

Latin America: 21st Century Popular Movements against Neocolonialism and Imperialism. The ALBA-TCP Summit

VIII Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Trade Agreement of the Peoples (ALBA-TCP for its initials in Spanish)

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*The nineteenth century was the era of the Latin American struggle against colonialism, culminating in the twentieth century in popular movements against neocolonialism and imperialism. These two hundred years of struggle are the foundation for the full attainment in the twenty-first century of an alternative world characterized by respect for the sovereignty and true independence of the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean. So declared **Nicolas Maduro**, President of Venezuela, at the **XVIII Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Trade Agreement of the Peoples (ALBA-TCP for its initials in Spanish)**. Maduro further declared that ALBA-TCP is in the vanguard of the struggle for the definitive independence of the Latin American and Caribbean nations.*

ALBA-TCP: An Alternative Project of Integration

ALBA-TCP was initially the idea of **Hugo Chávez**, the late president of Venezuela. From 1999 to 2002, in various Latin American and Caribbean forums, Chávez proposed the creation of a mechanism that would promote solutions to the various problems resulting from neocolonialism, on the basis of the principle of the unity and integration of the nations of the region, a vision formulated in the nineteenth century by **Simón Bolívar and José Martí**. The idea became reality on December 14, 2004, when Fidel Castro and Chávez signed in Havana the Joint Declaration for the establishment of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), as it was then known.

The Joint Declaration of 2004 maintained that integration in Latin America historically “has served as a mechanism for deepening dependency and foreign domination.” It proposed an alternative form of integration: “Only an integration based on cooperation, solidarity, and the common will to advance together with one accord toward the highest levels of development can satisfy the needs and desires of the Latin American and Caribbean countries, and at the same preserve their independence, sovereignty, and identity.” The Joint Declaration proclaimed that ALBA seeks social justice and popular democracy: “ALBA has as its objective the transformation of Latin American societies, making them more just, cultured, participatory, and characterized by solidarity. It therefore is conceived as an integral process that assures the elimination of social inequalities and promotes the quality of life and an effective participation of the peoples in the shaping of their own destiny.”

The 2004 Joint Declaration maintained that just and sustainable development is one of the

principles of ALBA, and this implies an active role of the state. “Commerce and investment ought not be ends in themselves, but instruments for attaining a just and sustainable development, since the true Latin American and Caribbean integration cannot be a blind product of the market, nor simply a strategy to amplify external markets or stimulate commerce. To attain a just and sustainable development, effective participation of the State as regulator and coordinator of economic activity is required.”

ALBA was created in the historic moment of a neoliberal onslaught, when the United States was attempting to impose on the continent the so-called Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which designed an integration favorable to the interests of U.S. corporations. With the emergence of governments of the left in the region, on a foundation of a popular rejection of neoliberalism, the U.S. initiative was blocked. Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay played a central role in the burial of the FTAA at the 2005 Summit of the Americas, held in Argentina.

Participants in the XVIII Summit of ALBA-TCP, conducted in a virtual form on December 14, 2020, included, in addition to Maduro: **Miguel Díaz-Canel**, President of Cuba; **Luis Arce**, President of Bolivia; **Daniel Ortega**, President of Nicaragua; **Ralph Gonsalves**, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; **Roosevelt Skerrit**, Prime Minister of Dominica; and **Gaston Browne**, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda. The participants celebrated the return of Bolivia to ALBA-TCP following the recapturing of democracy in the South American nation, one year after the breaking of the constitutional order by a U.S.- and OAS-supported *coup d'état* that overthrew the democratically elected president Evo Morales.

The participants stressed the importance of ALBA-TCP for the promotion of a Latin American integration that seeks sovereign complementarity and cooperation among the nations. Recently-elected Bolivian President Arce, for example, described ALBA-TCP as an instrument for the liberation of peoples in the struggle against imperialism and neoliberalism, an alternative to the plundering of the natural resources of Latin America and the Caribbean, to persistent damage to the environment, and to the privatization of resources and services that has increased the levels of poverty and inequality.

In his commentary, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega emphasized the significance of the recent presidential and parliamentary elections in Bolivia, the parliamentary elections in Venezuela, and the elections for Prime Minister in Saint Vincent and Grenadines. These electoral victories show that the powerful enemy does not have reason or right on its side and is only able to attain temporary victories, but the definitive victory will be won by the peoples. He criticized the United States, the Organization of American States, and the European Parliament as accomplices in the *coup d'état* against Evo Morales, the democratically-elected constitutional president in Bolivia, in November 2019. He also noted the importance of Cuba in the current stage of struggle for unity by the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean.



ALBA-TCP summit, 2017 (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, declared that the member nations of ALBA have in common such principles as resistance to colonialism and imperialism, the sovereignty and independence of the nations, and justice for the peoples. He noted that we have just passed through a dark period, but now we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. We must be prepared, he maintained, for the possibilities that likely will be provided by the upcoming post-pandemic and post-Trump historic moment.

The Summit agreed to the reactivation of the Economic Council of ALBA and of the Sucre as a money of interchange as well as the strengthening of PetroCaribe and the Bank of ALBA. Many of the participants proposed the creation of a Bank of Medicines, and Cuba and Venezuela were designated to coordinate this project. In addition, the countries voted unanimously in support of the designation of Sacha Llorenti as general secretary of the Alliance; Llorenti previously was the representative of Bolivia in the United Nations.

ALBA has suffered setbacks in recent years as a result of the fall of two self-proclaimed socialist governments that have been key members of the alliance. In Ecuador, the Citizen Revolution led by Rafael Correa fell following the presidential elections of 2017, won by Lenin Moreno, who was a Trojan Horse, the candidate of Correa's Nation Alliance Party who did not announce his intentions to dismantle the revolution and take the nation to the right. In Bolivia, the socialist government of Evo Morales fell to a violent, military *coup d'état* in November, 2019. In Venezuela, U.S. illegal and unilateral sanctions have weakened its capacity to play a leadership role in the alliance and to provide support for development projects in small Caribbean nations.

At the same time, there were other setbacks in the region, in which governments that were allies of ALBA fell. The Worker's Party in Brazil was removed from power through a

parliamentary-judicial *coup d'état*. And progressive governments in Argentina and Uruguay lost elections.

The right retook power from progressive and socialist governments through deceptive and/or illegal and unconstitutional means. When it retook power, the right made evident its lack of commitment to the people and the nation and its lack of a viable political project. Returning to the discredited neoliberal policies of the past and to the repression of the people, and implementing a project that responds to imperialist interests and not to the interests of national sovereignty nor to the needs of the people, governments of the right cannot maintain sufficient support among the people. The right is demonstrating in practice that its restoration project is unsustainable.

Recent developments show the unsustainability of the restoration project of the right. In Bolivia, the Movement toward Socialism has retaken the control of the government, reestablishing the democratic and constitutional order. In Venezuela, the Chavist alliance has recaptured control of the parliament, beating back the U.S. campaign for regime change. In Argentina, a progressive government has returned to power. In Mexico, a progressive government has been elected, culminating years of struggle. In Ecuador, the Citizen Revolution is organizing itself for the next elections. In Brazil, the neofascist government is completely lacking in legitimacy. These regional developments are supported by international developments, including the fall of the government of Trump and the development of COVID-19 vaccines by Russia, China, Cuba, the United States, and Great Britain.

ALBA-TCP and the construction of a more just and democratic world

The complementary integrationist project of ALBA-TCP is an advanced formulation of the vision expressed in 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia, where leaders of twenty-nine newly independent nations of Asia and Africa met. Sukarno, Nehru, Nasser, and Zhou En-lai played leading roles in putting forth the strategy of Third World unity in opposition to European colonialism and Western imperialism and in formulating the principle of economic cooperation among nations. The relations among newly independent nations was given organizational form in 1961, when twenty-one governments of Asia and Africa plus the former Yugoslavia and Cuba established the Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. In 1964, seventy-seven nations formed the G-77 as a bloc within the United Nations, which called upon Third World nations to develop new forms of mutually beneficial trade among one another in order to ameliorate the effects of imperialist exploitation. In 1966, eighty-three governments and national liberation movements from Africa, Asia, and Latin America met in Havana for the First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which named colonialism and imperialism as the source of Third World underdevelopment and defended nationalization as an effective strategy for attaining control over a national economy.

In 1974, the Third World brought its vision to the General Assembly of the United Nations, which approved the Non-Aligned Movement's proposal for a New International Economic Order. The document affirmed the principles of the right of self-determination of nations and the sovereignty of nations over their natural resources. It advocated: the creation of raw materials producers' associations to give raw materials exporting states control over prices; a new international monetary policy that did not punish the weaker states; increased industrialization of the Third World; the transfer of technology from the advanced industrial states to the Third World; regulation and control of the activities of transnational

corporations; the promotion of cooperation among the nations of the Third World; and aid for Third World development. In 1979, ninety-three nations at the Sixth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana reaffirmed “their deep conviction that a lasting solution to the problems of countries in development can be attained only by means of a constant and fundamental restructuring of international economic relations through the establishment of a New International Economic Order.”

The world-system, however, was entering into a sustained structural crisis, as a consequence of the fact that it had reached and overextended the geographical limits of the earth. The global elite responded to this situation with a sharp turn to the right, and the Third World project was derailed. But in the late 1990s, the Third World project was brought to renewed life on the basis of popular social movements in opposition to neoliberalism, which found their most advanced expression in Latin America. This time, however, not only would ideas be expressed, they also would be implemented in practice. Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador began to develop mutually beneficial economic and cultural relations, on a basis of respect for sovereignty. Their evolving relations with one another during the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century constituted an effort to move from dependency on trade with the global powers of the European-centered world-economy, which were economically disadvantageous, toward trade with other nations of the South, looking for win-win strategies based on mutual respect. They took the lead in forming regional associations, seeking to provide practical support for mutually beneficial trade and to include other nations in the process. In addition to ALBA-TCP, UNASUR (the South American Union of Nations) was established in 2008, calling for solidarity in the use of the resources of the region. CELAC (the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) was established in 2010. In CELAC’s Second Summit in Havana in 2016, the Declaration of Havana affirmed the commitment of the 33 governments to expand commerce within the region and to develop a form of integration based on complementarity, solidarity, and cooperation.

The revitalization of the Third World project at the beginning of the twenty-first century included the retaking by the Non-Aligned Movement of its historic principles. The 2006 Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana affirmed historic principles, including the equality and sovereignty of nations, non-intervention in the affairs of other states, and “the free determination of peoples in their struggle against foreign intervention.” The Seventeenth Summit of the Non-Aligned movement in Venezuela in 2016 called upon the peoples of the Third World to struggle against colonialism and neocolonialism and to participate in the construction of a more just world, established on a foundation of solidarity and cooperation.

The evolution of Chinese foreign policy dovetailed with the Latin American turn to South-South cooperation, inasmuch as China in recent years has followed a strategy of development through cooperation with other nations. In 2014, Xi Jinping, President of the People’s Republic of China, met with the heads of state of the nations of CELAC, including Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia, to establish the China-CELAC Forum, and he subsequently visited Venezuela and Cuba. In an interchange with Latin American journalists, the Chinese President maintained that China is seeking to develop its economy through trade based on cooperation and win-win relations of mutual benefit. He advocated the promotion of South-South cooperation in order that underdeveloped nations can attain autonomous and sustainable development, and he viewed the expanding economic and social relation between China and CELAC to be an example of South-South cooperation. He affirmed that

China is committed to a more just and reasonable international economic and political order.

For its part, Russia, after a period of neoliberal disorientation following the collapse of the Soviet Union, has retaken the Leninist principle of support for oppressed nations seeking transformation of unjust global structures. Accordingly, Russia at the present time is expanding relations with Cuba and Venezuela.

With the formulation of alternative principles to those of the capitalist world-economy and with the implementation in practice of economic and cultural interchanges, China, Russia, Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Nicaragua are developing, step-by-step, a world-system with alternative concepts and practices, and they are pointing the way toward the construction of a just, democratic, and sustainable world-system.

The Peoples of the North also are Called

The socialist and progressive governments and movements of the Third World are calling upon the peoples of the North to join in their global movement for a more just, democratic, and sustainable international world order. Joined with South-South cooperation, they envision a world characterized by North-South cooperation, in which trade relations are developed with respect for the sovereignty and development needs of the South, including the transfer of technology and open access to knowledge as a possession of all humanity. Compensation for the historic crimes of the North should be conceived as compensation for the crimes of colonialism, slavery, neocolonialism, and imperialism; and the payment of this historic debt ought to be made through a common human struggle to overcome the underdevelopment and poverty that these crimes have created.

The call of the Third World for an anti-imperialist struggle in the North is not inconsistent with the historical popular struggles of the peoples of the North. In the United States in the late 1960s, both the black power movement and the white student anti-war movement had their anti-imperialist dimensions, stimulated by study of the historic causes of the Vietnam War, in which it was learned that U.S. military involvement in Vietnam constituted a colonialist and imperialist war of aggression and a people united to attain independence and self-determination. In that historic moment, anti-imperialism was a dimension of a comprehensive popular movement in the United States that conceived itself as a movement against racism, poverty, and war.

The anti-imperialist struggle is necessarily a movement against poverty and war. Because, in the first place, colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism are the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment. And because, in the second place, the neocolonized peoples of the earth resist imperialism, which therefore provokes a militarist reaction by the imperialist powers, which maintain huge standing armies and launch ideological campaigns that fabricate pretexts for imperialist wars of aggression. In the resulting distortion of the consciousness of the people, enemies of civilization and violators of human rights and democratic norms are found everywhere. With an Orwellian logic, governments with advanced democratic structures are called authoritarian dictatorships, effectively preying upon the ignorance of the people concerning political dynamics in other lands. The people become confused and divided, distracted from the necessary struggle against the trusts, the transnational corporations, and the one percent.

The popular movement of 1965 to 1972 was on the right road, but it committed historic errors, and it encountered obstacles that it could not overcome. It was defueled by: the

elimination of the military draft; the insufficient intellectual work of its activists; the emergence of stagflation and related economic problems; the distractions of Watergate; and the turn of the power elite to neoliberalism at home and abroad. In the 1980s, Jesse Jackson tried to resurrect the movement with the concept of the Rainbow Coalition, but what was needed was the development of mass organizations on the basis of the concept, and not presidential candidacies. By the 1990s, identity politics emerged among progressives and liberals, a tendency that today is supported by the power elite, because it facilitates the inclusion of historically marginalized groups in the American project of imperialist domination of the world.

The peoples of the North today are called by the peoples of the Third World to participate in a common struggle by humanity against imperialism, war, underdevelopment, and poverty.

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