

Seventh Latin America Caribbean CELAC Summit - Between Evasion and Reality

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Perhaps it was inevitable that the main achievement of the seventh summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States in Argentina is to have been able to happen at all, thus keeping alive the vision of a Greater Nation for all the peoples of the region. Compared to the tremendous dynamism and forthrightness of CELAC's founders, the summit's Final Statement exhibits a bland, mediocre agenda of evasion and hollow aspirations. On a positive note, the Declaration confirms the commitment of the member States to integration, unity and political, economic, social and cultural diversity as a community of sovereign nations and it also reaffirms the proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace.

But the experiences of the last ten years show that in many respects the region's reality runs contrary to most of the statements in the Declaration's 111 points of the Declaration. Examples of this are the extensive presence of US military bases throughout the continent, the constant interventions of Western powers and interests in the region, the harassment and contempt towards indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, the application of "lawfare" against prominent political figures in several countries and the routine political manipulation of human rights institutions. More than anything, it has been electoral fortunes that have allowed the region to overcome initiatives aimed at sabotaging Latin American and Caribbean unity, such as the nefarious Lima Group.

Still, the underlying interventionist threat persists and the CELAC summit gave space to lamentable elements of what remains of the cruel interventions to damage Venezuela. The presidents of Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay attacked the government of Venezuela with the usual false accusations of lack of democracy and it is

worth recalling that the Lima Group was supported or endorsed at one time or another by the following countries: Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia under the coup regime, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Saint Lucia. Self-evidently, the power of manipulation and coercion in the region of the United States, and its allies among the NATO countries, persists and they simply wait for favorable conditions to be able to use it.

In the end, **President Nicolás Maduro Moros decided not to participate in the summit because the Argentine authorities could not guarantee his protection against possible legal provocations based on the illegal coercive measures of the US government against Venezuela.** The Final Declaration of the summit calls for the lifting of the illegal blockade of Cuba but not of the illegal unilateral measures against Venezuela, which now even the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has had to condemn as an abuse of the human rights of the Venezuelan people. Nor does the Final Declaration mention the theft in broad daylight of the patrimony of the Venezuelan people, the company CITGO, the gold stored in London and billions of dollars in the European financial system, by the United States and the governments of the European Union.

The ambivalence inherent in the Final Declaration is also reflected in its support for decolonization and human rights without calling for the closure and withdrawal of the US military base at Guantanamo or condemning the permanent abuse of human rights the base represents as a center for illegal detention and torture. That omission indicates the level of the capture by the United States and its Western allies of the consciences of many leaders in the region. **This was also seen unexpectedly in an outburst by President Lula da Silva at the margins of the summit. Lula made an absurd comparison between the illegal US aggression against Venezuela and the legitimate military operation of the Russian Federation in defense of Russian-speaking populations attacked by the government of Ukraine in alliance with NATO countries for eight years and counting.**

Lula's grossly foolish remark could be simply an attempt on his part to signal his ideological virtue to the elites controlling the US Democratic Party and its allies in the Brazilian elite who supported Lula in the presidential elections last October. **On the other hand, the just recently announced decision of leaders such as Lula, Gustavo Petro and Alberto Fernández not to send weapons in support of Ukraine does honor the declaration of the region** as a zone of Peace. Although it undoubtedly also has to do with the aspirations of Brazil and, especially, Argentina in relation to a future expansion of the BRICS group of countries.

In this global context, the eagerness of the ruling classes of the most powerful countries in Latin America to appease the US and European elites conflicts with the imperative of taking advantage of the economic benefits offered by the People's Republic of China and the development of a multipolar world. In fact, President Xi Jinping greeted the summit via an online link and stressed that China is working to push relations between China and Latin America and the Caribbean towards a new era based on respect, equality, mutual benefit, innovation, openness and well-being for all peoples.

While China demonstrates good faith with its extensive investment, cooperation and trade with the region, the regional policy of the United States has not changed since President Monroe's declaration of December 2nd 1823. The recent frank comments of the head of the

US Southern Command, General Laura Richardson, confirm that the United States continues to regard Latin America and the Caribbean as a subaltern zone, a source and supplier of fabulous natural resources. In addition, General Richardson said in her remarks to the Atlantic Council, a NATO-funded think tank, that Latin America and the Caribbean “has a lot to do with our national security and we have to start our play”, as if the peoples of the region will not remember the brutal history of intervention and destabilization by the United States over two centuries.

In relation to the tension between the encouraging message of President Xi Jinping and the permanent interventionist position of the United States, the presidents of Brazil and Argentina announced the day before the summit in Buenos Aires a project for a common currency between the two countries. They claim the initiative will boost regional trade and reduce dependence on the US dollar, perhaps in the style of the European Currency Unit (ECU), introduced in 1979 as an accounting unit for cross-border financial transactions. The ECU was associated with the European Exchange Rate Mechanism that sought to stabilize sharp variations between the different currencies of European countries. In 1999 the ECU was replaced by the single European currency, the Euro.

One has only to look at the economic history of Europe of the last 20 years to understand the futility of the idea that such a common currency will reduce regional dependence on the US dollar. Quite simply, all the corresponding independent financial architecture is lacking, for example a robust payments system, independent insurance institutions and other key financial services, a regional system of rating agencies or a banking system capable of resisting aggressive speculation in international financial and commodity markets. The idea looks like another example of the superficiality and ideological dependence on the West of the region’s social democratic political classes. They seem to hope they can evade facing the implications of the fundamental truth they themselves recognize in relation to environmental issues and other issues, for example, volatile commodity prices or foreign debt, that Western capitalism harms the peoples of the region and the whole world.

The capitalist model of the mythical invisible hand of the free market and its neoliberal fictional corollaries is collapsing. Even so, most governments of the CELAC countries seem to want to apply that same economic model to promote their countries’ development. This reality makes especially unconvincing point six of the Final Declaration, which affirms “the importance of prioritizing sustainable economic recovery with a cooperative, inclusive, equitable and solidarity-based approach.” But that economic model already exists in a well advanced form, thanks to the same revolutionary countries of the Bolivarian Alliance of our Americas (ALBA) that so many of the region’s governments attack and disparage without justification. This is the fundamental contradiction of CELAC and the biggest challenge facing Ralph Gonsalves, who now holds the pro tempore presidency of CELAC on behalf of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, a member country of ALBA.

As President Comandante Daniel and our Vice President Compañera Rosario said in Nicaragua’s message to the summit:

“The world urgently needs justice and peace... Respectful and Supportive Cooperation. The world needs understanding, empathy and affection. The Better World that we all want to create, urgently needs Respect, Peace, Solidarity and the Ability to Live Together, sharing the Scientific and Technological Development that has cost us all so much...We sing and move in Life and Hope, striving, We Go Forward... Always Further On!”

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