Sullivan 2018, 15). Miguel Díaz-Canel, Castro’s successor, pursued similar policies; the country held a constitutional referendum in 2019 that, among other things, recognized private property and foreign investment. As Feinberg writes, “when a country begins the transition from an authoritarian top-down economic model toward a more market-driven system, U.S. diplomats reflexively seek to assist the pro-reform factions and to bolster incipient private enterprise” (2016, 7).

Obama’s easing of travel restrictions elicited a response from the Cuban government, which sought further foreign investment to improve infrastructure in the tourism sector, illustrating the ways Obama’s engagement could facilitate the liberalization of the Cuban economy (De Bhal 2018, 443). Additionally, Washington’s push for “polyarchy” (a “thin” form of democracy amenable to neoliberalization) involved various democracy promotion activities (De Bhal 2018, 444–47).

De Bhal’s argument builds on the theorizing of William I. Robinson (1996), who linked the neoliberal goals of post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy to the class interests of U.S.-based and transnational elites (see also Robinson 2008, 41, 275). From this perspective, Cuba’s commitment to a socialist model presented a chal-

lenge to the deepening of U.S. hegemony in the 1990s and 2000s. Cuba's ability to withstand and deflect U.S. pressure can be viewed as an example of counterhegemony in a neo-Gramscian sense, wherein foreign polices of resistance by marginalized states shape the hegemonic practices of the dominant actor(s), often in indirect ways (Persaud 2001, 48–50).

Cuba's agency leading up to, and within, the normalization process was an effort to negotiate with the regional hegemon, including at the multilateral level, where Havana helped consolidate various challenges to the U.S.-led institutional order, in concert with counterhegemonic forces in the Pink Tide (Oliva Campos and Prevost 2015), even as it sought increased access to foreign capital (Robinson 2008, 349–50). The (counter)hegemonic terrain connects bilateral and multilateral platforms, meaning that the scope of inquiry on U.S. Cuba policy is best situated in regional structures, institutions, and dynamics.

While not denying the importance of demographic and political shifts in the United States or reforms in Cuba, the timing of Obama's decision raised questions about the strategic purpose of normalization. Of chief concern was the status of the United States' power in the region. The present study complements existing accounts that acknowledge the role of regional considerations (LeoGrande 2015; Shifter 2016), but in explicit opposition to claims of a posthegemonic shift in U.S.-Latin American relations. It argues that the Obama administration's effort to normalize relations signaled an attempt to protect the agenda-setting institutional power of U.S. hegemony, an issue brought to the fore by the left turn in Latin America during the 2000s. This study also contextualizes the return to a hardline position under Trump. Rapprochement represented a rebalancing of hegemony away from a coercive posture aimed at isolating Cuba toward a more consensus-based form, one that prioritized the U.S.-led institutional architecture of intrahemispheric cooperation, as evidenced in Washington's actions toward the Organization of American States (OAS) and its affiliated Summit of the Americas. Trump's actions suggested that the reconstitution of U.S. hegemony had entered a new phase, in which structural and coercive power replaced more consensual tools.

Although the following analysis centers on U.S. policy, recent scholarship on the international relations of the Western Hemisphere has emphasized the (often underappreciated) role of Latin American agency in interamerican politics (Long 2015; Tulchin 2016). Cuba holds considerable importance in this context. The Cuban Revolution was a totemic issue in interamerican relations, helping to define Cold War foreign policy across the Americas (Brands 2010, 3, 9–10; Gleijeses 2003). The agency of Latin American states during the Cold War was often expressed in relation to the status and (foreign) policies of Cuba's Marxist regime. As documented by Renata Keller (2015), for example, the Cuban Revolution echoed the Mexican Revolution in a way that destabilized Mexico's domestic politics while also affecting the country's external relations with both Cuba and the United States. Castro's nationalism called attention to the Mexican government's abandonment of its own nationalist project in the mid-twentieth century. Similarly, as detailed by Tanya Harmer (2011), Salvador Allende's government was inspired

by the Cuban example but constrained by the Cuban experience, which frustrated efforts to create a distinctly Chilean model of socialism and facilitated a more aggressive approach by the United States in the “interamerican Cold War.”

A full account of the Allende episode must recognize the agency of Chilean and Cuban actors alongside U.S. meddling (Harmer 2011, 220). Likewise, any discussion of recent shifts in U.S.-Cuba relations must acknowledge Havana’s role in creating the conditions that led to rapprochement. This included an array of diplomatic activities through bilateral channels and multilateral summitry in ALBA (Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América), CELAC (Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños), and CARICOM (the Caribbean Community) in particular (Oliva Campos and Prevost 2015). The internationalism of the Cuban Revolution continued after the Cold War, though diminished, as Cuba maintained a presence on the world stage (Krull 2014). This gives U.S. policy toward the island a regional dimension that does not exist with respect to other relatively small Latin American countries.

A POSTHEGEMONIC HEMISPHERE OR HEGEMONIC RECONSTITUTION?

In its effort to explicate the concept of hegemonic renewal, this study builds on the historiographic literature on U.S. (neo)imperial power and foreign policy in its own backyard. This brings the article’s main argument into alignment with revisionist accounts of U.S. motivations and the continuities therein (Grandin 2006; Schoultz 1998, 2009; Williams 1984 [1970]). In contrast to conventional views, which assign U.S. power a beneficent quality (Long 2015, 3–8), revisionist work emphasizes the myriad implications of U.S. dominance, linking Washington’s foreign policy to economic and ideological factors and interests that disadvantaged Latin American development and gave rise to U.S. preeminence. The analysis utilizes neo-Gramscian theory to foreground the shifting balance of power(s) in the hegemonic relationship between the United States and Latin America. In the historical materialist ontology of this approach, U.S. foreign policy stems from the socioeconomic interests of its elites. The motivations of policymakers are enmeshed in a hegemonic project that has centered on the extension of neoliberalism.

An often-used term, *neoliberalism* can be defined as both an ideology and a policy project. It facilitates the transnationalization of capitalism through a restructuring of political-economic relations, as seen mainly in the liberalization of trade and finance, deregulation, and privatization (Robinson 2008, 16–22). Challenges to U.S. hegemony undermine the longer-term viability of the neoliberal project, just as the move toward a posthegemonic regionalism went hand in hand with postneoliberal policies, as discussed below. The antineoliberal elements of the Pink Tide prompted a response on the part of U.S. policymakers to stabilize U.S. hegemony by renewing its more consensus-based features (Biegon 2017).

Even under the Obama administration, U.S. foreign economic policy remained committed to a neoliberal, Open Door strategy, reflecting the material interests of those who help formulate policy, as a predominantly socioeconomic and class-based

network of elites (van Apeldoorn and de Graaff 2014, 2017). This was articulated through common sense appeals to (neo)liberal values, firmly within the traditional ideology of U.S. foreign policy (Augelli and Murphy 1988). Revisionist historiography complements this critical view, helping to situate the shifting methods and strategies of foreign policy in the particularities of interamerican politics, shaped by periodic pushback against U.S. influence.

The economic factors that form the basis of revisionist accounts often sit in the background of policymaking, where they motivate—but do not wholly define—foreign policy strategies or doctrines. The longevity of the Monroe Doctrine, for example, cannot be explained solely by reference to the expansionary tendencies of U.S. capital; it has been applied in a variety of historical contexts with remarkable adaptability, from early U.S. anticolonialism and westward expansion to the military interventions of the early 1900s (Sexton 2011). The motivations of multiple generations of policymakers could be subsumed (at least in part) to a doctrine that justified hemispheric hegemony in various guises, including during the Cold War, when it fused with anticommunist ideology (Grandin 2006, 82; Schoultz 1998, 368–70; for a postrevisionist reading see Brands 2010, 175).

From a neo-Gramscian perspective, this supremacy became common sense in the ideology of U.S. foreign policy, where it was intertwined with a dutiful commitment to liberalism that reflected the interests and values of economic and policy elites (Augelli and Murphy 1988). In the post–Cold War world, the neoimperial reliance on direct forms of power gave way to a more indirect form of hegemony, interwoven with the region’s processes of democratization (Robinson 1996; Robinson 2008, 273–79). There persisted across these periods a “hegemonic presumption” on the part of the United States, to use Lowenthal’s well-known phrase (1976).

For U.S. policymakers, hegemony is not necessarily an end in and of itself. As the legacy of the Monroe Doctrine makes clear, the interests that coalesce into hegemonic projects are expressed through a spatial, geopolitical vision of the world, through which the Latin American backyard remains a site of great power competition, even after the Cold War (Agnew 2005).

Cuba’s proximity to the U.S. mainland heightens this geopolitical awareness. In 2015, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency argued that “foreign intelligence threats from Russia, China, and Cuban intelligence services continue to be a challenge, with Cuban intelligence services remaining the predominant counterintelligence threat” emanating from Latin America (U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs 2015, 6). In 2014, Russia reopened a dormant intelligence facility on the island. Meanwhile, China became an important source of trade, credit, and foreign investment for the country. Indeed, China’s emerging role in Latin America has generated considerable interest, with some concern that China could rival U.S. power (Erikson 2008; Gramer and Johnson 2018; Piccone 2016; Yu 2015). A revamped hegemony built on more consensual features could mitigate China’s rise in the U.S. backyard.

Recent scholarship on interamerican relations has posited the formation of a posthegemonic hemisphere (Crandall 2011; Riggirozzi and Tussie 2012; Sabatini

2013; Tulchin 2016). This involves several interrelated claims pertaining to the intentionality of U.S. policy, shifting power dynamics, and changes at the level of institutional cooperation. These trends are understood to have produced a posthegemonic condition in the international relations of the Americas. For some analysts, the Pink Tide eroded the once-dominant position of the United States, which had failed to respond effectively to the leadership challenges associated with the creation of new international organizations. Contrasting scholarship suggests that U.S. hegemony was reconstituted over this period (Biegon 2017). This article argues that Washington's oscillating approach toward Cuba is best understood in the context of a wider (if uneven) project of hegemonic renewal. For U.S. policy, the Cuban case attests to a shifting strategic approach. Whereas Obama's normalization aimed to facilitate consensual processes of institutional power, Trump's emphasis on isolating Cuba is indicative of a more coercive orientation.

In the conventional view, the waning of U.S. power was wrapped up in "the retrenchment of U.S. leadership and prerogative in the region" (Sabatini 2013, 2). Notwithstanding Washington's decadeslong commitment to neoliberalism, as encapsulated in the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), some observers associated the Bush and Obama presidencies with a neglect of Latin America (Riggiozzi and Tussie 2012, 3; for a review and critique of this neglect thesis, see Emerson 2010). With its attention focused elsewhere, and with the FTAA at an impasse, Washington pulled back from its agenda-setting role.

Tulchin explicitly connects the "end of U.S. hegemony" with the construction of UNASUR (Unión de Naciones Suramericanas), CELAC, and ALBA (2016, 168–91). These organizations represented a new wave of Latin American-led institutionalism that excluded U.S. participation. Obama's efforts on Cuba were widely interpreted as a momentous intervention, in line with what Tulchin characterizes as posthegemonic partnership (2016, 159), which held the potential for deeper diplomatic engagement across the Americas.

The purportedly posthegemonic character of Latin American regionalism was intertwined with the move away from liberal and neoliberal policies and toward post-(neo)liberal alternatives. Governments associated with this trend promoted multilateral projects in opposition to regional bodies shaped by U.S. influence (Riggiozzi and Tussie 2012, 5; Chodor and McCarthy-Jones 2013, 220). Following the fragmentation of the Washington Consensus, posthegemonic regionalism existed in stark contrast to the "open regionalism" of the 1990s and early 2000s, which was concerned mainly with the liberalization of trade and investment (Riggiozzi 2012; Briceño-Ruiz and Hoffman 2015; Briceño-Ruiz and Morales 2017).

The uncertainties of the postneoliberal era called into question the future of existing economic blocs and integration schemes (Carranza 2014). This was illustrated not only by the collapse of the FTAA but also by the politicization of Mercosur and the Andean Community. As Riggiozzi and Tussie note, new agreements were "grounded in systems of rules different from those that were shaped by U.S.-led interamerican relations, and that [were] part of a complex set of alternative ideas and motivations" (2012, 5). These were imbued with a new sense of legitimacy pre-

cisely because they sought to address social issues that were not on the agenda of U.S.-backed open regionalism (Riggirozzi and Grugel 2015). Moreover, conceptions of “regionness” changed as a result of transformations in political economy and increased institution building (Riggirozzi 2012; Riggirozzi and Tussie 2012), further undercutting older conceptions of a U.S.-centered hemispheric architecture.

The literature on regionalism includes nuanced critiques of the notion that the hemisphere has entered into a new, posthegemonic phase. As Petersen and Schulz (2018) argue, for example, the recent wave of Latin American regionalism has roots in older concerns over state capacity and legitimacy. Policymakers use mechanisms of intergovernmental cooperation to bolster domestic agendas; the agenda-setting consensus produced through these processes is often directed inward, not toward the level of regional public goods but toward the consolidation of domestic reforms. As Petersen and Schulz discuss, integration initiatives often go unimplemented (2018, 104–10).

The ebb and flow of Latin American regionalism is due partly to the shifting priorities of Latin American states and the reverberations of domestic developments onto the regional agenda. The recent collapse of the Venezuelan economy impeded ALBA’s initiatives, for example, including the Petrocaribe program. In 2018, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Paraguay suspended their membership in UNASUR over its handling of the Venezuelan crisis, while Mercosur suspended Venezuela’s membership in 2017 to push for a political transition in the country.

The continued power of the United States, in its myriad forms, should remain at or near the center of debates over regionalism in the Americas. The posthegemonic literature, like earlier strands of regionalist scholarship, has tended to downplay the “power-political aspects of regional government and regional institutions” (Hurrell 2005a, 185). This is not to say that older regional institutions are merely a conduit for “hegemonic imposition” (Hurrell 2005a, 194), but that in addition to agenda setting, they include an element of socialization that allows hegemonic states to legitimate their position. From outside the neo-Gramscian tradition but echoing Gramscian themes, Hurrell writes that “stable hegemony rests on a delicate balance between coercion and consensus,” and that “hegemonic states use institutions to project, cement and stabilize their power” (2005a, 200).

Building on Barnett and Duvall’s 2005 typology of power, Hurrell illustrates that the utility of U.S. institutional power exists in legitimating and stabilizing other forms of power, including coercion and structural-economic power (2005b). For Mark Rupert, situating Barnett and Duvall’s typology in a Gramscian-Marxian approach, the class-based interests that underpin hegemonic projects are “institutionalized in different times and places according to social circumstances and the history of political struggles” in an “ongoing dialectic of coercion and consent” (2005, 222). Paradoxically, as institutional power gives shape to this dialectic, the institutions used to stabilize hegemony provide a means for organized opposition and counterhegemony.

As states work through institutions to interact with other states, the exercise of institutional power requires the construction and maintenance of formal, rules-based

bodies. International organizations were central to Robert Cox's seminal conception of hegemony as a pillow that absorbs oppositional blows so that "sooner or later the would-be assailant will find it comfortable to rest upon" (1983, 173). Formal institutions can calibrate the consensual side of hegemonic relationships by allowing for the expression of agency by weaker actors. "Thus U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere," writes Hurrell, which "has involved coercion, military intervention, and protracted occupation," has "depended far more commonly on the mutual construction of collaborative liaisons in which weaker states and state elites came to see themselves as having a stake in the hegemonic project" (2005b, 51–52). The OAS, for example, reflects the asymmetrical power advantages of the United States in the hemispheric system and has long served as a means of building a regional consensus consistent with Washington's wider foreign policy agenda. It helped to deepen U.S. hegemony by fostering cooperation around a set of values, ideas, and rules central to U.S. geopolitical and economic interests, particularly in relation to neoliberal conceptions of democracy (or polyarchy, in Robinson's account, 1996).

In contrast to the view of posthegemonic regionalism as an emergent order (Riggirozzi 2012; Chodor and McCarthy-Jones 2013, 211), and by approaching hegemony as a fluid social relationship combining various forms of power, neo-Gramscian theory can explicate how, despite its waning influence, the United States was able to recalibrate its hegemony using a variety of foreign policy tools and mechanisms (Biegon 2017). For Obama, this meant adjusting diplomatic and institutional arrangements (e.g., on Cuba) to better absorb the blows of the then-ascendant new left. "In Gramscian terms," writes De Bhal, "the shift in U.S. policy represent[ed] a change to more *consensual* and *persuasive* means to pursue American interests in Cuba" (2018, 437, emphasis in original).

This was also true for the regional environment, at least under Obama. In a foreign policy context, as Sean Burges has argued with respect to Brazil (2009), the pursuit of consensual hegemony requires the use of diplomacy and institutions to develop an inclusive style of leadership that reinforces a state's structurally advantageous position. In contrast to Brazil, however, the United States can readily turn to coercive measures to advance its geopolitical interests more directly. This has characterized Washington's dominant approach to Cuba. Washington has worked to isolate and undermine the counterhegemonic challenges associated with Cuba's "anti-imperialist" posture while making periodic overtures to "normal" relations, generally under Democratic administrations.

ISOLATING CUBA

Relations between the United States and Cuba are the historical product of pronounced power asymmetries (Brenner 2006; De Bhal 2018; Schoultz 2009), and Washington's actions toward Cuba have always been embedded in larger imperial and hegemonic projects designed to reinforce its structural advantages. The determination to possess Cuba was a critical element in the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine (Sexton 2011, 51–73). Thomas Jefferson believed that the island would be

brought into the United States from “the first moment of the first war” (Lievesley 2004, 43). John Quincy Adams stated that “the annexation of Cuba” was “indispensable to the continuance and integrity of the Union itself” (Schoultz 2009, 18).

Cuba was the focal point of the Spanish–American War, and it came under U.S. occupation following the island’s independence from Spain in 1898. The Platt Amendment was inserted into the Cuban Constitution in 1901, giving Washington the explicit authority to intervene in the country’s internal affairs. It was during this time that the United States gained permanent control of Guantánamo Bay. The base would prove essential to the projection of force in the Caribbean Basin as the United States took on a more imperial role.

Cuba was dominated by U.S. interests for the first half of the twentieth century (Schoultz 2009, 13–51). Under the influence of U.S. investors, Cuba’s economy grew heavily dependent on sugar exports, while Washington routinely deployed military forces to shape political developments on the island. Its support was instrumental to Fulgencio Batista, who ruled intermittently from 1940 until Fidel Castro’s revolution in 1959. Cuba was not the only outpost of U.S. power in the Caribbean, but rather the “anchor” and “jewel” in an “American Mediterranean” *cum* “sugar kingdom” (Williams 1984 [1970], 419–62).

The interventionist impulse demonstrated so thoroughly in Cuba (and throughout the Caribbean) was the hallmark of an imperialism that persisted into the Cold War (Grandin 2006; Schoultz 1998), helping to consolidate a truly hemispheric hegemony, one that blended coercion with consensus-based forms of power, enacted through formal and informal institutions and legitimated through common sense ideological appeals to anticommunism and liberal democracy. The coercion-consensus dialectic can be seen in the swings in U.S. policy from gunboat and dollar diplomacy to Franklin Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor approach, from John F. Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress through Ronald Reagan’s proxy wars. The shift from Obama’s opening to Trump’s bellicosity is consistent with this pattern.

Because of its geographical proximity and its defiance of Washington’s Cold War agenda, Cuba came to occupy an “exceptional” place in the U.S. worldview (Pérez 2008). The revolution of 1959 and the loss of the island to the Soviet bloc created a sense of profound unease, exacerbated by the missile crisis of 1962. These traumas were embodied by the figure of Fidel Castro himself. Amid the pervasive “fear and loathing” of the bearded *comandante*, the deployment of coercive power against Cuba was partly an “exorcism in the guise of policy, an effort to purge Fidel Castro as an evil spirit who has tormented U.S. equanimity” (Pérez 2002, 250–51).

From the 1960s through the 1980s, Havana sought to spur revolution across the Third World. This involved aid to Marxist insurgencies in Central America and a military commitment to the conflict in Angola. For decades, containing Castroism meant isolating Cuba and countering its support for revolutionary movements. It also entailed undercutting the viability of the Cuban model. Having failed to oust Castro in the Bay of Pigs invasion, the CIA carried out repeated assassination attempts. Kennedy turned to Operation Mongoose, “a massive, multifaceted campaign of overt diplomatic and economic pressure to isolate

and impoverish the island,” replete with “covert paramilitary operations to overthrow the Communist regime” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2014, 43; see also Schoultz 2009, 170–212).

This aggressive deployment of force gave way to more muted coercive methods. The economic embargo, first instituted in 1962, emerged as the centerpiece of U.S. policy. After the Cold War, with the original geostrategic rationale for the embargo gone, commercial restrictions were tightened. Initially the product of executive action, the embargo was codified in the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act (known as the Torricelli Law), designed explicitly to “wreak havoc” on the Cuban economy, as stated by Representative Robert Torricelli (cited in Brenner 2006, 288). The 1996 Cuban Liberty and Democracy Solidarity Act (Helms-Burton) created a more expansive set of restrictions designed to curb investment in Cuba. By further isolating Cuba economically, it was hoped the expanded embargo would distress social relations on the island, fomenting rebellion (Lievesley 2004, 156–72; Pérez 2002, 247). Predictions were made about the imminent demise of the regime as Cuba suffered through a Special Period of severe economic contraction, the result of collapsing Soviet subsidies. As the Castro government persevered with few signs of a popular uprising, the goal of regime change was rationalized as “democracy promotion” (Robinson 1996, 93–105).

The fundamental logic of the U.S. embargo was to isolate Cuba to force political and economic change on the island. The Clinton administration did ease aspects of the policy in the late 1990s, allowing for greater people-to-people travel and some food and medical sales. The George W. Bush administration reversed course, however, staking out a more hardline approach (Lievesley 2004, 173–76; Sullivan 2018, 45). The crucial development was the 2003 formation of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, which sought to hasten the downfall of the Castro government. This was to be achieved through U.S. support for a variety of democracy promotion activities, some of which carried over into the Obama presidency. Under its auspices, the U.S. Agency for International Development distributed funds for various oppositional activities. Among other things, it sponsored ZunZuneo, a covert communications program designed to “undermine Cuba’s communist government” (Sullivan 2018, 58). This was the context in which development contractor Alan Gross was detained by Cuban officials in 2009 for aiding religious groups. Resolution of the Gross affair was key to Obama’s efforts to move forward with negotiations (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2014, 376–69).

The Cold War effort to isolate Cuba was central to a regional hegemony that predated and outlasted the bipolar conflict. U.S. actions toward Cuba were always predicated on broader “common sense” conceptions of (regional) hegemony, even if the embargo was occasionally derided as ineffective. For decades, the embargo failed to achieve its ultimate objective of regime change. Yet it had the effect of isolating Cuba in a number of respects, damaging the Cuban socioeconomic model, and weakening Havana’s capacity to influence regional and international developments. Although the Castro government survived, U.S. coercion served a larger hegemonic purpose, thwarting the appeal of Cuban-style Marxism.

As the antiquated embargo became increasingly unpopular in the region, however, the efforts at isolating Cuba grew more problematic (LeoGrande 2015). The opening toward Cuba was framed by U.S. policymakers as part of a wider “engagement” strategy in the hemisphere, as stated explicitly in the 2015 National Security Strategy document, where it would “consolidate gains in pursuit of peace, prosperity, democracy, and energy security” (Obama 2015, ii). Insofar as there was an Obama Doctrine applied to the Americas, engagement would help the United States deal with “rising powers in the hemisphere,” including not only Brazil but extrahemispheric players like China, Russia, and Iran, while also damping down “Bolivarian populism” (Carpenter 2016, 12–18). For Ben Rhodes, the architect of Obama’s Cuba policy, Trump’s re-isolation of Cuba threatened the ability of the United States to pursue its business and security interests on the island and elsewhere, among other things, by damaging the image of the United States in the region (Rhodes 2017).

THE INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE OF THE PINK TIDE

In contrast to coercive power, which, in the case of U.S.-Cuba relations, was aimed at isolating an adversarial state, institutional power is indirect. As “social control at a distance,” it manifests itself in the institutions that mediate between states to guide, steer, and constrain behavior (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 15–16; Hurrell 2005b, 33–58). In the early 2000s, Latin American states created several institutions of multilateral cooperation, most notably ALBA, UNASUR, and CELAC.¹

This trend illustrated the changing scope of international power in the Americas, as Latin American states, governed mainly by left-leaning leaders, turned away from the OAS to set regional agendas and create the rules that mediate state-to-state interaction (Riggirozzi 2012; Riggirozzi et al. 2015). Cuba’s inclusion in ALBA and CELAC and its participation in UNASUR summits were interpreted as diplomatic breakthroughs by both Cuba and the United States (Oliva Campos and Prevost 2015; Wikileaks 2008a). Just as Cuba’s exclusion from the OAS defined the Cold War interamerican order, Cuba’s inclusion in these new bodies reinforced the counterhegemonic tendencies of the Pink Tide, seen most clearly in the antineoliberal policies of its affiliated governments.

From a neo-Gramscian viewpoint, the ability of U.S. hegemony to adjust to these developments was partly contingent on maintaining the requisite institutional power, which meant protecting the status of the OAS against rival forums. ALBA began as a Venezuelan-Cuban initiative before expanding to include as many as 11 countries in the late 2000s, formalizing cooperation among the region’s more explicitly antineoliberal governments (Kellogg 2007). UNASUR achieved a high degree of institutionalization through a number of initiatives, including the South American Defense Council, which brought together military officials from 12 South American states. CELAC, created in 2010 out of the preexisting Rio Group, was envisioned by some as a potential replacement for the OAS (De la Barra and Dello

Buono 2012). All three IOs proscribed U.S. membership, and all three experienced various budgetary or political challenges as the Pink Tide receded. Collectively, however, these institutions undermined the centrality of the OAS in hemispheric affairs. They also provided mechanisms for China to engage Latin America further, as seen in the China-CELAC Forum, a landmark event in China's regional strategy (Yu 2015, 1060). "Given the choice between the onerous conditions of the neoliberal Washington Consensus and the no-strings-attached largesse of the Chinese," according to one South American diplomat quoted by Piccone (2016, 6), "elevating relations with Beijing was a no-brainer."

Internal communications from the Bush and Obama administrations revealed anxieties over burgeoning interstate cooperation outside the OAS. Although the Obama administration was on record as welcoming UNASUR, it was adamant that the OAS remain the "foremost multilateral organization in the hemisphere" (Clinton 2010). With its agenda-setting capabilities challenged, the United States could lose the ability to realize desirable outcomes through OAS rules and mechanisms. The three main regional initiatives that emerged in the 2000s were not given equal weight by U.S. officials. In general, ALBA was treated with the most suspicion. It was seen as the most precarious (and ideological) of the new regional groupings, dependent largely on Venezuelan oil revenue (and thus the global price of oil). Washington downplayed ALBA, partly to deprive Hugo Chávez of the rhetorical exchanges that fueled his anti-imperialist persona. However, officials privately expressed alarm at the expansion of ALBA, which was viewed as "an increasingly vocal and coordinated grouping" demanding attention both inside and outside the hemisphere (Wikileaks 2010a).

Initially, Washington did not view CELAC as a serious threat to the OAS. One diplomatic cable claimed that its founding ceremony was "a bulging rhetorical exercise" featuring "general and nonspecific language" (Wikileaks 2010c). Some saw CELAC as a serious development, however. In the lead-up to its formation, officials noted that the discussions over "the creation of a Latin America-Caribbean forum so close in membership to . . . the OAS serves to some extent to undermine the ideal of a united Western Hemisphere of democratic nations, while advancing the notion that there is a divide in the hemisphere between the two wealthiest nations and everyone else" (Wikileaks 2008b). This incongruity mirrored divisions in Latin America. While some officials understood CELAC as a prospective replacement for the OAS, others viewed it as complementary (Wikileaks 2010b).² It gained in stature as leaders looked to build stronger links to Asia. In 2015, representatives at the China-CELAC Forum outlined a five-year plan to strengthen Chinese-Latin American relations, with Beijing pledging hundreds of billions of dollars in investment.

Washington's views on CELAC and UNASUR were aligned with its perceptions of Brazil's emergence as a regional power. The United States maintained a complex partnership with Brazil. It acknowledged the country's prominence in South America but suspected its more ideological ambitions under the Lula and Rousseff governments. Brazil's opposition to the FTAA eventually killed that proposal in the mid-2000s. Moreover, the United States positioned UNASUR and

CELAC as potential competitors to the OAS, in contrast to the more limited ALBA. For Washington, the formation of these bodies showed a deliberate strategy on the part of the Brazilians, who consistently emphasized South-South cooperation under the Workers' Party (Burges 2009, 160–71).

Echoing the more radical members of Latin America's new left, Brazilian officials considered the OAS an outmoded organization dominated in practice by the United States (Wikileaks 2009a). At the same time, Brazil remained more supportive of the OAS than did Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, or Cuba. Brasília was content to use the more established interamerican system to press for certain causes, such as the (failed) reinstatement of ousted Honduran president Manuel Zelaya, who was deposed in a 2009 coup. The election of right-wing Jair Bolsonaro as president of Brazil in 2018 suggested the possibility of an ideological partnership with the Trump administration.

When Latin America's left turn deepened in the 2000s, some argued that the OAS was nearing "irrelevance" (Kerry and Menendez 2010). But as the present analysis makes clear, the diplomatic challenges wrought by the rise of the region's new left made the OAS more relevant to U.S. hegemony. This sentiment was reflected in debates in Washington, wherein policymakers and commentators noted that the traditional interamerican system was at a critical juncture as a result of the creation of new bodies like UNASUR and CELAC (Kerry and Menendez 2010). Key officials, including Secretaries of State Clinton (2010) and Kerry (2013), promoted the idea that with new multilateral organizations on offer, the OAS needed to be strengthened to remain the central agenda-setting body in the Americas. Members of Congress expressed concern over the impact new institutions could have on the U.S. agenda (Meyer 2016, 25–26).

Despite internal schisms, the older interamerican system allowed the United States to coordinate its response to the region's changing geopolitics. For example, Washington used OAS channels to lobby successfully against Venezuela's 2006 bid for a seat on the UN Security Council (Wikileaks 2006). Although they remained works in progress as the cycle of the new left drew to a close, the new institutions received support from across Latin America's ideological divides, shaping regionalism as the Pink Tide receded.

CUBA, THE OAS, AND THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

Created out of the Pan American Union following World War II, the Organization of American States is the centerpiece of the interamerican system. Based in Washington, the organization was a bulwark against communism in the Cold War before becoming a pillar of U.S. efforts to promote (neo)liberal democracy in the hemisphere in recent decades. As a multilateral body that sets regional agendas and creates consensus around policy goals, the OAS facilitates hegemony even as the organization enjoys some distance from its largest patron (Herz 2011; Long 2015, 43–55, 122–25; Meyer 2016; Shaw 2003, 2004). As Shaw argues (2003), there are

limits to Washington's hegemonic influence in the OAS. "There are cases when the United States dominates the organization, but, surprisingly, there are also cases when Latin American members resist U.S. pressure and reject U.S. proposals" (Shaw 2003, 88). The United States can go outside the OAS to unilaterally pursue its geopolitical objectives, but such a move carries costs to the authority of the inter-american system and the legitimacy of U.S. actions inside and outside this institutional framework.

The U.S. influence in the OAS was highly acute during the Cold War. In the Dominican Republic, for example, the United States was able to secure OAS backing for its 1965 invasion to prevent the potential emergence of a "Castroist" government, even though this violated OAS principles of nonintervention (Shaw 2004, 103–11). When the United States was unable to obtain OAS approval or acquiescence in other episodes, the organization did little to counter Washington's imperial behavior. That the United States sought but was denied a clear OAS mandate for events leading up to the 1954 overthrow of the Jacobo Árbenz government in Guatemala is evidence of this. Árbenz wanted to move the discussion of U.S. interference to the UN Security Council, while Washington insisted that the dispute be handled in the OAS (Shaw 2004, 78–80).

Once Cuba was expelled in 1962 for its Marxism-Leninism, the United States used the organization to expand sanctions against the country. The OAS Cold War agenda united Washington with regional elites. This was not a hegemonic imposition but a move that drew support from other (anticommunist) states, illustrating the dynamics of consensus building that contribute to U.S. hegemony and the role of the OAS in this process.

Even during the Cold War, the OAS occasionally mediated against U.S. interests (Biegon 2017, 120–21; Shaw 2004). It backed Argentina during its 1982 conflict with Britain over the Falklands/Malvinas Islands (against U.S. objections). In Nicaragua, the United States was unable to win agreement for a peacekeeping force, widely seen as an attempt to preempt the Sandinista revolution. A unified Latin American contingent also rebuffed the United States in 1960, when the organization condemned the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, following a conflict with Venezuela in which Trujillo's forces violated Venezuelan domestic affairs by attempting to assassinate President Rómulo Betancourt. In that case, the OAS implemented sanctions against the Dominican Republic despite Washington's opposition (Shaw 2004, 116–29).

According to Shaw (2003), in the immediate post-Cold War period, the United States was further incentivized toward multilateral decisionmaking in the OAS (see also Herz 2011). This overlapped with a shift in U.S. regional hegemony in the 1990s toward the promotion of polyarchy, or low-intensity neoliberal democracy (Robinson 1996), a foreign policy agenda that could be neatly tailored to the longer-term mission of the OAS, which pledges to "promote and consolidate representative democracy," according to its charter (OAS 1948).

Historically, Washington's use of the OAS had more to do with geopolitical trends than it did with the structure or rules of the institution itself. The consensus mechanism that sits at the core of OAS decisionmaking can hinder the ability of

the United States to win support for more direct forms of coercion. The principle of nonintervention enshrined in the OAS Charter was included at the behest of Latin American states (Herz 2011, 91–95), and members are granted equal status under its rules. Although the United States was the major force behind its formation, and although it provided the bulk of its funding over the years, it never fully possessed the institution (Biegon 2017, 120–21; Herz 2011; Meyer 2016; Shaw 2004, 30–37).

In the logic of neo-Gramscian consensus formation, it is this very indirectness of institutional power that helps to legitimate and stabilize existing asymmetries, allowing the hegemon to absorb oppositional currents from below. The OAS functions to guide and constrain the actions of members in a manner that facilitates consensus and legitimates the agenda and policies set by the hegemon through institutional practices. According to the U.S. GAO (2018), the “strategic goals” of the OAS and its affiliated interamerican institutions “are predominantly aligned with the strategic goals” of key U.S. agencies, which “employ mechanisms to ensure that assistance agreements with these organizations align with U.S. goals.” Growing Chinese influence has also been cited as a reason to strengthen the OAS and the wider U.S.-led hemispheric architecture (Raderstorf and Shifter 2018, 7).

The ability of the OAS to play an absorptive, mediating role remained crucial to the United States as Latin American politics moved leftward. However, as summarized by the Council on Foreign Relations (2015), the “ideological polarization and mistrust of the OAS” during the Pink Tide “prompted doubts over its relevance in the region, spurring the creation of alternative platforms for regional integration,” as discussed above. In 2005, José Miguel Insulza, who had served in the Chilean government of Salvador Allende in the early 1970s, was elected to head the organization over the objections of the United States, which put forth rival candidates. It was the first time a candidate opposed by the United States had been elected. Insulza’s successor, Luis Almagro, who took office in 2015, was generally viewed as being more favorable to U.S. goals (Meyer 2018, 4; Raderstorf and Shifter 2018). Almagro was instrumental in getting the OAS to take a more activist approach toward the government of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela.

Historically, OAS practices have aligned with U.S. policy goals across a range of issues, including “initiatives designed to liberalize markets” (Meyer 2018, 1). Even under the growing influence of the new left, the OAS provided a pathway to press for not only the consolidation of liberal democratic norms but also neoliberal economic policies (Biegon 2017, 118–24). This was displayed in the Summit of the Americas as well, a triennial hemispheric gathering sponsored by the OAS. The inaugural summit in 1994 launched the FTAA, the focus of subsequent gatherings (Mace and Loiseau 2005). As stated by Secretary of State John Kerry (2014), the summit brings together leaders from “across the region to open new markets and to create new free trade zones, to strengthen the movement toward democracy, and to improve the quality of life for all our people.”

The emergence of Latin America’s new left adversely impacted the U.S. ability to use the Summit of the Americas process to advance regional goals, including the

agenda setting and institutionalization of trade liberalization (Mace and Loiseau 2005). Yet as with the OAS, this form of summitry remained vital to Washington's pursuit of "cooperative hegemony," in Mace and Loiseau's term (2005), partly because new institutions were moving diplomacy and economic integration away from established multilateral forums. By the fourth summit, held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in 2005, opposition to the Washington Consensus overshadowed the formal agenda. The meetings were held alongside protests and a countersummit in which Hugo Chávez and other leftist leaders proclaimed the "death" of the FTAA. Seeking a diplomatic reset several years later, Obama used the fifth summit in 2009 to call for a "new era of partnership." The sixth summit, held in 2012, failed to yield a final statement of consensus (mainly because of the Cuba impasse), leading to speculation that the process had grown obsolete (Calmes and Neuman 2012). Calls to boycott future meetings increased. The United States dropped its opposition to Cuba's participation, and the seventh summit in Panama witnessed a historic meeting between Obama and Raúl Castro. Luis Almagro viewed Cuba's inclusion as a turning point for the hemisphere (Meyer 2018, 18).

Cuba's decadeslong exclusion from the OAS served as an enduring reminder of the organization's relationship to U.S. hegemony. In the 2000s, the status of Cuba re-emerged as a major issue, one that pitted Washington against the majority of the body's membership. The disagreement came to dominate the General Assembly, adversely impacting the ability of U.S. diplomats to work through the OAS to shape the multilateral agenda on other issues (Biegon 2017, 125–26). In 2009 the dispute was temporarily resolved in favor of Cuba's provisional readmittance. At U.S. urging, however, additional language was added to the resolution: "The participation of the Republic of Cuba in the OAS will be the result of a process of dialogue initiated at the request of the Government of Cuba, and in accordance with the practices, purposes, and principles of the OAS" (OAS 2009, 12).

Secretary of State Hilary Clinton was integral in securing the resolution, which, as reiterated by the U.S. ambassador to the OAS, allowed Cuba to reintegrate only after it complied with OAS principles through internal reforms (Wikileaks 2009b). This protected the hegemonic power of the OAS by reinforcing its viability as a consensus-building institution at a time of rival initiatives, but without diluting the values viewed as central to U.S. leadership and its foreign policy goals in the region. According to Dan Restrepo, senior director for Western Hemisphere affairs at the National Security Council, the resolution laid out "a process that specifically refers to the fundamental instruments of this organization of democracy, human rights, self-determination and other enumerated rights, [which] are precisely the rights that this administration is working to advance and defend in Cuba and throughout the Americas" (Sullivan 2010, 54). Policymakers aimed to use the resolution to push for additional liberalization in Cuba, while Cuban officials continued to criticize the OAS as an organization dominated by the United States (Sullivan 2010, 54–55).

Latin American opposition to Cuba's exclusion grew more intense, with representatives calling the policy "anachronistic," "callous," "unjust," and "violent" (Wikileaks 2009c). During the 2009 General Assembly, for example, "every speaker

except for Canada and the United States voiced their enthusiasm for real hemispheric dialogue and cooperation, which many claimed had been jeopardized by the 1962 resolution” barring Cuba (Wikileaks 2009c).

That the Obama administration was able to preempt Cuba’s unrestricted reinsertion shows the degree of U.S. influence within the institution. In an address to the organization, Clinton (2010) called for the urgent financial and political restructuring of the OAS, saying there was “serious work to be done to bolster the institution.” In 2013, Obama signed into law the Organization of American States Revitalization and Reform Act (Meyer 2016, 22). It proclaimed that the OAS should remain the primary multilateral body for hemispheric affairs while calling for a renewed focus on its core functions; namely, the promotion of liberal democracy. In 2014, the OAS internalized these reforms through a renewed “strategic vision,” which brought the body into closer alignment with U.S. strategic goals related to democracy promotion and security cooperation, among other issues (Meyer 2018, 6–7). The dramatic events of December 2014 also had an effect. “Latin American governments across the ideological spectrum . . . lauded the rapprochement between the U.S. and Cuban governments,” smoothing cooperation in the interamerican system (Meyer 2018, 19).

TRUMP, CUBA, AND THE POSTHEGEMONIC THESIS

During the 2016 campaign, Donald Trump stated, “the concept of opening with Cuba is fine” and, in reference to the embargo, “fifty years is enough” (Diamond 2015). Courting voters in Florida, however, he later adopted more traditional Republican talking points, criticizing Obama’s efforts to improve relations. The about-face was emblematic of Trump’s political style—imprecise and contradictory. His speech announcing that he would “cancel” normalization was vague, as he called for a “much better deal and a deal that’s fair” (White House 2017). Although Trump did not entirely reverse Obama’s reforms, the changes were “branded in a way to seem like a radical departure” (De Bhal 2018, 447). The shift was backed by key Republicans in Congress, including Florida senator Marco Rubio. This led some analysts to argue that domestic politics were once again driving policy, damaging U.S. interests as the island underwent a presidential transition from Raúl Castro to Díaz-Canel (Piccone 2018).

Trump placed additional restrictions on financial transactions with Cuban firms connected to the country’s military and security services. He also curbed some forms of individual travel to the island (Sullivan 2018, 46). Trump’s directive, implemented in November 2017, left some of the Obama-era policy changes in place, including the establishment of diplomatic relations (Sullivan 2018). The U.S. and Cuban governments continued to hold bilateral meetings on a range of issues, including migration. The administration kept the termination of the “wet foot–dry foot” policy, which accorded preferential status to Cuban immigrants. It did not return Cuba to the list of state sponsors of terrorism, adhering to the State Depart-

ment's 2015 decision to remove that designation. There was no serious effort to exclude Havana from the Summit of the Americas.

Amid the changes, U.S.-Cuba relations were complicated by a controversy surrounding health problems of U.S. embassy staff, with reports of mysterious attacks on personnel.³ This heightened the uncertainty surrounding "normalized" relations, with U.S. policy swinging from enmity to rapprochement and back again.

The extent to which Trump maintains a "strategic" approach to foreign affairs is a matter of debate. The foreign policy of the United States is more than the predilections of the commander in chief, however, and it is clear that behind Trump's disruptive style, U.S. statecraft has shifted. As illustrated by the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, renamed the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, USMCA), during which the Trump administration attempted to carve out benefits for certain sectors (such as the U.S. automotive and dairy industries) at the risk of damaging the viability of the wider agreement, the focus is more zero-sum and transactional. Institutional power has been deprioritized, with little concern for the legitimation of U.S. policy.

The Trump administration appears to favor more direct and coercive tools, applied bilaterally or outside of multilateral constraints or existing rules and geared toward a narrower understanding of U.S. (self-)interests. The America First agenda is based on ambiguous notions of national greatness, which can be tailored to various constituencies, including certain factions of U.S. capital and Trump's partisan base. In his second year in office, Trump reshuffled his foreign policy team, adding John Bolton as national security adviser, Mike Pompeo as secretary of state, and Elliot Abrams as special envoy for Venezuela, giving the administration a more neo-conservative orientation.

While acknowledging that the "impulse of the posthegemonic momentum has waned," due mainly to shifting politics in Latin America (Briceño-Ruiz and Morales 2017, 13), the literature has yet to account for the impact of Trump's foreign policy on the prospects of a posthegemonic hemisphere. Trump's approach to Latin America represents not a rejection of U.S. hegemony but its reorientation away from the consensual methods of the Obama years. The Trump administration has made rhetorical appeals to the Monroe Doctrine (Gramer and Johnson 2018). Bolton stated the administration would take "direct action" to combat the "troika of tyranny"—Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela—an approach Bolton tied explicitly to Trump's national security memorandum on Cuba, "the beginning of [the U.S.] effort to pressure the Cuban regime" (White House 2018). The administration expanded sanctions against this "troika."

As Trump reshuffled his foreign policy team, he promoted a number of hardliners affiliated with the Cuba lobby to key posts (Caputo 2018). Visiting the region in 2018, Vice President Mike Pence pushed for the isolation of Venezuela. Trump threatened military action against the country. Whereas the Obama administration sought to bring Cuba into the OAS, the Trump administration advocated the expulsion of Venezuela from the organization. The United States and its allies formally recognized opposition leader Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's interim president.

Addressing the UN Security Council in January 2019, Secretary of State Pompeo justified the U.S. effort to force Maduro from office by referencing, among other things, Venezuela's relationship with Cuba, stating: "the foreign power meddling in Venezuela today is Cuba" (Pompeo 2019).

Trump's approach dovetailed with a shift to the right in Latin American politics. The White House courted the governments of Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and Colombia's Iván Duque as potential partners in confronting Venezuela and Cuba. Although Trump's foreign policy relies on coercive tools (expanded sanctions and threats of military intervention), a modicum of consensus building persists, including through the OAS, which has served as an important site of U.S. efforts in regard to the Maduro government (Congressional Research Service 2019, 23, 37–39). The role of China and Russia in supporting Maduro generated considerable attention in Washington, where the investment, financial support, and military assistance of the extrahemispheric powers caused growing concern (Congressional Research Service 2019, 24–25). As the Venezuelan crisis impinged on Cuba-Venezuela relations, Cuba and China developed closer economic ties, with China becoming a major source of trade and investment for Cuba (Sullivan 2018). In 2018, Díaz-Canel made state visits to Moscow and Beijing as part of his first presidential trip outside the Western Hemisphere.

To an extent, Trump's approach responds to domestic political concerns, mollifying a hardline faction of Cuban Americans. A retightening of the embargo after a period of rapprochement is consistent with the ebb and flow of U.S. policy toward Cuba, recalling previous shifts from Democratic to Republican administrations. That said, it also coheres with a broader set of regional concerns that have persisted through the rise and decline of Latin America's new left, including the ideological and geopolitical influence of adversarial governments in Cuba and Venezuela. Although Trump did not rescind all of Obama's reforms, the changes were notable insofar as they indicated a more "traditional" U.S. strategy focused on "squeezing" Cuba economically and diplomatically. Coupled with the stalled momentum behind posthegemonic and postneoliberal regionalism, the Trump administration's approach further undercut the proposition that the hemisphere had crossed a posthegemonic threshold.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the understanding that U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba can only be fully understood by accounting for regional dynamics, the preceding analysis situated the "normalization" of diplomatic ties in the international politics of the Western Hemisphere. In the context of the Pink Tide, successful efforts by Latin American governments to construct new institutions of regional cooperation (which excluded U.S. membership and input, shifting the contours of multilateral agenda-setting processes) provided much of the impetus for rapprochement. To address the diplomatic and institutional challenges associated with the "new left," the United States would need to accommodate the "old left" stalwarts in some capacity. By rectifying the contested

status of Cuba in the OAS and the Summit of the Americas, the Obama administration aimed to revitalize the more established interamerican system against newer, rival organizations, preserving key mechanisms of hegemonic consensus building.

Trump pivoted to a hardline posture. Washington and Havana maintained formal diplomatic ties, but his administration implemented additional restrictions on U.S. investment and travel to the island, designed to adversely impact the Cuban economy and stunt momentum for further bilateral cooperation. Given the history of U.S.-Cuba relations, the return to a more coercive approach is not abnormal; it echoes historical swings in U.S. policy that have followed changes in presidential administrations and the regional environment.

Modifications to Trump's foreign policy team signified a more direct and assertive approach to Latin America. The White House unveiled a confrontational approach toward the governments of Cuba and Venezuela. This came at a time when Latin America's political climate had tilted right. As the Pink Tide gave way to a more fractured landscape, Washington gained an opening to reassert itself in the international politics of the region. Even in this context, however, the reexclusion of Cuba from multilateral forums would have involved diplomatic costs, undermining the consensual vestiges of a hegemony increasingly reliant on more coercive means.

Shifts in U.S. policy do not necessarily indicate that the United States lacks a coherent strategy toward Cuba and the wider region, nor do they support the characterization of the Western Hemisphere as a posthegemonic space. In a neo-Gramscian analysis, U.S. hegemony is an adaptable social process, one that necessarily involves different forms of power. Based on structural asymmetries and fortified by its coercive capabilities, U.S. hegemony can be dialectically adjusted to absorb counterhegemonic challenges and contingencies, but only with the requisite institutional power to build and stabilize consensus. From this vantage point, the "normalization" of U.S. policy toward Cuba was not so much an indicator of a posthegemonic hemisphere as an inflection point in a broader process of hegemonic reconstitution.

NOTES

1. Latin America's "new" regionalism also included an expanded Mercosur, the South American customs union that saw its membership grow during the Pink Tide; and the 2012 Pacific Alliance trade bloc, comprising Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru.

2. Embassy cables reveal the extent to which differences of opinion over CELAC played out in diplomatic discussions surrounding its creation. In general, the leftist governments of the Andean region were the most supportive of the notion that CELAC should replace the OAS, while the center-right government of Chile suggested that CELAC was not a replacement (Wikileaks 2010b, c).

3. In 2016 and 2017 as many as 24 individuals who worked at the U.S. embassy suffered from apparent physical attacks of an unknown nature, leading to a variety of symptoms, including hearing loss, dizziness, headache, fatigue, and cognitive issues. In 2017, the State Department ordered the departure of 15 Cuban diplomats from the Cuban embassy in Washington because of Cuba's "failure to protect U.S. diplomats in Havana" (Sullivan 2018, 37). As of this writing, investigations have yet to reach any definitive conclusions.

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