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Interview / Интервью

The Labyrinths of Latin America: At the Crossroads of Eras and Interests

Interview with Z.W. Iwanowski, P.P. Yakovlev, B.F. Martynov, V.X. Medina Gonzalez, A. Pacheco Pacifico, S. da Costa, F. Reis Melo, O.N. Bogatyreva, M.A.-M. Kodzoev, and E.A. Yakhnis

Abstract. On October 29, 2025, the Department of Theory and History of International Relations of the RUDN University hosted a scientific seminar titled “Geopolitics of Latin America,” bringing together leading Russian experts on the region. The discussion was moderated by Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor Alla Yuryevna Borzova. The discussion covered a comprehensive analysis of the key political, economic and social challenges of the region. The political block, represented by Doctor of Political Sciences, Professor, Head of the Center for Political Studies of the Institute of Latin America of the Russian Academy of Sciences (ILA RAS), Professor of the Faculty of Global Processes at Lomonosov Moscow State University Z.W. Iwanowski, identified the current regrouping of forces with a noticeable “right-wing” shift in power, internal disunity within societies in the region and factors of “tired democracy,” which may have implications for the foreign policies of Latin American countries in the global context. An economic review by Doctor of Economics, Chief Researcher of the Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Professor of the Russian University of Economics named after Plekhanov, P.P. Yakovlev, demonstrated the successful integration of Latin America into the global economic ecosystems—agriculture, food, energy, mining, technology, and finance—emphasizing the region’s transformation from a source of problems to an active provider of solutions. The review also addressed complex security threats. Doctor of Political Sciences, Professor of the Department of International Relations and Russian Foreign Policy at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation B.F. Martynov and Candidate of Historical Sciences, Senior Lecturer of the Department of Theory and History of International Relations at RUDN University V.X. Medina González examined in detail the convergent nature of drug trafficking, its link with corruption and terrorism, as well as the critical situation of the erosion of statehood in Ecuador. Migration trends, analyzed by Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor of the Department of Theory and History of International Relations at the Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin O.N. Bogatyreva and her Brazilian colleagues demonstrated the scale of internal displacement and the new challenges of environmental migration. The strategies of external players were also discussed: the pressure of US sanctions on Cuba (M.A.-M. Kodzoev, PhD in Political Science, Senior Researcher at the Center for Analytical Research at the Institute of Latin America of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Associate Professor at RUDN University, Associate Professor at RSUH), China’s expansion within the framework of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative (E.A. Yakhnis, RUDN University), and the role of the European Union (EU). The seminar concluded that the rivalry between the US, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and the EU is growing amidst increasing internal turbulence in the region, making it a critical arena for global geopolitics.

Key words: geopolitics, electoral cycle, global economic ecosystems, drug trafficking, migration, sanctions policy, One Belt, One Road, regional security, foreign policy rivalry

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Лабиринты Латинской Америки: на перепутье эпох и интересов

*Интервью с З.В. Ивановским, П.П. Яковлевым, Б.Ф. Мартыновым,
Х. Мединой Гонсалесом, А. Пачеко Пасифико, С. да Коста, Ф. Реисом Мело,
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Аннотация. 29 октября 2025 г. на кафедре теории и истории международных отношений Российского университета дружбы народов им. П. Лумумбы (РУДН) состоялся научный семинар «Геополитика Латинской Америки», объединивший ведущих российских латиноамериканистов. Модератором выступила доктор исторических наук, профессор Алла Юрьевна Борзова. В рамках дискуссии был проведен всесторонний анализ ключевых политических, экономических и социальных вызовов региона. Политический блок, представленный доктором политических наук, профессором, руководителем Центра политических исследований Института Латинской Америки Российской академии наук (ИЛА РАН), профессором факультета глобальных процессов Московского государственного университета имени М.В. Ломоносова З.В. Ивановским, выявил текущую перегруппировку сил с заметным сдвигом «вправо», внутреннюю разобщенность обществ региона и факторы «усталой демократии», что в глобальном контексте может повлиять на внешнеполитические ориентации латиноамериканских стран. Экономический обзор доктора экономических наук, главного научного сотрудника Института научной информации по общественным наукам РАН, профессора Российского экономического университета им. Г.В. Плеханова П.П. Яковлева продемонстрировал успешную интеграцию Латинской Америки в глобальные хозяйственные экосистемы — аграрно-продовольственную, энергетическую, горнодобывающую, технологическую и финансовую, подчеркнув превращение региона из источника проблем в активного поставщика решений. Серьезное внимание было уделено комплексным угрозам безопасности: доктор политических наук, профессор кафедры международных отношений и внешней политики России Московского государственного института международных отношений МИД России Б.Ф. Мартынов и кандидат исторических наук, старший преподаватель кафедры теории и истории международных отношений РУДН Х. Медина Гонсалес детально рассмотрели конвергентную природу наркотрафика, его сращивание с коррупцией и терроризмом, а также критическую ситуацию с эрозией государственности в Эквадоре. Миграционные тренды, проанализированные доктором исторических наук, профессором кафедры теории и истории международных отношений Уральского федерального университета имени первого президента России Б.Н. Ельцина О.Н. Богатыревой и бразильскими коллегами, показали масштабы внутренних перемещений и новые вызовы экологической миграции. Отдельно обсуждались стратегии внешних игроков: давление санкций США на Кубу (М.А.-М. Кодзоев, кандидат политических наук, старший научный сотрудник Центра аналитических разработок Института Латинской Америки РАН, доцент РУДН, доцент РГГУ), экспансия Китая в рамках инициативы «Один пояс, один путь» (Е.А. Яхнис, РУДН) и роль Европейского союза (ЕС). Итогом семинара стал вывод о нарастающем соперничестве США, Китайской Народной Республики (КНР) и ЕС в условиях усиливающейся внутренней турбулентности региона, что определяет его как критически важную арену глобальной геополитики.

Ключевые слова: геополитика, электоральный цикл, глобальные экономические экосистемы, наркотрафик, миграция, санкционная политика, Один пояс, один путь, региональная безопасность, внешнеполитическое соперничество

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— Dear Zbigniew Wladyslawowicz, I would like to open our discussion by asking for your thoughts on the current political landscape in Latin America. Could you please describe the current electoral cycle and the main lines of political confrontation that could

impact foreign policy priorities in these countries?

— Z.W. Iwanowski: In 2025, we are witnessing a complex and turbulent electoral cycle. In most cases, instability is due to a lack of a pro-presidential parliamentary majority,

disagreements between the center and the federal subjects, and the weakness of state institutions. Today, the balance of power is as follows: eight countries are governed by right-wing and center-right parties: Haiti, Paraguay, El Salvador, Ecuador, Argentina, Panama, Peru, and now Bolivia, where a 20-year leftist rule has ended. Three countries are socialist: Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. Five countries represent a moderate center-left: Brazil, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Uruguay. Four countries are close to traditional social democracy: Chile, Colombia, Honduras, and Guatemala. Thus, in 12 out of the 20 countries, the left-wing spectrum currently predominates. However, societies everywhere are divided due to electoral disillusionment, the failure of presidential programs, rising corruption, drug trafficking, and a lack of personal security. The term “tired democracy” has even emerged. Systemic crises in Cuba and Venezuela remain unresolved, an exaggerated environmental agenda is leading to deindustrialization, integration processes are in crisis, and the “Trump factor” cannot be ignored. As a result, Latin America is at a crossroads, with a realignment of political forces underway, but a general shift towards the right emerging. Globally, this could lead to rapprochement with the United States and certain difficulties in relations with Russia.

China takes a pragmatic stance; its policies are largely regime-driven, and it manages to establish good economic relations with all countries (Iwanowski, 2025a; 2025b).

— **Petr Pavlovich, let's now move on from politics to economics. As you mentioned, global economic ecosystems play a central role. What specifically is the goal of Latin American economic actors, and what are the region's achievements in this area?**

— **P.P. Yakovlev:** The main goal is to become an integral part of the existing and emerging global economic ecosystems: agri-food, energy, mining, technology, and finance. Let's take a look at each of these sectors in turn.

In the agricultural sector, countries have significantly increased production and exports over the past 10 years. The value of exports in 2024 amounted to almost USD 252 billion. Brazil has demonstrated phenomenal growth, competing with the United States for the world's largest agricultural export volume (USD 164 billion versus USD 176 billion in 2024). The region plays a key role in ensuring global food security (Yakovlev, 2023; 2025).

In the energy sector, the examples of Guyana and Argentina are illustrative. Guyana's GDP grew by 63% in 2022, and oil exports have increased dramatically. Argentina is developing the *Vaca Muerta* field and plans to become a global player in the LNG market (Yakovlev, 2023).

In mining, the region supplies critical raw materials: Mexico and Argentina produce 73% of global silver exports, while Chile and Peru produce 44% of copper. The “lithium triangle” (Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile) has enormous potential, containing approximately 60% of the world's lithium reserves (Yakovlev, 2023).

In the technology sector, high-tech exports are growing: electric cars have seen a 36% increase, while vehicles have increased by 69%. Costa Rica is the largest supplier of medical equipment. The Brazilian company Embraer has delivered more than 4,500 aircraft. Argentina has invested USD 25 billion in the Stargate data center project (Yakovlev, 2023).

In the financial sector, the highly developed banking system is noteworthy. The assets of the 20 largest banks in the region exceed USD 3.3 trillion. The emergence of the neobank *Nubank* (122 million clients) and the unprecedented spread of cryptocurrencies, which have a turnover of approximately USD 1.5 trillion in three years, are expanding the financial capabilities of countries in the region.¹ Thus, Latin America is becoming less of a problem for the world and increasingly offering solutions to overcome global challenges.

¹ Nubank Tops Forbes' World's Best Banks in Brazil and Mexico // Nubank. April 19, 2024. URL: <https://international.nubank.com.br/company/nubank-tops-forbes-worlds-best-banks-in-brazil-and-mexico/> (accessed: 12.02.2026).

— **Drug trafficking continues to be a serious problem, intertwined with economic and political factors. Boris Fedorovich, how do you assess this threat at both the regional and global levels, and what is the role of the United States in your view?**

— **B.F. Martynov:** This is a complex, convergent problem, as drug trafficking exists alongside criminal activity, corruption, and terrorism, affecting all countries in the region. The activity of the United States, especially under the Trump administration, can be summed up by the formula “interventionism under the guise of noble intentions.” The underlying principle is the seizure and redistribution of resources. All accusations of violating democratic principles are relegated to the background, while what can be “sold” to public opinion takes center stage: the fight against drug trafficking, crime, and smuggling. This is a new paradigm for justifying interventionism. Forceful solutions (as seen in Mexico and Colombia) do not resolve the problem, but only push it underground. However, there is another important aspect: the US often talks a lot about combating supply, but its efforts do not effectively address demand. The statistics are alarming: drug-related deaths reached 80,000 by the end of 2021. The strength of criminal structures in Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, and Ecuador, which are already challenging the local authorities, deserves special mention. These structures will play a significant role in shaping the future of Latin American countries. The region is facing a difficult period marked by authoritarian development, new coups, and civil wars.²

— **Xavier, could you please take a closer look at the case of Ecuador? Why has this seemingly stable country found itself in the epicenter of the crisis, and what does this say about the erosion of statehood?**

— **V.X. Medina González:** Ecuador has faced increasing violence and the rise of transnational crime. Due to its favorable geographic location and well-developed infrastructure, drug cartels from neighboring countries such as Colombia, Peru, and Chile have begun to exploit it to integrate their supplies into legal export chains. The tightening of controls in Mexico and Colombia has forced these networks to look for new routes, resulting in increased influence of Mexican cartels in Ecuador and the formation of strong ties with local groups. Overcrowded prisons have also become operational headquarters, where inmates coordinate drug trafficking and manage conflicts. This has led to negative changes in the socio-political system: increased murder rates, a crisis in the judicial system, mass migration, and capital flight. The expansion of criminal activity into neighboring countries highlights the need for a comprehensive international strategy to combat drug trafficking.

— **Andrea, your report focuses on environmental migration. Why is a new approach to understanding this phenomenon required?**

— **A. Pacheco Pacifico:** A broader interpretation of the term is needed, one that addresses not only climate cataclysms but also anthropogenic impacts, such as the destructive effects of corporate activity. Brazil lacks laws to protect people from this. According to some estimates, from 2008 to 2023, more than 4 million people were forced to flee their homes due to floods, destruction, and smoke from the Amazon fires. This leads to job losses, rising prices, and strain on the infrastructure of small towns. I cited the example of the Braskem company, which caused significant environmental damage to the region. Such people must be recognized as environmental refugees to hold the state accountable for their rights (Pacífico et al., 2020).

— **Santos da Costa and Felipe Reis Melo, your speeches touched on Brazil's foreign policy. What were the key differences between**

² Eleseenko D. Transformation of the Drug Market in Latin America: Trump's War with the Satelets // Russian International Affairs Council. April 1, 2026. (In Russian). URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/transformatiya-narkorynka-latinskoy-ameriki-voyna-trampa-s-kartelyami/> (accessed: 14.04.2026). See also: (Pyatakov, 2023).

the approaches of Presidents L.I. Lula da Silva and J. Bolsonaro, and what is Brazil's current foreign policy direction?

— **S. da Costa:** J. Bolsonaro criticized the UN, sought to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO), turned his back on Africa, opposed China, and advocated rapprochement with the United States. He moved closer to Israel, at the expense of the traditional balanced policy towards Israel and Palestine, and announced the opening of a trade mission in Jerusalem. With the return of L.I. Lula da Silva, Brazil's policy has changed: Brazil advocates multilateralism, international law, attention to the environment and social issues, and is returning to regional leadership and strengthening the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

— **F. Reis Melo:** Traditionally, Brazil has championed multilateralism. Its independent course was strengthened with the arrival of L.I. Lula da Silva in 2003: the country strengthened its economy, joined IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa), the G4 (Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan), initiated dialogue between South American countries and the Arab and African worlds, and was a founding member of BRICS. Under M. Temer and J. Bolsonaro, many achievements were lost, and the country gravitated toward the United States. With the return of L.I. Lula da Silva's 2023 presidential bid will see Brazil regain its independent stance, oppose sanctions, return to CELAC, actively participate in BRICS, and prepare to host the UN Climate Change Conference.

— **Olga Nikolaevna, concluding the section on migration, what are the main trends and models you identify for Latin America in the 21st century?**

— **O.N. Bogatyreva:** Three main models should be highlighted. The first is the traditional route north, to the United States and Canada. The second is the new trend of cross-border intraregional migration along the South-South axis. The third is transoceanic migration to Europe and Japan. The intraregional model predominates,

with the main destinations being Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, and Peru, where 6.7 million migrants from Venezuela have been sent. Conflict, instability, and crime play a significant role. Central America not only supplies migrants but also provides asylum. The "Trump factor" has significantly influenced the situation. Countries in the region are seeking cooperation through regional institutions: the Cartagena Declaration, the Quito Process, and the Los Angeles Declaration of 2022 (Bogatyreva & Krapivnitskaya, 2025).

— **Magomed Abdul-Mazhitovich, Cuba is an example of prolonged resistance to sanctions pressure. What are the roots causes of its crisis? How has it managed to withstand this pressure for so long?**

— **M.A.-M. Kodzoev:** The root cause is the more than 60-year-old trade embargo imposed by the United States. During the Soviet era and later, during the "left turn," Cuba had a stronghold. With the collapse of the USSR, the United States passed the Torricelli Act (1992) to push the Cuban economy toward collapse. However, the Cuban leadership skillfully implemented countermeasures. Venezuelan assistance through the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) was also very important. In response to this, the US has introduced even more stringent laws, threatening secondary sanctions against third-country companies.

Under Barack Obama, there was a partial improvement in US-Cuban relations, but under Donald Trump, pressure on the island nation was renewed, targeting tourism and medical programs. Secretary of State Marco Rubio became a symbol of this anti-Cuban policy. Cuba has now intensified diplomacy with Africa, the EU, and China, and most Latin American countries maintain relations with it. Cuba has found its niche and managed to resist pressure from Washington. (Davydov & Kodzoev, 2025).

— **Elizaveta Andreevna, how China's policy in the region is being implemented within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative?**

— **E.A. Yakhnis:** Since 2017, the region has officially been included in the initiative. Three areas are being developed: the Maritime, Digital, and Green Silk Road. The Maritime route is creating new logistics (the port of Chancay in Peru, a port in Mexico bypassing the Panama Canal). The Digital route includes projects with *Alibaba's* platform in Mexico, the laying of a Chile-Hong Kong undersea cable, the use of artificial intelligence technologies to ensure security in Argentina and Bolivia, and digital port modeling in Colombia. The Green route (officially launched in 2019) encompasses wind, hydropower, and solar energy projects in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. China is actively promoting infrastructure projects in all these areas.

— **A.Yu. Borzova:** Thus, it can be concluded that Latin America today is an arena of complex and multi-vector geopolitical rivalry. China is acting methodically and pragmatically, building multi-level dialogue, industry cooperation, and large-scale infrastructure expansion within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. Its economic-centric approach depends little on the ideology of the ruling regimes in partner countries, ensuring the sustainability of Beijing's presence in the region.

The European Union remains a traditional partner of Latin American countries, providing programmatic cooperation on climate, digitalization, and social policy through instruments such as the Global Gateway. However,

its capabilities are often constrained by financial and budgetary limitations.

The United States, while maintaining its role as a key military-political partner and the main recipient of migration, has increasingly used force and coercive instruments in recent years: from the suffocation of undesirable regimes (Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua) through sanctions to interventionism under the pretext of combating drug trafficking. The region's internal turbulence (political disunity, weak institutions, and the power of criminal networks) creates a breeding ground for such interventions while simultaneously increasing countries' vulnerability to external influence.

We are witnessing not just a competition, but a conflict of paradigms: the Chinese model of economic integration, the European model of normative-programmatic partnership, and the American model of coercive dominance and regime change. Given the emerging political shift toward the right in several key countries in the region, it is likely that this rivalry will continue to intensify. Latin America stands at a crossroads, and its future trajectory will be determined not only by internal struggles, but also by the outcome of this global battle for influence. For Russia, as colleagues noted, this means adopting a nuanced, balanced, and multi-vector policy that takes into account the full complexity of the evolving regional and global power configuration.

Interviewed by A.Yu. Borzova

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