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What does NATO do in Latin America?

In this struggle for governance, NATO has an active role in the region that is often not very visible. Colombia, NATO's only "global partner" in Latin America and the Caribbean



In the context of the conflict in Ukraine. The US and NATO claim their alliances with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in a geopolitical scenario that is increasingly decisively tilting towards the East and the return to hard geopolitics. Given the international impact of the war in Ukraine, does the US see its sphere of influence in Latin America threatened? What is NATO's relevance in the region?

I. NATO in LAC

A US *think tank* expert on security pointed out a few days ago: "there is a disinformation campaign promoted by Russia that extends throughout Latin America, questioning components of Western architecture that could keep the region safe (...) this juncture is a

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reminder that we must do more to support those fighting for democratic governance in the Western Hemisphere."

In this struggle for governance, NATO has an active role in the region that is often not very visible. In addition to the full members of NATO, there are two figures in which Latin American countries are located: "*Partners across the globe*" and *Extra-NATO Main Ally (MNNA)*.



- *Colombia, NATO's only "global partner" in LAC*
 - NATO cooperates individually with a number of countries that are not part of its regional partnership frameworks (The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council/Partnership for Peace, the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative).
 - Known as "partners around the world" or simply "global partners", they include Afghanistan, Australia, Colombia, Iraq, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand and Pakistan, which have access to the full range of activities that NATO offers to all partners.
 - Each partner develops an Individual Partnership Cooperation Program (IPCP).
 - Colombia's IPCP established priority [areas](#) for cooperation: cybersecurity, maritime security and terrorism and its links to organized crime, human security; and strengthening the capabilities of the Colombian armed forces. Through training and exercises, they seek to develop the interoperability of their armed forces, in accordance with NATO norms and standards.

- December 2021: [Meeting](#) between the Deputy Secretary General of NATO and the Minister of Defense of Colombia to update cooperation.
- Colombian personnel regularly participate in courses at the NATO School in Oberammergau, Germany, and the NATO Defense School in Rome, Italy. Demining, counterinsurgency and counternarcotics courses stand out.
- *Main extra-NATO ally: Argentina (since 1998), Brazil (since 2019) and Colombia (2022-subject to US Congress approval)*
 - The "Extra-NATO Principal Ally" (MNNA) is a [designation under U.S. law](#) that provides foreign partners with certain benefits in the areas of defense trade and security cooperation. A MNNA is not part of NATO nor is it covered by the nato's security and mutual defence guarantees. The term 'NATO', as well as 'ally' (at least in the sense of Article 5 as understood in the North Atlantic Treaty), gives a [false impression of the existing bilateral agreement](#).
- FACT: Brazil has [334,500 active military](#) personnel, Colombia with [200,000](#) and [Argentina with 51,309](#) (data as of 2018).
- NATO has 3.5 million assets between military and civilian personnel. Only Brazil and Colombia would contribute more assets than the European members annexed in the nineties to NATO (North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Croatia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic and Hungary). Argentina has assets similar to those of Bulgaria (24,800) and the Czech Republic (25,000) together (see annex 1).
- *Accession of Mexico?*
- In November 2021, the [Atlantic Council \(NATO's political arm\) raised the possibility of Mexico's accession](#).

II. What does the link with NATO imply?

- As highlighted by the Deputy Secretary General of NATO, Mircea Geoană, in the panel ["The evolution of NATO's role in Latin America"](#) of the Concord Summit (2020):
 1. NATO financing against terrorism, building resilience, fighting corruption, building integrity, fighting climate change and fighting the rise of China and Iran.

2. Indoctrination: One of the ways, among others, in which inclusion in NATO is generated is by sending young officers to the NATO Defense School or creating *ad hoc* training programs, to show the evolution of NATO doctrines.
- The [NATO 2030 Agenda](#) (defined in June 2021) sets out a commitment to strengthen NATO's relations with like-minded partners and forge new commitments in Africa, Asia and Latin America: "When NATO's neighbours are more stable, we are more secure (...) Strengthening partners and training local forces is a more sustainable and cost-effective way to increase security and stability and fight terrorism. NATO and NATO partners have a long history in this area, which can serve as a basis for better fulfilling their core tasks of crisis management and cooperative security."

III. [Southern Command](#) and NATO

- NATO has a presence in the region through operations and exercises with the United Kingdom, Canada, France and the Netherlands in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) programs. An example of this was the joint response following the earthquake in Haiti.
- U.S. and NATO interagency participation in annual HA/DR exercises is promoted, to which would be added an annual high-level conference between U.S. agencies to ensure coordination between government areas to counter China and Russia in the region.
- The Southern Command proposes to compete with adversaries, such as Russia, through Military Information Support Operations (MISO) and Operations, Activities and Investments (OAI).

IV. Final notes

- The US has begun negotiations with Venezuela that could remove restrictions on the oil sector and export it to the EU. Colombia offered to export crude. This could be one of the requests by NATO members to Colombia, Argentina and Brazil, three of the oil and gas producers in the region.
- MISOs could also have a place in Colombia, but not in Argentina and Brazil. In fact, Brazil allowed the return of Telegram.

- It is unlikely that any of the three countries will actively participate in the war, however, status as those of global ally of NATO and MNNA, are complementary to a wide range of US military assistance and training programs, a dimension that becomes even more strategic to secure the region to the US that continues in hegemonic decline and in a context of strong changes in the multilateral system and return to the hard geopolitics.

ANNEX 1

ANEXO 1
PRESUPUESTO Y MILITARES
ACTIVOS (2020)

| PAIS | % del PIB | Miliones de dólares | Militares activos |
|------------|-----------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Argentina* | 0,8 | 5.143 | 51.500 |
| Brasil | 1,4 | 25.101 | 334.500 |
| Colombia | 3,4 | 10.133 | 200.000 |
| México | 0,6 | 6.607 | 237.000 |

Fuente: SIPRI, Military Expenditure Database.
* Activos militares de 2018

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Budget and active military (2020)

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