




## Che's critique of the Organization of American States: from Punta del Este (1961) to Bolivia (2019)

Shannon Brincat <sup>a</sup> and Juan Z. N. Cáceres<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Politics and International Relations, University of the Sunshine Coast, Sunshine Coast, Australia; <sup>b</sup>School of Law and Society, University of the Sunshine Coast, Sunshine Coast, Australia

### ABSTRACT

Che's revolutionary solidarity championed the Spirit of Bolivar and Marti across the Latin American Community. Underlying this solidarism was a fervent belief in the potential for an emancipated regional Americas freed of neo-imperialist control. Yet, Che saw this possibility thwarted by the regional hegemony of the US government and its dominance of regional organizations through which it was able to intervene economically and even militarily across its southern neighbours. In this article, we explore Che's critique of the US' dominance of the Organization of American States (OAS) and how this has distorted regional integration in the Latin American Community by focusing on his famous speeches at Punta del Este at the Alliance for Progress (AFP) conference in 1961. We argue that Che's critique remains relevant for analysing regional integration today by highlighting the role of the OAS and its intervention in the Bolivian coup of 2019.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

That is the world today ... That is how we have to see it in order to understand ... and draw conclusions that will permit our peoples either to head toward a happy future of harmonious development, or else become appendages of imperialism ... (Che Guevara, August 8, 1961 in García & Girona, 2020, pp. 24–25)

Despite shared linguistic, colonial, and historico-cultural ties; despite economic forces pulling for increased financial and trade cooperation, and, despite high levels of public support for Latin American integration (in both economic and political terms), regional integration in Latin America remains weak. *Why?* In sharp contrast to the seemingly inexorable expansion of regionalism in international order, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)<sup>1</sup> organizations have only been further weakened in recent years. Arguably the high-water mark was 2004: the *Cuzco Declaration* announced it would invoke 'Bolívar's dream' through the creation of a political South American Community of Nations (CSN), including a regional parliament, common market, and single currency. That same year, MERCOSUR established its parliamentary institution, Parlasur, that finally sat in 2007. In 2008, The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) was created, the successor to the CSN, effectively merging the Andean Community and MERCOSUR trade blocs based on a consensus mechanism. Yet since then, most of UNASUR's members have left and MERCOSUR's Parlasur has not achieved any of its functions – Bolívar's 'dream' remains just that.

In this article we explore how Che Guevara provides a critical answer for why regional integration remains distorted and under-developed in the Americas. His explanation emphasizes three causal factors. Firstly, Che posits that the strength of US imperialism across the region – via foreign capital and monopolies (including resource and labour exploitation), control of regional organizations, and in ‘extreme cases’ military intervention within states – is able to effectively counter any progressive or socialist governments in the region and thereby forestall endogenous attempts at regional integration they may promote. Secondly, Che highlights the wilful submission and complicity of the national bourgeoisie across all states of the Americas in league with US hegemony and capitalist interests. This results in a form of state capture of LAC countries amenable to overruling US interests. Thirdly, Che suggests that the ongoing socio-economic distortions across the Americas that result from this imbalance, means that regional integration will continue to be subverted under the interests of the US unless it can be countered by proletarian internationalism, Pan-American solidarity, and (later in his thinking) the Tricontinental, to redress the world’s ‘dispossessed’ (Guevara, 1967, in Deutschmann, 2003, p. 361).<sup>2</sup> Despite the 60 years that have passed since Che’s writings, we will show how his explanatory framework still illuminates much about ongoing regional distortions across the Americas with a particular focus on the US’ ongoing control of regional institutions, specifically the OAS, and its ability to use these forums as vehicles for its own interests.

The article is divided into two parts. The first describes Che’s primary arguments regarding regional distortions that result from US imperialism made in famous speeches at Punta del Este conference in 1961, cross-referenced to his other works that further outline his position. This is divided between the arguments that Che makes against regional organizations such as the OAS being dominated by the US, and, those against the OAS being used to attack the sovereign independence of Cuba. The second part then charts the role of the OAS in the Bolivian coup of 2019. We highlight how many of Che’s criticisms of the role of the OAS were present, focusing especially on the control of this regional organization for political influence and economic advantage, arguing that Che’s approach remains relevant for the political analysis of regionalism in the Americas today.

### ‘Our America and Theirs’

These were the words Che used to describe the bifurcation between his vision of a united, socialist LAC, and another under imperialism and neo-colonialism. Che’s speeches at the Ministerial Meeting of the Inter-American Economic and Social Council (CIES) in Punta del Este on 8th, 16th and 23rd August 1961 are emblematic of his rejection of the South American regionalism underpinned by US hegemony (Guevara, 1961/2006). This meeting was sponsored by the Organization of American States’ (OAS) ‘*Alliance for Progress*’ (hereafter AFP) – and we should note how the US provided nearly 60% of the OAS funding and has historically been the major contributor of its finances (Farthing & Becker, 2021). The AFP was initiated during the early stages of the presidency of John F. Kennedy (supported by several Latin American governments) with two aims: establishing a form of economic cooperation across all LAC, and, seeking condemnation of the Cuban revolution. The conference followed the perceived failure of the US to have the San José Declaration (August 1960) condemn the Cuban government, and, Kennedy’s embarrassing attempt to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs (April 1961) and re-establish a non-communist government friendly to the US.

Following these failures, Kennedy now appeared far more conciliatory: he called the conference at Punta del Este the ‘historic meetings of the hemisphere’, claiming the US had ‘good

sense' and 'generous purposes' in its full commitment to the AFP (Kennedy, 1961, p. 1). On its face, the proposed Alliance did appear progressive: it pledged, amongst other things, 2.5% annual increase of per capita income, democracy, and even land reform – a pressing issue for many states and a key priority of leftist movements in the region. The US even promised 20 billion USD over a decade (see Dunne, 2013, p. 1391). Kennedy did not attend the conference at Punta del Este, however. Some say that he was 'preoccupied' with the Berlin crisis, his primary interest (Weis, 2001, pp. 330–331). Others suggest his absence was to ensure there was no recriminatory debate between Kennedy and the Cuban delegation (Gordon, 1967, p. 624), especially following Kennedy's recent 'savaging' in the ideological debate with Khrushchev in their only summit just weeks earlier.

Set in context, the AFP grew out of a series of events that had revealed widespread antipathy against the US in the region. Arguably, this antipathy first became apparent during the then vice-president Richard M. Nixon's infamous 'goodwill' tour of eleven South American countries in April 1958 – many of which devolved into protests and/or riots that revealed widespread hostility to the US. In response, Washington began to re-evaluate its policies in Latin America (Weis, 2001, pp. 324–325) with a seeming historic shift heralded in President Kennedy's speech on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1961. This speech deliberately echoed many of the revolutionary Left's (including Che's) arguments at the time: combating illiteracy, endemic diseases, and poverty, alongside tax and land reform (cited in Dunne, 2013, p. 1391). Alongside many references to 'free men', 'freedom' and the dangers of 'tyranny', Kennedy implied that if the peoples of the Americas continued to live in 'poverty and ignorance and despair', all the while knowing that 'abundance and the tools of progress [were] within their reach', then they too would embrace revolution following the Cuban model (cited in Dunne, 2013, p. 1390). Kennedy's counterstrategy was to, therefore, 'transform the American continent into a vast crucible of revolutionary ideas and efforts' – a bourgeois form of revolutionism consistent with American liberalism and free trade. This would increase development under free market principles rather than the socialist variant embodied in the post-1959 Cuban revolution.

### **Goal 1: Che's rejection of a US dominated regionalism at Punta del Este**

Kennedy's White House speech cited two previous regional efforts underpinning his promised leap in regional integration: the OAS (the multilateral hemispheric body created by the US and responsible for launching the AFP), and, *Operation Pan America*. The latter had been proposed in the late 1950s by Brazilian President Kubitschek (1956–1961) as a massive development program to overcome the growing economic gap between North and South America, and whilst it never eventuated, Kennedy proclaimed the AFP had to be as bold as the 'majestic concept of Operation Pan-America' (Weis, 2001, p. 322). *Operation Pan America* had drawn inspiration from the developmental model of the Marshall Plan but did not get any support from successive US administrations who continued to reject any such type of development strategy for the South American region in favour of private investment, increased trade, and austerity measures across all southern states (Weis, 2001, pp. 324–325). The OAS, an organization dominated by the US in terms of funding and personnel, believed that by promising financial assistance in the form of the AFP could secure both anti-communist sentiment, and, foster economic dependency across the region.<sup>3</sup> These interests were quite obvious, given the \$20 billion promised was in grants and loans rather than direct investment which typified what the AFP actually meant by promoting Latin American states to 'self-help' (Eighth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs [OAS], 1962, p. 11). Che would

show how this was the mechanism by which the AFP would remove real economic development and replace it with tied aid and foreign ownership.

There were two alternatives to US-led economics ranged against the US delegation at the conference. The first was the dependency theories of Raúl Prebisch and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (Gordon, 1967, p. 626). This position highlighted the dependency of the Americas, showing, via economic analysis, how the benefits of technology and international trade would inevitably accrue to the core state (the US) over time. Guevara offered a related but more radical interpretation, openly denouncing the AFP as a form ‘economic imperialism’ with underlying political objectives. Of course, Che openly borrowed from the ideas of Dependency Theory just like Prebisch’s approach but he was far more focused on ending dependency via socialist economics rather than believing a common market could overcome these issues (see Yaffe, 2009). Despite the AFP’s rhetoric, Che was at pains to show the inherently political nature of the conference, indeed, of any international forum proposing economic ‘progress’ disconnected from politics. Whereas liberal ideology attempted to sever or obscure the economic from the political, from Che’s critical Marxist vantage, there could be no such separation. Indeed, any assertion was nothing but a deliberate falsification, attempting to make economics appear a domain apart from the political but which in fact controls it. In the press conference held immediately after proceedings on August 23, Che made this claim central stating that the AFP was a ‘political meeting’ designed to ‘chain the Latin American countries more tightly to the financial organizations of Wall Street’ (Guevara, 1961, in Guevara, 2006, pp. 82–83).

Che openly attacked the ‘colonial mentality’ of the economic planning of the AFP exemplified in its emphasis on building infrastructure – much like the ‘development’ projects of today – without transferring the means to do so. According to Che, denuded of this transfer, states of the Americas could never become industrial-agricultural (‘developed’) but would remain bound by dependency (Guevara, 1961 in Guevara, 2006, pp. 38–39). Here, Che was echoing the core claims of Dependency Theory and the ECLAC at the conference. A key factor was the *type* of development the Alliance promoted in which the issue of building latrines became infamous – that is, the AFP was falling to the economic thinking that made ‘the latrine *the* fundamental thing’ (emphasis added Guevara, 1961, in Guevara, 2006, p. 62).<sup>4</sup> It was these type of elements, Che alleged, that revealed the AFP to be only superficially concerned with economic development, whereas its real intention was to have political control of development across the region via various economic levers leading to monopolization. According to Che, this was a form of economic imperialism and thereby an infringement of the principle of non-intervention under the UN Charter (a principle in the OAS Charter too) – a charge cognizable only if one saw the economic and the political as indelibly linked as he did. Accordingly, many words were spent – on both sides – in establishing this link between economics and politics in the AFP or denying it.

During his speeches, Che refrained from bombastic pronouncements of the triumph of socialism or links with the Soviets. Instead, he focused on providing evidence-based arguments demonstrating how the proposed economic integration model of the Alliance would enable monopolization under the principle of ‘free trade’. For example, corporations such as The United Fruit Company may have been expelled from Cuba he said, but they lived on, eyeing off other holdings across the continent that the AFP would facilitate. In this way, Che unmasked the AFP as Kennedy’s trojan horse to open the gates of weaker states and re-embed American control through foreign investment, the key mechanism for an emergent neo-imperialism. According to Che, the Alliance

would not promote Latin American harmony and cooperation but ‘subdue’ the region’s ‘peoples according to imperialism’s instruction’ (Guevara, 1961, in Guevara, 2006, p. 57).

Che’s second speech doubled-down on this accusation: denouncing economic aggression under the illusion of free enterprise in the AFP that would actually mean ‘the exploitation of human by human’ across the continent (Guevara, 1961, in Guevara, 2006, p. 74). Citing evidence that foreign loans had merely become the means for Latin American states to finance foreign (especially US-based) monopolies, Che asserted that this would inevitably lead to imbalance of payments, a drop in wages, and inflationary processes across the region (Guevara, 1961, in Guevara, 2006, pp. 77–78). Even nationalists in states like Brazil had made similar accusations that American corporations were withdrawing more money from their country than they were investing (see Langguth, 1978, pp. 65–66) – a position consistent with Prebisch and ECLAC as well. It soon became apparent that the amount of US aid promised at Punta del Este did not equal the net transfer of resources, nor cover the debts still owed to the US. It was just another expression of the illusion that the foreign exchange imbalance could be overcome by the industrialized US guaranteeing just prices for export commodities (Gordon, 1967, pp. 631–632).

Despite the American delegation’s best diplomatic overtures, Che outlined how the ‘Yankee Imperialism’ of the AFP would *actually* work: it would end outmoded feudal systems, initiate monetary and modest land reforms, provide limited industrialization (only in consumer goods), and retain all technology and raw materials imported from the US. According to Che, this would ultimately have disastrous consequences in the region: what we now term elite capture and neo-imperialism. Firstly, it would lead the capture of local elites that he described as the process by which the national bourgeoisie of Latin American states would, over time, come to align with the interests of US foreign capital. As he would later explain, the AFP sought to share ‘a small quantity of the profits with the native exploiting classes, thus making into firm allies against the highly exploited classes’ (Guevara, 1962, in Bonachea and Valdes, 1969a, p. 82).<sup>5</sup> Che called this ‘the more intelligent system of exploitation’ because it made the ‘nationalists’ of any neo-colonized country ‘assume the role of protecting US interests’. What made the imperialist experience in South America distinct from Africa and Asia was that whilst each continent shared the distortion of economic exploitation, the Americas had not developed the economic forces that would permit a nationally independent bourgeoisie to emerge. In this context, North American monopolies came to dominate without competition and any national bourgeois elements in the southern states would be absorbed into the dominant interests of the US (Guevara, 1961, in Bonachea and Valdes, 1969a, p. 61). The national bourgeoisie and landowners in the South were ‘in constant conflict with monopoly capital’ but because of their relative power imbalance to Northern monopolies of the US, they would ‘back down and compromise with imperialism’ (Guevara, 1962, Bonachea and Valdes, 1969a, pp. 82, 79) and eventually ‘side’ with it (Guevara, 23 August 1961, in Garcia & Salado, p. 104). Elsewhere Che made similar observations as to why the national bourgeoisie ‘ally’ with imperialism against fellow citizens (see Guevara, 1961, in Bonachea and Valdes, 1969a, pp. 62–65). Che anticipated this key facet of neo-imperialism as early as 1960 as highlighted in *Memorandum of Conversation between Mao Zedong and Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara (1960)*, elements of which he takes up in his speeches at Punta de Este. Here, he explained the link between elite-capture and neo-imperialism by describing how ‘imperialism fostered the national bourgeoisie’ in Cuba. Che posited that the national bourgeoisie were ‘basically importers’ in that imperialism ‘gave them capital, technology, patents, and markets’ so even though ‘they lived in their own country, their interests were entangled with imperialism’, and as such they ‘did not stand for national interests; they were, in fact, colluding with imperialism’ (Guevara, 1960). The sword cut both ways. As early as 1954,

Che commented on the internal nature of US imperialism that relied on appeasing its working class via high wages and access to goods to keep the ‘contradiction’ between labour and capital at bay (Guevara, 1954/1988). Thus, we could suggest that in distinction from older forms of imperialism that excluded the working class and poor from its benefits, within neo-imperialism some members of the working class in the imperial, Northern core, benefit from economic extraction from the underdeveloped periphery. The AFP was designed to enhance such processes.

Secondly, Che explained how the US had changed its imperial system over-time – something the AFP would accommodate further – by moving away from direct occupation to forms of neo-imperialism. For example, whilst the US formally ended colonial rule in Cuba in 1902, it had nevertheless persisted in a new form via extraction and foreign capital. Any purported changes to imperialism were ‘only *formally*’ (emphasis added. Guevara, 1961, in Garcia & Salado, p. 100). It had simply shifted to what we call its neo-imperialist form. At the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Che reiterated this point, citing examples across Africa, Asia and specifically the Lusophone independence movements in Guinea, Angola, and Mozambique underway at the time. The faults of colonialism which impeded the people’s development were not confined to ‘the political field’ but continued through the deterioration in the terms of trade and unequal exchange that meant that, without international socialist solidarity, ‘weak countries’ would inevitably fall once again ‘under the political domination of the imperialists and the colonialists’ (Guevara, 1964/1966, pp. 7–14). For many today, the economic foundation of neo-imperialism lies in monopolistic financial capitalism that is established on the basis of powerful multinational companies (see Enfu & Baolin, 2021) – this was a pivotal idea across Che’s thinking, and not just at Punta del Este. Che consistently tied imperialism to neo-colonial practices in this manner and he describes the ‘new’ form these invasive processes were developing over this period. So, by the time of his *Message to the Tricontinental* (Guevara, 1967 in Deutschmann 2003, pp. 350–364) Che could refer to how certain changes (i.e. international law and promotion of sovereignty) may have ‘forced neo-colonial powers to give up their former absolute prerogatives’ but that ‘colonialism continues ... with similar effects as far as the economic situation is concerned’. Moreover, he identifies ‘the foundation of imperialism’ within the extraction of capital, raw materials, and labour, that leads to ‘absolute dependence’. Under these conditions which time Che now believed ‘the autochthonous bourgeoisies’ had, quite simply, ‘lost all their capacity to oppose imperialism – if they ever had it ...’ (Guevara, 1967, in Deutschmann 2003, pp. 350–364).

At Punta del Este, Che saw how the US was ushering in highly refined systems of neo-imperial control through institutions like the OAS and its ‘AFP’. For example, the agrarian reforms the US sought through the AFP were to replace large and small land holdings with medium-sized, mechanized landholdings that would better utilize agricultural workers, facilitate the growth of a bourgeois agricultural class, and establish mutually beneficial relations to US monopolies through mixed companies. Even under this type of strategy and the free exchange agreement of the AFP, any investment would be directed to the interests of finance capital with dividends channelled back to the US. Ultimately, it would provide a short-term boost for local bourgeois owners but at the cost of neo-colonial rule (Guevara, 1961, in Guevara, 2006, pp. 100–102). Local populations would be forced to scramble for labour contracts after the enclosures of their small landholdings and, at the national level, this would increase competition between Latin American states for their raw materials and labour, and, lead to a drop in wages and tax revenue across all these states. The result of the relative under-development of the South American region was not just ‘monstrously distorted economy’ that reduced its people to wage labours and the exploited (or ‘dispossessed’) (Guevara, 9 April 1961 in Bonachea and Valdes, 1969a, p. 62) but that the entire region

would become ‘the parade ground of US imperialism’ (Guevara, October 2, 1968, Bonachea and Valdes, 1969a, p. 79). In its hegemonic position, the US could create ‘Puppet governments’ and/or ‘weak and fearful local rulers’ who were ‘incapable of contradicting orders from their Yankee master’ (Guevara, April 1967, in Deutschmann 2003, p. 354). So just as the US could not allow any ‘rival’ imperialisms to intrude in its sphere of influence (the animating purposes behind the Monroe Doctrine), the US could not permit the Cuban revolution to be an exemplar of struggles of ‘economically less weak nations’ against ‘colonial America’ (Guevara, 1969b, pp. 131–132). The ‘Yankee master’ had to be seen to be in control.

This sheds light on what the Kennedy administration sought through the AFP. If they could gain acceptance of the broad political program of the Alliance set out in the ‘Declaration to the Peoples of America’ (that was based on the Charter of the OAS) it could undercut the alternative represented by Cuba. As such, the AFP took on board the promises to strengthen democratic institutions, accelerate economic and social development, and increase the standard of living across LAC – albeit under the principle of the ‘self-help of each country’ rather than some multi-lateral institution. To achieve this outcome Kennedy used a number of ‘inducement mechanisms’ (Dunne, 2013, p. 1408) and was ultimately successful in getting members of the OAS (except Cuba) to sign the document on August 17, 1961. Henceforth, the mode of regional development was to be set by the OAS via the AFP. For Che, this exposed the mask of economic development for actual political control, and example of what Martí described as how ‘excessive influence of one country over another’s commerce becomes political influence ...’ (Guevara August 8, 1961, in Guevara, 2006, p. 20).

### **Goal 2: Che’s defence of the Cuban Revolution**

This leads directly to the other fundamental priority of the AFP, the political isolation of Cuba which had animated the agenda of the OAS for a number of years already. According to Weis, the US government:

... sought to reforge pan-Americanism and its political arm, the Organization of American States (OAS), into a sword to use against him [Fidel Castro] and every other potential revolutionary in the western hemisphere. (Weis, 2001, p. 323)

The AFP was an extension of this, a means to ensure ‘our [US]’ southern neighbours would not ‘choose a separate way in affairs antagonistic to our [US] interests’ (Gordon, 1967, p. 637). This was hardly a state secret – already in December 1959 the then US Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Livingstone Merchant said that the ‘Cuban problem’ was the ‘most difficult and dangerous in all the history of our relations with Latin America, possibly in all our foreign relations’ (Boggs, 1960, para 3). Che commented how the AFP was ‘conceived’ as a ‘counter’ to the example that Cuba represented (Guevara, August 8, 1961, in Guevara, 2006, pp. 21 & 22). The leadership of Fidel Castro was indisputable but the role of Che and the other ‘barbudos’ made them long-term targets of the US government as well. Only with the success of the Cuban revolution and the expansion of leftist movements aiming to address real economic grievances across the continent, was compelled the US to use the OAS as a vehicle for addressing these concerns to curb this ideological spread. Accordingly, the OAS pivoted toward developmental concerns in the region and, at least initially, the efforts of the OAS were more than just ideological rhetoric with the AFP spending a billion dollars in its first year (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, n.d.).

At the first Punta del Este conference in 1961, the aim of ostracizing Cuba remained elusive. Che found sympathetic ears in the Brazilian and Argentine delegations, and, in how other states like Bolivia and Ecuador sought self-determination that was formally consistent with Cuba's position. Che commented he 'never felt alone' at the conference. And when attempts were made to isolate Cuba, Che's shrewd defence was to emphasize those parts in the resolution that explicitly established the 'right of countries with difference social systems to coexist in Latin America' (Guevara, 23 August 1961, in Guevara, 2006, p. 93). At the second meeting of the OAS's AFP on 22–31 January 1962, however, again at Punta del Este, the US sought Cuba's full suspension from OAS (and/or at least economic sanctions). Colombia alleged the Cuban government was supporting left-wing insurgencies in its territory and Peru remained firmly in the US orbit (Harmer, 2019, pp. 123–125). Other states, like Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico were less enthusiastic but specific proposals to end Cuba's 'participation in the Inter-American System' were ultimately successful. Che warned there were no longer any 'discordant voices' in how states voted in the OAS but a shameful consistency on the 'imperialist-bourgeois front' (Guevara, October, 1962, in Bonachea and Valdes, 1969a, 83).

With the complete success of US aims by the end of the second conference, the AFP was now bereft of any real political purpose. That is, without the need to exclude Cuba, the OAS could revert to business as usual: neglecting 'real' economic development and ensure ongoing political control of the region in accordance with US interests. In the following years, land reform was negligible, the money promised under the AFP was not forthcoming or later channelled into other areas, less than half of the states achieved the promised growth-rates, and, despite many detailed plans for developmental projects given to the OAS these remained extremely limited in practice (see ECLAC, 2008). But looking for the chimera of money/development to flow from the AFP is in-itself a mistake, for more than anything what transpired highlighted the sagacity of Che's critique from the previous year: the Alliance had *always* been for political control rather than to assist economic development of Latin American states. Tellingly, the OAS had never previously prioritized economic development or poverty reduction until the Punta del Este conference. For instance, at its most successful ninth conference in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1948 that adopted the OAS Charter, the Pact of Bogotá, and the American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man, it was the Economic Agreement of Bogotá that endeavoured to advance economic cooperation among American States which never entered into force. The OAS Charter did refer to economic development and general economic policies but these remained largely rhetorical.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in the years 1958–1961, *actual* military aid to Latin America increased from 48 to 91 million USD, nearly all of it directed against left-wing social movements, dwarfing the amount *promised* in developmental aid under the AFP (Villanueva, 1971, p. 147).

When they were discussing what to do with Trujillo's dictatorship, Kennedy and his fellow 'New Frontiersmen' had already outlined their order of priority in terms of regime-types in the region that the OAS would zealously follow:

There are three possibilities in descending order of preference: a decent democratic regime, a continuation of the Trujillo regime or a Castro regime. We ought to aim for the first, but we really can't renounce the second until we are sure that we can avoid, the third. (quoted in Dunne, 2013, p. 1402)

Che would later call this the 'Trujillo precedent' and Weis (2001, p. 331ff) has shown how the uplifting rhetoric of the OAS Charter and the AFP did not conceal their compatibility with authoritarian regimes. During the first conference, Che had remonstrated how many states were being represented by oligarchs and not the people or their representatives (Guevara, 23 August 1961, in Garcia & Salado, p. 93) – contradicting the democratic principles of the Alliance before it had begun.



Following the 1962 meeting where Cuba was excluded, thirteen constitutional governments in Latin America would be replaced by military dictatorships and rather than a multilateral regional forum, the AFP turned into twenty bilateral agreements with these oligarchic regimes, administered by a US bureaucracy under the auspices of the OAS (Weis, 2001, p. 331). As Smith wrote, ‘The most striking failure of the Alliance of Progress occurred within the political realm’ with a ‘rash of military coups’ and dictators ‘holding sway’ (1999, p. 155).

Under this hegemony, Hobsbawm (1970) evaluated that over this time the US intervened directly in Central American states with overwhelming military force, and, in South American states via massive increases in indirect support (i.e. counter-insurgency and paramilitary forces, financial support, and political advisors). This finding was consistent with Che’s own prediction that, ‘despite its lack of credibility’, the OAS was a ‘convenient mask’ for US intervention ‘anywhere in Latin America where a change in the established order endangers their interests’ (Guevara, April 1967, Deutschmann 2003, p. 354). Che would continue to highlight this contradictory role of the OAS and its use by the US as perpetrators of ‘exploitation and oppression’, even making these claims at the UN (see Guevara, 1964/1966). His later emphasis on sovereignty and self-determination to buttress support for Cuba’s defence (see for example Guevara February 24, 1965 in Bonachea and Valdes, 1969a), was already present in his speeches at Punta del Este where he labelled the OAS conference in Costa Rica (in August 1960) that, he claimed, ‘denied’ Cuba’s right for defence as ‘one of the strangest denials in the history of international law’. Indeed, he claimed it was Cuban liberty that was preventing ‘the United States from falling upon Latin America’ (Guevara 8, August 1961/2006)

But now, with the successful ousting of Cuba, and thus bereft of any real critical voice left within it, the US could reduce the importance of the AFP, take any real money off the table, and revert to the OAS as its preferred vehicle to directly support its political and economic interests across the region.

### The OAS from Punta del Este 1961–1962 to Bolivia 2019

So, are Che’s comments on the failures of Latin American regionalism at Punta del Este simply historical curiosities, or can they help us analyse the regional politics of the Americas today? As we have seen, Che posited that US imperialism would take many forms, including the intrusion of foreign capital and monopolies, extraction of labour and raw materials, the domination of regional institutions, and in ‘extreme cases’ even military intervention, *and*, that the national bourgeoisie across Latin American states would come to align with the interests of this US hegemony. In this section we show that his critique remains prescient. Focusing on the role the OAS played in the 2019 Bolivian coup, we show how this institution continues to promote US interests: that it does so in the pursuit of economic benefits to the US (and pliant local elites), and; that it seeks political control either via indirect means where these are sufficient, and directly when it can do so.

The OAS played the pivotal role in the Bolivia coup of 2019 that overthrew the only indigenous president in Bolivia’s history, Evo Morales, and who had enjoyed remarkable policy successes acknowledged by many international observers. The International Monetary Fund recognized that Bolivia experienced fifteen years of strong growth and poverty reduction with an annual real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 4.8 percent between 2004 and 2017<sup>7</sup> (IMF, 2018); economic inequality decreased by more than 16 points according to the World Bank GINI index; people living in extreme poverty fell from approximately 36 percent to 17 percent, and; in 2010 the World Bank upgraded Bolivia’s classification from a lower to lower-middle

income state (Gomez Sarmiento, 2019). Morales also introduced a litany of socially progressive reforms such as protection of vulnerable population (including women and the elderly) and gender equality (Kopek, 2020). According to Valdez (2014), Morales was ‘widely popular at home’ for his ‘pragmatic economic stewardship’ that spread the wealth of Bolivia’s resources across the masses (Valdez, 2014). On the other hand, parts of the military, right-wing business interests, and elements of the traditional ruling class (rich landowners primarily) were displeased with the prospect of yet another term for such a progressive government (see Dalenz, 2018). As suggested in Che’s analysis of how the national bourgeois classes will behave in these conditions, these classes were far more amenable to interventions led by the OAS on behalf of the interests of the US during the electoral crisis of 2019.

Questions had already been raised about term limits – the rules of which Morales had changed and which did not look to be ‘best practice’ to Western media sources.<sup>8</sup> Bolivia’s electoral system requires that to become president a candidate must obtain at least 50% of the vote, or, that a candidate obtains a minimum 40% with a 10% lead in front of the candidate in second place.<sup>9</sup> If neither condition is met, the two most voted candidates compete in a run-off by simple majority. In the presidential election, Morales obtained 47.07% and his closest rival Carlos Mesa 36.51% of the valid votes and therefore Morales *should* have been declared the presidential winner. Yet the OAS Electoral Observation Mission’s (EOM) press release made the following day openly claimed there were ‘drastic and hard-to-explain changes’ in the election after projections from the preliminary result (OAS, 2019c). The US mission to the OAS and 14 other members released a joint statement in which they praised the professional and technical work carried out by the EOM and unequivocally expressed that the OAS Electoral Integrity Analysis Mission (EIAM) found irregularities in the electoral process and therefore that ‘it was not possible to validate the results of the Bolivian election’ (OAS, USM, 2019, paras. 5 & 6). As surmised by *The New York Times* the fallacious claims of the OAS set off ‘a chain of events that changed the South American nation’s history’ (see Kurmanaev & Trigo, 2020).

The EOM methods and data were soon proven to be fundamentally (and potentially deliberately) flawed (Weisbrot, 2020). Yet despite criticisms of its methods made at the time Williams and Curiel (2020), the OAS doubled-down on its claims of fraud in three subsequent reports and in its audit went so far as to claim ‘clear manipulation’ and significant irregularities. Idrobo et al. (2022) have shown that not only was the final result fully explainable but the OAS audit had also excluded the last 4 percent of tallies (something it did not admit to either). Similarly, Rosnick (2020) has shown a number of coding errors, especially in the OAS audit that withheld information from its comparison of physical and online vote tallies. Several international independent studies like those commissioned by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) could not find statistically significant evidence to indicate that the election was fraudulent (Curiel & Williams, 2020). These authors expanded their research published in the *Washington Post* affirming that ‘as specialists in election integrity, we find that the statistical evidence does not support the claim of fraud in Bolivia’s October election’ (Curiel & Williams, 2020). The highly politicized nature of the OAS claims was proven when *The Los Angeles Times* reporters Wilkinson and McDonnell (2020) showed that Carlos Trujillo, the US ambassador to the OAS, had steered the EOM to report widespread fraud and pushed the Trump administration to support the ouster of Morales.

Regardless of their veracity, the net result of the OAS’ actions were to contrive a tense and uncertain environment that led to the ouster of Morales. Many have since claimed the OAS was the ‘main political foundation of the coup’ (Weisbrot, 2020) because of its refusal to re-examine its data and instead insisting on a new election. On the 23rd of October 2019, three days after the election, the OAS-EOM’s

director Gerardo de Icaza stated that ‘due to the context and the evident problems in the electoral process, it would continue to be the best option to call for a second round’. The OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro during an extraordinary session of the OAS went even further, claiming that:

... there was a coup d’état in Bolivia. It happened on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, when an electoral fraud took place and as a result the ex-president Evo Morales won the election in the first round. (Infobae, 2019, para 1)

Almagro’s statement parroted the EOM’s problematic data but dismissed even a run-off election (as outlined by Bolivia’s constitution and electoral laws) instead calling for ‘another electoral process’ entirely (OAS, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c, p. 13). The OAS was more interested in pushing to repeat the election instead of accurately clarifying the result. Moreover, even though the lead researcher admitted to errors, the OAS did not and has not made a retraction. By the 10<sup>th</sup> November the OAS report concluded that the election ‘must be annulled and the electoral process must begin again’ under ‘a newly composed electoral body’ – something Morales accepted in full, calling for a new presidential election (Ramos, 2019).

This would not occur, however, because on the same day Morales was compelled by Bolivia’s armed forces (military and police, specifically commander of the Armed Forces, Williams Kaliman) and the fear of civilian violence, to resign and leave the country (Greenwald, 2020). Vice-president Álvaro García Linera, and the president and first vice-president of the Senate Adriana Salvatierra and Rubén Medinacelli also resigned. In this confused context the religious and conservative third Senate vice-president Janine Áñez proclaimed herself as the interim president on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November with the US, UK, Brazil and Colombia almost immediately recognizing Áñez as the legitimate president of Bolivia (see Office of the Press Secretary, 2019). On the 13<sup>th</sup> of November the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement ‘The United States applauds Bolivian Senator Jeanine Áñez for stepping up as Interim President of State to lead her nation through this democratic transition, under the constitution of Bolivia’. The constitution was unclear on whether this was the appropriate line of succession but regardless it did stipulate the acting president must call for elections within 90 days – the new presidential election would not take place until 18th of October 2020, almost one year later. A variety of academics and journalists have scrutinized these events and an overwhelming consensus exists in categorizing them as a coup d’état against Morales (see Farthing & Becker, 2021; Serrano, 2021).

The political forces the OAS unleashed against Bolivian democracy were those Che outlined – arguably the most effective of these was the use of local elites pliable to US interests, including Bolivia’s richest families and even the clergy who were concerned with their hierarchy being ‘uprooted’ (see Farthing, 2019). These local elites would align with US interests, as Che predicted. Bolivian business and ruling elites were led by figures like Luis Fernando Camacho Vaca, a politician and lawyer from one of the countries richest families, and who presided over the Santa Cruz Civic Committee denouncing the election ‘fraud’. In December of 2019 he admitted that when he and his father ‘were able to secure that both [the Police and the Armed Forces] were going to confine troops to barracks’ that they then ‘gave Morales 48 hours to resign’ (Mealla, 2022, para 13). Camacho was later arrested on terrorism charges on the 28th of December 2022. The elites were also led by Carlos Mesa, a former vice-president with a keen pro-privatization agenda, who had already been accused of corruption and fled the country after his highly questionable hydrocarbon tax during the so-called ‘Second Gas War’ in 2003. According to Wikileaks, Mesa maintained constant communication with Washington in their efforts to destabilize Morales’ government (Cohn, 2019). Mesa has since been listed as an expert in the Washington think-tank ‘Inter-American Dialogue’ funded by the US

Government ‘soft-power arm USAID, various oil giants, and a host of multi-national corporations active in Latin America’ (Blumenthal & Norton, 2019, para 10). In 2021, the Bolivian Attorney General’s Office presented to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights a report suggesting the coup was ‘organized, planned, and executed’ by Luis Fernando Camacho (opposition leader of MAS), by police, military, and the Catholic Church (Chávez Serrano et al., 2021, p. 12).

Áñez’s first actions as interim president were to restore religion to a central place in Bolivian politics, and, allow the army to support the police for public order without liability for *any* crime (Decree 4078) (Gutiérrez, 2020, paras 6, 7 & 8). Repression of indigenous and/or supporters of Morales soon followed. A report submitted by a group of international human rights organizations<sup>10</sup> to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions documented serious human rights violations including the massacres at Sacaba (Cochabamba, 15 November) and Senkata (El Alto-La Paz, 19 November) in which at least 21 Bolivian civilians died and hundreds were injured (CELS et al., 2020). Áñez was accused by some, even the presidential rival Carlos Mesa, of seeking to become president beyond the interim period (Ramos & O’Boyle, 2022; Europa Press International, 2020: para 6). The OAS remained silent on this issue. In the subsequent election Áñez initially ran for president but one month before voting she quit the race based on poor polling data (BBC, 2020). She was later arrested and sentenced in June 2022 to 10 years in prison by the Tribunal de Sentencia Penal Anticorrupción Primero de la ciudad de La Paz (First Anti-Corruption Criminal Sentencing Court of the city of La Paz) for participating in the coup and other crimes. The tribunal also sentenced former commanders of the Armed Forces and police – including Kaliman – for crimes ‘contrary to the constitution and a dereliction of duties’ (AFP, 2022, para 3). After Áñez’s arrest, the OAS issued a statement calling ‘for ‘credible and impartial trials’’ and stressed what it described as worsening ‘political interference and corruption in Bolivia’s judicial system’ (Aljazeera, 2021). On this point, Mexico would rebuke the OAS for interfering in the internal affairs of Bolivia and making ‘unilateral pronouncements’ on behalf of all member states (see Aljazeera, 2021).

Underlying the actions of the OAS in precipitating this crisis were fundamental interests regarding resource control – again, highlighted in Che’s critique at Punta del Este regarding the need for political controls to facilitate extraction. Roger Noriega, the permanent representative of the US to the OAS unequivocally expressed this ideological alignment within the organization:

Opportunities abound in the Americas – not merely to build a trade area embracing 800 million consumers, but to forge a community of nations committed to common values of free enterprise, democracy, and the rule of law. More prosperous and stable democracies make better partners in protecting our interests and confronting new challenges close to home. (Noriega, 2002)

As is well known, the OAS has long promoted the elimination of restrictions and the liberalization of trade (especially raw materials) in favour of US business and local LAC elites. This comportment is exemplified in the proliferation of US-led free trade agreements (six with twelve countries in the region); trade and investment agreements with Argentina, the Caribbean Community, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Paraguay; and the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation (ATEC) with Brazil. In the context of Bolivia, this interest in raw materials took a specific form. The US has historically remained largely uninterested in investing in Bolivia until a relatively recent shift in recognition of the strategically valuable new key ‘rare earth’ elements, especially lithium, and securing US access to these. For many, this resource informs the backdrop of the crisis as Bolivia holds the richest reserves of lithium in the world with an estimated of 39 million tonnes (Martin, 2022, para 3).

In the lead up to the coup, Lithium had become a priority of the US government because of its multiple industry applications – many central to security – had been classified by the United States Geological Survey as a ‘critical mineral’ for national security with a net import dependency exceeding 50% (Aponte-García, 2020, p. 55). Given this dependency *The National Blueprint for Lithium Batteries* (2021) remained surprisingly silent as to *how* the US would procure this resource from global supply chains in the Americas. China overwhelmingly dominates the supply-chain of these rare-earth minerals, with some claiming up to 95% come from or are processed in China – and the US had realized it had ‘dropped the baton’ on this strategically vital area (see Lu, 2023). The commander of the Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) of the US Department of Defense General Laura Richardson publicly described the resource richness of LAC as ‘off the charts’ referring specifically to how it holds 60% of the world’s lithium and the relevance of these holdings to ‘our [US] adversaries’ and ‘competitors’, especially China, as a central concern for US National Security (see Atlantic Council, 2023). It is a revealing aside that when Elon Musk was challenged about his support of coup he tweeted ‘we will coup whoever we want!’ The link between this precious resource, technological production, and geopolitical rivalry (Hailes, 2022), were a key impetus to the ramping up of US involvement in Bolivia.

It also shows how the OAS has served to address the changing security concerns of the US over-time. Che was highly critical of how the OAS was being used as a vehicle to exclude Cuba from its regional neighbours and increases its vulnerabilities to future attacks from the US. Early in the 1950s the containment of communism had been the central security concern of the OAS typified in its very definition of what constituted a ‘threat’ in the 10th Inter-American Conference in Caracas in 1954. When the democratically elected and socialist Arbenz government of Guatemala was overthrown by a US backed coup in the same year, with the CIA installing a ruling junta with Colonel Castillo Armas as the head of government, the OAS did not intervene on the side of democracy. Indeed, the Eisenhower administration pressured OAS members to support an anti-communist resolution – Resolution 93 – suggesting that Arbenz regime was a communist foothold (Streeter, 2006). Che witnessed this counter-revolutionary violence firsthand. As we have already seen, the anti-communist security concerns were ramped up prior to the AFP meeting in 1961 under which the OAS was able to remove Cuba in 1962, despite no provision in its Charter permitting it to do so. Soon after, the OAS supported the intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and approved the US military occupation between 1965 and 1966 – something which it apologised for in 2016.<sup>11</sup> This had followed the US armed intervention *Operation Power Pack* aimed to prevent the development of what President Johnson feared would be a second Cuban revolution – ‘I sure don’t want to wake up ... and find out Castro’s in charge’ he said (see Coleman, 2015). Herz captures this conjunction between the OAS and US security interests directly, arguing that ‘the 1960s can be characterized as the period when the OAS was most clearly used as an instrument of US foreign policy ...’ (Herz, 2008, p. 12).

We would concur with Herz and suggest this conjunction continues today. Crucial to the success of the Bolivian coup were the leaders of the armed forces and police who, aside from being led by Bolivian elites described above, had a crucial resource in their training. Central were the highest-ranking military and police officers in the country at the time, General Kaliman (who ‘suggested’ Morales to resign in order to ‘pacify’ the country) (Hernández Bermúdez, 2021) and the Police Chief Vladimir Yuri Calderón Mariscal who ‘broke the stalemate by leading large parts of the police force to revolt on November 9th’ just prior to Morales’ resignation (Sprague, 2019). Both General Romero and Chief Mariscal had received military training in the US *School of the Americas* (SOA). This organization has provided US training to Latin American members of military forces since the

start of the Cold War and has been viewed as a key institution to secure political control of the continent and the reorganization of the regional economy. The SOA pledge includes the explicit aim of fostering 'knowledge and understanding of US customs and traditions' across the region (Wadi, 2015, para 8). As explained by Wadi (2015), established in 1946 in Panama, the SOA was responsible for training over 64,000 South American soldiers 'many of whom later became notorious torturers and murderers in death squads' and according to former Panamanian President Jorge Illueca, the SOA was the 'biggest base for destabilization in Latin America' (Wadi, 2015, paras. 6, 7 & 8)..<sup>12</sup> This school has been linked to military personnel involved in multiple coups d'état and military governments that Latin America endured with the SOA becoming a symbol of interventionism in the region. As many as eleven LAC head of states that seized power overthrowing civilian governments attended the SOA (Livingstone, 2010). The SOA has been labelled as 'School for Dictators' (Grimmett & Sullivan, 2001, para 16) and the 'School of Assassins' (Rine, 2020, para 4) due to their alumni seizing power by violent means.<sup>13</sup> Among them was the Bolivian dictator General Hugo Banzer Suarez who had attended the SOA in 1956 and seized power through a violent coup in 1971, holding power until 1978. Between 1949–2004 the SOA trained 4211 Bolivian military personnel becoming the 5<sup>th</sup> LAC country with the highest number of trained officers (Navarro, 2019).<sup>14</sup>

With these examples it is easy to appreciate why Fidel Castro called the OAS a 'Yankee Ministry of Colonies, a military alliance, and an apparatus of repression against the liberation movements of the Latin American peoples' (Castro, 1969) – something Che would echo in his speech before the 19th session of the United Nations General Assembly in December of 1964, calling the OAS 'the US Ministry of Colonies' (Guevara, 1964/1966, Vol. 1: 7-14). In the epilogue to *Guerrilla Warfare* (1969b), Che outlined the many ways the US would justify the use of force across the continent 'by constructing a means of aggression' and on top of the list was the OAS and its 'dangerous precedent of intervention' that had been developed in what he called the 'Trujillo pretext'. According to Che, the US may intervene through some 'reputable inter-American organ' (like the OAS) or even directly if such an organ does not serve its purpose. The US can also intervene, Che claimed on the basis of historical examples, by: maintaining support of puppet regimes that can use force against undesirable movements; or to restrict arms supplies to a state thus compelling them to seek arms from other states, including communist governments, thus triggering a right of intervention; or to even seize upon an 'initial pretext' with exiles, volunteers, and mercenaries to attack from within (see Guevara, 1969b: esp. Epilogue, 135-137). The case of the 2019 coup in Bolivia is another link in this long chain of armed interventions evincing a number of these tactics especially of using reputable international organs, the use of pretexts, and internal forces for such ends.

## Conclusion

This article has focused on Che's thought on the geopolitical forces that have restricted LAC regionalism as reflected in his speeches at Punta del Este in 1961. Here, Che outlined how and why within its tightly controlled sphere of influence, US-led neo-imperialism would continue to subvert any emancipatory regional integration via foreign capital, monopolies, control of regional organizations, military intervention, and elite capture. These forces would not only contradict and eventually override any promises contained in the AFP and would continue until such time as 'true proletarian internationalism' and the 'invincibility of the guerrillas' took root in the region's 'dispossessed masses' (Guevara, April 1967 in Deutschman, 2003, pp. 363–365). By the end of 1962, the US would largely renege on Kennedy's 'generous purpose' made at Punta del Este and successive

administrations would sacrifice the vision of a prosperous, free, and socially just hemisphere for the anti-Communist ‘security’ that right-wing dictators could provide them. As surmised by Rabe, its Cold War fears led the US to ‘mutilate the grand goals that were inherent in the AFP’ (Rabe, 2006). As a case study, we then found that the Bolivian coup d’état of November 2019 reflected numerous aspects of Che’s critique of US hegemony made at Punta del Este, in particular his condemnation of the role played by the OAS and the use of pliant local elites in league with US interests.

But there is one crucial matter seemingly inconsistent with Che’s predictions: the fact that *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) was returned to power, albeit with Luis Arce rather than Morales leading the government. Indeed, this is one of the fascinating aspects of this entire episode regarding how MAS was able to reclaim legitimate power. This taps into Che’s irrefusable belief in the possibility for leftist movement to mediate shifts in political power and echoes many of Che’s claims around the necessity of unity and clarity of purpose in staving off imperial control. This may be indicative of a general weakening of the OAS as a vehicle for US interests, or even a weakening in US capacity for maintaining its interventions in the region. But on balance it is more than likely it was the negligent work of the OAS, especially the EOM’s problematic data, that made any attempt to delegitimize MAS simply untenable once this information was widely exposed. It is too early to speculate on its broader significance, however. Perhaps, most of all, it shows that Che’s emphasis on resistance to imperialism is actually possible when social forces in states are united and push back against attempted coups.

By way of conclusion we would like to make one final point how Che’s explanation regarding the ongoing problems of regional integration in the Americas provides a sober counter to both the optimistic liberal theories of regionalism that promises to foster liberalization and settle market disputes (Börzel, 2016), and, the constructivist position that views regionalism as the expression of a common sense of identity that shape collective norms, behaviours, and action within a geographical region (i.e. Acharya, 2004). Instead, Che’s answer reveals regionalism and its distortion as a tool of neo-imperialist control – and argument supported in many contemporary studies on LAC regionalism. These consistencies in findings with the wider literature are obvious but important to draw-out nonetheless. For example, Toklatián’s (2019) has argued that Latin America remains a ‘drifting region’ in the global arena, but firmly anchored to the regional hegemony of its Northern neighbour. Bianculli (2016) has shown how American regionalism is bifurcated between those that seek to strengthen the autonomy of the region by reducing the influence of the US, and, those that seek a regionalism under the dominance of the US – the continued ascendancy of US regional hegemony is clear in either camp. Another argument consistent with Che’s explanation is Neves and Honório (2019) who posit what they call the ‘autonomy void’ is present in the current forms of regionalism in Latin America and the re-activation of the American-oriented institutions, such as the OAS, that put ‘the region’s societies in a position of dependency to non-national projects to regional outcomes’.

Che, somewhat incredulously, believed that the masses across the Americas were, at the time of 1962, conscious of the imperialist contradictions in the region and would not fall to these again – in his words, ‘the consciousness of the masses have matured too far for them to fall into such a naïve trap’ (Guevara Oct-Nov 1962, in Deutschmann 2003, p. 85). We can see that, however earnest, he was sadly wrong on this point. Instead, it would fall to The Second Declarations of Havana and, later, the stance of the Tricontinental to take up the core elements of Che’s position made explicit at Punta del Este: the rejection of US interventionism in the region, the acceptance of international solidarity and aid (especially from the USSR and China), the necessity of social revolution in all states across the continent, and perhaps most importantly, the unity of a socialist LAC as the *only* route to independence (see López & Yaffe, 2017, p. 10).

## Notes

1. The Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) region is comprised 33 countries. The definition includes countries that are part of South America, Central America, and the Caribbean.
2. Whilst fundamental, this third part is beyond the scope of this article to explore. We hope to take it up in future research.
3. It should be noted also that just a few years earlier, sixteen American states had joined the US in signing in Rio de Janeiro the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR or Rio Treaty) that was considered a collective security agreement against foreign (specifically communist) intervention in the region.
4. The 'latrinocracy' (as it is now pejoratively derided) refers to the emphasis on sanitation as the solution to serious poverty issues at the neglect of real development (see Subcomandante Marcos, in Besancenot & Löwy, 2017, p. 119).
5. Che does not use the term elite capture but his comments on how the national bourgeois class will side with Northern capital and follow the dictates of US imperialism is a regional expression of this process in South America. That is, national bourgeois elements have been able to control or steer public resources for their benefit, especially through asset ownership and political power, in accordance with the overriding interests of the US through which they are able to maintain such controls. This may broaden the usual definition of 'elite capture' but it is nevertheless consistent with its form in neo-imperialism. This link between elite capture and wider neo-imperial interests has been noted especially since Mamdani (1976).
6. These include promotion of prosperity (article 13), development (articles 17, 18, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51), and equality (articles 34 and 45) for all (also see Scheman, 1981, p. 85).
7. Morales was in office from 2006 to 2019.
8. This was despite the fact that in 2017 the Bolivian Constitutional Court had unanimously decided all elected officials could run for re-election based on its interpretation of the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR, an organization of the OAS), specifically, Article 23(2) (Right to Participate in Government).
9. See Bolivian Constitution, Article 166(II) and Chapter III, Section I, Article 52 (II [b]) of the Bolivian Electoral System (Law No. 26 of 2010).
10. The report was released by the Andean Information Network (AIN), Bolivia; the Association for Human Rights, Bolivia; the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS), Argentina; The Europe-Third World Center (CETIM), Switzerland; and the University Network for Human Rights (UNHR), USA.
11. Both of these were in contravention of The OAS Charter's express condemnation of aggression and upholding of the principle of non-intervention (directly or indirectly, 'against its political, economic and cultural elements', Article 15).
12. The 'school' would be expelled from Panama in 1984 and relocated to Fort Benning, Georgia, and renamed WHINSEC.
13. In countries such as Panama (Generals Miguel Antonio Noriega in 1983 and Omar Torrijos in 1968), Ecuador (Major General Guillermo Rodriguez in 1972) Peru (Major General Juan Velasco Alvarado in 1968), and six others in Argentina, Bolivia and Honduras.
14. The 'school' would be expelled from Panama in 1984 and relocated to Fort Benning, Georgia, and renamed WHINSEC. In its mission statement, WHINSEC claims to have been founded upon the Charter of the OAS (Wadi, 2015, paras. 6, 7 & 8) but since 2016 issues of transparency and accountability have plagued the organization with the 9th U.S. Circuit of Appeals ruling that the names of students did not have to be disclosed (Thanawala, 2016).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

*Shannon Brincat* is a Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations and the Program Director of the Bachelor of International Studies at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia. He holds a PhD in International Relations and a Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Arts (both with Honours). His range of



specializations include international political theory, climate change adaptation, and security. He has designed participatory research platforms and data collection in India, Mozambique, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. He has published 8 books and over 40 papers in international journals and books. For his publications see: shannonbrincat.com.

**Juan Z. N. Cáceres:** is a PhD candidate in the School of Law and Society at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia. He is working on a thesis titled *Latin American Regionalism. Progress or regression?: A critical analysis of the role of Colombia and Ecuador within the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR)*. He holds a Master of International Studies, a Master of Teaching, Postgraduate degrees in Australian Migration Law and Constitutional Law and a Bachelor of Laws.

## ORCID

Shannon Brincat  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1426-5793>

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