

Notes and Reflections

BOLÍVAR, 200 YEARS LATER

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"Bolívar 200 anos depois" (Bolivar, 200 years later) is the title of a conference held at *Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa* - Autonomous University of Lisbon (UAL), on 11 October 2010. This event, organized by UAL and the *Instituto para a Promoção e Desenvolvimento da América Latina* - Institute for the Promotion and Development of Latin America (IPDAL), was supported by the Embassies of Panama and Colombia in Portugal.

The main ideas of Simon Bolívar¹ on political, economic and social issues were the subject of debate and reflection, particularly those that have an international dimension and were enshrined as principles of International Law: Security and Collective Defence, Respect for the Territorial Integrity of States and the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes.

More than a mere idea, the ideal of unity, which had been one of the greatest ambitions of the "Liberator of America"², also deserved special attention. Indeed, throughout the work of Bolivar, the Liberator cites the word "America" as an expression of this ideal countless times. In most cases, Bolivar focuses on the idea of a Confederation of Hispanic-American Nations.

"More than anyone, I want to see in America the forming of the greatest nation in the world, not for its size and wealth, but for its freedom and glory"³.

¹ Venezuelan military and politician, Simon Bolivar was born in Caracas in 1783. After the failure of his federal project following the disintegration of Gran Colombia, Bolivar died in Colombia in 1830.

² The territories (former colonies of Spain) liberated by Simon Bolivar correspond to the current states of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.

³ Letter from Jamaica (Reply from a Southern American to a gentleman from this island. Kingston, 6 September 1815). Letter by Simon Bolivar addressed to Henry Cullen.



On 7 December 1824, Bolívar sent an invitation from Lima to Colombia, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Guatemala to attend a Congress to be held in Panama.

"It seems that if the world had to choose its capital, the Isthmus of Panama would be chosen for that privileged purpose, positioned as it is in the centre of the globe, looking at Asia on one side and at Africa and Europe on the other ... The Isthmus is equal distance from those ends and for this reason it could be the provisional location of the first Assembly of Confederate States..."⁴.

At the Amphictyonic Congress of Panama⁵ in 1826, Simón Bolívar proposed the signing of an offensive and defensive Alliance Treaty, a border demarcation that took into account the *utis possidetis* of 1810⁶, and the use of conciliation and mediation in conflict resolution. Federico Richa Humbert, the Ambassador of Panama in Portugal⁷, drew attention to the importance of this event, stressing that it was the first Conference of States that met in that part of the world, and which sought to solve common problems through international cooperation. However, the modest political will on the part of many of the governments involved, the lack of interest shown by the United States of America (USA)⁸, and especially the development of nationalisms, condemned this initiative to failure.

"Even the press has fuelled this lack of control, by bringing about the idea of isolation in each individual, because by preaching that scandal will befall on everyone, it has destroyed the confidence of all ... Each province keeps for itself the authority and power, each one believes it should be the centre of the nation. We shall not speak of the Democrats or the fanatics, or talk of colours, because if we enter the bottomless pit of these issues, the genius of reason would be buried ... "⁹.

After Panama, there were several unsuccessful attempts that insisted on the *Bolivarian* dream, such as in Lima (Conferences of 1847 and 1865), and Montevideo (1888 Conference). Instead of a confederation of American Nations – based on equality

⁴ Lima Circular Letter, 7 December 1824. In *Obras Completas de Bolívar*, Vol. II. Caracas: Ministério de Educação Nacional, s.d. p. 52.

⁵ The Amphictyonic Leagues in Ancient Greece consisted of individuals from various city-states who came together to worship a particular deity, with the aim of ensuring mutual defence and cooperation. This type of association – with a sacred nature – is considered to be the precursor of the current idea of Federation.

⁶ The border demarcation of the new American States should respect at the outset, that is, temporarily and before a new treaty, the boundaries that existed prior to independence.

⁷ He was invited to participate as a speaker at the Conference "Bolívar 200 years later," organized by UAL and IPDAL and held on 11 October 2010.

⁸ Among the causes of US lack of interest we can highlight Bolívar's insistence on two matters, the independence of Cuba and Puerto Rico, and the abolition of the slave trade in Hispanic America.

⁹ Letter by Simon Bolívar addressed to General José António Páez, 8 August 1826.



between all states – from 1889¹⁰ (with the holding of the first Pan American Conference, organised by Washington) the "Inter-American system" was set up.

This was clearly a hierarchical system that adopted the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Pact, 1947) and the Organization of American States (OAS, 1948) as its main legal instruments. Thus, the *Bolivarianism* ideal yielded against *Monroism* realism¹¹.

The project to create an Ibero-American Community of Nations was another issue discussed at the Conference "Bolivar 200 years later". Fernando Garcia Casas¹² reminded us that, in 1970, Spain proposed the creation of an Ibero-American Community (CoIBA) with the clear political objective of promoting democracy in the region. Indeed, the end of dictatorships in Portugal and Spain, and the democratization process that gained momentum in the late 1980s in Latin America, near the end of the Cold War¹³, had created the best conditions for a compromise between Spain and Portugal and their former colonies.

When the first Ibero-American Summit was called in 1991, there was unprecedented euphoria among the parties, as it was the first time - after Panama in 1826 - Latin American states could meet without the presence of the USA.

A forum for dialogue and political cooperation between Iberian countries and Latin America, with a great potential, especially in political, social and economic areas, the CoIBA project is currently facing serious difficulties, like many other forms of cooperation and integration. The reasons for this include the growing political weight of bilateral agreements in detriment of multilateral ones¹⁴, the growing ideological, political and economic heterogeneity of states that make up the region, and, once again, the emergence of nationalism, often invoked by "populist governments" at what they see as new forms of external hegemony.

Latin America, 200 years later, is considered to be a broad zone of peace. With a GDP growth of 6% (2010) and relative tranquillity derived mainly from exports of raw materials, the region is immersed in a democratization process that, although incipient, extends throughout the territory, with the exception of Cuba.

The paradigmatic case of Brazil, already seen as an emerging power that claims more "voice" and increased "democratization" at major decision-making worldwide events (Security Council, IMF, WB, ... G20), must be underlined. In addition, Brazil's

¹⁰ 1st Pan-American Conference (USA, 1889-1890), 2nd Pan-American Conference (Mexico, 1902), 3rd Pan-American Conference (Brazil, 1906), 4th Pan-American Conference (Argentina, 1910), 5th Pan-American Conference (Chile, 1923), 6th Pan-American Conference (Cuba, 1928), 7th Inter-American Conference (Uruguay, 1933), 8th Inter-American Conference (Peru, 1938), 9th Inter-American Conference (Colombia, 1948).

¹¹ The Monroism represented the views of the North-American vision of Pan-Americanism, based on U.S. predominance over other American states. Its first manifestation was precisely the presidential message of James Monroe, sent to Congress in 1823, where he advocated the idea "America for Americans", ie, away from European interests.

¹² Fernando Garcia Casas, Cabinet Chief of the Ibero-American Secretary General. He was invited to participate as a speaker at the Conference "Bolivar 200 years later," organized by UAL and IPDAL and held on 11 October 2010.

¹³ With the end of the Cold War, Latin America clearly is no longer a priority of U.S. foreign policy.

¹⁴ It must be noted e that the FTAA project was delayed and in its place, several bilateral agreements were signed between the U.S. and some Latin American countries like Colombia, Chile and Peru. Relations between the EU-Mercosur regional blocs or EU-CAN seem stagnant. The relations between the EU and Brazil or the EU-Chile are quite more dynamic. However, Mercosur ebbs and flows depending on the circumstances and difficulties that arise between the Member States.



diplomatic arm is looking for increased South American integration and aims to become the regional leader¹⁵.

Fernando Garcia Casas also pointed out that Latin America is currently facing serious challenges, such as the fight against poverty. In fact, 32.1% of Latin Americans remain in poverty and 12.9% are considered indigent. This corresponds to 180 million poor people, including 72 million in a situation of deprivation. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), poverty continues to affect more children and adolescents than other sectors of society¹⁶. And although the balance of the last seven years is positive, Latin America continues to be the most unequal region in the world. According to the first Report on Development for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), inequality persists and tends to perpetuate itself in areas where social mobility is low and represents an obstacle to progress in human development¹⁷. Moreover, despite the absence of interstate conflict that could develop into armed conflicts or wars, other non-traditional threats to security, such as drug trafficking and urban violence, make this region one of the least safe in the world¹⁸.

To this complex scenario fraught with uncertainty about the future, Jorge Volpi¹⁹ adds little cultural knowledge or ignorance of each other, and the total disappearance of all distinctive Latin American characteristics. According to the Mexican writer, Latin America as a prototype, imprinted on Western imagination as the land of dictators, guerrilla fighters and magical realism, has been fading over time. Lacking real power, the Latin American identity is constantly challenged by countries like Mexico - completely bound to the United States and Canada - a country whose settlement, political and economic decisions are made towards the north, no longer the south. However, it is in the south that we find incipient integration mechanisms that are starting to work²⁰. Volpi tells us of a likely scenario for the future, a continent with two major regional blocs, one in North America, which will eventually absorb the Caribbean, and one in the South, with Brazil as the main centre of gravity.

¹⁵ The 1st Latin America and Caribbean Summit (33 countries), held in Costa de Sauipe (Bahia) in December 2008, and the agreed compromise to be an Organization of Latin American States and of Caribbean countries was a perceptible setback to the foreign policies of Spain and the United States and a genuine triumph for Brazil, who started the initiative.

¹⁶ See the CEPAL Report (2010), "Social Panorama of Latin America 2010".

¹⁷ See the PNUD Report (2010), "Acting for the Future: Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Inequality."

¹⁸ According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODOC), it is estimated that around 40% of the global total of violent crimes are committed in Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹⁹ Jorge Luis Volpi Escalante is a Mexican writer (winner of the 2nd Prize for Essay Debate-Casa de América, 2009, for his book "El insomnio de Bolívar"). He was invited to participate as a speaker at the conference "Bolívar 200 years later," organized by UAL and IPDAL, held on 11 October 2010.

²⁰ The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) is formed by the twelve countries of South America. The treaty that formed it was signed in Brasilia on May 23, 2008. Apart from the Councils of Heads of State, Foreign Ministers and delegates, seven sectoral ministerial councils were created to promote integration and cooperation in the following areas: energy, health, defence, infrastructure and planning, social development, combating drug trafficking, and education, culture, science, technology and innovation.



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