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US “Outposts” in Latin America: Military-Technical Cooperation, Military Bases and Joint Exercises

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Abstract. The authors analyze the forms of interaction between the United States and Latin America in the military sphere. The relevance of studying this issue is due to the aggravation of relations between the collective West and Russia, as well as between the United States and China, within the framework of which Latin America acts as a zone of competition between the world powers. In this regard, the analysis of Latin American vector of US policy in the military aspect from the point of view of Russia’s strategic interests is particularly important. The lack of domestic scientific research on this problem greatly adds to its relevance. As for the novelty, based on the review of the world market of arms and military equipment (AME), this article determines the dynamics and the share of the American producer in the total volume of arms trade. In the context of military-technical cooperation (MTC), the authors also consider the peculiarities of the American military power projection on Latin America, which is a zone of exclusive interests of the United States. Among the key formats of interaction and projection of influence, the authors include the following: arms and military-technical supplies to the armies and security services of the states of the region; training of military personnel in Latin American countries; financing of armies and military units; cooperation programs to optimize the managerial and organizational functions of the Latin American armed forces, establishment and maintenance of various types of military bases, conducting joint military exercises. Using new factual material, we examine each of the listed forms and show the systematic and geostrategic nature of the US influence on the Latin American region in the military aspect. As for military trade, the authors identify the main partners of the United States in South America.

Key words: USA, Latin America, military-technical cooperation, MTC, interaction, military bases, joint exercises

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«Форпосты» США в Латинской Америке: военно-техническое сотрудничество, военные базы и совместные учения

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Аннотация. Авторы анализируют формы взаимодействия между США и Латинской Америкой в военной сфере. Актуальность изучения данной проблематики обусловлена тем, что в условиях обострения конфликта между коллективным Западом и Россией, а также стабильно напряженных отношений между США и Китаем Латинская Америка волей-неволей выступает зоной конкуренции мировых держав. В связи с этим анализ латиноамериканского вектора США в военном аспекте с точки зрения стратегических интересов России особо важен. Дефицит отечественных научных исследований по данной проблеме также добавляет ей актуальности. Новизна исследования обусловлена тем, что на основе обзора мирового рынка вооружений и военной техники (ВиВТ) определена динамика и доля американского производителя в общем объеме торговли вооружениями. В контексте военно-технического сотрудничества (ВТС) рассмотрены особенности проекции американской военной мощи на Латинскую Америку, являющейся зоной исключительных интересов США. К числу ключевых форматов взаимодействия и проекции влияния авторы относят следующие: поставки вооружений и военно-техническое снабжение армий и служб безопасности государств региона, подготовка военных кадров в странах Латинской Америки, финансирование армий и военных подразделений, программы сотрудничества по оптимизации управленческих и организационных функций латиноамериканских вооруженных сил, обустройство и поддержание функционирования различного типа военных баз, проведение совместных военных учений. На новом фактологическом материале рассмотрена каждая из перечисленных форм и показан систематический и геостратегический характер влияния США на латиноамериканский регион в военном аспекте. В военно-торговом отношении определены основные партнеры США в Южной Америке.

Ключевые слова: США, Латинская Америка, военно-техническое сотрудничество, ВТС, взаимодействие, военные базы, совместные учения

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Introduction

The current situation in world politics is characterized by a high degree of geopolitical tension, one of the main symptoms of which

were the security talks between Russia and the United States held in 2021—2022. The leitmotif of the talks was the problem of the projection of the US and NATO military power near Russia's

borders. It should be emphasized that this direction of power projection is only one particular aspect of the US global military policy. Another important direction of the same policy has been and remains Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), as a nearby and strategically important region for Washington, which since 2017 has been qualified by the U.S. as a zone of competition with Russia and China (Yevseenko, 2022, p. 164), although this has been discussed in the academic literature even earlier (Evan Ellis, 2013).

The importance of this area is evidenced by the fact that after Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine, the issue of Latin America was actively raised. Thus, in March 2022, the US State Department spokesman Kerry Hennen said that Russia was threatening to “export the Ukrainian crisis” to America by expanding its military cooperation with Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.¹ Therefore, the current state of Russian-American relations updates the study of the problem of the US military presence in the LAC in the context of posing more general problems related to the positioning of a superpower in the global arms market.

In the interpretation of the aforementioned range of problems in Western political science, two main scientific approaches can be distinguished — American and Latin American, which in many respects are of the opposite nature. In the first, the main emphasis is naturally placed on the progressive direction of the military-technical cooperation (MTC) between the United States and the LAC,² and the Pentagon factor in the modernization and

optimization of the technical support of Latin American armies (Evan Ellis, 2019). A number of works are characterized by a positive assessment of the American regional defense strategy as an example of successful inter-American cooperation through supranational organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) (Medeiros, 2014). In the context of the recent penetration of extra-regional powers in the Latin American region, publications analyzing the defense and security competition for the region have also begun to appear (Gilroy, 2020).

The modern Latin American scientific tradition is dominated by a vision linked to a critical understanding of the phenomenon of the US military influence in the region. Many authors draw attention to the problem of asymmetry between the two Americas, especially in the military aspect (Gandásogui, 2015). Perhaps the most refined critique of American military influence in the region was formulated by the Brazilian political scientist and historian Enrique Serra Padros, who coined the term “pentagonization” of Latin America (Padrós, 2007). The Mexican researcher Carlos Barrachin, in his developments, studied the evolution of the US military influence in the region at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries (Lisón, 2006). A comprehensive view of the complex system of relations between the U.S. and LAC, including the military aspect, is proposed in the work of the American researcher J. Tulchin (2018). Quintessential in its value is the monograph by Sebastian Elias and Bitar Giraldo, who studied the phenomenon of the US militaristic influence in the region using the example of military bases (Giraldo & Elias, 2017).

In domestic political science, foreign policy aspects have been given priority in the analysis of the U.S. — LAC relations, while MTC aspects have mostly often faded into the background. In the Russian-language academic literature, there is a lack of research on Washington’s military interaction with Latin American states. However, there is still some research available. Among the

¹ The US Warned that Russia Threatens to Export to Latin America the Conflict in Ukraine Using Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba // Infobae. March 31, 2022. URL: <https://www.infobae.com/en/2022/03/31/the-us-warned-that-russia-threatens-to-export-to-latin-america-the-conflict-in-ukraine-using-venezuela-nicaragua-and-cuba/> (accessed: 04.04.2022).

² Baer J. U.S. Military Presence in Latin America Increasing // The Council on Hemispheric Affairs. July 1, 2015. URL: <https://www.coha.org/u-s-military-presence-in-latin-america-increasing/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

most notable studies by Russian authors is the article by A.A. Manukhin (2019) on the influence of the American factor on the state of the armed forces in the countries of the region. Issues of military cooperation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic were addressed by A.N. Pyatakov (2021). S.S. Goreslavsky (2020a; 2020b) and T.A. Alekseeva (Alekseeva & Goreslavsky, 2018; 2020) write about the latest trends in the global arms and military equipment (AME) market. Recent studies on Washington's interaction with the region in the areas of MTC and security include the works of O.O. Krivolapov and N.V. Stepanova (Krivolapov & Stepanova, 2020; 2021).

This allows us to say that the analysis of the US foreign policy towards Latin American countries through the prism of the current state and development of MTC is a relatively new and unexplored phenomenon in Russian literature, which opens considerable space for applied research. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that this article does not claim any place in military science, since its goals and objectives (which will be defined below) are of a purely applied political science nature. Therefore, the authors reserve the right not to go beyond the bounds of a limited range of problems sufficient to achieve the set goal (but perhaps *not* sufficient to solve the problems military science is facing).

The purpose of this article is to analyze the dynamics and current state of MTC between the United States and Latin America and the Caribbean as one of the factors of Washington's geopolitical influence in the region. Achieving this goal will require determining the position of the United States in the world arms market as an objective fundamental basis for the deployment of military power in the Latin American direction, which is the subject of the first part. At this stage, the critical difference in the weight categories of the positions of the United States and Latin American countries on the scale of the global AME market will be shown. Parts 2 and 3 will examine the strategy of a direct US military presence, using the example of military bases located in the region and joint exercises. It is

expected that this will reveal the complex effect of the US military presence, which, together with programs of a near-military nature (such as military training programs, etc.), is an important factor in Washington's foreign policy in the LAC.

The article is based on a comparative analysis that has made it possible to reveal the interdependence between the US foreign policy priorities and the realities of MTC on the scale of the Western Hemisphere. There is a kind of correlation between these two phenomena, since the position of the American producer of AME, as further research will show, is extremely strong. The United States is the world record holder in the export of AME, and therefore the situation observed in the Latin American arms market largely depends on it. At the same time, the opposite effect is also taking place: the realities of MTC between the states of the region to a large extent determine Washington's policy in its relations with them. The adoption of the *Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)* of 2017, which made it possible to restrict the ability of other countries to acquire Russian weapons, indicates that the United States is concerned about competition in the AME market. Under the CAATSA law, the U.S. can impose sanctions on the purchase or resale of Russian weapons.³ Of course, after February 2022, the U.S. began to support even tougher sanctions.

In solving research problems, a research strategy is implemented that combines political science analytical methods with the empirical-statistical approach of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). SIPRI has its weaknesses and limitations related to some inaccuracy and approximation of the data obtained. The institute is the largest center dealing with arms control issues. According to SIPRI itself, its calculations are approximate,

³ H.R.3364 — Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act // Library of US Congress. August 2, 2017. URL: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3364/text> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

since it is impossible to accurately calculate the trends in the global AME market, due to the lack of access to closed databases. Some countries publish only part of their data, while others keep all information secret. At the same time, only the gross value of contracts for the purchase and sale of arms and equipment sold on the world market in a given period is available, not including the defense budgets of states and other expenses related to armaments. The use of this approach in a scientific article might lead the reader to question its reliability, but in the absence of more accurate and authoritative sources, the SIPRI calculations were used.

The hypothetical-deductive method made it possible to substantiate the central assumption of the work, namely that military cooperation between the United States and the countries of the LAC is one of the forms of realization of Washington's foreign policy influence. The perfection and mass production of American weapons, the vast (and successful) experience of participation in military operations, the colossal financial support from the state, and everything else related to the US military presence in Latin America are, in essence, the results of the general socio-economic superiority of the superpower over its neighbors south of the Rio Grande River. Therefore, the military presence of the American superpower itself demonstrates the enormous military and political influence of Washington here.

The USA in the Global and Latin American Arms Markets

The United States is the world's largest military power, spending 740 billion USD on military and defense in 2022.⁴ It also has an advanced military-industrial complex (MIC) that allows it to remain among the world's leading suppliers of AME. In addition to the obvious

⁴ Defense Budget Overview. Fiscal Year 2023. Budget Request // U.S. Department of Defense. March 2022. URL: https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2023/FY2023_Budget_Request.pdf (accessed: 19.03.2023).

commercial benefits of exports (in 2021, the total US AME exports amounted to 10.9 billion USD, rising to 14.5 billion USD in 2022),⁵ the impressive MIC serves as a serious strategic resource that helps implement foreign policy tasks.

Washington has a clear understanding of the great geopolitical potential of MTC with the countries of the world, so the development of a strategy for action in this area is carried out at a very professional level. For effective coordination of the work of the diplomatic and military departments, there is a special Bureau of Military-Political Affairs at the U.S. State Department.⁶ The decisive criterion for the supply of American AME to a particular country is the national security of the United States, which was reflected in the National Security Presidential Memorandum Regarding U.S. of 2018.⁷ In the most recent National Security Strategy, the main focus has shifted to the global geopolitical rivalry between the US, China, and Russia.⁸ Common sense suggests that in the context of a full-scale, open conflict with Russia, the United States is likely to be even more concerned about MTC with world regions, including Latin America.

By arming allies around the world, Washington can influence the geopolitical balance of power at the regional level, which

⁵ SIPRI Dataset. URL: https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_values.php (accessed: 19.03.2022).

⁶ Directorate of Defense Trade Controls // U.S. Department of State. URL: <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-arms-control-and-international-security-affairs/bureau-of-political-military-affairs/directorate-of-defense-trade-controls-pm-ddtc/> (accessed: 20.03.2022).

⁷ Presidential Memorandum on United States Government-Supported Research and Development National Security Policy // The White House. January 14, 2021. URL: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-memorandum-united-states-government-supported-research-development-national-security-policy/> (accessed: 20.03.2022).

⁸ National Security Strategy // The White House. October 2022. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/8-November-Combined-PDF-for-Upload.pdf> (accessed: 20.12.2022).

seems to be a top priority, including in the zone of exclusive interests of the superpower — in Latin America. Despite the fact that, with the exception of episodic outbreaks of tension, there have been virtually no interstate armed conflicts in Latin America's recent history, the presence of a sufficiently strong army is of no small importance to many Latin American states for a number of reasons.

According to SIPRI, 76% of global AME exports are provided collectively by the United States (36%), Russia (20%), France (8.2%), Germany (5.5%), and China (5.2%). In the period from 2010—2014 to 2015—2019, the US exports grew by 23%, significantly increasing the lead over the nearest competitors, while the growth of the global arms market was about 5.5%, reaching the highest figures since the end of the Cold War (about 97 billion USD)⁹ in the indicated period. Only French (by 72%) and German (by 17%) manufacturers showed a significant relative growth in the same period, but their shares in the total volume are relatively small.¹⁰ On the other hand, Russian arms deliveries to the global market have significantly decreased (by 18%) (Dynkin, Arbatov & Baranovsky, 2021, p. 319). Obviously, this situation is beneficial to the United States, and it will try to maintain and consolidate its success.¹¹

⁹ The average figure of 97 billion USD seems to the authors of this article to be significantly lower, than the actual volumes.

¹⁰ At the same time, the total import of AME of all 28 EU member states for 2015—2019 accounted for 26% of global exports.

¹¹ According to the “Military Balance 2022” report, prepared by experts of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), in real terms (taking into account the strong inflation caused by pandemic restrictions in 2020—2021), military spending in all countries of the world has slightly decreased. For example, the U.S. military budget in 2021 was reduced by 6% (see: Military Balance 2022. Further Assessments // IISS. February 15, 2022. URL: <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2022/02/military-balance-2022-further-assessments/> (accessed: 20.03.2022)). However, since the negative effect of the pandemic hit the entire global economy, and not just the United States, on average global terms, the US producers of AME have retained their original positions in the global market.

The United States' dominance in the global arms market gives it a huge influence over its conjuncture. In recent years, the architecture of global flows of AME has noticeably transformed, in which the actions of the United States have played an important role. In 2015—2019, total arms imports to the European Union (EU) and the Middle East have increased significantly. Supplies to Asia and Oceania and the Western Hemisphere, on the other hand, decreased significantly (Table 1). At the same time, arms deliveries from the United States to European and Middle Eastern countries separately increased by 45 and 79%, respectively, while those to the American and Asian markets in each case decreased by 20%. These trends reveal a stable correlation between the world's AME markets and American exports. The only exception is the African continent, where, despite a modest increase in the US shipments, there was also a slight decline in total volume. A difficult question is what comes first in this case — global fluctuations in demand by region or a conscious and controlled increase in supply to certain regions on the part of the supplier?

It seems that the former is more common, although there may be exceptions. In our case, the important thing is that, given the political will, the military *superpotencia*¹² represented by the United States can in practice influence the situation on the market, and it actually does. But firstly, countries that do not really need weapons cannot provide serious demand, and secondly, if a direct competitor appears in the region, then it will be extremely difficult for the United States to prevent it from entering the local market and filling the niches available here with weapons.

In the light of the above, the Latin American AME market has undergone very significant developments, with a decline of more than 40%, mainly due to economic difficulties caused by a number of crises that led to a decrease in the solvency of governments. This mainly affected South America, where the positions of the US

¹² Superpotencia (Spanish) — superpower.

manufacturers were initially not as strong.¹³ For the region’s top four importers, the U.S. has not been a major supplier in recent years. In 2017—2021, the “northern neighbor” became fifth for Brazil (after Great Britain, Sweden, France and Italy), third for Chile (after Australia and Germany), and fifth for Peru (after South Korea, Spain, Italy and New Zealand). For Venezuela, the United States was not even in the top five partners (the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, etc.), and only for Colombia remained the first.¹⁴ But the thing is that the countries of the South American region are richer than those of the Central America and the Caribbean, and, consequently, they buy much more weapons. The exception is Mexico, but it is so close to the United States, that it can be considered reliably “protected” from a large-scale penetration by an extra-regional arms supplier.

Table 1

Geographical Structure of the Global AME Market by Region, 2016—2020, %*

| Region | Growth in AME deliveries | Share of the region in the global market | Growth of imports from the USA | Share among importers of AME from the USA |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---|
| Asia and Oceania | −8.3 | 42 | −20 | 32 |
| Middle East | +25 | 25 | +79 | 47 |
| EU | +12 | 12 | +45 | 15 |
| Africa | −13 | 7.3 | +10 | 2.7 |
| Western hemisphere | −43 | 5.4 | −20 | 2.6 |

Note. * — The dynamics of growth of deliveries of AME to certain regions of the world is traditionally considered in the “three-year” and “five-year plans.” Indicators for 2016—2020 are calculated in comparison with the previous five-year period 2011—2015. Therefore, in order to identify long-term and even medium-term trends in the arms market, relatively recent information is quite

¹³ The total American market, excluding the US, accounted for less than 2.6% of the US AME exports. Of that, 68% went to Canada and Mexico.

¹⁴ Data compiled using the SIPRI interactive scoring system. See: Importer/Exporter TIV Tables // SIPRI. URL: <https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

sufficient. But to complete the picture, here are the data for the period 2017—2021: Asia and Oceania (−4.7%), Middle East (+2.8%), EU (+19%), Africa (−34%), Western Hemisphere (−36%). See: SIPRI Yearbook 2022: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security // SIPRI. 2022. P. 13. URL: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/yb22_summary_en_v2_0.pdf (accessed: 20.03.2022). Obviously, the trends indicated in the table persisted several years later.

Source: compiled by the authors according to the data of: (Dynkin, Arbatov & Baranovsky, 2021).

Negative trends in the South American arms market primarily affect the interests of non-regional manufacturers, whose positions here are weaker. For example, in the period 2010—2014 Venezuela, whose main suppliers were Russia, China, Spain and the Netherlands, bought hundreds of millions of dollars of AME annually and was the largest recipient of weapons in the region. MTC ties through began to build up from the very first years of Hugo Chavez’s rule: for the period from 2002 to 2011 deliveries of Russian arms to the South American country increased by 555% (Rouvinski & Jeifets, 2022, pp. 154—155). However, in 2015—2019, in the context of the financial and economic crisis, the total volume of purchases fell sharply (by 88%).¹⁵ After that, the import of Russian weapons into the country decreased by 40%, and in the period 2017—2019 fell sharply. As a result, the Russian Federation gave way to China as the main supplier of AME on the Venezuelan market (58%) (Dynkin, Arbatov & Baranovsky, 2021, p. 349). In general, a similar trend was observed for LAC during this period: the total volume of imports of AME for the five years 2015—2019 dropped by 59%, accompanied by a slowdown in the average growth rate of South American GDP.¹⁶

¹⁵ Venezuela — Arms Imports // Index Mundi. URL: <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/venezuela/arms-imports> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

¹⁶ Tasa de crecimiento del producto interno bruto (PIB) total anual a precios constantes // CEPAL. URL: https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/dashboard.html?iindicator_id=2207&area_id=131&lang=es (accessed: 23.03.2022).

Screening out non-regional producers in this way plays into the hands of the United States, as it opens up additional opportunities for them. Recent macroeconomic data indicates likely positive changes in the economies of Latin American countries in the nearest future. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), South America's GDP, which fell sharply in 2020, began to recover as early as 2021, and is expected to rise significantly by the end of 2022.¹⁷ This trend may create the conditions for a recovery in demand for arms and, consequently, a revival of the regional AME market. The question is, which supplier will receive the main contracts for the supply of AME if demand in the region increases again?

Quite different trends can be seen in the closest approaches to the US borders — in Mexico, the countries of Central America and the Caribbean, where the superpower is the largest supplier of weapons. For 2015—2019 they have significantly increased the volume of their purchases (by 23%). The growth of military spending in the subregion for 2010—2019 increased by 49%, which is explained by the need to build up military-technical means to combat criminal violence. This is particularly true in Mexico,¹⁸ where the criminogenic situation is high. It accounted for about 70% of all weapons imported by the United States to the Mesoamerican region in 2015—2019 (Dynkin, Arbatov & Baranovsky, 2021, p. 349).

In 2007, as part of a security cooperation agreement, a major joint program, the Mérida Initiative was adopted, under which the United States provided Mexico with more than 2.8 billion USD over ten years to purchase weapons,

including 590.5 million USD worth of aircraft and helicopters.¹⁹ Recently, the country has reaffirmed its plans to increase military spending, which ex-president E. Peña Nieto spoke about back in 2016.²⁰

In 2019, following clashes between the police and the country's largest organized crime group, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, President A.M. López Obrador established the National Guard,²¹ whose operational and military needs also require additional weapons. The trend continued later: in 2021, there were eight armed conflicts in LAC, each of which claimed the lives of more than a thousand people.²² Of course, these are internal conflicts, since international clashes have not been observed in the region for a long time.

This also explains the fact that most of the weapons supplied by the United States to the LAC belong to the category of light and small arms. Military equipment imported to the region is mainly armored personnel carriers, light attack aircraft or trainer aircraft, transport planes and helicopters, less often combat helicopters, self-propelled artillery mounts, anti-submarine torpedoes, combat boats, radars, fighter jet engines. Among the serious weapons, one can mention only 23 RIM-116A RAM shipborne anti-aircraft missile systems and 8 RIM-162 ESSM modifications, as well as 1 medium-range ship-to-air missile Mk-56 VLS delivered to

¹⁹ Seelke C. R., Finklea K. U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond // Congressional Research Service. June 29, 2017. P. 9—11. URL: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R41349.pdf> (accessed: 20.03.2022).

²⁰ Aumenta sin precedentes gasto militar en México // TeleMundo. 05.01.2016. URL: <https://www.telemundo47.com/noticias/local/aumenta-gasto-militar-en-mexico-sin-precedentes/101725/> (accessed: 20.03.2022).

²¹ Ley de la guardia nacional // Cámara de diputados del h. congreso de la Unión. 27.05.2019. URL: <https://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LGN.pdf> (accessed: 20.03.2022).

²² SIPRI Yearbook 2022: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security // SIPRI. 2022. P. 4. URL: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/yb22_summary_en_v2_0.pdf (accessed: 20.03.2022).

¹⁷ Estudio Económico de América Latina y el Caribe Dinámica laboral y políticas de empleo para una recuperación sostenible e inclusiva más allá de la crisis del COVID-19 // CEPAL. 2021. P. 109. URL: <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/47192-estudio-economico-america-latina-caribe-2021-dinamica-laboral-politicas-empleo> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

¹⁸ In SIPRI reports, the Mexican and Central American AME markets are treated as a single entity.

Mexico in 2020, equipped with a semi-active radar homing head.²³ In general, it is obvious, that the set of supplied AME is more suitable for the tasks of countering internal threats to the state than for protection against an external enemy.

At the same time, a new phase in the fight against organized crime began in the countries of the “Northern Triangle” (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador). Under the “Biden Plan to Build Security and Prosperity in Partnership with the People of Central America,” they are expected to receive a massive 4 billion USD in aid, which will be used, among other things, to further modernize and rearm law enforcement agencies.²⁴ Judging by the extremely optimistic reaction of the countries of the subregion, the Biden project could repeat the fate of the Merida Plan and increase their dependence on the supply of goods, including weapons, from the United States.

For Washington, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean are a particularly sensitive area where the US military presence is a matter of national security. According to the American researcher T. Bruneau, if during the Cold War the United States was fighting communism here, today it is trying to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe (Bruneau, 2016). According to the 2021 Interim National Security Manual, “The national interests of the United States are inextricably linked to the fate of our immediate neighbors.”²⁵ Obviously, this determines its interest in maintaining its position here as the main trading partner and the main supplier of

arms. The need of the LAC countries in the supply of AME from the United States is also due to the underdevelopment of the regional MIC. Unlike their European and Asian counterparts, they have very limited capabilities for the independent production of most types of weapons. In 2015—2019, not a single LAC country was included among the top ten importers or exporters of AME.

Brazil remains the main supplier from the region (24th in the world with a share of 0.2% of world supply) (Dynkin, Arbatov & Baranovsky, 2021, p. 325). From 2018 to 2020, its exports increased by 40 million USD and amounted to 281 million USD. Brazil is trying to play a more significant role in the world market by supplying combat and training aircraft, helicopters, armored vehicles and patrol boats (Yakovlev, 2013), but has not yet achieved any significant results. The rest of the region lags far behind: Colombia’s exports amount to about 14 million USD; Ecuador’s — 2 million USD.²⁶

The main importer in LAC is also Brazil (37th in the world), which from 2018 to 2020 purchased 594 million USD worth of AME. It is followed by Chile — 367 million USD; Mexico — 276 million USD; Peru — 113 million USD; Colombia — 107 million USD; and Venezuela — 51 million USD.²⁷ This allows the region, which has recently demonstrated periodic economic growth and improved solvency, to remain a profitable market in the long term. Given the willingness of the United States to sacrifice pragmatism in favor of geopolitics and the political volatility of the LAC itself, North American manufacturers maintain a competitive advantage here even during periods of economic downturn in the region.

The US arms trade in the LAC also has its “dark” side, causing social outrage. For example, the unhindered sale of firearms in the United

²³ Trade Registers // SIPRI. URL: https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php (accessed: 20.03.2022).

²⁴ The Biden Plan to Build Security and Prosperity in Partnership with the People of Central America // Joe Biden for President. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20191231132015/https://joebiden.com/centralamerica/> (accessed: 20.03.2022).

²⁵ Renewing America’s Advantages. Interim National Security Strategic Guidance // National Security Strategy Archive. March 2021. P. 10. URL: https://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021_Interim.pdf (accessed: 20.03.2022).

²⁶ Data compiled using the SIPRI interactive scoring system. See: Importer/Exporter TIV Tables // SIPRI. URL: <https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

²⁷ Ibid.

States contributes to filling the arsenals of Mexican organized crime groups. Approximately 70% of the weapons seized by Mexico's law enforcement from 2013 to 2018 were of American origin.²⁸ Even though we are talking mainly about small arms and, to a lesser extent, light weapons, this problem remains in line with the US MTC with Mexico, since it affects the level of security in the neighboring country, forcing the government to increase imports of American AME.²⁹ The very fact that weapons fall into the hands of organized crime groups is a factor that tarnishing bilateral relations and the image of the United States in the region. The situation is similar in Honduras, by the way, where, according to some reports, more than half of the weapons used by criminal structures come *en masse* from the United States.³⁰

The interests of the United States in the region are not limited to a mere presence on the arms market. Unlike most of its non-regional competitors, the U.S. here pursuing not only and not so much economic as geopolitical goals. The experience of the Cold War, when the United States, for example, actively armed the Nicaraguan Contras, suggests that in a region, so important to Washington, it is vital to ensure a permanent US presence on the arms market and in other areas of MTC.³¹ The United States “tie” them to its MTC for many years, since the maintenance of the supplied military equipment requires the periodic purchase of components

and spare parts. At the same time, the United States does not agree to the transfer of technology, since this could weaken the level of dependence of Latin American partners, for which even recently there has been some demand from importing countries (Alekseeva & Goreslavsky, 2020, pp. 41—42).

In light of the above, the most important factor for the U.S. is the role it has long tried on itself — the role of a regional policeman and defender against external encroachments on the security of Latin American countries. *The Inter-American Mutual Assistance Treaty* (Pact of Rio de Janeiro, 1947), which laid the foundation for the regional system of collective security, as well as the OAS, reinforced by the US Army's Southern Command and by the 4th US Navy Fleet, recreated in 2008, which Fidel Castro called the “fourth interventionist fleet,”³² reliably “defend” the Western Hemisphere from extra-regional military incursions, but they cannot protect from the United States itself. For this reason, we can distinguish that, for the most part, the US military deliveries to the LAC solve two problems: they provide a stable market for small arms and light weapons, which brings in considerable income, and helps the governments of Latin American countries maintain relative law and order and stability, which is always advantageous for Washington.

Forms of Interaction

Military cooperation between the U.S. and the LAC is complex. In the context of the strategy of expanding geopolitical influence, the US military presence in the region is not limited to the export of AME. Bases of various types (traditional and non-traditional) located in a number of LAC countries allow the United States to project its military-political power

²⁸ Redes sociales democratizan tráfico de armas en México // Insight Crime. 12.10.2021. URL: <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/redes-sociales-democratizan-trafico-armas-mexico/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

²⁹ Las armas de Estados Unidos invaden América Latina // Latinta. 28.05.2019. URL: <https://latinta.com.ar/2019/05/las-armas-de-estados-unidos-invaden-america-latina/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

³⁰ Reporte: Las armas de EEUU invaden América Latina // HispanTV. 27.05.2019. URL: <https://www.hispantv.com/noticias/sudamerica/429455/eeuu-armas-america-latina-mexico> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

³¹ Stohl R., Doug T. The Small Arms Trade in Latin America // NACLA. March 6, 2008. URL: <https://nacla.org/article/small-arms-trade-latin-america> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

³² American Response on a Hemispheric Scale: The 4th Interventionist Fleet // Reflections of Comrade Fidel Castro. May 4, 2008. (In Russian). URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20080611032841/http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/reflexiones/2008/rus/f040508r.html> (accessed: 20.03.2022).

directly. The contingent of the Armed Forces (AF), permanently deployed on the ground, is, in its essence, the guarantor of Washington's long-term interests. The very small share of the permanent military contingent present in the LAC countries is indicative: for example, in 2019, out of 200,000 US troops permanently stationed abroad, only 1,500 were in the region (Herrera, 2020, p. 271). In 2022, this figure approached the mark of 2,000 people.³³ Together with the AF of Latin American countries, the Pentagon develops defense strategies and conducts large-scale exercises. In addition, both on a bilateral basis and through the OAS, measures are being taken to counter terrorism, as well as peacekeeping and various humanitarian programs (the fight against drug trafficking (Martynov et al., 2017), illegal arms trafficking (Elesenko, 2021), etc.).

Among the forms of the US military presence, in addition to the supply of weapons and military-technical supplies to the armies and security services of the states in the region, there are several varieties: first, the organization and implementation of the educational process for the training of personnel of the Latin American military; secondly, the financing of the armies and military units of the Latin American armies; thirdly, cooperation programs to optimize the managerial and organizational functions of the Latin American AF; fourthly, the establishment and maintenance of various types of military bases; and finally, joint military exercises.

The training of military personnel in the form of training of officers at American military universities has a long history. The most notable example is the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) at Fort Banning, Georgia.³⁴ The infamous School of the

Americas, previously located in the Panama Canal Zone, moved to the United States in 2000 and currently functions as WHINSEC. A number of the top politicians and statesmen in the 20th century LAC, such as Juan Melgar Castro, president of Honduras from 1975—1978, Roberto D'Aubuisson, commander of the Salvadoran "death squads," Leopoldo Galtieri, leader of the Argentine junta and others, were graduates of this school.³⁵ The scandals surrounding its activities had a wide resonance, especially after public pressure in 1996 led to the publication of training manuals used at the school that advocated torture, extortion, and execution against detainees suspected of illegal activities.³⁶ There is a human rights organization whose main goal is to shut down WHINSEC on humanitarian grounds.³⁷ The SOA Watch databases contain a colossal number of documents confirming the incompatibility of the practical results of the Institute's activities with the principles of democracy and humanism declared by the leadership of the United States as the doctrinal basis of its entire foreign policy. One can argue about the tendentiousness of these statements, but it is clear, that the reputation of WHINSEC is very doubtful and scandalous.

In the 21st century, representatives of senior officers of Latin American armies regularly attend professional development courses within the framework of WHINSEC. In addition, the practice of so-called off-site sessions is being actively used. At the invitation of the military departments of Latin American countries, instructors from the United States conduct special training courses. Thus, for example, in Peru from 2001 to 2015, 13.6 thousand military personnel were trained. As part of the "Plan

³³ Number of Military and DoD Appropriated Fund (APF) Civilian Personnel // Global Security. 2022. URL: https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2022/dmde_website_location_report_2209.xlsx (accessed: 23.03.2022).

³⁴ Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. URL: <https://armyuniversity.edu/whinsec/en/home> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

³⁵ Livingstone G. The School of Latin America's Dictators // The Guardian. November 19, 2010. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/nov/18/us-military-usa> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

³⁶ SOA Watch: Then and Now // SOA Watch. URL: <https://soaw.org/soa-watch-then-and-now> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

³⁷ About SOA Watch // SOA Watch. URL: <https://soaw.org/about-soa-watch> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

Colombia” the United States has trained 77 thousand Colombian militaries. In both cases, the main goal of the training was the fight against drug trafficking, however, given the fact that pockets of partisan resistance still remain in both states, the courses were also aimed at countering the guerrilla.³⁸

Major cooperative programs are being implemented to improve defense management practices, including multilateral practices such as the Defense Institutions Reform Initiative (DIRI) and the U.S. Department of Defense Military Advisory Program, which extend to all countries recognized by the United States as democratic. Bilateral programs include the Integrated Defense Planning and Management System in Guatemala (*Sistema Integrado de Planeamiento y Gestión de Defensa*, SIPLAGDE).³⁹ Despite the fact, that none of these programs provides for the direct participation of American advisers in the development of the defense strategies of Latin American states, it is obvious that, being in themselves elaborations of a highly developed military power, all these programs cannot be applied effectively enough without further US assistance. Washington, therefore, seeks to maintain and consolidate its presence and geopolitical influence in the region, actively using the MTC as one of the ways to achieve these goals.

A fairly common channel of the US influence and presence is the funding of the AF and military units of the Latin American armies. The leaders are Mexico, Colombia and Peru. The cumulative volume of the US funding for the armies and police of the countries of the region (in the form of grants or direct material assistance) in the period from 2000 to 2017

amounted to 20.5 billion USD, of which Colombia accounted for 9.5 billion USD, Mexico — 2.9 billion USD, and Peru — 1.5 billion USD.⁴⁰ However, the most effective and direct method of force projection is the deployment of military and naval bases, as well as operational paramilitary groups.

US Military Bases in Latin America

The US military presence in LAC is a constant in the rather tense and politically eventful life of the region. A particularly wide military penetration into the region took place in the 20th century. The main political consequence of the US presence was the organization or support of coups d'état. Suffice to say that in the period from 1902 to 2002 327 coups d'état took place in 27 states of the region with the direct or indirect US involvement.⁴¹

On the whole, the forms of the US military presence in the region, according to the criterion of transparency, can be divided into two main groups — direct and indirect, which, in turn, can have an internal classification. At the same time, it should be noted that at the beginning of the 21st century there is a clear trend towards the predominance of indirect forms. This makes it possible to largely camouflage the presence of the US military in the region and, as a result, to extract a number of socio-political dividends: to reduce the degree of political tension around this issue, to draw less public attention to it and to hide the military-political process in the region as much as possible.

Military bases remain the main direct form of the presence of the US AF in the LAC. At the same time, this format has undergone the greatest institutional transformations in recent decades.

³⁸ Duque Y. V., Rodríguez A. I. Colombia: Un peligro para la región // *Desinformémonos*. 13.07.2021. URL: <https://desinformemonos.org/colombia-un-peligro-para-la-region/> (accessed: 02.05.2023).

³⁹ Alemán A. J. Transforming Defense in Guatemala // *PRISM. The Journal of Complex Operations*. November 20, 2017. URL: <https://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/1375956/15-transforming-defense-in-guatemala/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

⁴⁰ Isacson I., Kinosian S. U.S. Military Assistance and Latin America // Washington Office on Latin America. April 27, 2017. URL: <https://www.wola.org/analysis/u-s-military-assistance-latin-america/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

⁴¹ Guerrero M. E. Memoria del golpe de Estado en América latina durante el siglo XX // *Voltaire, Actualidad Internacional*. 30.03.2006. URL: <https://www.voltairenet.org/article137304.html> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

A number of Latin American political scientists record the formation of such a phenomenon as “quasi-bases,” which outwardly look different, but de facto perform the same set of functions and tasks.⁴² The transformation of the outer shell of the phenomenon of American military bases does not usually lead to a change in content.

As for expert estimates of the number of the US military bases in the region, there is no consensus; different sources provide different and sometimes contradictory information. For example, according to the report prepared by the U.S. Department of Defense in 2015 — “Base Structure Report,” — at least five Latin American states officially have the US military bases.⁴³ It’s about Cuba (Guantanamo Bay Naval Base), Honduras (Soto Cano or Palmerola Air Base), El Salvador (Comalapa), Colombia and Peru. The report also mentions the US military presence in Costa Rica, but this case is not considered by American analysts as a military base.

In order to get an idea of the real situation and to estimate the total volume of the US military bases in LAC, one should first look at their official classification. After the Howard Air Force Base in Panama was closed in 1999, according to an agreement signed back in 1977 by O. Torrijos and J. Carter,⁴⁴ the United States felt the disadvantages of a direct military presence and developed a more flexible model. According to the typology introduced by the Pentagon at the beginning of the 21st century,⁴⁵ there are several types of the US military bases.

⁴² Enciso F. Bases militares estadounidenses en América Latina // Revista mexicana de ciencias políticas y sociales. 2019. Vol. 64, no. 235. P. 625—630. <https://doi.org/10.22201/fcpys.2448492xe.2019.235.62573>

⁴³ The Base Structure Report — FY 2015 Baseline // U.S. Department of Defense. 2015. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20161102172301/https://www.acq.osd.mil/eie/downloads/bsi/base%20structure%20report%20fy15.pdf> (accessed: 25.08.2022).

⁴⁴ Treaty Concerning the Permanent Neutrality and Operation of the Panama Canal // Panama Canal Authority. URL: <https://pancanal.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/neutralty-treaty.pdf> (accessed: 25.08.2022).

⁴⁵ The Global Posture Review of United States Military Forces Stationed Overseas // U.S. Government Publishing

The first types are military bases in the traditional sense, referred to in American terminology as the main operating bases (Main Operating Base, MOB). These are fully equipped military complexes with the appropriate infrastructure and logistics, with a large military contingent permanently stationed there. Apparently, it is this type of base that the Pentagon considers as actually military bases and mentions them in its reports. Their main characteristic is that they operate within the framework of relevant interstate agreements, with the consent of local governments, and are therefore legally legitimate. At present, it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain the consent of governments (although the case of Peru shows otherwise), so the US prefers milder forms of military presence.

Indirect presence formats include the following types of bases — Forward Operating Locations (FOL) and Joint Cooperative Security Locations (JCSL). In this format, the military contingent is minimal, but there is the possibility of its temporary increase in the event of a military operation or joint exercises, legally the points do not belong to the United States. In some cases, they can be rented out, in others, the use of their infrastructure is carried out on a commercial basis (for example, the Pentagon must pay a certain amount for landing a military aircraft at such a base). Often, bases such as FOL and JCSL are run by private military corporations, and the main contingent of military personnel is contractors of the host country.⁴⁶

Apparently, this type of “soft” bases (or quasi-bases) includes seven Colombian military installations that do not appear in official reports in the status of real US military bases, but de facto they are. It should be recalled, that in 2009 Bogotá and Washington signed an

Office. September 23, 2004. URL: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-108shrg23080/html/CHRG-108shrg23080.htm> (accessed: 25.08.2022).

⁴⁶ Más tropas de EEUU en América Latina: Señales de una invasión // HispaTV. 21.10.2017. URL: <https://www.hispantv.com/noticias/opinion/357196/america-latina-base-militar-invasion-amazonia> (accessed: 21.02.2022).

agreement on the planned deployment of American military experts to seven bases of the Colombian AF.⁴⁷ Subsequently, the Supreme Court ruled that the government's decision was unconstitutional. As a result, the Colombian authorities decided to switch to the format of leasing military infrastructure for a period of ten years. Currently, the US presence is limited to 200 military experts distributed among seven bases, whose official task is to help the Andean country in the fight against drug trafficking and terrorism. But the current lease agreement provides for the possibility of expanding the US military contingent to 800 and the civilian personnel to 600 people, if necessary.⁴⁸

In the modern history of LAC, there are a number of cases of the closure of US military bases and the suppression of negotiations on their installation. For example, in 2010, the Ecuadorian government of R. Correa decided not to renew the contract for the lease of the Manta base.⁴⁹ In 2003, the Brazilian president L.I. Lula da Silva withdrew from negotiations with the Pentagon on the deployment of a radar base in Alcantara, however, in 2020, during the presidency of J. Bolsonaro, an agreement providing the United States with access to the base was signed after all.⁵⁰

The process of installing new military bases in the traditional sense was actively unfolding

⁴⁷ Colombia y EEUU firmaron acuerdo sobre bases militares // La Nación. 30.10.2009. URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20091103092330/http://www.nacion.com/ln_ee/2009/octubre/30/mundo2142464.html (accessed: 25.02.2022).

⁴⁸ ¿Existen 8 bases militares estadounidenses en Colombia? // AFP. 12.07.2018. URL: <https://factual.afp.com/existen-8-bases-militares-estadounidenses-en-colombias-inexacto> (accessed: 25.02.2022).

⁴⁹ Ecuador le pidió a Estados Unidos desalojar la base militar de Manta // El Tiempo. 29.07.2008. URL: <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-4417675> (accessed: 27.02.2022).

⁵⁰ Governo promulga acordo com EUA para Base de Alcântara; ministro prevê testes em 2021 // Globo. 05.02.2020. URL: <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2020/02/05/governo-promulga-acordo-com-eua-para-base-de-alcantara-ministro-preve-testes-em-2021.ghtml> (accessed: 27.02.2022).

until the middle of the second decade of the 21st century. So, at the end of 2016, the government of the Peruvian department of Amazonas, the U.S. Southern Command and the Peruvian company *Partenon Contratistas E.I.R.L.* signed an agreement on the construction of a helicopter base. This object had no name, but was rather vaguely called the Center for Regional Emergency Operations (*Centro de Operaciones de Emergencia Regional*, COER). The Peruvian variant of COER is considered by some analysts to be the fourth type of American military base.⁵¹ The cost of the object is estimated at 1.3 million USD. According to the project, at the military base there must be a helicopter airfield with an area of 625 square meters, as well as all the necessary infrastructure with logistics, communication, monitoring and analytical centers. For Peru, this practice is the rule rather than the exception. Since 2008, the country has been actively developing COER-type centers. By 2021, 17 military centers with different functional purposes have already worked.⁵²

In conclusion, it can be stated with some degree of certainty that, taking into account the flexible formats of the American presence (including FOL, JCSL and COER), dozens of military facilities with the participation of the US military contingent are currently operating in LAC. It is reported that there are about 75 different “quasi-bases” located on the territory of the region.⁵³ If we add to this the new format tested by Brazil (military bases in the form of

⁵¹ Operación América Unida: Presencia militar permanente de EEUU en América Latina // TeleSur. 06.11.2017. URL: <https://www.telesurtv.net/opinion/Operacion-America-Unida-presencia-militar-permanente-de-EEUU-en-America-Latina-20171106-0055.html> (accessed: 27.02.2022).

⁵² Ruiz P. Bases y presencia militar de EE.UU. en Perú // Rebelión. 02.02.2023. URL: <https://rebellion.org/bases-y-presencia-militar-de-ee-uu-en-peru/> (accessed: 27.02.2023).

⁵³ Más tropas de EEUU en América Latina: Señales de una invasión // HispaTV. 21.10.2017. URL: <https://www.hispantv.com/noticias/opinion/357196/america-latina-base-militar-invasion-amazonia> (accessed: 21.02.2022).

continuous military exercises, see below), then their number will increase. It should be emphasized that the strategy of deploying military bases in LAC does not lose its relevance at the present time. This is evidenced by the Pentagon's construction work on the erection of a military facility in Argentinean Patagonia, which became public in May 2022.⁵⁴

Joint Military Exercises

In total, a set of regular exercises is being conducted under the auspices of the Pentagon: UNITAS — the longest naval exercises in the world (since 1959); Fuerzas Comando — training of special forces and working out the interaction of regional units; NAMSI — support for the North American Maritime Security Initiative; Tradewinds — maritime exercises focused on the security of the Caribbean; PANAMAX — maritime exercises focused on ensuring the free flow of commerce through the Panama Canal; and CENTAM Guardian — ground unit maneuvers focused on responding to natural disasters and regional security. The process of conducting maneuvers is currently being conducted in an almost continuous format and de facto represents a strategic system of military exercises spread out in time and space.

Often, the United States arranges military maneuvers that actually pursue political goals, although the latter are not explicitly indicated. Typically, such operations are carried out under the guise of anti-terrorist or other motives. As an illustration, two examples from the contemporary political life of LAC can be cited. The first one, the Bolivian case, dates back to 2005, when the United States made no secret of its political pressure goals. In the 2009 Unified Quest maneuvers, the US troops practiced an intervention in Bolivia during an anticipated civil war between the right and the left (Pellegrini, 2018, pp. 130—141). The maneuvers were

⁵⁴ Miranda B. ¿Una nueva base militar de Estados Unidos en América del Sur? // El Espectador. 29.05.2022. URL: <https://www.elespectador.com/opinion/columnistas/beatriz-miranda/una-nueva-base-militar-de-estados-unidos-en-america-del-sur/> (accessed: 04.06.2022).

carried out as a measure of intimidation and pressure on voters during the 2005 presidential election. As part of these maneuvers, a US military contingent of 500 soldiers was stationed at a military base in Paraguay, 200 km from the Bolivian border.⁵⁵

The second case relates to the political process in Venezuela. From June 6 to 17, the interstate maneuvers “Tradewinds 2017” took place in the waters near its shores.⁵⁶ According to the U.S. Southern Command, 2,500 military from Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Grenada, Suriname, Jamaica and others took part in the maneuvers. NATO was represented by military personnel from the United States, Canada, France and the United Kingdom. The official goals of the maneuvers were designated as “developing ways to counter organized transnational crime and terrorism and practicing rescue operations in the event of natural disasters.”⁵⁷ It is noteworthy, however, that the exercise took place just days before Venezuelans voted in the elections for the National Constituent Assembly, which were scheduled to take place on June 30, 2017. In 2021, the Tradewinds exercise was held off the coast of Guyana,⁵⁸ and in 2022 in the waters of Belize and Mexico,⁵⁹ but in recent years the political component is less obvious.

⁵⁵ Dangi B. What is the U.S. Military Doing in Paraguay? // Upside Down World. August 1, 2005. URL: <https://upside-downworld.org/archives/paraguay/what-is-the-us-military-doing-in-paraguay/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

⁵⁶ More Bases, Military Exercises: The (Para)Military Option against Venezuela in Action // TeleSur. September 18, 2017. URL: <https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/More-Bases-Military-Exercises-The-ParaMilitary-Option-Against-Venezuela-in-Action-20170918-0023.html> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

⁵⁷ Tradewinds 2017 // U.S. Southern Command. 2017. URL: <https://www.southcom.mil/Media/Special-Coverage/Tradewinds-2017/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

⁵⁸ Tradewinds 2021 // U.S. Southern Command. 2021. URL: <https://www.southcom.mil/Media/Special-Coverage/Tradewinds-2021/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

⁵⁹ Tradewinds 2022 // U.S. Southern Command. 2022. URL: <https://www.southcom.mil/Media/Special-Coverage/Tradewinds-2022/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

An example of military exercises, in which the US military did not directly participate, but which were coordinated by the Pentagon, are the maneuvers carried out in the “heart” of the Amazon in the so-called “triple border” zone, where the demarcation lines of three Latin American states — Brazil, Peru and Colombia — meet. Formally, the exercises were held from November 6 to 12, 2017 at the initiative of the Brazilian government and were called “Amazon Log-17,” as well as “Operation United America” (*America Unida*).⁶⁰ The abbreviation “Log” in the official title indicated the logistical nature of the exercises, during which the tasks of delivering humanitarian aid to hypothetical zones of political and social instability were officially practiced. These exercises did not belong to the category of regular ones and were rather carried out in the ad hoc format. Nevertheless, they attracted tremendous public attention, and were qualified in the press as “unprecedented,” so it is worth considering them in more detail.

A total of 1.5 thousand Peruvian, Brazilian and Colombian military personnel took part in Amazon Log-17. The exercise was closely monitored and coordinated by representatives of the US Southern Command and observers from 19 countries.⁶¹ The Brazilian side was represented by the Logistics Unit of the Army. The matter was not limited to the designated time frame of the exercises as such. Upon their completion, the Brazilian military decided that a “temporary military base” would function in Tabatinga (Amazonas), and the exercises would continue indefinitely (de facto, the maneuvers lasted until the second quarter of 2018). The situation developed according to a scenario,

⁶⁰ Côrtes B. M. ¿Qué hay detrás de las maniobras militares conjuntas en la Amazonia? // *El Espectador*. 15.11.2017. URL: <https://www.elespectador.com/mundo/america/que-hay-detras-de-las-maniobras-militares-conjuntas-en-la-amazonia-article-723088/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

⁶¹ Fuerzas multinacionales con apoyo de EE.UU. se despliegan en la Amazonía // *Caras y Caretas*. 12.11.2017. URL: <https://www.carasycaretas.com.uy/fuerzas-multinacionales-apoyo-ee-uu-se-despliegan-la-amazonia> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

similar to the exercises of the US troops in Honduras in the 1980s, NATO troops in Hungary and the Baltic States in 2015—2016: first, short-term maneuvers, and then, based on the created infrastructure, the presence of the military in the area of the exercises was extended. Legally, such a format of military presence is not subject to qualification as a “military base” (and, importantly, approval by the congresses of the participating countries), but de facto it is a full-fledged multinational military base. The location of the Amazon Log-17 exercise was also not chosen by chance.⁶²

Summing up the consideration of the phenomenon of joint military exercises, it should be emphasized that this format of interaction is a significant addition to the network of military bases deployed in the region. The scale, regularity and wide range of the Latin American partners of the United States participating in the exercises make it possible to qualify them as one of the most important elements of the complex and multi-level structure of the military influence of the “northern neighbor” on LAC.

Conclusion

Based on this study, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the political and military-strategic aspects of the US presence in LAC.

First, the MTC with the countries of the region and the deliveries of arms allow Washington to maintain a permanent presence in the AME market, which is important from a geopolitical point of view. The penetration of competing manufacturers here is not advantageous, since it effectively deprives the United States not only of a profitable market, but also of one of the most effective ways to influence local governments.

⁶² Pastor M. Más tropas de EEUU en Latinoamérica: Señales de una invasión anunciada (+ Infografía) // *CubaDebate*. 23.10.2017. URL: <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2017/10/23/mas-tropas-de-eeuu-en-latinoamerica-senales-de-una-invasion-anunciada-infografia/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

Secondly, although Washington's tactical interests at this stage are localized mainly in the Middle and Far East, LAC remains in the focus of the Pentagon's long-term military interests. A rather powerful military infrastructure, functioning with the participation of the US military, remains in the region and tends to expand. The Pentagon has a wide range of mechanisms for interaction with Latin American

partners in its arsenal. This gives reason to qualify the region as a zone of permanent and frontal influence of the "northern neighbor." In the event of hypothetical political instability in the countries of the region or a sharp escalation of global tensions, the potential of the US military presence can be updated and promptly used in full force.

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