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Voces de la diplomacia: las relaciones entre América Latina y el Caribe a través de la mirada de los embajadores latinoamericanos

Special Edition

Voices of Diplomacy: Latin America-Caribbean relations through the Lens of Latin American Ambassadors

**EDICIÓN ESPECIAL A CARGO
DE ANNITA MONTOUTE
Y JACQUELINE LAGUARDIA
MARTÍNEZ**

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Boletín del
Grupo de Trabajo
**Crisis, respuestas
y alternativas en
el Gran Caribe**



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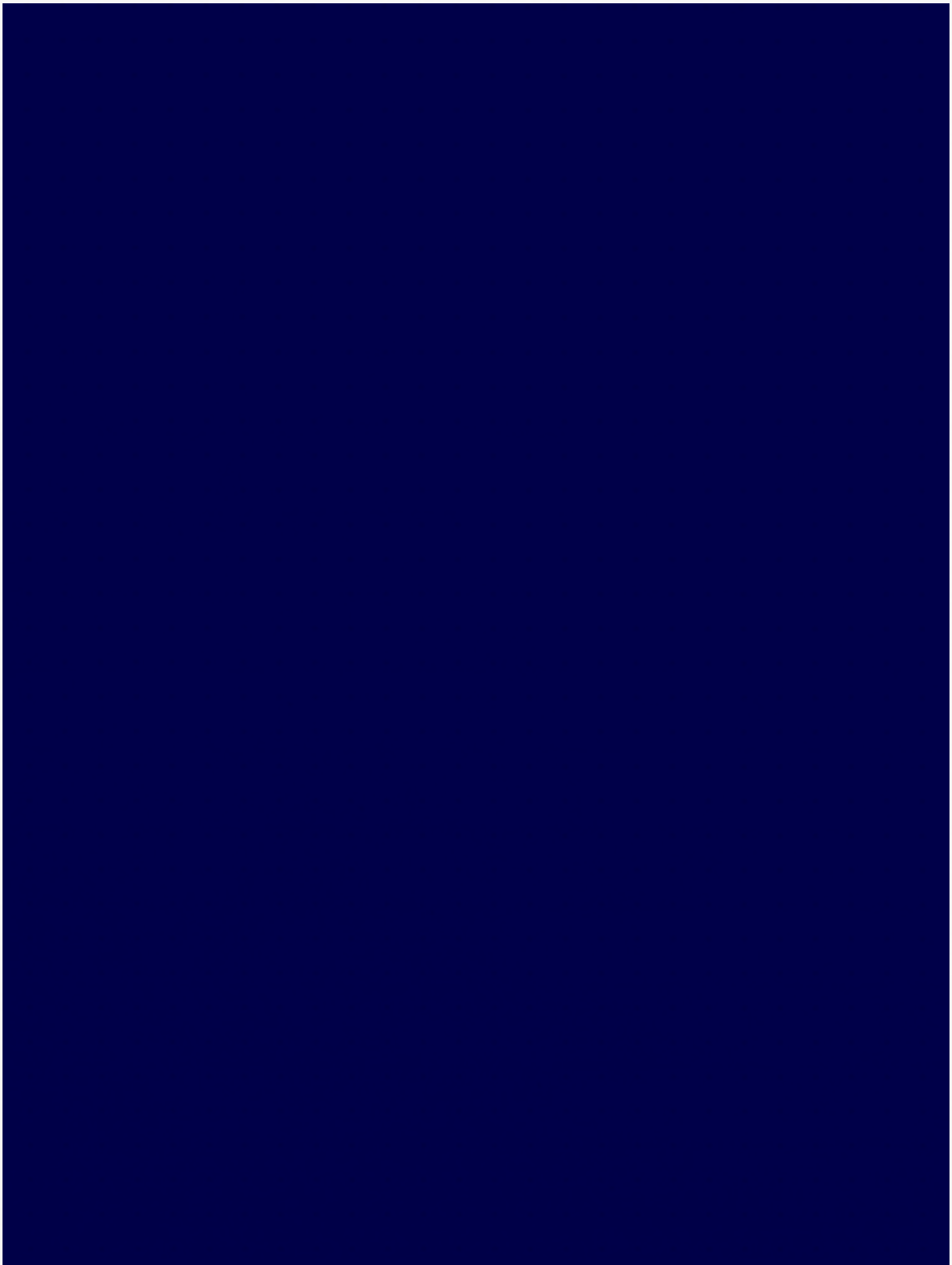
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Introducción a la Edición Especial

Annita Montoute*

Jacqueline Laguardia Martínez**

Durante las últimas seis décadas, el Instituto de Relaciones Internacionales (IIR por sus siglas en inglés) de la Universidad de las Indias Occidentales (The UWI) se ha consolidado como una institución regional líder en la promoción de la investigación académica y la educación de posgrado sobre temas internacionales con un énfasis particular en el Caribe y América Latina. Desde su fundación en 1966 en el campus de St.

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Augustine en Trinidad y Tobago, el IIR ha participado activamente en investigaciones colaborativas sobre políticas internacionales, servicios de asesoría y diálogos con actores clave en la política regional, reforzando así su papel como un recurso intelectual y estratégico vital para el Caribe. El IIR es centro miembro de la red de CLACSO.

Como parte de sus iniciativas de expansión, el IIR ha cultivado una relación dinámica con las embajadas latinoamericanas con sede en Puerto España. Reconociendo la importancia de fomentar las relaciones entre América Latina y el Caribe, el IIR albergó el Centro para América Latina y el Caribe (CENLAC por sus siglas en inglés), dirigido por el Dr. Lancelot Cowie desde 2003 hasta 2016, cuando fue nombrado Embajador de Trinidad y Tobago en Cuba. Al regresar el Dr. Cowie de su responsabilidad como diplomático, el IIR le acogió nuevamente desde el compromiso renovado de promover el diálogo y la interacción con América Latina en diversos ámbitos como cultura, artes, economía, política e historia—a través del lanzamiento del Foro Latinoamericano (LAF por sus siglas en inglés) el 27 de abril de 2023. El Dr. Cowie dirigió el LAF hasta su fallecimiento el 24 de junio de 2024. Actualmente, el LAF está dirigido por la Dra. Jacqueline Laguardia Martínez, profesora titular del IIR.

Esta colección de textos que hoy presentamos desde el espacio de los Boletines de los Grupos de Trabajo de CLACSO surgió gracias a una iniciativa propuesta durante una sesión del LAF celebrada el 21 de marzo de 2024. En ese encuentro el Embajador de Colombia en Trinidad y Tobago William Bush sugirió la confección de un volumen compuesto por contribuciones de embajadores latinoamericanos, cada uno reflexionando sobre las relaciones de sus respectivos países con el Caribe. La propuesta fue acogida con entusiasmo por la entonces Directora Interina del IIR, la Dra. Annita Montoute. Gracias a su dedicación, cinco embajadores respondieron al llamado, contribuyendo con ensayos donde se subraya el compromiso con el fortalecimiento del entendimiento de las relaciones entre América Latina y el Caribe.

Esta edición especial del Boletín *Caribes* se honra en presentar este conjunto de ensayos que destacan vínculos poco reconocidos entre América Latina y el Caribe. Escritos por los embajadores de Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, México y Venezuela, estas contribuciones están dirigidas a un público amplio de lectores en América Latina y el Caribe, en particular aquellos dentro de la red CLACSO con intereses hacia el espacio caribeño. Los textos examinan la evolución histórica, los compromisos políticos, la cooperación económica y las iniciativas diplomáticas que configuran las interacciones entre varias naciones latinoamericanas y el Caribe.

El volumen abre con un análisis de las relaciones de Argentina con el Caribe, en particular su colaboración con la Comunidad del Caribe (CARICOM por sus siglas en inglés) en áreas como la educación, la salud, la agricultura y el intercambio cultural. Argentina ha apoyado de manera constante las posiciones de CARICOM en la gobernanza global, incluyendo el cambio climático, la financiación para el desarrollo, los derechos humanos, la paz y la seguridad, la integración regional y la descolonización. Cabe destacar que Argentina respalda la Iniciativa de Bridgetown, una propuesta liderada por el Caribe para reformar el sistema financiero global.

El siguiente ensayo explora la política exterior de Colombia hacia el Caribe durante las últimas tres décadas, destacando la importancia estratégica de la región para Colombia, país que también comparte una identidad caribeña. La naturaleza y el enfoque de estos lazos han evolucionado con las sucesivas administraciones. Actualmente, la política exterior de Colombia está alineada con el Plan Nacional de Desarrollo que prioriza iniciativas conjuntas en comercio, inversión y sostenibilidad ambiental dentro de un marco multilateral.

La política exterior de México hacia el Caribe es el foco de la siguiente contribución. Se subraya la importancia geopolítica, estratégica, económica, cultural y política de la región para México, y cómo esta importancia ha variado a lo largo del tiempo. Desde la década de 1970, tras la

creación de CARICOM, México ha ampliado su cooperación en desarrollo y economía con el Caribe anglófono en áreas como energía, agricultura, respuesta a desastres y ayuda humanitaria. A través de su participación en la Asociación de Estados del Caribe (AEC), México ha promovido el desarrollo regional, la estabilidad y la seguridad mediante el comercio, la inversión y el apoyo para enfrentar desafíos globales.

La cuarta contribución examina la relación profunda y de larga data de Cuba con el resto del Caribe, moldeada por una historia, cultura y geografía compartidas. La solidaridad, la independencia y la soberanía son elementos centrales de estos vínculos. Los países de CARICOM han condenado de manera constante el bloqueo de Estados Unidos contra Cuba, y las relaciones bilaterales se han mantenido sólidas a través los años. La Cumbre CARICOM-Cuba, celebrada desde 2002, ha facilitado estas alianzas. Cuba ha defendido temas clave del Caribe en la arena internacional como las reparaciones por la esclavitud, la lucha contra el cambio climático y el acceso a recursos financieros, destacando su programa de asistencia médica como bandera de la cooperación regional.

El ensayo final reflexiona sobre la influencia de dos figuras clave—Simón Bolívar y Hugo Chávez—en la política exterior de Venezuela hacia el Caribe. Se destaca el apoyo crucial brindado por Haití y otras naciones caribeñas durante las campañas independentistas de Bolívar. La revitalización del legado de Bolívar por parte de Chávez incluyó un renovado enfoque en el Caribe, inspirado en parte por pensadores progresistas caribeños. Venezuela también ha apoyado el movimiento por las reparaciones impulsado por el Caribe y ha promovido estrategias de desarrollo a través de iniciativas como PetroCaribe y otros programas de cooperación.

Desde el compromiso diplomático de Argentina con la CARICOM hasta los lazos ideológicos e históricos de Venezuela con las islas del Caribe, este volumen ofrece un análisis integral de las políticas exteriores que configuran la cooperación entre América Latina y el Caribe. Las discusiones subrayan los beneficios mutuos de estas relaciones—que van desde

el comercio y el intercambio cultural hasta la respuesta ante eventos meteorológicos extremos—a la vez que abordan desafíos persistentes como el cambio climático, la integración económica y la seguridad regional. A través de una perspectiva multidisciplinaria, esta colección contribuye a una comprensión más profunda de la historia compartida, las aspiraciones políticas y el futuro colectivo de América Latina y el Caribe.

Este número contó con la valiosa colaboración de la MSc. Krystal Seecharan, joven investigadora, analista geopolítica y estratega en comunicaciones, graduada con honores del Instituto de Relaciones Internacionales.



Introduction to the Special Edition

Annita Montoute*

Jacqueline Laguardia Martínez**

Over the past six decades, the Institute of International Relations (IIR) at The University of the West Indies has established itself as a leading regional institution for advancing scholarly research and postgraduate education on critical international issues, with a particular emphasis on the Caribbean and Latin America. Since its founding in 1966 at the St. Augustine campus in Trinidad and Tobago, the IIR has actively engaged in collaborative international policy research, advisory services, and dialogue

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- ** Senior Lecturer at the Institute of International Relations at The University of the West Indies. Prior to this, she held the position of Associate Professor at the University of Havana and was a Research Associate at the Cuban Institute for Cultural Research 'Juan Marinello'. She has actively participated in numerous academic conferences, delivered lectures, and fulfilled teaching responsibilities across North America, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean. She is a member of the Cátedra de Estudios del Caribe 'Norman Girvan' at the University of Havana and co-coordinates the CLACSO Working Group on "Crisis, respuestas y alternativas en el Gran Caribe". She earned her PhD in Economics from the University of Havana.

with key policy stakeholders across the region, thereby reinforcing its role as a vital intellectual and strategic resource for the Caribbean.

As part of its broader networking initiatives, the IIR has cultivated a dynamic relationship with Latin American embassies based in Port of Spain. Recognizing the importance of fostering Latin American–Caribbean relations, the IIR hosted the Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean (CENLAC), directed by Dr. Lancelot Cowie from 2003 until 2016, when he was appointed Trinidad and Tobago’s Ambassador to Cuba. Upon his return, the IIR renewed its commitment to promoting dialogue and engagement with Latin America across diverse domains—including culture, identity, the arts, economics, politics, and history—through the launch of the Latin American Forum (LAF) on April 27, 2023. Dr. Cowie led the LAF until his passing on June 24, 2024. The LAF is currently directed by Dr. Jacqueline Laguardia Martinez, Senior Lecturer at the IIR.

This volume of articles emerged from an initiative proposed during a session of the LAF held on March 21, 2024. At this gathering, His Excellency William Bush, Ambassador of Colombia to Trinidad and Tobago, suggested the creation of a scholarly volume comprising contributions from Latin American ambassadors, each reflecting on their respective countries’ relationships with the Caribbean. The proposal was enthusiastically supported by the Acting Director of the IIR, Dr. Annita Montoute. Thanks to her dedication to the project and the efforts of Ambassador Bush, five ambassadors responded to the call, contributing essays that underscore their commitment to deepening the understanding of Latin American–Caribbean relations.

Given the significance of the themes explored—many of which highlight underrecognized linkages between Latin America and the Caribbean—this special edition of *Boletín Caribes* presents a compelling collection of works exploring Latin American – Caribbean relations. Authored by the ambassadors of Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and Venezuela, these contributions are intended for a broad Latin American and Caribbean

readership, particularly within the CLACSO network, of which the IIR is a member center. The essays examine the historical evolution, political commitments, economic cooperation, and diplomatic initiatives that shape the interactions between these nations and the Caribbean.

The volume opens with an analysis of Argentina's engagement with the Caribbean, particularly its collaboration with CARICOM in areas such as education, healthcare, agriculture, and cultural exchange. Argentina has consistently supported CARICOM's positions in global governance, including climate change, development finance, human rights, peace and security, regional integration, and decolonization. Notably, Argentina endorses the Bridgetown Initiative, a Caribbean-led proposal to reform the global financial system.

The following essay explores Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean over the past three decades, emphasizing the region's strategic importance to Colombia—a Caribbean nation itself. The nature and focus of this relationship have evolved with successive administrations. Currently, Colombia's foreign policy is aligned with the National Development Plan, which prioritizes joint initiatives with developing countries in trade, investment, and environmental sustainability within a multilateral framework.

Mexico's foreign policy towards the Caribbean is the focus of the next contribution. It underscores the region's geopolitical, strategic, economic, cultural, and political significance to Mexico, and how this importance has varied over time. Since the 1970s, following the establishment of CARICOM, Mexico has expanded its development and economic cooperation with the Anglophone Caribbean in areas such as energy, agriculture, disaster response, and humanitarian aid. Through its involvement in the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), Mexico has promoted regional development, stability, and security via trade, investment, and support for addressing global challenges.

The fourth contribution examines Cuba's enduring relationship with the Caribbean, shaped by shared history, culture, and geography. Solidarity, independence, and sovereignty are central to these ties. CARICOM countries have consistently condemned the U.S. blockade against Cuba, and bilateral relations have remained strong across political administrations. The CARICOM-Cuba Summit, held since 2002, has facilitated this engagement. Cuba has championed key Caribbean priorities such as reparations, climate change, and financial inclusion, with its medical assistance program standing out as a hallmark of its regional contribution.

The final essay reflects on the influence of two pivotal figures—Simón Bolívar and Hugo Chávez—on Venezuela's foreign policy towards the Caribbean. It highlights the crucial support provided by Haiti and other Caribbean nations during Bolívar's independence campaigns. Chávez's revival of Bolívar's legacy included a renewed focus on the Caribbean, inspired in part by progressive Caribbean thinkers. Venezuela has supported the region's reparations movement and pursued equitable development strategies through initiatives such as the PetroCaribe scheme and other cooperation programs.

From Argentina's diplomatic engagement with CARICOM to Venezuela's ideological and historical ties, this volume offers a comprehensive analysis of the foreign policies shaping Latin American-Caribbean cooperation. The discussions underscore the mutual benefits of these relationships—ranging from trade and cultural exchange to disaster response—while also addressing persistent challenges such as climate change, economic integration, and regional security. Through the eyes of diplomats, this collection contributes to a deeper understanding of the shared history, political aspirations, and collective future of these interconnected regions.

This special issue benefited greatly from the distinguished contribution of MSc. Krystal Seecharan, a young researcher, expert in geopolitical analysis and strategic communications, and an honors graduate of the Institute of International Relations.



Argentina and the Caribbean Community

Challenges and Opportunities

Gustavo Martinez Pandiani*

The Argentine Republic recognised the significance of fostering strong ties with the nations of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) very early in its inception as a bloc. Rooted in a deep historical connection that transcends geographical distance, our relationship is grounded in shared struggles for independence, economic development and a common vision for a more prosperous and integrated Latin America and the Caribbean; or, as I prefer to say, the Caribbean and Latin America.

- * Ambassador of Argentina to Trinidad and Tobago. Ambassador Gustavo Martínez Pandiani is an experienced career ambassador with an outstanding record of more than 30 years in the diplomatic field. He has a Master of Public Administration (MPA) from Harvard University. He also earned a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Georgia State University, with a concentration in international business, strategic marketing and leadership. Martínez Pandiani is a Lawyer from the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). He also has a degree in Political Science from the University of Salvador (USAL), where he studied political systems and sociology. Ambassador Martínez Pandiani joined the Argentine Foreign Service in 1992. He served as Consul at the Argentine Embassy in Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Antigua and Barbuda (1993–1995); at the Consulate General in Atlanta (1995–1997); at the Consulate General in Miami, Puerto Rico and the Bahamas (2009–2013). He was ambassador of the Argentine Republic to Barbados, Dominica, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and representative to the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States – OECS (2018–2020). He has also held strategic positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including undersecretary for Latin American and Caribbean Affairs, national coordinator of CELAC and director of Central America and the Caribbean. Likewise, he had responsibilities as minister plenipotentiary in matters of public diplomacy and international economic relations.

Argentina's permanent presence in the region reflects our long-standing relations with CARICOM, solidified in 1998 with the signing of an agreement to foster political consultation, cooperation and coordination. In 2024, we also commemorated the anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with several CARICOM countries, including fifty years each with Grenada and The Bahamas, and sixty with Trinidad and Tobago.

Bilateral cooperation has long been one of the cornerstones of our relationship, evidenced by our shared efforts in areas ranging from education and healthcare to agriculture and cultural exchange. Our countries also share core values in regional and global fora. Notwithstanding these common achievements, we know that CARICOM expects much more from Argentina. Today, as we aspire to improve our bonds with our Caribbean partners in all fields, we stand ready to expand and deepen our ties even further.

Argentina has been a reliable trading partner for many CARICOM nations, particularly in the exchange of agricultural products. Our country can offer food and related services at competitive prices, but, above all, it can also assist with increasing local agricultural productivity. In that regard, we highly praise the participation of Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in a new South-South cooperation project on Managing Water and Soil Resources for Sustainable Agriculture.

In 2019, we launched a triangular cooperation initiative on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) alongside the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), through which, over four hundred professionals were trained in different programme areas related to detection and surveillance of AMR. Under this initiative, 12 Caribbean countries also joined an external laboratory quality assurance programme led by our Malbrán Institute. In addition to the technical expertise and capacity-building offered, the project also successfully built a strong network of professionals within

the Caribbean region with keen interest in AMR, which will endure beyond the project's duration.

Taking great pride in this accomplishment, we have reaffirmed our commitment to the programme by incorporating into the already very active working agenda of the Argentinian embassy in Port of Spain the new “South-South Solidarity against Superbugs” project, also being developed with PAHO.

Further, through our joint work with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), we are willing to foster technical cooperation in areas that have proven successful, such as pest control, nuclear medicine, and training of professionals in nuclear safety. Considering the importance given by several CARICOM countries to the transit of dual-use goods and technologies, Argentina can provide training and assistance in the development of state controls to prevent diversion, and training of human resources for this purpose.

Of course, our relationship must and can go beyond the exchange of good practices and capacity-building. In this regard, we see CARICOM as a strategic political partner and a promising economic associate.

Argentina has consistently supported CARICOM's endeavours on the international stage, advocating for issues of common interest such as climate change, finance for development, respect for human rights, peace and security, regional integration and decolonisation.

We support the Bridgetown Initiative to reform the global financial system so the world can better respond to current and future crises. We are also engaged with fostering collaboration in climate action, both bilaterally and through coordination between our Southern Group (with Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay) and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

We participated in and are closely looking forward to the outcomes of the 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States,

especially the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States (ABAS), which we endorse fully.

Our commitment to addressing natural disasters is reflected in our White Helmets Initiative's resolution in the OAS General Assembly, as well as in our willingness to ensure that the Climate Adaptation and Comprehensive Response to Natural Disasters Fund from CELAC is properly channelled to develop projects in Central America and the Caribbean. We are also interested in engaging with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) to identify areas in which our White Helmets could contribute to strengthening disaster risk reduction.

In terms of human rights, we have joined CARICOM in calling for the establishment of a regional office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in The Bahamas. We further fully endorse the acknowledgment in international and regional fora that slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, were appalling tragedies in history that demand reparatory justice.

On similar grounds, the current situation in Haiti weighs heavily on our hearts and minds, as we witness the immense suffering endured by our fellow Haitians. Argentina expresses its deep appreciation for the role of CARICOM in facilitating Haiti's efforts to overcome the ongoing political stalemate and security situation. Argentina is evaluating ways to cooperate with the Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti, honouring our long tradition of friendship and solidarity. We must seize this moment as an opportunity to strengthen our cooperation and redouble our efforts to address the root causes of instability in Haiti.

Building greater regional density is one of the keys to addressing these issues, with a view to enabling Latin America and the Caribbean to engage more with other world regions, and on a better footing. Argentina considers that in the negotiation process with extra-regional partners within the framework of the fora that we are part of, such as CELAC-EU, we must

work internally to define priorities in order to advance towards a result that is mutually beneficial.

Together, we also share a strong political commitment built around the complete elimination of colonialism in all its forms and manifestations. In this regard, every year we renew our appreciation for the support of CARICOM in the Question of the Malvinas Islands, an issue of great importance to the Argentine people, as the islands are an important part of Argentina's past, present and future trajectory. Argentina would have continued to develop the Islands as an integral part of our territory, were it not for an act of force against international law in 1833, through which the United Kingdom illegitimately occupied the Islands. Having never consented to this breach of territorial integrity, we have asserted our legitimate rights in the subsequent decades. Over 190 years after the beginning the occupation, it is time to go back to the negotiating table and renew the dialogue towards a peaceful resolution to the dispute. This goal is tantamount to a state policy to which all Argentine political forces agree and remains valid regardless of changes in government.

Argentina deeply appreciates that our partners in the Caribbean Community reiterate their call to the United Kingdom to resume negotiations in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and declarations of the Organization of American States and other regional and multilateral fora. We hope to continue receiving this critical support from CARICOM in order to achieve a peaceful and definitive solution through negotiations to this anachronistic colonial situation on South American soil.

In conclusion, let me reaffirm Argentina's commitment to the ideals of solidarity and cooperation with CARICOM. It is only through mutual collaboration and integration that we can collectively navigate the challenges and opportunities that we face, shaping a more prosperous and unified Caribbean and Latin America region.



Colombia Foreign Policy towards the Caribbean: 1994 – 2024

William Sidney Bush Howard*

Introduction

Colombia, a country that lies in the north-western part of South America, holds a significant geopolitical position shaped by its varied topography and close ties to other countries. Bordered by Peru to the south, Brazil to the southeast, Venezuela to the east and Panama to the northwest, Colombia is even more significant in the region because it has coastlines on both the Pacific and the Atlantic. These maritime borders with countries in Central America and the Caribbean help to promote economic and diplomatic ties. The Andes Mountain range, the vast Amazonian rainforest,

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and the coastline region of the Pacific and Caribbean oceans store much of the country's unique biodiversity and comprise several important and diverse geographical features which have allowed it to open up trading routes, generating economic activity and engendering regional relations. Further, the country's strategic importance as a gateway to the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans is enhanced by its proximity to the Panama Canal, rendering it important geopolitically even outside of the South American continent. Colombia also shares many geographical, historical, gastronomic, and linguistic similarities with islands in the Caribbean such as Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, and is therefore considered to be part of the Caribbean. It has a long history of being involved in numerous international organisations and treaties and is therefore a major actor in regional affairs. Historically, the country's capacity to manage difficult issues which derive from its unique location, such as drug trafficking, migration and environmental concerns, significantly impacts its presence on the world stage and in South America's geopolitical landscape.

Colombia's Foreign Policy toward the Caribbean

An analysis of Colombia's foreign policy regarding the Caribbean is crucial in comprehending the complex network of political, economic and cultural ties that mould the dynamics of the region, as well as its position in the global economy. Given that the Caribbean's overall stability may to a significant extent be influenced by Colombia's stance on national issues which permeate through the region such drug trafficking, transnational crime, and border security, understanding Colombia's foreign policy toward the Caribbean aids in evaluating its contribution to regional stability and security. In an effort to strengthen ties with nearby regions, Colombia therefore commits to multilateralism by being an active member in organisations such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), and the Organization of American States (OAS). Hence, from a multilateral perspective, the country's

leadership and independent and collaborative efforts in the region is exhibited in various fora. Over the past two decades, for instance, through increased diplomatic relations between Colombia and the Caribbean, Colombia has showcased its keen focus on regional environmental sustainability and climate resilience through its foreign policy by addressing common environmental challenges, including hurricanes and rising sea levels.

Several variables have influenced the historical rapport between Colombia and the Caribbean, establishing the foundation for current diplomatic, economic and cultural relations, including, multifaceted historical events, geopolitical factors, economic interests and cultural linkages. The period of colonisation under the control of the Spanish Empire which began in the fifteenth century is a critical example of a major mutual historical event binding Colombia and many Caribbean countries. The regions that are currently under the jurisdiction of Colombia once belonged to the Viceroyalty of New Granada, while several islands in the Caribbean were frequently split up among other colonial powers besides Spain, such as France, Britain, and the Netherlands. Since the goal of the mercantilist system was to syphon off income from the colonies for the advantage of the colonial rulers, the economic exploitation of natural resources, such as agriculture, mining, and trade shaped the economies of Colombia and the Caribbean.

The Caribbean was very important to the European colonial powers because of its strategic location and advantageous ports. It therefore acted as a crossroads for trade, making it easier to move products between Europe, the Americas, and Africa. Comparably, Cartagena and other coastal regions of modern-day Colombia were strategically important for both trade and defence. The aforementioned mutual historical events, however, do not negate the region's unique historical trajectories, local settings, and subsequent developments. Within the larger framework of Spanish colonialism, each region had a distinct experience due to the variety of

indigenous cultures, the geographical makeup of the land, and the historical events that followed colonialism.

To fully understand foreign policy, a state's interactions with the international community, including its objectives, decision-making procedures, and results, must be analysed. Colombia aspires to maintain diplomatic and economic ties with all states, regardless of their political, economic, or ideological systems, ensuring that its economy remains open, it is active in global trade and adherent to international law. Regarding the Caribbean specifically, and the international community more broadly, Colombia's foreign policy is oriented around liberalism. Openness to international cooperation, diplomacy, and the democratic function of international institutions are typical components of liberal theories. Understanding the foreign policy choices of countries which subscribe to liberalism therefore requires an analysis of the ways in which they interact with international institutions and other non-state actors, democracy and systems of economic interdependence through liberal viewpoints.

Historically, Colombia has actively participated in the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the OAS, and the United Nations (UN). In 1965, Colombia initially established diplomatic relations with Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Barbados, Bahamas, Suriname, Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Belize, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Lucia, and Saint Kitts and Nevis.

According to former Colombian President, Juan Manuel Santos, "Colombia's foreign relations must become more diverse in order to advance toward democratic prosperity, both in the multilateral setting and while seeking out new allies and strategic partnerships on a global scale," which proves that Colombia's foreign policy is based on consolidating and strengthening institutions to achieve growth and competitiveness, equal opportunities, and peace. This overarching sentiment has led to ambitions for a greater degree of regional integration and diversification of relationships as Colombia aims to increase trade, investment, and

technical exchange opportunities with Latin America and the Caribbean. Further, Colombia's foreign policies also take into consideration the values and concerns of the G77 and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, two subgroups of which it is a member.

Colombia's Foreign Policy under each administration: 2000 to 2024

Colombia's foreign policy stems from its Constitution, within which Article 9 of the 1990 iteration states that, "The foreign relations of the State is based on national sovereignty, on respect for the self-determination of the people and on the recognition of the principles of international law approved by Colombia. In the same manner, the foreign policy of Colombia will be oriented toward the integration of Latin America and the Caribbean."

While this sets a policy-based foundation for Colombian-Caribbean foreign relations, Article 227 of the Constitution further emphasised that, "The state shall promote economic, social and political integration with other nations and especially with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean by means of treaties which, on the basis of fairness, equality and reciprocity, create supranational organizations even to the point of constituting a Latin American community of nations."

It is also important to look at some of the happenings of the decade before the year 2000, in order to contextualise the development of Colombia's Caribbean Foreign Policy up until present day.

César Augusto Gaviria Trujillo (1990 - 1994)

César Augusto Gaviria Trujillo served as the President of Colombia from 1990 to 1994. During his presidency, Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean region saw several significant developments, reflecting

the country's strategic interests and diplomatic engagements, as well as regional dynamics. Notable efforts included the deepening of economic cooperation and trade relations with Caribbean nations, and collaborations on security initiatives aimed at combating transnational threats and ensuring regional stability. Ensuring that Colombia was an active member in regional organisations such as CARICOM and the ACS during this time, Trujillo aimed to promote dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding with the Caribbean region. In fact, the Agreement on Trade, Economic and Technical Cooperation between CARICOM and Colombia, as well as the Convention establishing the ACS were both signed in 1994, in Cartagena, Colombia, underscoring the important role that Colombia has played in multilateral relations in the Caribbean region for the past 30 years.

Ernesto Samper Pizano (1994 - 1998)

On the economic front, during Ernesto Samper Pizano's tenure as President from 1994 to 1998, the government of Colombia reinforced its commitment to carrying out the Agreement on Trade, Economic and Technical Cooperation between CARICOM and Colombia. Pizano's government placed an emphasis on promoting prosperity through integration and free trade, while prioritising sustainable development and the fight against poverty. Under Pizano, Colombia also participated in OAS initiatives to redefine hemispheric relations and preserve and strengthen democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Andrés Pastrana Arango (1998 - 2002)

During Andrés Pastrana Arango's presidency from 1998 to 2002, Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean region was defined by a multitude of challenges and objectives. Pastrana inherited a complex regional landscape marked by persistent armed conflict, rampant drug trafficking,

and socioeconomic disparities. Recognising the interconnectedness of these issues across borders, Pastrana's administration prioritised security cooperation as a cornerstone of its foreign policy agenda. Consequently, efforts were made to enhance collaboration with Caribbean nations in combating drug trafficking, transnational crime, and terrorism, particularly through the implementation of joint operations and intelligence-sharing initiatives to disrupt illicit drug networks operating in the region.

In addition to security cooperation, Pastrana's administration actively engaged with Caribbean countries diplomatically to address common challenges and promote regional integration. Participation in regional forums such as the OAS and CARICOM provided platforms for dialogue and cooperation on issues ranging from drug trafficking to socioeconomic development. Despite occasional political tensions and divergent interests, Colombia's efforts to build trust and foster dialogue among regional stakeholders contributed to enhanced cooperation and understanding.

Economically, Pastrana's administration sought to strengthen ties with Caribbean nations through trade agreements, investment promotion, and development assistance programmes. Initiatives aimed at expanding market access, facilitating cross-border trade, and promoting investment in key sectors such as agriculture and tourism were pursued. However, economic disparities, regulatory barriers, and logistical challenges posed obstacles to deeper economic integration and cooperation in the region.

Overall, his presidency laid the groundwork for Colombia's continued engagement with the Caribbean region. His administration's efforts to address security challenges, foster diplomatic engagement, and promote economic development contributed to enhanced regional stability and prosperity. However, ongoing challenges with drug trafficking, armed conflict, and economic disparities necessitated sustained efforts to further deepen cooperation and address regionally common obstacles in the years ahead.

Alvaro Uribe Vélez (2002 - 2010)

During Álvaro Uribe Vélez's presidency from 2002 to 2010, Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean underwent significant transformations, marked by a proactive approach to regional security, economic integration, and diplomatic engagement. Uribe's administration inherited a country grappling with internal armed conflict, drug trafficking, and strained relations with neighbouring countries. Under his leadership, Colombia pursued a foreign policy agenda aimed at addressing these challenges while promoting stability, cooperation, and economic development in the Caribbean region.

Under Uribe's presidency, Colombia intensified efforts to strengthen security cooperation with Caribbean nations to combat drug trafficking, transnational crime, and terrorism. Operation Caribbean Shield, launched in 2003, exemplified Colombia's commitment to enhancing maritime security and interdicting drug shipments in collaboration with Caribbean partners. Through joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and capacity-building initiatives, Colombia sought to disrupt illicit drug networks operating in the Caribbean and mitigate the flow of drugs to international markets.

Uribe's administration actively engaged with Caribbean countries diplomatically to foster dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding. Bilateral and multilateral initiatives were pursued to address common challenges such as drug trafficking, organised crime, and environmental degradation. Colombia's participation in regional organisations such as CARICOM and the ACS provided platforms for collaboration on security, economic development, and cultural exchange. Additionally, Uribe's government worked to strengthen ties with Caribbean nations through high-level visits, diplomatic exchanges, and development assistance programmes.

Economic integration emerged as a key pillar of Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean under Uribe's presidency. Efforts were made to deepen trade relations, attract investment, and promote economic cooperation with Caribbean countries. The consolidation of trade agreements, such as the Colombia-CARICOM Free Trade Agreement, for instance, aimed to facilitate bilateral trade and investment flows, enhance market access, and foster economic growth in the region. Moreover, Colombia actively participated in regional initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable development, infrastructure investment, and connectivity in the Caribbean basin.

Uribe's presidency saw Colombia emerge as a regional leader in addressing common challenges and promoting cooperation in the Caribbean. Through proactive diplomacy and constructive engagement, Colombia played a pivotal role in advancing regional security, stability, and integration. Uribe's government sought to build coalitions, forge partnerships, and leverage its regional influence to address shared concerns such as drug trafficking, organised crime, and natural disasters. By assuming a proactive and collaborative approach to regional affairs, Colombia under President Uribe demonstrated its commitment to promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the Caribbean region, which has left a lasting impact on Colombia-Caribbean relations.

Juan Manuel Santos (2010 - 2018)

During Juan Manuel Santos' presidency from 2010 to 2018, Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean evolved to prioritise regional integration, economic cooperation, and diplomatic engagement. He assumed the role as President of the country after emerging from decades of internal conflict, which he sought to counter by consolidating peace and strengthening ties with neighbouring Caribbean nations. Under his leadership, Colombia pursued a foreign policy agenda aimed at fostering

regional stability, promoting economic development, and deepening cooperation in the Caribbean region.

Regional integration and diplomatic engagement became two of the main tenets of Colombia's foreign policy toward the Caribbean under Santos. Santos emphasised the value of diplomacy in resolving shared issues and fostering confidence among regional parties while actively promoting communication and collaboration through bilateral and multilateral channels. Colombia was able to work together on security, trade, and sustainable development through its membership in groups like the ACS and CARICOM. In order to improve relations with Caribbean countries and further common interests in fields like security, environmental preservation, and cross-cultural exchange, Santos also gave top priority to high-level diplomatic visits and exchanges.

As part of its foreign policy agenda, Santos' administration made an attempt to increase market accessibility, ease international trade, and encourage investment in important industries including energy, tourism, and agriculture. Trade agreements, such as bilateral investment treaties and the Colombia-CARICOM Free Trade Agreement, were signed with the intention of promoting regional prosperity, job creation, and economic progress. Colombia, at that time, acknowledged the significance of sustainable economic development for fostering stability and lowering poverty in the region, therefore Santos reinforced joint efforts to improve connectivity and infrastructure development in the Caribbean.

President Santos continued Colombia's efforts to strengthen security cooperation with Caribbean nations to address transnational challenges such as drug trafficking, organised crime, and maritime piracy. Joint operations, intelligence sharing, and capacity-building initiatives were pursued to disrupt illicit drug networks, combat money laundering, and enhance maritime security in the Caribbean. Santos also supported regional initiatives aimed at promoting cooperation in areas such as disaster response, humanitarian assistance, and environmental protection,

recognising the interconnectedness of security and development challenges in the region.

He emphasised the importance of environmental conservation and sustainable development in Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean. Initiatives were launched to protect marine ecosystems, promote renewable energy, and address climate change impacts in the Caribbean region. Santos advocated for greater international cooperation in addressing environmental challenges, including marine pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity loss, understanding the shared responsibility of countries in safeguarding the Caribbean's natural resources for future generations.

Iván Duque Márquez (2018 - 2022)

During Iván Duque Márquez's presidency, which began in 2018 and continued until 2022, Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean underwent several key developments, stressing economic cooperation, security collaboration, and regional integration. Under Duque's leadership, Colombia continued to prioritise engagement with its Caribbean neighbours while addressing shared challenges and opportunities in the region.

A significant aspect of Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean under Duque was the promotion of economic cooperation and trade relations. Efforts were made to strengthen existing trade agreements and explore new opportunities for economic collaboration. Initiatives were aimed at enhancing market access, facilitating investment, and promoting trade in sectors such as agriculture, energy, and tourism. Duque's administration recognised the importance of economic integration in driving growth, creating jobs, and fostering prosperity in both Colombia and the Caribbean region.

He continued Colombia's efforts to strengthen security cooperation with Caribbean nations to address transnational challenges such as drug trafficking, organised crime, and illegal migration. Joint operations, intelligence sharing, and capacity-building initiatives were pursued to disrupt criminal networks, combat money laundering, and enhance border security. Duque's administration also supported regional initiatives aimed at promoting cooperation in areas such as counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and maritime security, discerning the importance of collective action in addressing common security threats.

Diplomatic engagement and regional integration remained key priorities in Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean under Duque. Colombia continued to participate actively in regional organisations such as CARICOM, the ACS, and the OAS to promote dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding. Duque's administration highlighted the importance of strengthening diplomatic ties, fostering cultural exchanges, and building partnerships with Caribbean nations to address shared challenges and opportunities in the region.

His presidency saw Colombia's increased engagement in providing humanitarian assistance and disaster response in the Caribbean region. Colombia responded to natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes by providing emergency aid, technical assistance, and support for reconstruction efforts. Duque's administration focused attention on the importance of solidarity and cooperation in responding to humanitarian crises, demonstrating Colombia's commitment to supporting its Caribbean neighbours in times of need.

Gustavo Petro Urrego (2022 - present)

The current President of Colombia, Gustavo Francisco Petro Urrego, assumed office in 2022. Thus far, Urrego's foreign policy towards the Caribbean has been oriented around one of the objectives of the National

Development Plan of Colombia, namely, internationalisation of the Colombian economy. This will focus on Latin America and the Caribbean through the promotion of joint actions with developing countries, within the multilateral framework of trade, investment and environmental sustainability.

In this regard, great importance has been placed on enhancing regional integration not only on the basis of such structures that already exist, but also in searching for new opportunities for collaboration between Colombia and the Caribbean region. In the context of a world that is evolving every day, with the increase in production costs and the reduction of real wages, Colombia is making efforts to integrate itself into regional and global value chains, seeking productive complementarity, sanitary diplomacy, quality certification and the promotion of rules of origin.

In terms of trade, understanding that there is still quite a bit of room for improvement between Latin American and Caribbean countries, the government's aim is to propel the level of trade and infrastructural investments in these countries, in a way that privileges productive and export diversification.

Academically, Colombia considers it to be essential that bilingualism is promoted throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, for the benefit of the wider development of the region, and for keeping in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Correspondingly, as a continuation of efforts made by previous Colombian presidents, the current Government carries out fully funded Spanish Language Learning courses in Caribbean countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Suriname and Saint Vincent, as a way to encourage working professionals to understand the necessity of learning a foreign language.

The 2nd Joint Commission for Technical, Cultural, Educational and Sports Cooperation (2023-2025), which took place in San Andres Islands, Colombia, was another positive step in Colombia's foreign policy towards

the Caribbean, serving as a continuation of the first which was held in 2020. Following a meeting in 2019, Ministers of Foreign Affairs of CARICOM countries and Colombia also met in 2022 at the 2nd Colombia-CARICOM Ministerial Summit, where interests were reinforced by all parties involved to continue with the deepening and strengthening of ties between Colombia and CARICOM.

Theoretical Perspective from Juan Gabriel Tokatlian

Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, an Argentine political scientist and international relations scholar, has provided valuable insights into Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean through his extensive research and analysis. While his work primarily focuses on broader Latin American affairs, his perspectives offer important considerations for understanding Colombia's engagements in the Caribbean region.

One of Tokatlian's notable contributions lies in his examination of regional security dynamics and the challenges posed by transnational threats such as drug trafficking, organised crime, and maritime piracy. In his book "Latin American Foreign Policies: Between Ideology and Pragmatism," he emphasises the significance of security cooperation among Caribbean nations to address these challenges effectively. This perspective is particularly relevant to Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean, given its longstanding efforts to combat drug trafficking and organised crime, which often involve transiting through Caribbean routes.

Furthermore, Tokatlian's analysis underscores the importance of historical context in shaping contemporary foreign policy dynamics. In his research, he highlights the historical legacies of colonialism, independence movements, and cultural ties that influence Colombia's relations with its Caribbean neighbours. Understanding this historical background is

crucial for contextualising Colombia's diplomatic engagements and security priorities in the Caribbean region.

Additionally, Tokatlian's scholarship on regional integration offers insights into Colombia's participation in Caribbean multilateral organisations and integration initiatives. In his article "The Difficulties of Regionalism: The Andean Community, Mercosur, and the Caribbean Community," Tokatlian discusses the challenges and opportunities of regional integration in Latin America, including Colombia's interactions with CARICOM and the ACS. This perspective highlights the complexities of Colombia's efforts to engage with Caribbean nations within the framework of regional integration processes.

Moreover, Tokatlian's analysis of diplomatic strategies and international relations sheds light on Colombia's diplomatic engagements with Caribbean countries. His research emphasises the importance of diplomacy in building trust, managing conflicts, and advancing mutual interests in the region. This perspective underscores the significance of Colombia's diplomatic efforts to foster cooperation, dialogue, and conflict resolution in its relations with the Caribbean.

Theoretical Perspective from Rodrigo Pardo

Rodrigo Pardo is a Colombian politician, diplomat, and journalist known for his extensive experience in foreign affairs and public service. As a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Pardo played a significant role in shaping Colombia's foreign policy, including its engagements with the Caribbean region. While Pardo has not published scholarly works on this specific topic, his tenure as Foreign Minister provides valuable insights into Colombia's approach towards the Caribbean.

During his time as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1991 to 1994, Pardo focused on enhancing Colombia's relations with its Caribbean neighbours through diplomacy, economic cooperation, and regional integration

efforts. One of the key aspects of Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean under Pardo's leadership was the emphasis on strengthening bilateral and multilateral ties with Caribbean nations.

He prioritised diplomatic engagement with Caribbean countries to address common challenges and promote cooperation on issues such as security, trade, and development. His efforts aimed to foster closer political and economic relations with Caribbean nations, recognising the importance of regional stability and prosperity for Colombia's own security and economic interests.

Furthermore, Pardo's tenure as Foreign Minister coincided with significant developments in Colombia's relations with the Caribbean region, including efforts to deepen economic integration through trade agreements and regional cooperation mechanisms. For example, Colombia's participation in regional organisations such as CARICOM and the ACS expanded during this period, reflecting Colombia's commitment to regional engagement and collaboration.

Additionally, Pardo's diplomatic efforts sought to address security challenges in the Caribbean, including drug trafficking, organised crime, and maritime piracy. Colombia's cooperation with Caribbean nations on security issues under his leadership aimed to strengthen intelligence sharing, law enforcement cooperation, and joint operations to combat transnational crime and ensure maritime security in the region.

While specific scholarly references directly linking Rodrigo Pardo to Colombia's foreign policy towards the Caribbean may be limited, his role as Foreign Minister during a critical period in Colombia's diplomatic history provides valuable insights into the country's approach towards the region. Pardo's diplomatic initiatives, regional engagements, and efforts to enhance cooperation with Caribbean nations reflect Colombia's broader foreign policy objectives of promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the Caribbean basin.

Future Prospects and Conclusion

Colombia has always had strong relations with its Caribbean neighbours. Diplomatic engagement and collaboration have been facilitated by regional institutions like the OAS, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), CELAC, the ACS, and CARICOM.

Most recently, on January 24, 2023, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Colombia and the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, during the VII Summit of Heads of State and Government of CELAC, regarding the establishment of a mechanism for political consultations.

Additionally, in 2024, the Government of Colombia, after a series of meetings and consultations, requested formal CARICOM membership, or, if this was not possible, Associate Membership, on the basis that Colombia shares a high degree of commonality with the Caribbean, not only historically and politically, but also culturally and geographically.

With the Republic of Honduras becoming part of the Extended Troika of CELAC through its undertaking of the Pro-Tempore Presidency of CELAC for 2024-2025, made official during the 8th Summit of Heads of Government of CELAC in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines this year, Colombia also became part of the Extended Troika of CELAC as the country is anticipated to undertake Pro-Tempore Presidency for 2025-2026. Furthermore, in 2024, Colombia accepted the role of Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the ACS for the year 2024 to 2025.

All the above-mentioned happenings are clear evidence of the strides that the Government of Colombia has been making in terms of strengthening its ties with the Caribbean region in a multi-faceted way. Still, there is so much potential to be tapped into by Latin American and Caribbean countries. With that said, regardless of what comes of the international

relations of the Greater Caribbean, and the sea that unites us, one thing is very clear: that we are all brothers of this great Caribbean, and it is our obligation to continue working together to take care of the land, the sea and the people who occupy it.

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Cuba and its Relations with the Caribbean

Gustavo Véliz Olivares*

Introduction

This article aims to provide a general overview of Cuba's projections towards the Caribbean. Cuba shares a common geography and centuries of history with the Caribbean, marked by colonisation and the horrors of slavery that stemmed from it. This phenomenon is brilliantly characterised by Juan Bosch, who states that the history of the Caribbean is marked by the conflicts between empires and the region's inhabitants over control of its fertile lands. It also encompasses the battles between empires to claim territories from one another. Ultimately, it is the story of the Caribbean peoples' fight for liberation from their colonial rulers. Without viewing history through this lens, it is difficult to grasp the significant role

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this region has played and continues to play in global politics (Bosch, 2009).

It is in the context described above that the relations between Cuba and the Caribbean were formed. These relations, both in their historical content and current expression, transcend the strictly geographical and are characterised by the diversity of nuances in their cultural heritage, national sentiments, and anti-slavery struggles, which, due to its history, Cuba shares with Caribbean countries.

In terms of foreign policy, the Caribbean remains one of the areas of obligatory attention for Cuba, and Cuba, in turn, remains a reference and paradigm in terms of independence and sovereignty. Although these are societies with different economic-social formations and political systems, and even though Cuba is not a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), it shares common challenges and issues with these countries. The impact of climate change is a clear example of this.

Cuba's projections towards the Caribbean in the 21st century express continuity and recognition of fundamental characteristics in its foreign policy, as Fidel Castro Ruz articulated in 2002: Independence, Courage, and Concerted Action.

When referring to the Caribbean, this paper focuses on the fourteen independent countries of CARICOM, although conceptually, Cuba's projections towards the region have not been limited to these countries alone. In a broader sense, Cuba has developed close and historical ties with the Greater Caribbean, and in specific situations and circumstances, Cuba's presence has also extended to the non-independent territories of the Caribbean.

Beyond CARICOM, Cuba, in its relations with the region, shares spaces in the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), among others. As expressed by the historical leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz, at the

First CARICOM-Cuba Summit held in Havana in 2002, “The only way out for our peoples is integration and cooperation, not only between states but also among the various regional frameworks and organizations.” (Castro Ruz, 2002).

Bilateral Relations: Shared Principles and Claims

The relations between Cuba and the Caribbean are regarded as a successful example of South-South cooperation which, as a trend, has transcended the particularities of any political party.

Between 2020 and 2024, several CARICOM member countries held general elections, including Guyana (March 2020); Trinidad and Tobago (August 2020); Jamaica (September 2020); Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (November 2020); the Bahamas (September 2021); Barbados (January 2022); and Antigua and Barbuda (January 2023). In all cases, and in line with the general trend mentioned above, relations with the Caribbean have remained intact and even strengthened, regardless of the political figures or entities holding power.

Exchanges between Cuba and the Caribbean have demonstrated that they transcend the strictly formal framework of diplomatic relations and reflect dynamism, solidarity, and continuity, independent of pragmatism or inertia. Referring to these relations, during the 8th CARICOM-Cuba Summit held in Barbados in December 2022, President Díaz-Canel emphasised that these relations are “framed in principles of solidarity, friendship, selflessness, and gratitude.” (Díaz-Canel, 2022). In its foreign policy projections, Cuba has explicitly supported high-priority interests for Caribbean countries, such as reparations for the damages of slavery, the impacts of climate change, and the persecution by centres of transnational financial capital, among others.

In this regard, during his speech at the 6th CARICOM-Cuba Summit, held in St. Mary, Antigua and Barbuda in December 2017, Army General Raúl

Castro Ruz reiterated, “Cuba’s unwavering position to support, under all circumstances, the right of small island states and developing nations to receive special and differentiated treatment in access to trade and investments”, while also supporting “the equally just demand to receive cooperation based on their real situation and needs, and not according to per capita income statistics that schematically classify them as middle-income countries and exclude them from essential financial resources for their development.” (Castro Ruz, 2017). He further called for unity “against the persecution by centres of transnational financial capital, which seek to damage the international reputation of Caribbean countries and hinder their economic development through inclusion in spurious and unilateral lists and dangerous supranational efforts, supposedly to combat corruption.” (Castro Ruz, 2017). Castro Ruz also expressed Cuba’s firm support for “the just demand of the Caribbean Community for compensation from colonial powers for the horrors of slavery and the slave trade.” (Castro Ruz, 2017).

In a similar vein, the Final Declaration of the 8th CARICOM-Cuba Summit expressed, among other things, its “deep concern about the inclusion of certain CARICOM member states in the lists of non-cooperative jurisdictions” and “highlighted the importance of reparations and compensation, as an act of justice, for the damages caused by slavery” (CARICOM, 2022).

The CARICOM-Cuba Summits have been held triennially since 2002, alternating their venues between Havana and a CARICOM member state. These summits have become a mechanism for exchange and high-level communication between CARICOM countries and the Republic of Cuba. The most recent summit took place in Bridgetown, Barbados, in December 2022, which Cuba attended with a high-level delegation, headed by the First Secretary of the Communist Party and President of the Republic, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, and then-Minister of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment, Rodrigo Malmierca, among other senior officials and directors

from Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, this does not mean that Cuba-Caribbean relations are only sustained at this level and through the mechanism of the Summits, as high-level bilateral visits have also been maintained as an expression of the interest and alignment between both parties.

In addition to attending the 8th CARICOM-Cuba Summit in December 2022, President Díaz-Canel also made official visits to Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. In Kingstown, he was received by, and held official talks with, Prime Minister, the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves. In February 2024, the Cuban President made his second visit to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to attend the 8th Summit of the CELAC, an occasion coinciding with the 10th anniversary of the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, adopted at the second summit of the organisation held in January 2014 in Havana.

During his Caribbean tour in December 2022, the Cuban President made his first official visit to Grenada, where he was received by Grenadian Prime Minister, the Honourable Dickon Mitchell. Subsequently, Prime Minister Mitchell made an official visit to Havana in April 2024 to mark the 45th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral relations between the two countries; he was also received by President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez. During the visit, official talks were held, and several agreements were signed between the two countries.

In February 2023, the Cuban President also visited Belize. In each instance, he was accompanied by official delegations to strengthen relations on matters of mutual interest; while correspondingly, on various occasions, Caribbean Prime Ministers have made visits to Cuba. In 2013, Prime Ministers Roosevelt Skerrit of Dominica, Ralph Gonsalves of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, as well as Baldwin Spencer and Kenny Anthony, the then-Prime Ministers of Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Lucia, respectively, attended ceremonies marking the 60th anniversary of the Moncada Barracks attack in Santiago de Cuba.

More recently, CARICOM countries were highly represented at the G-77 and China Summit held in Havana in September 2023. Honourable Prime Ministers, Presidents, and Foreign Ministers from several Caribbean countries led their respective delegations to the Summit, including Roosevelt Skerrit of Dominica, Dickon Mitchell of Grenada, Ralph Gonsalves of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Chan Santokhi of Suriname, Mia Mottley of Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago's Minister of Foreign Affairs and CARICOM Affairs, Amery Browne.

Bilateral relations have also been followed up at the legislative level. In September 2024, the Honourable Bridgid Annisette-George, Speaker of the House of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, along with parliamentary delegation, made an official visit to Cuba. In the same month, the Honourable Dessima Williams, President of the Senate of Grenada, also visited Cuba. Both delegations were received by their legislative counterparts and held official talks with the Cuban President.

Further, priority issues in Cuba's foreign policy have received attention, support, and follow-up from Caribbean countries. The distinguished intellectual Norman Girvan, former Secretary-General of the ACS (2000-2004), a scholar and expert on the internal issues of the region, indicated that solidarity is not only material but also political and psychological. An important form of solidarity from CARICOM countries with Cuba has therefore been their constant condemnation of the U.S. blockade (Girvan, 2012).

This was demonstrated at the 79th United Nations General Assembly, when on September 29, during the general debate on the topic "The Need to End the Economic, Commercial, and Financial Blockade Imposed by the United States of America Against Cuba," countries such as Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, among others, expressed once again their opposition to the blockade, both in their national capacities and by endorsing the positions of regional groups and organisations like CELAC, the Non Aligned Movement (NAM), and CARICOM. In addition

to explicit statements, all Caribbean countries have systematically voted in support of the Cuban resolution calling for the lifting of the blockade and have expressed opposition to Cuba's inclusion in the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

In this regard, the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) this year expressed its "satisfaction with the decision by the Government of the United States of America to remove the Republic of Cuba from its list of countries that do not fully cooperate in the fight against terrorism," noting however that, "Cuba remains on the U.S. State Department's list of countries designated as State Sponsors of Terrorism. Therefore, COFCOR renews its call for the urgent removal of Cuba from the list of countries designated as State Sponsors of Terrorism. COFCOR also reaffirms its rejection of the unilateral imposition by the United States of the economic, commercial, and financial embargo against Cuba. Both the designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism and the 62-year-old embargo are unjust and have been wrongly imposed on the Cuban people, and they must be ended."⁶

For its part, the 47th Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community reiterated its call for the lifting of the blockade and expressed "grave concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Cuba, as a result of the unjust embargo imposed on the people and government of Cuba by the United States of America for the last 62 years." It further pointed out that, "CARICOM considers the continued inclusion of Cuba by the U.S. State Department on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism as erroneous and offensive," and reiterated "its call for Cuba to be immediately removed from this list." (CARICOM, 2024).

Moreover, paragraph 24 of the final declaration of the 8th CARICOM-Cuba Summit included an agreement to declare October 6 as CARICOM-Cuba Day Against Terrorism in memory of the 73 CARICOM and

⁶ Communiqué issued at the conclusion of the 27th Meeting of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR), Roseau, Dominica, May 23-24, 2024.

Cuban nationals who lost their lives in the bombing of the Cuban airline off the coast of Barbados on October 6, 1976, for which there has been no accountability.

In Trinidad and Tobago, these positions have been consistently upheld and expressed by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister at the United Nations during the 78th and 79th General Assemblies in 2023 and 2024, respectively. On June 24, 2024, following a meeting with the Cuban Ambassador in Port of Spain, the Ministry of CARICOM and Foreign Affairs published a Declaration reaffirming the country's position against Cuba's classification as a State Sponsor of Terrorism.

Foreign Minister Amery Browne's statements against the blockade and in favour of Cuba's removal from the terrorist list were reiterated in a speech he delivered during a wreath laying ceremony at the site of a memorial plaque at the Piarco International Airport on October 6, 2023, to commemorate the 47th Anniversary of the Barbados airline bombing (Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, 2023).

Another platform for exchange, expression, and mutual support on the common challenges which affect or are inherent to both Cuba and the other Caribbean countries involved is the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of America (ALBA). Some CARICOM states, specifically the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) countries Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, and Saint Kitts and Nevis, share membership, participation, and outlook on common issues within ALBA with Cuba.

A critical aspect of relations between Cuba and CARICOM has also been commercial exchange. In this regard, there is an active regulatory framework that enables the development of these relations. In July 2000, the Economic Cooperation Agreement between the Republic of Cuba and the Caribbean Community was signed, entering into force in January 2001. In 2017, the Second Protocol to the Bilateral Trade and Cooperation

Agreement was signed, which expanded the tariff preferences granted by Cuba and facilitated access to markets. In his speech at the 6th CARI-COM-Cuba Summit, Army General Raúl Castro Ruz expressed his pleasure at the signing of the Second Protocol.

In pursuit of even greater commercial exchange and more options, the Caribbean has also been represented at important commercial events and trade fairs in Cuba, such as the Havana International Fair (FIHAV) and Expocaribe. In 2023, several companies from Trinidad and Tobago participated in FIHAV and a Business Forum between the two countries was held. Trinidad and Tobago was also present at FIHAV 2024 through its Trade Facilitation Office in Havana and several of its companies, which also participated in the fair.

According to Cuban scholar and researcher Marlén Sánchez Gutiérrez (2017), for Cuba, the Caribbean offers a chance to diversify its international economic relations. For instance, both parties would benefit from promoting a multi-destination tourism framework, leveraging their combined offerings, while also pursuing complementary economic activities in sectors like food, pharmaceuticals, and biotechnology. This can be achieved through sustainable strategic alliances that foster mutually beneficial investments.

Medical Cooperation with the Caribbean

Cuba's relations with the Caribbean are multifaceted and can be described as multidimensional, never restricted to just utilitarian or purely aid-based aspects. Cooperation, therefore, occupies a central place in the bilateral agenda.

Decree Law No. 16 "On International Cooperation" published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Cuba in December 2020, specifies in Article 3 that international cooperation refers to the actions Cuba offers and receives, based on the principles of solidarity and mutual benefit, which

are an essential aspect of foreign policy (Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba, 2020).

Based on the principles of Cuban foreign policy and as part of it, Cuba has offered and maintained various forms of collaboration with the Caribbean at the request of governments in need, always under strict adherence to agreements and cooperation between the parties. Medical brigades have played a central role in this cooperation and in relations with the Caribbean as a whole.

An important milestone in Cuba's medical collaboration with the Caribbean has been the "Miracle Operation" (Operación Milagro), a programme created by Commanders Chávez and Fidel in July 2004. Several Caribbean countries have directly benefited from medical care through the Miracle Operation, including Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Guyana, Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Haiti. By 2016, 275,716 Caribbean patients had been treated through the programme (Cubadebate, 2016).

In terms of medical cooperation with the Caribbean, special mention should be made of Cuba's collaboration with Haiti, which began on December 4, 1998. This collaboration took on particular significance with the launch of the Comprehensive Health Programme (PIS), which extended to several countries affected by the devastating hurricanes George and Mitch in the Caribbean and Central America. At the time of the January 2010 earthquake, over 400 Cuban collaborators were working in Haiti. In line with the Caribbean countries' ongoing attention and support for Haiti, Cuba has maintained its cooperation with the country in a direct, on-the-ground manner. On November 15, 1999, the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) was inaugurated in Haiti, and in August 2005, the first 128 Haitian students graduated from the school.

Another symbolically significant aspect of Cuba's medical collaboration in the Caribbean has been the integration of members from the Henry

Reeve International Contingent of Specialized Doctors in Disaster Situations and Serious Epidemics. This contingent was created on September 19, 2005, in response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, USA.

Currently, over 1,000 health collaborators are serving in twelve CARICOM countries. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, the “Technical Cooperation Agreement in Health between the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Republic of Cuba” was signed in 2002. Since then, more than 700 health collaborators have participated in various health cooperation programmes in different regions of Trinidad and Tobago. In November 2024, an extension of this Agreement was signed, continuing more than two decades of uninterrupted cooperation in health between both countries.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Cuba sent 2,600 members of the Henry Reeve Contingent to 26 countries in 34 brigades, 17 of which served in the independent CARICOM countries, as well as in other territories such as Montserrat, the British Virgin Islands, and Martinique. Additionally, Cuba offered 140 thousand doses of Cuban vaccines to Caribbean countries for COVID-19 immunisation.

Other Actions of Cooperation and Exchange

Bilateral relations with Caribbean countries are not, however, restricted to the physical presence of health collaborators, although this has been the most widespread modality as part of cooperation agreements. Some equally successful examples of cooperation include education brigades in the Bahamas and Jamaica, as well as literacy programmes in Haiti using the renowned “Yo Sí Puedo” (Yes I Can) method.

One of the most significant areas of cooperation and exchange with the Caribbean has also been human resource training. By 2023, more than 6,000 Caribbean students had graduated from Cuban educational institutes, including over 3,500 in programmes sponsored by the Ministry

of Public Health. Another area of cooperation has been medical care for Caribbean patients in Cuba, and at the 8th CARICOM-Cuba Summit, 200 free treatments with the Cuban drug Heberprot-P were offered for specialised treatment of patients with diabetic foot ulcers.

In addition to the presence of Cuban collaborators in Caribbean countries, important initiatives such as the opening of the Center for the Stimulation of Child and Adolescent Development in Guyana, with the participation of specialists from Cuba's Ministry of Education, have also taken place.

Regarding culture, exchanges between Cuba and the Caribbean remain fluid and hold significant potential. The Caribbean Festival in Santiago de Cuba, for instance, has fostered closer ties and exchanges between the eastern region of Cuba, in particular, and several Caribbean countries. Belize, for example, was the main focus of one edition of the Caribbean Festival. Cuban cinema has also showcased the bonds between Cuba and the Caribbean. Filmmaker Rigoberto López made notable efforts in support of "Caribbean Itinerant Cinema," promoting the circulation of Caribbean films across the region. In the literary sphere, several Caribbean authors have received prizes or mentions in the prestigious Casa de las Américas⁷ competition, which takes place in Havana. The 2012 Havana Book Fair was also dedicated to the peoples of the Caribbean. In 2019, the "Park of Caribbean Heroes" was built in Havana, which has become a place for celebrations and commemorations related to Cuba's relations with the Caribbean, as well as a reference point for Caribbean embassies in Havana.

In the academic field, the Norman Girvan Chair of Caribbean Studies at the University of Havana remains active, focusing on Caribbean issues

7 Guyana and Jamaica (2006), Haiti and Guadeloupe (2008), Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica (2010), Barbados (2011), Haiti and Guadeloupe (2012), Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago (2014), Martinique and Guadeloupe (2016), and Barbados and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (2018).

while also promoting and encouraging greater engagement with the wider region through the analysis of its development and challenges.

Conclusion

Relations between Cuba and the wider Caribbean are an expression of political and diplomatic will, sustained over time and outwardly demonstrated by both parties, despite pressures such as campaigns against the presence of Cuban medical brigades in the region. The formal establishment of diplomatic relations with the first four Caribbean countries represented an act of independence, which the Caribbean Community has maintained to this day, more than five decades after the original event in 1972. Since then, the relationship has been characterised on both sides by solidarity and unconditional support, free from paternalism and pragmatic utility. Just as the Caribbean countries have supported Cuba in various contexts and scenarios, even without Cuba's formal membership in the regional grouping, Cuba has been consistent in advocating for the core interests of the wider Caribbean.

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The Importance of the Caribbean in Mexico's Foreign Policy

Víctor Hugo Morales Meléndez*

In memory of Dr. Lancelot Cowie

Mexico is a country of multiple belongings. This notion has prevailed for decades among scholars of Mexican foreign policy and geopolitics. Due to its size and location, the country encompasses a space in which geographical diversities converge, flow and intersect, thereby shaping its ethnic, cultural, social, economic and historical characteristics.

Being situated on the American continent and cut across by the Tropic of Cancer, it is a country geographically located, for the most part, in North America. However, resulting from its ethnic origin and cultural heritage it

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is a Mesoamerican nation, whose philosophical and religious foundation and majority language come from Europe and the West's legacy. While Mexico has increasingly looked towards the Pacific as the new focus of economic and technological dynamism, above all, it is a nation that recognises itself as essentially Latin American.

Mexico is also Caribbean. This premise is another of the country's multiple belongings and will be the focus of this work. The country has historically been linked to Caribbean waters, has been influenced by, and had an impact on the past course of the Caribbean Sea; has presence and interests in the Caribbean Basin, in addition to being an intrinsic part of the Greater Caribbean.

Mexico's foreign policy—guided by constitutional principles, driven by objectives, values and interests, and bounded by its geographical location—has established one of its pillars in the Caribbean. As an emerging country, its capacity for positioning, movement and influence can be achieved in this neighbouring space of its geopolitical framework.

The Caribbean in the history of Mexico

The relationship of what is now the Mexican territory with some Caribbean islands can be traced back to the waves of settlement of the first human beings on the continent, bearing in mind that barely 200 kilometres separate the North-Eastern tip of the Yucatán Peninsula and the Western coast of Cuba. Tulum is testimony to the relationship that the Mayan people developed, since the 12th century, with the Caribbean Sea.

The arrival of the Europeans to Mexican territory, at the dawn of the 16th century, occurred from the Caribbean as a result of the shipwreck, in 1511, of a Spanish vessel in waters near Jamaica where only a dozen sailors succeeded in saving themselves on board a barge. Upon arriving at the Yucatán coast, they were taken prisoner by the Mayan inhabitants. As the years passed, only two Spaniards survived, Jerónimo de Aguilar and

Gonzalo Guerrero, the latter managing to integrate himself into the local culture and wed a Mayan woman who bore the first mestizos in what is current day Mexico.

In 1517, the Governor of Cuba, Diego Velázquez, organised a naval expedition under the command of Francisco Hernández de Córdoba who returned to the island after visiting the Yucatán Peninsula. A year later, he deployed another expedition commanded by Juan de Grijalva, who arrived at the island of Cozumel, followed by a third, led by Cristóbal de Olid. A fourth voyage would set sail in February 1519, with the task of locating ships from the previous expeditions, as well as rescuing the group of Spaniards who had been held by the Mayans since 1511. The mission was under the command of Hernán Cortés, who would ultimately become the conqueror of Mexico. Cortés' first foray was to the Caribbean Island of Cozumel. Skirting the peninsula until reaching Tabasco, Cortés battled the inhabitants and, upon triumph in Centla, went on to find the Villa de Santa María de la Victoria on March 25, 1519, the first Spanish settlement on continental soil. Two years of resistance would ensue, until the fall of Tenochtitlán. Thus, Mexico's conquest was organised from Caribbean territory.

Adopting the name Viceroyalty of New Spain, what is now present-day Mexico, became the most important location in the empire, developing constant connections with the expanding Spanish Caribbean over the following centuries. During that period, several events stand out, including the introduction of Nao goods from China that linked the Philippines with Acapulco, later crossing the Caribbean en route to Spain, allowing for contact from New Spain with some other Caribbean islands, mainly Cuba, and the growing presence in New Spain waters of filibusters and privateers who converted some Caribbean islands into their hubs of operation and looting, such as Francis Drake, Jean Lafitte and Henry Morgan. Also of import, denoting the strategic importance and economic capacity of New Spain were the empire's possessions that were located far from the centres of viceregal power, such as the island of Trinidad whose

economy, at the end of the 18th century, depended on “the remittances in the form of situado (deposit) received from the Royal Treasury of New Spain (Mexico)” (Morales Patrón, 2014: 208).

Subsequently, during the independence period, in 1853, President Antonio López de Santana began persecuting his political enemies. Benito Juárez, who would become president of Mexico, was forced into exile, the Caribbean being the first phase of his expatriation where he spent two months in Cuba. Fourteen years later, after the victory of the Republic against the French invasion, in May 1867, President Benito Juárez was recognised by the National Congress of the Dominican Republic as *Bene-mérito de las Américas* (The Meritorious of the Americas).

Exile also caused Cuban national José Martí to reside in Mexico in 1875 and 1876, where he worked for Universal Magazine. In 1883, Mexico signed a boundary agreement with the territory that now connects the Mexican border with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), “in an act of pragmatism, (it) recognized the territory (Belize) that Great Britain had claimed under conquest, and thus avoided possible expansion into a marginally explored territory. However, it established the principle of its legitimate right over Belize, which it never exercised” (Lajous, 2013, 134-135). Nine years later, Mexico recognised Cuba’s independence and established diplomatic relations with the island.

In due course, upon visiting Mexico in 1947, renowned Caribbean social activist, Dominican born Juan Bosch, almost became the victim of an attack, ordered by the dictator Leónidas Trujillo. However, the following decade bore witness to refuge being offered in Mexico to Cuban revolutionaries, an event that played a significant part in uniting Mexico with the Caribbean and contributing to its historical path. Two fundamental figures of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, were offered refuge and lived in Mexico during the Revolution. In 1956, Castro and Guevara would set sail in the Granma from Mexico to Cuba, and within three years the revolution would be successful.

In 1960, due to persecution under the Duvalier dictatorship, Haitian Gérard Pierre-Charles sought refuge in the country. For 25 years he and Susy Castor, also an exile and a respected and important Haitian academic, contributed to the development of social sciences in Mexico, paying particular interest to obtaining a better understanding of the Caribbean. Later, in 1970, a public policy decision culminated in the Cancún development project which would profoundly transform Mexico's vision and ties to the Caribbean. By 1974 the first hotels were opened and the federal territory of Quintana Roo converted into a Federation State. Since then, much of Mexico's development is explained by the growth of this Caribbean tourist hub.

In that important year of 1974, Mexico also signed a cooperation agreement with the recently established CARICOM, and in 2010, the Summit process between both parties began. A year later, in 1975, Mexico promoted the formation of the Multinational Caribbean Shipping Company (NAMUCAR), a commercial fleet of ships, with a Mexican as president of its Board of Directors. It was a joint effort by several Central American and Caribbean countries alongside Mexico and Venezuela.

Subsequently, relations between Mexico and the Caribbean in the 1980's were characterised mainly by cooperation in energy and banking. In August 1980, Mexico signed the Energy Cooperation Programme for Central America and the Caribbean with Venezuela (the San José Agreement) in order to supply hydrocarbons to importing countries in the mentioned sub-regions. In addition, on January 5, 1982, the Act for Mexico's accession to the Caribbean Development Bank, currently based in Barbados, entered into force through the subscription of shares, formalising Mexico as a regional member.

As part of the development of integration processes that ensued at the end of the Cold War and the need for CARICOM to seek an alternative to its dilemma of deepening and expanding, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) was established in 1994, an organisation which unites the

25 independent states of the Greater Caribbean and Mexico. The ACS is a space and a mechanism through which Mexico maintains permanent dialogue with the countries of the Greater Caribbean and can engage in cooperative actions with all members.

While only some examples of the shared history have been outlined, Mexico's constant and growing relationship with the Caribbean continues to strengthen in various ways, such as with the recent 2023 UNESCO declaration to recognise the bolero as a joint Cuba-Mexico item of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The relevance of the Caribbean for Mexico

In 1992, the then Ambassador on Special Mission for Caribbean Affairs, Héctor Manuel Ezeta, indicated, "Mexico's relationship with the Caribbean has a high strategic value. It gives us the opportunity to strengthen regional political coordination with countries that, regardless of their size and degree of development, share with us similar problems such as external debt, the threat to stability as a result of drug trafficking, the depredation of its natural resources and sea pollution" (Mariñez, 1996: 26).

Since then, the country's foreign policy actions have focused on the Caribbean as an area clearly identified in that decade as Mexico's third border, described as such to highlight the value of its closeness, interrelation and importance for national life. Addressing the question of why the Caribbean is of importance to Mexico, this section focuses on five specific foreign policy related aspects to provide answers.

As part of Mexico's multiple belongings and multidirectional trajectory, the Caribbean carries quite a strategic relevance. As a Greater Caribbean country, Mexico considers the Caribbean Basin, in geopolitical terms, its natural area of presence and influence. The Caribbean region also represents a space of shared challenges with a large number of small island states, which include, for instance, common risks and threats such as the

effects of climate change and the consequent continued proliferation of sargassum, the trafficking of narcotics and illegal weapons, and the increase in diseases as a consequence of human mobility. It is worth recalling that, according to Ivelaw Griffith, “all Caribbean nations are impacted by the PWPs (problems without passports), although threat intensity varies. For instance, drugs and crime stand in the salience and intensity as threats to the entire region. On the other hand, terrorism issues present a narrower regional scope and a lower intensity, although geopolitical dynamics oblige Caribbean and other leaders to place a high regional premium on it” (Griffith, 2024: 226).

The Yucatán Peninsula is the Caribbean part of Mexico, with a 1,500-kilometre coastline that runs from the Laguna de Términos in the Gulf of Mexico to the Chetumal Bay in the Caribbean Sea. The country also shares a land border with a member of the Caribbean Community, Belize. Due to its location, Mexico is considered within the United States’ geostrategic and security perimeter, a situation similar to the Caribbean’s. Defence measures include, according to the United States’ vision, the monitoring, prevention and fight against threats such as transnational organised crime, the influx of weapons, terrorism and migration from the south. This approach from the north, a consequence of its perceived vulnerability after 9/11, impacts Mexico’s interaction with the Caribbean as a whole.

Well into the 21st century, Mexico’s National Security Programme established that Mexico is a maritime neighbour of the Greater Caribbean, a region with a historical, cultural and economic diversity that presents various degrees of interrelation with the country. While the vulnerability, particularly environmental, of some countries in the Greater Caribbean poses indirect security risks, Mexico has committed to offering support and cooperation programmes for economic development—with emphasis on the tourism sector—in addition to strengthening the response capacity of countries in the region to disasters and natural phenomena (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2014).

A second aspect is the political relationship between the Caribbean and Mexico which, as mentioned, can be traced back to the period of Spanish occupation. This did not emerge from the Spanish courts but rather, the exploration of the Yucatán peninsula, which would culminate in the fall of the Aztec empire, as determined from the Cuban enclave. Thus, the Caribbean was the first of Mexico's borders. Some of the Viceroy's of New Spain, before becoming so, were either Captain Generals in Cuba or born there, as was the case of the Second Count of Revillagigedo.

As previously indicated, the protection and hospitality awarded to young Cuban revolutionaries by Mexico was the object of one of the most relevant political episodes of the 20th century regarding Mexico's ties to the Caribbean. Specifically, the political value that Mexico's position represented in the Organisation of American States (OAS) in the defence of the Cuban Revolution is significant. Further, there were hundreds of Caribbean exiles who sought refuge in Mexico, such as the aforementioned Cuban José Martí and Julio Antonio Mella, Haitian brothers Charles and Pierre Moravia Morpeau and journalist Joseph Jolibois Fils, as well as dozens of Dominicans in the late 1940s and 1950s fleeing Trujillo persecution. The stability of its neighbourhood is important for Mexico, which is why it "has a clear interest in strengthening democratic governance in the region, especially in Central America and the Greater Caribbean" (Fierro Rocha, 2014: 142).

While it is accurate that Mexico's economic relations are mainly concentrated in North America, it is also true that the Caribbean represents an alternative for trade and investment, as well as an opportunity for diversification in said aspects. According to DATA México, trade with the Caribbean, in 2023, amounted to US\$2.498 billion, of which \$1.817 billion corresponded to Mexican exports and \$681 million to imports from the Caribbean. Given the overall dimensions of Mexico's foreign trade, these reflect reduced figures, representing only 0.19% of Mexico's total trade.

The Dominican Republic is Mexico's main Caribbean trading partner, accounting for almost half of the area's trade in 2023 with a total of US\$1.114 billion, where Mexico benefited from a strong surplus, exporting \$822 million and importing \$292 million. The Dominican Republic is Mexico's 49th ranked global trading partner, while Mexico is the Dominican Republic's 4th global trading partner and main source of investment, with upwards of US\$10 billion going towards investments on the island. Mexico's second largest Caribbean trading partner is Trinidad and Tobago with total trade reaching US\$377 million, of which \$279 million are imports, and exports steadily increasing to \$98 million.

Globally, Trinidad and Tobago is Mexico's 62nd ranked trading partner, and Mexico, the island's 8th. Mexico's third largest Caribbean trading partner is Cuba with a total trade of \$328 million, covering \$306 million in exports and \$22 million in imports. Cuba is the 67th ranked global partner for Mexico, and Mexico the 5th for Cuba. While the country is an important Caribbean economic partner, it has a very limited presence in the Mexican market from which it could benefit further. Prominent Mexican companies such as Helvex and Infra have expanded their participation and positioned their brands to include Caribbean markets, while CEMEX has established production plants in Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

Culture, a fourth aspect of Mexico-Caribbean relations, is also quite important, given factors such as reciprocal influence, artistic exchange and shared identity. To begin with, the mutual cultural impact between Yucatán and Cuba has been constant throughout the centuries due to their proximity.

Cuba's national poet, Nicolás Guillén, built a strong relationship with Mexico and two of his main works were published there. One of the pioneers of Mexican musical nationalism, Manuel M. Ponce, lived in Cuba from 1915 to 1917 where he composed Suite Cubana, while Mexico welcomed Cuban born Dámaso Pérez Prado, who had an enormous impact

on Mexican music. Further, Mexican cinema and mariachi were culturally evident throughout several generations in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Currently, Cancún is also considered a centre for Jamaican, Cuban, Dominican and Trinbagonian rhythms.

In Mexico's relations with the Caribbean, cooperation has played a key role and covers aspects as diverse as development, energy, security, governance and disaster preparedness. Moreover, the commitment to Caribbean development and stability, through cooperation, has been of import to Mexico's own development and stability. The San José Agreement, joint cooperation programmes with CARICOM, the triangular cooperation agreements with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), participation in naval exercises, the launch of the Caribbean Territorial Information Platform for Disaster Prevention, in addition to various bilateral cooperation projects, are concrete examples of this commitment to cooperation and reflect Mexico's interest to draw closer to the Caribbean and advocate for regional development.

The Caribbean in Mexico's foreign policy

Despite the ostensible relevance that the Caribbean has had and still holds for Mexico, in the mid-1980s a renowned scholar of Mexican foreign policy indicated that, "despite the geographical proximity, the common historical origin and the culture and language ties, relations between Mexico and Caribbean and Central American countries over the last four decades have generally been of little importance. The priority assigned to the region by Mexican foreign policy has been—until very recently—really very low" (Ojeda, 1986: 25). However, two foreign policy actions taken in response to events in the Caribbean, specifically in the Spanish-speaking countries, would allow us to override this statement, namely, protection of the principle of self-determination and non-intervention in the case of Cuba after the victory of its revolution, and the rejection of military intervention against the Dominican Republic in 1965. Another stance worth

mentioning that had a positive impact on the Caribbean was Mexico's advocacy for decolonisation, demonstrated by its support of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples which was approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 1960, following which an extensive process of decolonisation would begin in the Caribbean.

In the 60s and 70s, "the Caribbean was considered a region of high explosivity and received greater attention, as never seen before. Colonial decomposition led to a formal opening of new diplomatic ties. From those moments, ideas began to form about the Caribbean as a third border and to invoke Mexican Caribbeanness," (Morales, 2002: 554). Consequently, in 1966, formal relations were established with Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, and a year later the Mexican Embassy would open in Kingston, the first in the English-speaking Caribbean.

In fact, the previous apparent little display of Mexican diplomacy would change starting in the 1970s when Mexico promoted a greater international presence and a more active foreign policy, as indicated by the then president of Mexico, Luis Echeverría, before the Permanent Commission of the Congress of the Union when he stated that, "we have embarked on a new stage of our foreign relations, in accordance with the national aspirations and with the changing realities of the contemporary world" (Tello, 1975: 186).

The new Caribbean reality to promote its independence processes motivated greater formal linkages and therefore, greater attention to the region. Thus, in 1974, a cooperation agreement with CARICOM was signed, under which the Joint Commission between both parties was created and President Luis Echeverría became the first Mexican leader to tour the English-speaking Caribbean when he visited Jamaica. A year later he would visit Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago and receive a visit from the Jamaican Premier Michael Manley (Ojeda, 1984: 187). In addition, during those years, President Luis Echeverría promoted the formation of the

NAMUCAR, while the establishment of diplomatic relations with Caribbean countries accelerated (see table 1 below).

Table 1: Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with Caribbean Countries

Country	Date of Establishment
Dominican Republic	29 March 1890
Cuba	20 May 1902
Haiti	July 1929
Jamaica	18 March 1966
Trinidad and Tobago	30 April 1966
Barbados	11 September 1972
Guyana	1 March 1973
Bahamas	14 January 1974
Grenada	11 April 1975
Suriname	25 November 1975
Dominica	19 April 1979
St. Lucia	17 May 1979
Belize	21 September 1981
Antigua and Barbuda	14 September 1984
St. Kitts and Nevis	31 July 1990
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	31 July 1990

Source: Author's compilation

The following decade, Mexico fully recognised itself, according to another scholar, as a Caribbean country, “after more than a century of not being considered as such, given the Hispanic colonial disintegration that broke, with continental independence, the union between the ancient New Spain and the Antillean islands” (Muñoz, 2006: 94). In essence, Mexico had begun a process of looking towards the Caribbean with the Cancún megaproject and the establishment of the State of Quintana Roo and, with it, the massive settlement of the Riviera Maya and the expansion of Chetumal, thereby reaffirming its Caribbean identity.

Together with Venezuela, Mexico undertook an energy cooperation project for Central America and the Caribbean in 1980 and made the decision to become a non-borrowing member of the Caribbean Development

Bank in 1982. That same year, then candidate who would eventually become Mexico's president, Miguel de la Madrid, indicated that, "it is vital for us Mexicans to avoid military interventions or destabilizing projects in the countries of the Central American and Caribbean area" (De la Madrid, 1983: 249). Consequently, in 1983, Mexico once again made use of the principle of non-intervention in the face of the United States' invasion of the island of Grenada, opting instead during that decade to promote the celebration of cultural festivals around its Caribbeaness. At the end of that era, Mexico became a CARICOM Observer State, and the Caribbean was conceptually individualised in the National Development Plan, which indicated that, "in the Caribbean, Mexico will continue to maintain unrestricted respect for the pluralism existing in the area and will seek, at the same time, a greater economic and cultural connection. Special attention will be given to Cuba, a nation with which there are close ties of history, culture and language," (Poder Ejecutivo Federal, 1989: 50). Latin America and the Caribbean were perceived in those years as "one of the main priorities of foreign policy and our efforts to approach the region are an essential part of our development strategy" (Rozental, 1993: 78).

In an appearance before the Senate of the Republic in December 1991, the then Foreign Minister, Fernando Solana, directly addressed the growing relevance of the already recognised links to the Caribbean, pointing out that, "due to its strategic position in world geopolitics and because we are part of this region, Mexico promotes intense diplomatic activity in the Caribbean, our third border" (Alponte, 1993: 278). Correspondingly, the first Ambassador on Special Mission for Caribbean Affairs was appointed in order to engage in better dialogue and understanding with the islands that had become independent and undertaken their own integration process through CARICOM.

At the end of the 20th century, in the 1995-2000 National Development Plan, this sub-region would be placed in a section called Central America and the Caribbean, which indicated that "the national security and

economic and cultural capacities of Mexico depend on the expansion of strategic alliances with the nations of Central America and the Caribbean. It is in the national interest to consolidate the free trade framework with the region, intensify political consultations and ensure that cooperation promotes mutually beneficial objectives.” (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1995). Specifically, it was noted that, “Mexico must intensify its presence and its political, economic and cultural exchanges with Belize and other Caribbean nations. For this, it is fundamental to offer the greatest of support to the Association of Caribbean States, of which Mexico is a part” (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1995).

A political transition at the turn of the 21st century then saw adjustments in the strategic objectives of Mexico’s foreign policy. The 2001-2006 National Development Plan stipulated that, “for reasons of cultural identity, geographical proximity, common historical roots, economic complementarities and shared aspirations for development and integration, ties with the Latin American and Caribbean region constitute a priority of Mexican foreign policy” (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2001). In July 2001, Mexico’s president participated in the 22nd Summit of CARICOM Heads of Government in the Bahamas to expand Mexico’s presence and promote relations with the countries of the Caribbean Community. At the same time, the government undertook a strong international agenda that included organising various meetings, among which was the International Conference on Financing for Development where, in 2002, a disagreement ensued with the Cuban government, Mexico’s main partner in the Caribbean, marking a significant distancing of both nations for several years. So serious was the incident that some remarked that, “the weight that the relationship between Mexico and Cuba had in the regional geopolitical balance would also be seriously diminished” (Pellicer et al, 2006: 69).

Six years later, in the 2007-2012 National Development Plan, similar arguments were considered when developing foreign policy towards the region, particularly “given the Mexican historical heritage and cultural

identity, and since the country shares challenges and aspirations with Latin America and the Caribbean, the region will always be a priority for Mexico”, but the weight of the relationship with Cuba was felt and it was specified that, “on the basis of maturity, affinity and respect, the Mexican government assumes the commitment to establish a positive and respectful relation with the integrating states, without exceptions.” It was further indicated that, “Mexico will benefit from the great opportunities presented by the countries that are part of the CARICOM, both for their economic potential and for the high level of coordination and political consensus that they have achieved in multilateral forums. Mexico has its third border in the Caribbean, which should be seen as a junction to strengthen political, commercial, tourist and cultural relations,” thus awarding greater relevance to the Caribbean (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2007). In fact, it is in this period, at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, that Mexico takes a decisive step towards dialogue and cooperation with the non-Spanish-speaking Caribbean, by establishing the Mexico-CARICOM summit mechanism.

The first Mexico-CARICOM summit was convened in the Riviera Maya in January 2010 and an agenda was decided upon to initiate projects that were of common interest. Two years later, the second Summit was hosted in Bridgetown, Barbados, during which the strategic importance of Mexico’s relation with this integration mechanism was affirmed, in addition to the establishment of a biannual cooperation programme. Another two years later, the third summit was held in Mérida, Yucatán, which saw agricultural cooperation as the factor of interest with the signing of a triangular training programme in collaboration with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). Additionally, Mexico offered support on financial instruments associated with natural disasters and the subsequent biannual cooperation programme was adopted. At the same time, the sixth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) took place, with a broad vision on the challenges of the Greater Caribbean. In 2016, the fourth summit gathered in Belize during which Mexico presented the Mexico-CARICOM

Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management Strategy in recognition of Mexico's contribution to strengthening the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, while at the same time approving a biannual technical cooperation programme. Presently, Mexico shall decide when to schedule the next Summit.

Moreover, in January 2010, after the devastating earthquake in Haiti, Mexico sent 26 planes and 19 ships carrying personnel, material and relief equipment, along with 13 thousand tonnes of humanitarian aid to the island (Granguillhome, 2010: 151). This show of solidarity stands as a benchmark of the significance of Mexican humanitarian aid in the Caribbean.

Based on Mexico's perceived privileged geographical location, the National Development Plan of 2013-2018 established that, "given the important historical, cultural and linguistic legacy in common, in addition to the geographical proximity, Latin America and the Caribbean constitute "Mexico's main space of geopolitical influence". It proposed to support "the development efforts of the Central American and the Caribbean nations, through a renewed international cooperation strategy," as well as "identify new opportunities for trade and tourism exchange that might expand and stimulate Mexico's economic relations with the Latin American and Caribbean region." (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2013). Within that period, relations with Cuba which had deteriorated since 2002, were fully normalised.

Along with the process of regional rapprochement undertaken through the summits with CARICOM, bilateral dialogue and cooperation with a significant number of Caribbean countries were institutionalised through the signing of Memoranda of Understanding. To date, Mexico has established a political dialogue mechanism on issues of common interest with Barbados, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Suriname, and most recently in 2024, with Trinidad and

Tobago. In recent decades, Mexico has therefore built an extensive diplomatic and consular network in the Caribbean (see table 2 below).

Table 2: Mexico's Missions in the Caribbean

EMBASSIES	CONCURRENT ACCREDITATIONS	CONSULATES	ORGANISATIONS
Belize		Consular Section	
Cuba		Official: La Habana	
Dominican Republic		Consular Section	
Guyana		Consular Section	Observer, Caribbean Community
Haiti		Consular Section	
Jamaica	Bahamas	Honorary: Nassau	
St. Lucia	Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines	Honorary: St. John, Goodwill, Saint George, Basseterre, Kingstown	Observer, Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
Trinidad and Tobago	Barbados, Suriname	Honorary: Bridgetown, Paramaribo	Member of the Association of Caribbean States

Source: Author's compilation

In short, since the 1970s, Mexico has strengthened political dialogue with Caribbean countries through both bilateral and regional schemes. It has become increasingly strengthened as a partner in cooperation within the Caribbean's agricultural and environmental agenda, in particular. Through its participation in the ACS, Mexico contributes to promoting a united, resilient and supportive Caribbean in its actions; has endorsed the development, stability and security of the Caribbean; has been expanding trade exchanges, investments for development and generating a mutually beneficial business climate; in addition to joining in solidarity with Caribbean countries in the fight against global threats that disproportionately affect the region, such as global warming, organised crime and insecurity.

The vision for the Caribbean in the 2018-2024 Presidential term

Over the past six years, looking to the South has been a main directive of Mexico's foreign policy, particularly as a determining factor in recovering the country's presence in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The National Development Plan of 2019-2024 indicates that the government of Mexico "offers cooperation, friendship and respect to all countries in the world and, particularly, to the sister nations of Latin America and the Caribbean," adding that, "Mexico ratifies its historical and cultural place in that region and will emphatically promote economic, cultural, scientific and technological exchanges that contribute to the cause of Latin American integration." (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2019).

The Sectoral Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2020-2024), on the other hand, is more specific and confirms that Latin America and the Caribbean are priorities due to geographical proximity, shared history and cultural identity. It further adds that the political, economic and social processes that occur in the region directly impact Mexico, influencing its strategy "to promote inter-institutional coordination meetings to strengthen political dialogue with the Caribbean, aiming to position Mexico as one of the main co-operators in the region." (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2020). As a result, in the 2021-2024 International Development Cooperation Programme, the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation was assigned to "substantively collaborate in the comprehensive development of our neighbouring countries to improve the quality of life; contribute to the sustainable human development of our partners, giving priority to the Central America and Caribbean population; channelling resources, goods, technology, knowledge and experiences towards the most undeveloped nations"; essentially forming the basis of a humanist foreign policy (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2021).

The Sectoral Programme also specifies a responsibility “to prioritize political dialogue with the 15 Caribbean countries, both at the bilateral level and in regional forums (ACS, CARICOM, OECS, OAS) together with cooperation and cultural diplomacy actions.” (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2020).

Based on this programmatic framework, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the following objectives with respect to relations with the Caribbean: to create long-term self-sustaining ties and rapprochement in priority areas; support and promote issues of interest to Caribbean countries in multilateral forums; intensify multi-sector cooperation, trade and investments; support the improvement of the quality of life and well-being of Caribbean populations; and position Mexico in the Caribbean as a reliable partner and mediator. This has led to foreign policy actions that have resulted in better understanding and greater cooperation with the Caribbean.

To obtain a deeper political rapprochement with the Caribbean, the following was also operationalised: dialogue and cooperation with Cuba was intensified, including reciprocal presidential visits; a proposal was submitted to open a Mexican Embassy in Barbados; and Mexico promoted the election of St. Vincent and the Grenadines as President Pro Tempore of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) for the 2023-2024 term. Within the margins of the ACS, Mexico assumed chairmanship of the 2021-2022 Council of Ministers, during which tourism was defined as an essential activity and the 2022-2028 Action Plan developed. Mexico also served as Chair of the Special Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction and in various instances, promoted the organisation of discussion forums such as the Senate of the Republic, and the International Colloquium of the 30th anniversary of the ACS, in Mérida, to encourage reflection on the Caribbean reality. Mexico’s strong position condemning the economic embargo against Cuba and push for a resolution to the Haitian crisis are other ways Mexico engaged on Caribbean issues.

Further efforts at cooperation include the establishment of the Geospatial Observation Centre for the Caribbean at The University of the West Indies' (UWI) St. Augustine Campus, as well as the provision of humanitarian support in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic with the donation of medical supplies to Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, St. Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Mexico also facilitated the implementation of the Sembrando Vida Programme, particularly in Cuba; the preservation of historical archives with five Caribbean countries; the execution of the Mexico-CARICOM-FAO Resilient Caribbean Initiative in 13 countries in the area; the Special Scholarship Programme for Higher Studies in six countries of the Eastern Caribbean; and the formalisation of plans to convert the current Mexican Cultural Institute in Belize into the Mexican Institute for the Caribbean. Additionally, Mexico extended annual scholarships to Caribbean officials for the Summer School on Disarmament, reflecting Mexico's commitment to the Caribbean as a zone of peace and non-proliferation of weapons. Following the 7.2 magnitude earthquake in Haiti in August 2021, the government of Mexico—in an emergency operation—also deployed three military planes containing 19 tonnes of humanitarian aid, thereby asserting its ability to launch into immediate action to support Caribbean countries in vulnerable situations. Moreover, the Caribbean Territorial Information Platform for Disaster Prevention provides support to Caribbean countries to reduce risks from various hazards.

In terms of security, Mexico's participation in the forum, "Regional Symposium: Violence as a Public Health Issue-The Crime Challenge", held in Port of Spain in 2023, was quite timely and resulted in the support of participating Heads of government in the fight to combat illicit arms trafficking. Mexico has also maintained its participation in the Tradewinds naval exercises, the most recent being in Guyana and Barbados, with the latter taking place in May 2024 under the theme "Promoting a secure Caribbean: 2024 and beyond."

Similar to the growth of Cancún 50 years ago, currently, the Mayan Train can become the engine that stimulates the development of Mexico towards its Caribbean coast and, with it, its relations with the Greater Caribbean.

On 1st October 2024, Dr Claudia Sheinbaum, who is a member of the same party as former president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, assumed office as President of Mexico (2024-2030). The new government is expected to follow a humanist foreign policy, linked to constitutional principles which contribute to regional well-being and stability and to solving major challenges such as security, health and migration in the Latin American and Caribbean region (Sheinbaum, 2024: 335). The Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Dr Juan Ramón de la Fuente, has reiterated that Mexico is part of Latin America and the Caribbean, where our identity, culture and traditions are found.

Final reflections

Owing to its geographical, historical and cultural belongings, as well as to its economic and security interests, the Caribbean—of which Mexico is a salient actor—is an area of strategic priority both for Mexican foreign policy and security policy, as well as a space for strengthening its regional leadership.

Therefore, a comprehensive foreign policy strategy with guidelines and actions that continually revitalise Mexico's presence in the region is fundamental for maintaining political contacts, trade and financial exchanges, cultural dissemination, development and humanitarian cooperation, as well as for its own development and stability. This strategy must also consider the diversity and heterogeneity of the countries that form the Caribbean.

Mexico must look, with a broad and geostrategic vision, at the geopolitical impact that the Caribbean represents for the country, particularly

given that its strategic oil facilities are located towards the entrance to the Caribbean Sea. Accordingly, cooperation and coordination with the Caribbean are unavoidable for Mexico, specifically on issues such as global warming, transnational crime and human mobility. Therefore, the Yucatán Peninsula—the Mexican Caribbean area—must be treated as a region of strategic focus in relation to Mexico’s security.

Historically, the Caribbean was the gateway to Mexico. If the concept of the third border was useful thirty years ago to denote Mexico belonging to the Caribbean, now it must be conceptualised as a strategic area due to its importance for development, stability, security, political dialogue and coordination, trade diversification and the dissemination of Mexican culture. In essence, it is an area where Mexican foreign policy can continue to sustain a space apropos for its presence and influence.

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Bolívar and Chávez

Key Figures in the Conceptualisation of Venezuelan Foreign Policy towards the Caribbean Region

Álvaro Sánchez Cordero*

Venezuela's relationship with the Caribbean region transcends pragmatism and realism. It is a relationship deeply rooted in the collective imaginary of our historical struggle for independence dating back over 200 years. Venezuelan Liberator Simón Bolívar and his Patriot soldiers were able to accomplish Venezuela's independence, as well as the independence of other South American countries, thanks to the assistance provided by various good and willing people from Jamaica, Trinidad and St. Lucia, among others, but most importantly by the newly free and independent nation of Haiti.

- * Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Ambassador Álvaro Sánchez Cordero is the appointed Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, a position he has held since 2022. Ambassador Sánchez Cordero brings over 21 years of diplomatic experience, having served as Chargé d'Affaires in several countries across Europe and the Caribbean, including Barbados, the Netherlands, Russia, and the United Kingdom. In 2014, he was appointed Deputy Foreign Minister for North American Affairs. Prior to his diplomatic career, Ambassador Sánchez Cordero taught history at the Bolivarian University of Venezuela. He holds a degree in History from the Inter American University of Puerto Rico. Ambassador Sánchez Cordero is married to Ms. Monica Rey, and together they have three children.

Indeed, in 1816, as Bolívar was increasingly in despair, Haitian President Alexander Petion not only funded Bolívar's new liberation expedition to Venezuela and South America, but he armed Bolívar with ideas of anti-enslavement, emancipation and racial equality, all of which profoundly changed both Bolívar's view and strategy, culminating in military and political triumph, as they settled the foundations for a new inclusive paradigm that looked at the Caribbean region, of which Venezuela is part of, as an indispensable ally, and its people as brothers and sisters fighting for common causes.

However, Bolívar's ideas as the leading force underpinning the newly independent State of Venezuela lasted roughly from 1830 to 1999, the turning point at which the elites of the new political class began to engage the traditional colonial powers in the region. This decision to divert from following Bolívar's path of Latin American and Caribbean unity and equality led inevitably to negative consequences.

Nonetheless, the period 1998 to 1999 represents a watershed epoch in our history as a new historical chapter was written with the election in 1998, and coming to power by 1999, of the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Chávez went on to lead a social and political revolutionary movement as President, based precisely on the egalitarian ideology of Simón Bolívar, hence its name, the Bolivarian Revolution.

Desperate for an economic change that would provide agency to large masses of underprivileged people suffering the consequences of years of neo-liberal economic policies, as well as decades of social discrimination and invisibility, the vast majority of Venezuelans turned to Chávez, and consequently to Bolívar, for guidance on the eve of the 21st century.

The newly elected Chávez immediately tasked his government with implementing a new political vision that pursued the elimination of poverty; equal access for all Venezuelans to the country's land, oil and revenue, as well as other natural resources; people's direct political participation;

comprehensive educational reform; and cultural exposure based on inclusivity and in close observation to Bolívar's legacy and teachings.

By the same token, Chávez replicated these domestic changes into his foreign policy vision, where concepts such as South-South cooperation, Latin American and Caribbean unity, solidarity, anti-imperialism, decolonisation, complementarity, respect for people's self-determination and sovereignty, as well as support for multilateralism, gained prominence and became pillars of Venezuela's current foreign policy doctrine called "People's Bolivarian Diplomacy".

Chavez began a whole process of cultural approximation by recreating Bolívar's history through a historical revision, and the publication of research and documents made fully available to the wider population in order to awaken the needed knowledge of, and pride in, Bolívar's achievements and teachings, to better navigate the realities of a new world. Indeed, a new scientific approach to the study of history developed during this time in Venezuela known as *Insurgent History*. This approach, of course, included the Caribbean region. From the onset, President Chávez gave prominence to the Caribbean in his daily and foreign affairs. Notably, Chavez's first ever trip abroad, as Venezuelan President, was to Jamaica in 1999. This was a pilgrimage of sorts for Chávez, as in 1815, Bolívar wrote his famous document, the "Jamaica Letter", calling for independence and unity, in Kingston. In addition, Chávez brought to the fore the idea of Venezuela as a Caribbean nation, as it shares its coastline with Caribbean countries, making the latter ideal for further, friendlier, robust and meaningful engagement, based on the aforementioned principles of People's Bolivarian Diplomacy.

Moreover, thanks to the new Bolivarian vision of the Caribbean, we found inspiration in Caribbean thinkers whose work was widely regarded as entrenched in the core and identity of Caribbean civilisation, including Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, Eric Williams, C.L.R. James and Marcus Garvey, among many others, who advocated for decolonisation,

Pan-Africanism and unity based on intellectually rigorous research, study and debate.

One practical example that illustrates our political and ideological engagement with the Caribbean, founded on the core of the research of the aforementioned Caribbean thinkers of the 20th Century, in tandem with Simón Bolívar's legacy from the 19th Century, has been Venezuela's commitment and support for reparations in the international arena for Caribbean people. We see it as a means of acknowledging the dire consequences of colonisation and enslavement in the region and we support the position that former colonisers should contribute to funding for the development of the region.

But perhaps the best example of Venezuela's new diplomatic and economic approach to the Caribbean region was the establishment of Petrocaribe in 2005. Early in his presidency, Chávez visualised a fully comprehensive energy programme that would sell oil to Caribbean countries at preferential rates, as well as foster direct exchange of domestic products; thus, avoiding the nefarious trap of using US petrodollars, while strengthening trade, commerce, complementarity, development and solidarity linkages between Venezuela and Caribbean countries. This is how Venezuela conceived of Petrocaribe bearing fruits to the region for at least one decade, until the Unilateral, Coercive Measures (UCMs) by the US Government against Venezuela gravely affected Petrocaribe's operations.

Similar to Petrocaribe, and very much linked to it, Venezuela implemented various other social and cooperation programmes in the Caribbean region starting in the first decade of the 21st Century, including, Mission Miracle to assist those in need of eye care and surgery; the construction of infrastructure for development; the strengthening of older programmes, like Fundayacucho, which provides scholarships to study abroad; and the various Venezuelan Institute for Culture and Cooperation (IVCCs) programmes extended around the Caribbean as cultural branches of Venezuelan embassies, engaged in the teaching of Spanish as a second

language and Venezuelan culture. All of these have signified a closer relationship of the people, and by the people, in moments when the Caribbean region has mostly needed them, considering the constraint on financial markets, which were particularly acute after the so-called Great Recession of 2008-2009.

Last but not least, another aspect of Venezuelan engagement in the Caribbean has been its support for, and at times creation of, multilateral fora indigenous to the Caribbean region, such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which proclaimed the Caribbean region as a zone of peace in 2014, as well as The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). Venezuela is also engaged in organisations with the Caribbean in other groupings such as the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Venezuelan foreign policy in general, and towards the Caribbean in particular, is ultimately implemented by the Venezuelan Ministry of People's Power for Foreign Affairs. Our foreign policy makers and enablers have had one important advantage, which is that the current Venezuelan President, Nicolás Maduro, served as foreign minister for six years during the latter part of the Government of Hugo Chávez. Hence, Maduro's knowledge and experience as a top diplomat has helped him as president, but it has also facilitated the work of the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs in terms of the pre-eminence that President Maduro has placed on regional and world affairs.

In addition, as soon as the Bolivarian Revolution came to power in 1999, a steady change took place within Venezuelan public administration that matched the social changes in our society. Therefore, 25 years later, Venezuelan diplomats and officers from the Ministry of People's Power for Foreign Affairs have been embedded in Bolivarian theory and local political practice based on daily Venezuelan realities, which all in all have

increased their awareness and professionalism when engaging with the world, projecting the principles of People's Bolivarian Diplomacy.

Finally, what are the future prospects of Venezuelan foreign policy towards the Caribbean? Undoubtedly, recent world changes and trends have had an impact on all human beings in all regions, and the Caribbean has not been an exception. In fact, in many respects, the Caribbean region has taken the brunt of world constraints, particularly regarding climate change, the proliferation of firearms, the surge in non-communicable diseases and limited access to financial credit for development. Consequently, Venezuelan foreign policy development towards the Caribbean region has taken into serious consideration these new realities to formulate a more meaningful engagement with practical results, since many of these issues are also gravely affecting Venezuela, especially climate change.

The Venezuelan government and people have become de facto first responders in the Caribbean region whenever a natural catastrophe threatens to destabilise or destroy infrastructure, as well as people's lives and livelihoods, throughout the Caribbean. From the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, all the way to the most recent disaster caused by Hurricane Beryl in Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Venezuela has been present providing needed assistance, along with solidarity messages, showing that we are all together as one facing common threats in this new world reality.

Currently, in the midst of renewed imperial aggression in the first quarter of the 21st century, Venezuela is called once again to enforce its sovereignty and independence. We are indeed, as José Martí used to say, fighting for our second independence. Therefore, our Bolivarian history, particularly the assistance given to Simón Bolívar by Haiti in 1816, is more present than ever in our minds. Indeed, as Venezuela brilliantly overcomes the new set of aggressions currently upon us, our sincere bonds of friendship, solidarity, brotherhood and sisterhood with the Caribbean region can only be strengthened.



Boletín del Grupo de Trabajo
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