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POLICY PAPER

RAW POWER AND ADAPTATION

RECALIBRATING DIPLOMATIC CONTOURS
ACROSS THE SOUTH ATLANTIC–WEST
AFRICA, LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN



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BACKGROUND

In 2019 - well before the onslaught of COVID-19 and the wars in Europe and the Middle East - the central thesis of a policy paper by this author, analyzing the relationship between Africa and the Caribbean, characterized it as one of missed opportunity due to the lack of consistent, meaningful engagement between the two regions - despite the relationship's special significance given their shared history. Underinvested: The Caribbean African Relationship (PCNS 2019) chronicled the links between Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, beginning with the 400-year history of the triangular slave trade, followed by a period of intense political activity during which the African diaspora established the Pan-African Movement (PAM) in 1958 as a potent force in the struggle against racism and colonialism. PAM supported the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa and racial segregation in Rhodesia, becoming a vital cog in the civil rights movement in the United States (U.S.).

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1.0 BACKGROUND

In 2019 - well before the onslaught of COVID-19 and the wars in Europe and the Middle East - the central thesis of a policy paper by this author, analyzing the relationship between Africa and the Caribbean, characterized it as one of missed opportunity due to the lack of consistent, meaningful engagement between the two regions - despite the relationship's special significance given their shared history. *Underinvested: The Caribbean African Relationship (PCNS 2019)*¹ chronicled the links between Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, beginning with the 400-year history of the triangular slave trade, followed by a period of intense political activity during which the African diaspora established the Pan-African Movement (PAM) in 1958² as a potent force in the struggle against racism and colonialism. PAM supported the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa and racial segregation in Rhodesia, becoming a vital cog in the civil rights movement in the United States (U.S.).

By the early to mid 1970s, at the height of the U.S.-centered Black Power Movement, PAM as a political force seemed largely expended. While State-centered engagement within the more formal trappings of the United Nations (UN), such as the G77,³ continued, the political activism of previous decades became more nuanced, with the focus shifting to attempts to shape and influence the institutions in which these newly independent States took their seats. Interestingly, however, purpose-built mechanisms - such as those established within the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP) by the Treaty of Georgetown in 1975 - intended to provide a platform for the 79 member states to engage with the European Union (EU) on matters of development cooperation whilst also facilitating deeper relations between ACP member states, met with limited success. While the EU leveraged the ACP relationship to strengthen its credentials as a Western model for development cooperation with countries of the so-called Third World, ACP member states - the largest grouping of developing countries outside the UN, based in Europe - failed to seize the strategic opportunity to use their numbers to build the group into a political force capable of representing their interests on the world stage. In addition, initiatives that could have ultimately led to rich, vibrant exchanges between Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific were not pursued.

Across the South Atlantic space, colonialism's footprint has been heavy. Within the Latin American and Caribbean region (LAC), for example, until the arrival of China as a significant commercial and investment actor, trade flowed north and south across the Atlantic, replicating routes developed between the metropolises in the north and their colonies in the south. Commercial air travel followed these trade routes. Travel from Brazil to Jamaica, for example, involves going north across the Caribbean to Miami, and then south to Jamaica. Travel between Africa and the LAC region similarly involves flights to Europe or the U.S., then onwards to the South Atlantic, rather than via the most direct route - considerably increasing travel time in all cases.

As a result, despite their proximity,⁴ inter-regional trade between the mainly English-speaking Caribbean and the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries of Latin America

1. Len Ishmael, *Underinvested, the Caribbean-African Relationship*. Policy Center for the New South. PP-19/08 June 2019.

2. PAM was founded three years after the Bandung conference of 1955 establishing the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

3. The G77 was established by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1964, at the UN. The group has evolved over time into the G77+China.

4. Trinidad, for example, is less than 6 miles away from Venezuela.

remains low, as does trade between LAC and Africa. Similarly, intra-regional trade flows as a percentage of overall trade within Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America - at 12%, 11.9 % and 14.7%⁵ respectively - are also low relative to other groupings. This is due to the combined effects of the colonial legacy, infrastructure constraints, and high logistics costs.

While robust regional mechanisms to enhance engagement between Africa, the Caribbean, and the LAC region remained largely underdeveloped until relatively recently, bilateral initiatives have been instrumental in building South-South cooperation. Significant among these in the LAC region were the efforts of President Luiz Inácio Lula De Silva who, in his first term as Brazilian president (January 2003-2011), spearheaded several initiatives to drive regional cooperation - including tabling the idea of a "Bank of the South" (a precursor to the BRICS New Development Bank) to provide loans for capital infrastructure. Under Lula, the Brazilian state offered scholarships to Caribbean students, access to diplomatic training at the renowned *Instituto Rio Branco* (the country's highly acclaimed Diplomatic Academy), and agricultural technological support.

Former presidents of Venezuela, Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías, and of Cuba, Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz, also played important roles in supporting the development of their smaller Caribbean island neighbors. Awash with fossil fuel wealth, Venezuela's "Petro-Diplomacy" cushioned the shock of rising energy prices in the early 2000s by offering a line of credit to the countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) when oil prices topped \$100/barrel. Venezuela also rebuilt homes and provided support in the aftermath of hurricanes and natural disasters in Dominica, Montserrat, and Grenada.⁶ Cuba's relationship with its Caribbean neighbors has been one of consistent support across a range of sectors, including education, agriculture, and health. Through its diplomatic mission to St Lucia (the headquarters of the OECS), Mexico offered scholarships to OECS students and support across various sectors, including agriculture.

Bilateral, rather than formal, regional exchanges also extended across the South Atlantic. From the mid 1970s, Cuba supported the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in its struggle for independence. During his first presidential term, Lula gave prominence to relations with Africa, undertaking several visits to the continent. Trinidad & Tobago opened its first mission in Africa, in Pretoria, in 2004 following the end of apartheid, and was followed by Jamaica in 2005; that same year, Jamaica also opened a mission in Brazil. In 2011, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) was established, providing a platform for EU-CELAC engagement and for regional meetings in advance of various summits of the Washington-based Organization of American States (OAS).⁷ Despite the creation of a formal mechanism for region-to region engagement, relations between the Caribbean and Latin America - despite their proximity - continued to wax and wane, depending on the outlook of the country holding CELAC's rotating presidency at any given time.

Since 2019, however, relationships within and across the South Atlantic have been transformed as countries react and attempt to adapt to a period of crises, disruption and disorder. They are now keenly focused on what they can achieve together, seeking to secure their interests, diversify partnerships, align with like-minded others, and reduce reliance on

5. Paolo Giordano. Latin America and the Caribbean. Trade trends Estimate. 2025 edition. IDB. <https://publications.iadb.org/en/trade-trends-estimates-latin-america-and-caribbean-2025-edition>

6. As it did in Dominica in the aftermath of Hurricane Allen in 1988 and in Montserrat after the Soufriere Hills volcanic eruption, which devastated the southern half of the island and permanently displaced 11,000 persons, two thirds of the country's population.

7. Cuba was suspended from membership of the organization in 1962.

Western institutions and leadership. They are actively multi-aligned, no longer coerced into choosing sides in conflicts - whether between the U.S. and China, or the West and Russia. Engagement is deepening beyond the Bretton Woods and OECD frameworks, particularly within non-Western groupings such as the BRICS. Countries are benefiting from the rise of middle powers - including Türkiye, India, the Gulf States, and others - and from China's increasing stature as a super power and long-time ally, from whom they can secure more options in support of their development. They are also benefitting from fractures in the West, as Western countries - minus the U.S. - actively seek deeper relations with the Global South.

In the process, the diplomatic contours of the South Atlantic are being recalibrated. Long viewed as an arena of illegal flows - from slavery, piracy, and the destruction of indigenous people and their cultures, to channels for drugs, illegal weapons, and human trafficking - this space is being transformed from a zone of nefarious activity into one where new arteries for commerce and exchange are being forged, enhancing prospects for shared prosperity, growth, development, and resilience.

2.0 A NEW REALITY

This recent period of crises has heightened the sense of a world fragmenting into blocs, each organized around its own interests. Business as usual no longer applies. The rules-based liberal world order in place since the Second World War is being challenged not only by new global actors, but also by growing elements of populism and nativism within mature democracies, and by citizens who feel that liberal democracy, their governments, and institutions have failed them.⁸ In the process, globalization and the principles of free trade and open markets - long the bedrock of global stability and prosperity - is being systematically dismantled, replaced instead by strategic considerations fueled by a resurgence of great power rivalry, demand for critical minerals, and the struggle for dominance in new technologies. New trade clubs, such as the Transatlantic Minerals Group proposed by the EU in 2024, the OPEC-type grouping advanced by Argentina, Bolivia and Chile around lithium, and the recently announced Quad Critical Minerals Initiative put forward by the four Quad nations - Australia, India, the U.S. and Japan - are amongst the varied responses proposed by different groups.

These factors, coupled with a more assertive U.S. foreign policy and sweeping changes to U.S. tariff regimes, are pushing countries of the Global South to both accelerate the pace of deepening relations among themselves and in building new coalitions. New U.S. policies have also created a wedge within the West, raising questions about the bloc's solidarity - long the bulwark of the liberal-based world order. Japan, one of the U.S.'s closest allies, and threatened by new tariffs on trade with the U.S., plans a "major upgrade to defense sector cooperation" with EU defense contractors, as both sides seek to rely less on the U.S. while strengthening domestic industries.⁹

In addition, as great powers move away from traditional, formal structures of multilateralism, countries of the Global South - and middle powers ranging from Brazil, South Africa, Argentina, and Nigeria to those further afield, including Türkiye, Indonesia, Kazakhstan,

8. OECD Trust Survey 2023. <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/trust-in-government.html>

9. Takashi Tsuji. Japan and EU plan major upgrade to defense sector cooperation. Nikkei Asia June 16th, 2025

and others - are increasingly being sought as partners by the West.¹⁰ Such partnerships are seen as important given the rising wealth and political power of these countries, amidst the withdrawal of U.S. leadership from several multilateral fora and the risk of China stepping into this breach. The EU President's eagerness to fill this vacuum - following the U.S.'s dismantling of USAID and its withdrawal from the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) with South Africa in support of the latter's decarbonization efforts - illustrates this trend.¹¹

Indeed, over the last few years, the Global South has been the target of renewed initiatives by the EU and the former U.S. administration to incentivize countries away from China by launching their own Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)-type projects, including the EU's Global Gateway and the U.S.'s Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment. Germany, Britain, Italy and Spain have recently agreed to the sale of 40 Eurofighter Typhoon jets to Türkiye. This matter, which had been under discussion since 2023, has recently gained greater prominence given uncertainty around U.S. intentions as a leading member of NATO, particularly with respect to the defense of Europe.

Following the withdrawal of American engagement with the UN's Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, Germany called for the creation of a North-South Commission reminiscent of the one established by Willy Brandt in 1980, amidst calls for middle powers of both North and South to collaborate in support of the global multilateral agenda. While changes in approaches to coalition building have inspired the idea of 'likeminded internationalism' as a strategic adaptation to current conditions,¹² middle powers of the north, such as Germany, and those of the south, such as Brazil, hold divergent positions on a number of contentious issues - including not only multilateral institutional reform, but even more so the politically fractious matters of the war in Ukraine and Gaza, sanctions on Russia, and the current state of the rules-based world order. Much trust has been lost; overcoming this will be a challenge not to be underestimated.¹³

3.0 STICKS AND STONES: THE POLITICS OF RAW POWER

The countries spanning the South Atlantic have not escaped the weight of current global tensions. Widening global divisions - wedges between America and the rest of the West, escalating U.S.- China discord (China being the most important trading partner for both LAC and Africa), and the raw power deployed by the region's hegemon - heighten tensions and risks as countries tread the proverbial tightrope between the two superpowers. The U.S. has long considered the Caribbean Sea, the South Atlantic and the LAC region as its 'backyard.' With a population of approximately 668 million, this region is far from homogenous,¹⁴ and relations with the U.S., though vital, have not always been smooth. The U.S.'s recent deployment of warships and other military assets off the coast of Venezuela, amongst others, highlights this reality.

10. Xhoi Zajmi. Kazakhstan is posing as a Middle Power with global ambitions. Euractiv. June 2, 2025. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/kazakhstan-is-positioning-as-a-middle-power-with-global-ambitions/>

11. Antony Squazzin, S'thembele Cele, Ntando Thukwana. Bloomberg News. Financial Post. EU and South Africa pledge to draw closer as Trump targets both. March 13, 2025. <https://financialpost.com/pm/business-pmn/eu-and-south-africa-pledge-to-draw-closer-as-us-targets-both>

12. Len Ishmael, Stephan Klingebiel, Andrew Sumner. In Search of Plan B. Like Minded Internationalism and the Future of Global Development. May 2025. Policy Paper. PP – 14/25. Policy Center for the New South.

13. Eric Olamder. How Middle Powers are Navigating the US China Rivalry. China Global South Project. June 18, 2025

14. The Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region comprises countries of extreme divergence in terms of ethnicity, cultures, language, and size, ranging from the continent-sized country of Brazil, to the microstates of the Caribbean. Twenty-eight of 33 countries are considered middle income.

Disagreements have arisen over the region's deepening relations with China, issues of sovereignty and ideology, and America's long-standing embargo on Cuba. In recent times, the Gulf of Mexico has been renamed, and ownership of the Panama Canal is being contested. U.S. involvement in Brazilian internal affairs - such as sanctioning Supreme Court officials over legal matters pertaining to former President Bolsonaro, allegations of suppression of free speech, and threats of additional tariffs of 50% on Brazilian goods as of August 6, 2025 - have plunged relations between the two largest democracies in the Americas to their lowest point in several years. Mexico faces 25% tariffs on steel and automobiles despite its participation in the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMECA) which was renegotiated during President Trump's first term.

The implications for political, economic and social instability across the region are considerable - and stem from factors beyond tariffs. Plane-loads of deportees threaten to overwhelm the facilities of receiving countries. Renewed sanctions on Venezuela, the review of Chevron's license, and threats of a 25% tariff on exports from all countries procuring oil from Venezuela will further impoverish the country,¹⁵ destabilize the wider area, and undermine prospects for growth in the region, which, at a forecasted 2.1% for 2025, is already below the world average.¹⁶

Brazil, currently holding the rotating presidency of BRICS and slated to host COP30 in November, is a special target for American scrutiny, given its status as a founding BRICS member, its ties with China and Russia, and evolving matters around Bolsonaro's legal trials. But the fact that less than 12% of its exports (\$38.1m)¹⁷ are traded to the U.S., versus 30% (\$94.41 billion) to China,¹⁸ provides Brazil with some space within which to maneuver. Plans are already in place to offset losses through increased trade with China. Nonetheless, the threat of additional levies of 50% - linked to Brazilian efforts to uphold law and order within its democracy - has led to outrage in the country, with citizens rallying around the flag and bestowing on Lula the "Carey effect" - a popularity bump that has enhanced his numbers ahead of national elections in 2026. Conversely, U.S. threats of extraordinary tariffs on agriculture and dairy will hit at the core of Bolsonaro's supporters, mostly in the soya and beef industries. BRICS discussions around a new currency and other measures to reduce vulnerability to Western financial institutions have also provoked U.S. threats of 100% tariffs on all BRICS members, plus an additional 10% on any country aligning itself with the "anti-American" bloc.¹⁹ In rebuffing the notion that the group seeks to compete with any other power, Lula responded: "The world has changed. We don't want an emperor."²⁰

Brazil, second only to China in global renewable energy stocks, plays a key role in protecting the Amazon, one of the world's most important ecosystems. The success of COP30 may be in question, given America's withdrawal from the Paris Accords and threats by Argentina to follow suit. However, U.S. disengagement also provides a global platform for others - most notably China - to take the lead. A recent *Financial Times* article notes that China is

15. Upwards of 7.9 million Venezuelans have been displaced, largely as a result of EU and U.S. sanctions, with the bulk of these people being housed across Latin America and the Caribbean.

16. While Brazil benefited from U.S. tariffs on China in 2018 (through increased agricultural exports) the country's advocacy for an expanded role for BRICS may affect it negatively this time around.

17. World bank <https://wits.worldbank.org>

18. Brazil Exports to China-2025 Data 2026 forecast 1989-2024 historical. <https://tradeingeconomics.com>

19. Michael Stott. Brazil to increase its BRICS commitment in defiance of Trump. *Financial Times*. International. Monday July 28, 2025.

20. Callum Sutherland. Trump Threatens Extra 10% Tariff for Countries 'Aligning' themselves with Anti-American BRICS policies. *Time Magazine*. July 8th, 2025.

stepping into the leadership vacuum created by U.S. withdrawal by intensifying its efforts at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other Geneva-based UN entities, ratcheting up activity in leading resolutions, offering concessions, and forming coalitions.²¹

The small size of Caribbean islands has not shielded them from being caught in the crosshairs of U.S. trade and other sanctions. Dominica, St Lucia and Antigua & Barbuda have been threatened with restricted travel to the U.S., and travel advisories have been issued to these and other countries as a result of Cuba's support for their health sectors. Such travel bans and advisories threaten tourism - the lifeblood of the region - for which the U.S. remains the largest market.

For both Latin America and the Caribbean, living in the shadow of the world's superpower has provided harsh lessons. Jamaica's Michael Manley, a socialist-leaning ally of neighboring Fidel Castro, sought to renegotiate contracts with American and Canadian companies operating the country's bauxite mines to ensure greater value remained at home. The move, alongside other nationalist policies, triggered sharp economic repercussions: the Jamaican dollar collapsed, plunging the nation into a downward spiral of political, social, and economic turmoil that gutted the middle class as incomes fell and the economy contracted.²² Under different circumstances, Grenadian Maurice Bishop's close ties with Cuba which included support for the construction of the country's first international airport backed by an IMF loan, set the stage for the 1989 American invasion.

Though the small size of Caribbean states has left them particularly vulnerable in many respects, it has also fostered a distinct strength - an instinctive understanding of the importance of regional integration as a strategy to reduce systemic vulnerabilities. The nine-member OECS hosts the world's smallest economic union, established in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. The larger, fourteen-member Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is one of the world's oldest regional integration groupings, with roots tracing back to the British West Indian Federation of 1958. By contrast, Latin America's sheer geographical scale and uneven infrastructure contributed to a weaker response to the COVID-19 pandemic relative to its Caribbean neighbors. The latter weathered the crisis more effectively, drawing on their history of deep integration to coordinate public health measures, manage the pandemic's economic and social fallout, and jointly reopen borders.

Across the Atlantic, the Trump administration's recent invitation to five West African leaders - Senegal, Liberia, Mauritania, Gabon, and Guinea Bissau²³ - to discuss new partnerships around critical minerals highlights the divisions now emerging across Africa. Notably absent from the talks were Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa, and Ghana, among the continent's largest democracies. Nigeria, West Africa's largest economy, is under U.S. sanctions, as is South Africa, which also faces the threat of 30% tariffs, with the possibility of more should the proposed 100% levy on all BRICS member countries be implemented.

The unpredictable nature of the new U.S. administration's policies - and the need to navigate and balance these amid heightened great power rivalry - has become one of the most pressing challenges for countries of the South Atlantic. At the same time, many share

21. Mercedes Ruehl, Henry Foy, Laura Dubois, Joe Leahy. Beijing in drive to fill UN power vacuum left by skeptical Trump. Financial Times International. Thursday 24 July, 2025.

22. The value of the Jamaican dollar was J\$0.909 per US\$1 in 1973. By 1978, its value relative to the U.S. dollar had declined. Today, J\$1000 is equivalent to US\$6.22.

23. Jewel Bright. Trump Courts African Leaders at White House. July 9, 2025. NPR.Org <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/09/nx-s1-5462613/africa-leaders-trump-white-house-china-minerals-oil>

the view that the current development model no longer serves their interests, prompting a search for alternatives. This has given rise to a three-pronged strategy for managing current pressures: deepening of South-South cooperation; recalibrating diplomatic alignments to reduce dependency on Western structures, institutions and partnerships; and pursuing active multi-alignment alongside emerging issue-based coalitions.

4.0 DEEPENING SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

Like other countries of the Global South, nations in LAC and Africa are being propelled in this era of crises to secure their interests through multiple modalities. Non-Western groupings - such as the BRICS, in which Brazil with China are founding members - form an attractive nucleus for cooperation on issues of common interest. The expanded BRICS+ formulation provides opportunity for synergies between a widening number of countries, many of whom participate in other forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the G77+China. These overlapping memberships provide a wider scope for consensus-building and coalition-forming, enabling coordinated positions in multilateral arenas, including the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the WTO, and others.

With the addition of Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, the UAE and Iran, BRICS member countries are now exerting influence through an expanding network that spans multiple regional groupings - among them the African Union (AU), Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), the ASEAN Community, and CELAC. Collectively, these blocs represent a growing share of the world's population and resources across Asia, Africa, and the LAC region.

These countries are also developing new mechanisms to reduce their exposure to Western policies and institutions. Initiatives include cross-border payment systems that bypass SWIFT, currency swap arrangements, and the settlement of trade in local currencies. At the BRICS Summit in 2025, members unveiled plans for a BRICS Multilateral Guarantee designed to offset the political risks faced by poorer countries seeking access to capital markets. The BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) is expanding the range of its instruments and measures in support of both members and non-members alike. China has also announced plans to establish a new organization for the regulation of artificial intelligence (AI).

Global South countries are also deepening trade among themselves and strengthening regional internal markets through targeted policies aimed at increasing intra-regional trade. Examples include policies linked to the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Latin America's MERCOSUR, the Andean Community, and CARICOM's single market. CARICOM's *Vision 25 by 2025* - to reduce the region's large food import bill by 25% by the end of 2025 - is one such initiative. It seeks to displace almost \$419 million worth of extra-regional food imports,²⁴ building on the region's long history of agricultural production with an eye toward self-sufficiency. Tasked with implementing this initiative is a new, purpose-built private sector entity, the CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO).

Links within the LAC region are also deepening around food security. U.S. threats to sanction Chinese-built vessels have precipitated the recent dispatch of a Caribbean delegation to Brazil in an attempt to diversify supply chains closer to home - sourcing high-quality agricultural products and meat at affordable prices - in an attempt to reduce the high cost-of-living challenges currently faced.

24. <https://thecpso.org> 2025, Barbados

Deepening South-South cooperation is evident in other areas. Recent tensions with the U.S. have precipitated agreement for urgent talks between Mexico and Brazil, Latin America's two largest economies, aimed at increasing trade between them - particularly in agribusiness and industrial components - to offset losses resulting from threatened U.S. tariffs of 30% and 50% respectively. Sources note, "there is a lot of enthusiasm from both countries...there is a deep political, programmatic and ideological affinity... at all levels."²⁵ Mexico and Chile host a cooperation fund to support implementation of joint projects, and Mexico also supports programs with Honduras and El Salvador to boost jobs and improve food security, valued at \$62 million. Brazil and Colombia both support investments in the Caribbean as non-borrowing members of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB).

Across the South Atlantic, new ties are being built and long-standing ones revitalized. Columbia and the AU are collaborating on projects to empower women, while Brazil has committed \$27 million to fund social programs in over 40 countries through the International Labor Organization (ILO). In 2023, Angola and Argentina launched a Business Forum to deepen economic cooperation and diversify bilateral exchanges. Africa and Latin America are also exploring the use of sustainable bioenergy, emphasizing the importance of joint research and knowledge-sharing to address shared development challenges.

Morocco, on Africa's Atlantic Coast, is increasingly asserting its identity as an Atlantic State through a range of initiatives. These include rapidly expanding its diplomatic footprint in LAC by opening missions across Central and South America as well as the Caribbean. Morocco also supports the joint mission of the Eastern Caribbean States (ECS) in Rabat, while its Agency for International Cooperation (AMCI) provides scholarships for students to study in Morocco - enhancing the country's soft power across the Atlantic.

The UN system's multilateral institutions are also playing a role in deepening engagement between Africa, LAC and Asia. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) and its sister organization, the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), for example, have established a trust fund to support cooperation projects between Asia and Latin America.²⁶ UNECLAC and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) are also collaborating on various projects. By sharing experiences and policy recommendations, the three commissions are building synergies between the different regions and developing new platforms for collaboration.

At the regional level, the relationship between Africa and Caribbean countries has also deepened. Scheduled meetings and engagement facilitated by CARICOM and the AU have increased in frequency. Since September 2022, African and Caribbean countries have hosted an annual AfriCaribbean Trade and Investment Forum, bringing together hundreds of participants engaged not only in business, but also in cultural exchanges. Open Skies Agreements, enabling direct flights from Africa to the Caribbean, are currently being explored.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AU and CARICOM collaborated on joint vaccine procurement as well as the provision of essential medicines and supplies through the Africa Medical Supply Platform, while China and India provided vaccines to both Africa and the LAC region. On June 24, 2025, Nigeria's President Tinubu visited St Lucia - the headquarters of the OECS - for a series of meetings aimed at deepening cultural exchanges and building commercial and educational ties in fintech and energy between the West African nation and Caribbean countries.

25. Christine Murray, Michael Pooler. Brazil and Mexico in talks to strengthen ties. Financial Times. June 30, 2025.

26. Enrique Gomez Ramirez. South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Latin America. European Parliament Briefing March 2019

Bi-regional financial systems are also taking shape. The African Import-Export Bank (Afreximbank) has concluded agreements with 12 Caribbean countries, strengthening economic, trade, and investment ties between the two regions while providing the Caribbean with a \$3 billion line of credit. The bank has announced plans to establish nine trade centers across Africa and the Caribbean to serve as hubs for business information and to facilitate trade and investment.²⁷ On June 30, 2025, during Afreximbank's 32nd annual meeting, the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) was unveiled. Based on a new debit card, PAPSS aims to transform trade payments across 16 African countries by enabling settlement in local currencies. A similar platform, the Caribbean Payment and Settlement System (CPASS), is being rolled out in the Caribbean, with Barbados and the Bahamas having already completed a successful pilot trial. Financial ties are also expanding through banking sector integration, with regional Caribbean banks opening new branches in Africa and a Nigerian bank preparing to do the same in the Caribbean.

Relations with other members of the Global South outside the South Atlantic are also increasing: a recent example being the visit of India's Prime Minister on July 5, 2025, to his counterpart in Trinidad & Tobago, which led to the execution of six agreements to enhance cooperation in several areas including infrastructure and pharmaceuticals, disaster mitigation, defense, technology, climate change, healthcare and agricultural research. President Modi used this as an opportunity to reiterate commitment to the Global South.²⁸ On July 8, 2025, Brazil and India agreed to establish the Joint Commission on Scientific and Technological Cooperation for deeper cooperation in digital public infrastructure, AI, quantum technologies, renewable energy and outer space.²⁹ Brazil and India already work together in satellite technology to monitor deforestation and boost agricultural productivity. In a remarkably short period, countries across the South Atlantic Basin - and others in the wider Global South - are identifying shared interests and building partnerships that strengthen resilience for the future.

5.0 INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRADE ROUTES

The South Atlantic is a natural trade corridor for Africa and Latin America. Given the heightened scramble for raw materials abundant in both continents, and the growing emphasis on South-South cooperation, it is slated for greater prominence. Together with the land corridors being built across Latin America to the Pacific coasts, the South Atlantic is also positioned to play a role in linking Africa, Latin America and Asia through trade. Such links are already taking shape. Investments in infrastructure between Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa - including Morocco's *Atlantic Initiative* launched in 2023 - are creating new trade routes across the South Atlantic. The Moroccan project includes the construction of a new port at Dakhla, on the country's Atlantic coast, with the goal of providing new trade routes for the landlocked countries of the Sahel and for energy giant Nigeria to Latin America. Meanwhile, Morocco's trade in phosphates with Brazil and Argentina is growing. Morocco's trade with Brazil rose from \$655 million in 2016 to \$2.05 billion in 2022, while trade with Argentina increased by 45% between 2021-2022, reaching \$1.5 billion.³⁰

27. The Rise of Global Africa. Africa and the Caribbean forge new economic ties. <https://african.buisness> April 14, 2025 African Business. Hubs to catalyze business across Africa and the Caribbean April 11, 2025

28. Embassy of India. July 5, 2025. Trinidad & Tobago. <https://jiceias.com/upsc-current-affairs-india-trinidad-and-tobago-agreements-2025/>

29. https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/joint-statement-india-and-brazil-two-great-nations-with-higher-purposes/ Joint Statement India Brazil: Two Great Nations with Higher Purpose. July 9, 2025

30. Youssef Tobi. The Atlantic Rim a catalyst for Morocco-Latin America Relations. Policy Brief. PCNS. June 2023.

In November 2024, the Presidents of China and Peru inaugurated the Peruvian Port of Chancay, marking the starting point of a new maritime-land corridor between Beijing and Latin America that will save 25 days of ocean travel between Asia and Latin America. Unveiled during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) by China's Xi Jinping and Peru's Dina Boluarte, the \$3.6 billion mega-port - funded and built by China - forms part of an ambitious \$72 billion China-Brazil-led project to construct a 5,000+ km railroad linking Brazil, Bolivia and Peru.³¹ This project will increase connectivity and facilitate the transit of agricultural products and mineral ores to Asian markets. The project will also include a river link to Brazil's Atlantic ports of Barcarena, São Luís and Ilhéus.

Not only will this initiative reduce dependence on the Panama Canal by 2031, it will also catalyze the development of Latin America's internal market across its vast continent while facilitating the movement of African and Latin American goods crossing the South Atlantic and the Pacific to Asian markets, and vice versa, resulting in a major reshaping of trade flows in the region. By providing a new link between West Africa, the LAC region and the countries of the ASEAN community and Asia, these initiatives are laying the foundations for new trade routes across both the South Atlantic and the Pacific, unlocking fresh opportunities for South-South cooperation.

6.0 RECALIBRATING DIPLOMATIC ALIGNMENT

The geopolitics of the day are pushing countries around the South Atlantic to diversify their partnerships and accelerate wider geopolitical realignment around mutual interests. Important among these is the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), whose members have rapidly increased investments across both Africa and the LAC region. The UAE - with €110 billion in investments - has emerged as Africa's top investor, recently overtaking China.³² GCC investments in the LAC region are also growing apace, with Gulf states demonstrating keen interest in the region's clean energy future, as they seek to move away from fossil fuel dependence, broaden partnerships, and expand their sphere of influence.³³

The UAE, for example, has invested \$2.45 billion for green diesel and an aviation fuel plant in Bahia, Brazil, supporting the country's clean energy transition and consolidating its dominant role in the sector - second only to China. Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund has made a \$2.5 billion acquisition in Vale's metal division in Brazil and announced plans to secure access to Argentina's north-west mining regions, home to significant lithium deposits.³⁴ Qatar, meanwhile, has extended a \$775 million loan to Argentina, invested \$500 million in energy transmission linked to the country's shale project, and expanded QatarEnergy's presence in Mexico's natural gas and petroleum sectors. Together, these initiatives point to a collective and expanding GCC interest in the LAC region.

Deeper relations are also being established between the GCC and Caribbean States. The GCC–Association of Caribbean States (ACS) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) of

31. Diana Roy. China's Growing Influence in Latin America. Council on Foreign Relations. January 10, 2025

32. Middle East Monitor. UAE becomes Africa's largest investor, overtaking China. December 25, 2024. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20241225-uae-becomes-africas-largest-investor-overtaking-china/?ampLen>

33. Ishmael. Winds of Change: BRICS Club of Nations and the Dawn of the New South. Trends Research & Advisory. Issue 21. Strategic Trends. August 2024.

34. Hannan Alghamdi. How Trump's Policies are Pushing Latin America Towards the Gulf. Gulf Research Center. March 26 2025

September 18, 2023, is one such example.³⁵ The signatories resolved to work together to safeguard multilateralism and reaffirmed their commitment to the UN Charter. They agreed to cooperate on climate action and the preservation of marine environments in both the Caribbean Sea and the Arabian Gulf. Additionally, they established the GCC–ACS Joint Action Plan to enhance trade and investment flows, providing a framework for dialogue on investment needs and business opportunities among officials, the business community, and regional and international organizations.

Other formal agreements and initiatives between GCC members and Caribbean countries include:

- UAE-Caribbean Cooperation Forum: This forum, inaugurated in Dubai in 2018, convened government officials and business leaders to explore avenues for cooperation, leading to the signing of a framework agreement.
- Saudi Arabia-CARICOM Summit: The inaugural summit between Saudi Arabia and CARICOM in 2023 aimed to strengthen alliances and explore new areas for cooperation in the economic, tourism, investment and trade sectors.
- UAE-Caribbean Renewable Energy Fund: Valued at \$50 million, this fund supports clean energy projects in Caribbean countries to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, promote sustainable energy, and enhance climate resilience.

Other middle powers are investing in an array of mechanisms for deeper engagement with LAC countries. India, for example, engages in a series of political and economic platforms with the region, including the India Business Forum for Latin America and the Caribbean; the India-LAC (Business) Conclave; the India-CELAC Forum; the India-System of Integration in Central America (SICA) and India-CARICOM Dialogues. Beyond the recent India-Trinidad & Tobago agreement referenced previously, community-level development projects have been a focus of India's engagement with the Caribbean. In 2019, Prime Minister Modi offered CARICOM countries US\$14 million in grants for community projects and a US\$150 million line of credit for solar energy and climate change-related projects. An India-CARICOM Task Force has been commissioned to reinvigorate cooperation.

Türkiye maintains a regular presence in the region. President Erdoğan has visited multiple times as part of a broader strategy to expand partnerships through political, economic, developmental, and cultural engagement, and by participating in regional forums like CELAC. Türkiye has signed Economic and Trade Cooperation Agreements with 19 LAC countries and has significantly increased its diplomatic presence, establishing 13 missions compared to 6 in 2009. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) has offices in Mexico and Colombia to strengthen South-South ties, providing humanitarian aid, development assistance, scholarships and technical assistance. Turkish language and culture courses are also available at some universities. The country holds observer status in several regional bodies, such as the OAS and the ACS, and has consultation mechanisms with CARICOM and MERCOSUR. Regular meetings are also held with the CELAC Quartet (and Troika) at the Foreign Ministers' level.

35. The ACS comprises 25 member states and 3 associate members from Latin America and the Caribbean, all situated around the Caribbean Sea. One of its key objectives is to preserve the region as a zone of peace, free from the transshipment of hazardous wastes.

7.0 EXPANDING ROLE FOR CHINA

In this era of U.S. maximalist displays of raw power and “America First” principles, China positions itself as the counterfoil - exuding soft power, presenting itself as a bulwark of global stability in a volatile world, and a defender of multilateralism and globalization, while burnishing its leadership credentials. Although China’s engagement with countries across the LAC region and Africa has grown rapidly, its relationships with all of these countries have a long history.

China has long been an ally of the Global South, from the early days of NAM in the 1950s and the G77 grouping established in the 1960s. In the early 1970s, while still a relatively poor country, China designed, financed and built the 1,860km Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority rail line (TAZARA) - the longest in sub-Saharan Africa - to move copper from Zambia’s landlocked mines to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, at a cost of US\$406 million (US\$3.29 billion in today’s money). Unable to secure Western backing and rebuffed by the World Bank (which deemed the project economically “not viable”), China’s Chairman Mao Tse-Tung responded positively to appeals for support,³⁶ resulting in what could be considered the early template for China’s model of development cooperation via infrastructure investments in the Global South. Since then, Chinese ties across Africa and LAC have deepened significantly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013 and currently valued at over \$1.3 trillion.

China’s engagement with these regions predates European ventures by centuries. The Chinese Indian Ocean Silk Maritime Trade Route connected China to East Africa long before European forays into the region. In Latin America, trade links with China date back to the 16th century, beginning with routes between Mexico and China and, by the 1840s, to Cuba and Peru, centered on agricultural plantations and silver mines. Today, people of Chinese ancestry form the largest (non-Indian) Asian diaspora in Latin America, with demographically significant communities in Venezuela, Brazil, Paraguay, Colombia, Argentina, Panama, Nicaragua, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Peru, and smaller populations in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Puerto Rico.

While China has been Africa’s largest trading partner for 16 consecutive years, an assessment of the trade and investment links with LAC shows this relationship to be equally significant. Growing from \$18 billion in 2002, Chinese-LAC trade exceeded \$450 billion by 2021 and is projected to exceed \$700 billion by 2035.³⁷ Trade agreements have been signed with several countries, and 22 countries are also signatories to the BRI. While U.S. and EU trade and investment links remain important, China is the region’s foremost trading partner and has concluded comprehensive strategic partnerships with Venezuela, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador. Chinese investments are also increasing. The BRI network of infrastructure and other investments spans the continent, and Chinese firms are major investors in the region’s energy, infrastructure, and other sectors. Prominent among these is China’s BYD, which has secured mineral rights in Brazil’s lithium-rich Jequitinhonha Valley. Having opened its first Brazilian factory in 2015 to produce electric bus chassis, the company’s new factories in Campinas and Camacari will consolidate BYD’s presence in its largest EV market outside of China.³⁸ BYD’s first Brazilian-made EVs were sold on the

36. Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority. TAZARA. Our History <https://www.tazarasite.com/our-history>

37. Diana Roy. China’s Growing Influence in Latin America. Council on Foreign Relations. January 10, 2025. Exports consist mainly of oil, petroleum products, copper, dairy, beans, and vegetables, while manufactured goods make up the bulk of imports.

38. Diana Roy. China’s Growing Influence in Latin America. Council on Foreign Relations. January 10, 2025

local market in 2025; today, the automaker's various initiatives are filling a vacuum created years ago by the withdrawal of American automaker, Ford, in 2021. The company is also considering establishing a factory in Peru to produce car batteries, given the uncertainty surrounding previous plans for expanding existing factories in Mexico due to the threat of U.S. tariffs.³⁹

China's Huawei, having lost market share in the West due to political risk concerns, launched a 5G project in 2022 in Curitiba, Brazil, where a majority of mobile networks already utilize the company's infrastructure.⁴⁰ Taken together, China's investments include over \$73 billion in the construction of oil refineries and processing plants in coal, copper, gas, oil, and uranium.⁴¹ Investments have also been made in Chile, Bolivia, and Argentina's lithium mines, critical for the production of EVs and batteries. China and Chile have also agreed to cooperate in additional sectors, including IT, infrastructure, energy, and communications.

The continent also benefits from access to Chinese loans, with Venezuela being the largest net borrower, having received \$60 billion in financing for infrastructure and energy projects.⁴² Major Chinese banks have established a presence in the region, particularly in Brazil, Argentina, and Panama, providing financing for infrastructure projects, supporting trade, and expanding their operations through acquisitions of local banks. Notable amongst these are the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) - the world's largest bank by assets, with a strong focus on infrastructure projects - and the Bank of China. State-owned China Development Bank (CDB) and the Export-Import Bank of China (CHEXIM) have historically been major lenders to Latin America, particularly for infrastructure and resource-related projects. The China Construction Bank (CCB) and Bank of Communications (BoCom) are also expanding their operations across Latin America.

8.0 REFLECTIONS

Western interests are no longer, de-facto, those of the rest of the world. No longer amenable to picking a side in the ongoing war in Europe or in the great power struggle between China and the U.S., countries of the Global South are choosing to march to the beat of a different drum - one of their own making - aligned with their own interests. Rather than being anti-Western, these are pro-south. Rather than choosing one side over another, they are engaging with everyone in search of the best offer.

Why now? Because increasingly, they can. Today they have more options, and the West no longer holds the same attraction - nor the absolute power - it once did. The old order is being contested, and its values and norms are also being undermined from within. And while the makings of a new world order remain murky, there is a prevailing sense that for much of the world, the status quo no longer holds, and there can be no going back. Disorder is the new game, and raw power its king. While questions remain over the new source of global leadership, China is laying its claim.

39. Somini Sengupta. Chinese giants rush into Brazil with dreams of dominating a continent. New York Times. July 5th 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/21/climate/china-brazil-electric-vehicles.html>

40. Huawei also operates in South Africa and across the African continent

41. Diana Roy. China's Growing Influence in Latin America. Council on Foreign Relations. January 10, 2025

42. Diana Roy. China's Growing Influence in Latin America. Council on Foreign Relations. January 10, 2025

The West is losing credibility with the rest of the world, in which 7 of the global population's 8 billion reside. "It is increasingly been seen to be cherry picking in its application of international law; international law has become more of a menu from which to select arguments, rather than the basis on which to apply the rules consistently."⁴³ The question of 'whose rules?' has galvanized countries across the South Atlantic and the Global South into renewed efforts aimed at redesigning systems of global governance to respond to the needs of the many, as opposed to the self-interests of a few. Much trust has been lost with the old guard, and countries of the Global South are exercising sovereignty through the new and fresh partnerships they are forging in flexi-laterals, mini-laterals, and other like-minded coalitions.

At their recent summit in Rio de Janeiro, the BRICS once again addressed recurrent claims of the group's "anti-Western stance." "The BRICS are a set of countries that want to find another way of organizing the world from the economic perspective. I think that's why the BRICS are making people uncomfortable."⁴⁴ Working together should not by default be equated with an intention to work against others. When Western countries strengthen ties among themselves in the G7, they are not labeled as anti-Global South. Yet, non-Western countries seeking to secure their interests in groupings of their own making and choice are often burdened with such labels.

Punitive measures on BRICS countries (and others) as they seek to design new mechanisms to safeguard their interests only heighten the likelihood of redoubled efforts to bypass Western institutions and reduce geopolitical vulnerabilities. Brazil, for example, has pledged to redouble its commitment to the BRICS and further diversify partnerships in the face of recent U.S. tariffs. The same is true for countries such as India, where U.S. threats to raise tariffs over purchases of Russian oil make a rapprochement with China a more attractive proposition than before. While the recent thaw in Chinese-Indian relations remains tentative, it has received a boost in the recent meetings between the two leaders during the 2025 Tianjin SCO summit and it is one of several trends pointing to a recalibration of international relations, as countries adapt to a world in which the rules and norms are changing - even for U.S. allies. The UK is working more closely with the EU, as are Canada and Japan. South Africa is focusing on building deeper ties across the Global South, while also strengthening connections within Africa.

Having long awaited a systemic rebalancing of global economic and political structures, countries of the South Atlantic and the wider Global South are now taking matters into their own hands - and increasingly they have the means to do so. The BRICS, after all, did not materialize without what its members consider to be just cause. Frustrated by years of voicing deep-rooted concerns over underrepresentation in key World Bank and IMF governing bodies that failed to reflect their true size and growing influence, they formed their own club in 2009. Similar impulses led China to establish the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2016.

Today, these countries are deepening relations within and between their blocs, while forging new routes across oceans. New institutions are emerging - including a proposed BRICS Multilateral Guarantee Initiative, tabled at the most recent BRICS summit in July 2025, aimed at reducing the political risk for poorer countries accessing capital markets. China

43. Richard Milne, Laura Dubois. West risks losing credibility over Gaza, says Norway. Financial Times. Geopolitics. July 29, 2025

44. Callum Sutherland. Trump Threatens Extra 10% Tariff for Countries 'Aligning' themselves with Anti-American BRICS policies. Time Magazine. July 8th, 2025.

has also unveiled a proposal for a global AI regulator and is sharing AI as an open-source commodity across the Global South, helping bridge the digital divide. New approaches to debt and climate resilience are being advanced by small states such as Barbados, whose Prime Minister Mia Mottley has spearheaded widely acclaimed innovations like the Bridgetown Initiative and debt swap facilities for environmental conservation and climate resilience. Such efforts reflect a growing emphasis on homegrown solutions by the South, for the South. Far from being anti-West, these countries are simply Pro-South.

The chaos and instability of recent years have produced several outcomes - perhaps none more significant than the momentum they have given the Global South to pursue greater cooperation and solidarity between them, while securing better terms in negotiations with others. Far from being underinvested, relations among South Atlantic states today are rich with promise which is being actively tapped. These countries are reshaping their shared space. Imperfect and incomplete though their efforts may be, they are assembling initiatives that deepen ties not only across the South Atlantic but also across the Pacific, enabling quicker access to China and other Asian markets, expanding networks, and building resilience as a bloc. Rather than a "small yard with a tall fence" mentality, they are building a "big yard" for resilience - with a low fence that like-minded partners can easily cross. Collectively, they are constructing a space where their future - and, by extension, the future of global diplomacy - is quietly being imagined, influenced, and shaped.

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The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable and enterprising "new South" that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership, and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions.

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