PUEAA

Working Paper 16

The US exit from Afghanistan. Reverberations across Latin America

by

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October 2023

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PUEAA Working Paper Series
Working Paper No. 16. The US exit from Afghanistan. Reverberations across Latin America
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DOI: https://doi.org/10.22201/pueaa.001r.2023

Publication Date October 2023

2nd Edition: February 2025
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
Programa Universitario de Estudios sobre Asia y África
Calle de Filosofía y Letras 88
04360, Copilco Universidad
Coyoacán, Ciudad de México

Editorial Credits
Editorial coordination and layout design: Andrea Reyes
Proofreading: Anaelia Lazcano
Spelling, grammar, and source review: Ivanna López.
Cover design: Yussef A. Galicia Galicia.

Suggested citation: Marchini, G. (2024). *The US Exit From Afghanistan. Reverberations Across Latin America*, PUEAA Working Paper Series, No. 16. DOI: https://doi.org/10.22201/pueaa.001r.2023

Abstract

In this paper, I aim to analyze which direct or indirect implications the US withdrawal from Afghanistan had for Latin America, especially in the economic sphere, an aspect less addressed. My point is that there were few direct economic effects, due to the lack of relevance of trade and investment links between Afghanistan and Latin American countries, but the consequences of the US exit reverberated through the global system and through its real and potential effects on topics of common interest. As peripheral and semi-peripheral countries, and despite the absence of international wars in the region, several Latin American countries share with Afghanistan aspects of an insertion in the global economy which includes illicit activities or activities at the margins of legality, like the production, transit and exports of drugs, or the privatization of war, or are affected by the struggles between the great powers, especially the United States and China.

Resumen

Este artículo pretende analizar cuáles son las implicaciones directas e indirectas que tuvo en Latinoamérica la salida de EEUU de Afganistán, especialmente en el ámbito económico, aspecto menos explorado. Mi punto es que hubo algunas afectaciones económicas directas, gracias a la falta de relevancia de los vínculos comerciales y de inversión entre Afganistán y los países latinoamericanos, pero las consecuencias de la salida de EEUU repercutieron a través del sistema global y a través de sus efectos reales y potenciales sobre temas de interés común. Como países periféricos y semiperiféricos, y a pesar de la ausencia de guerras internacionales en la región, varios países latinoamericanos comparten con Afganistán aspectos de su inserción en la economía global que incluyen actividades ilícitas o al margen de la legalidad, como la producción, tráfico y exportación de drogas, o la privatización de la guerra, o se ven afectados por los enfrentamientos entre las grandes potencias, especialmente Estados Unidos y China.

The US Exit From Afghanistan. Reverberations Across Latin America

Geneviéve Marchini

Introduction

The seizure of power by the Taliban in August 2021 and the chaotic withdrawal of American troops and civilians from Afghanistan after nearly twenty years of war, have been interpreted as a disaster and a humiliation for the United States. These events meant a new US defeat in a prolonged asymmetric conflict as well as a failure for NATO, and were interpreted in terms of the ongoing struggle for global hegemony. However, although this event was important in geostrategic terms, its impact on the global economy was weak, due to the small size of the Afghan economy and the absence of significant investments following more than forty years of conflict.

From a Latin American viewpoint, analysts feared that the centrality of Central Asia for the US and its geopolitical dynamics which include global and regional actors like China, Russia, India, or Pakistan, would make Latin America less relevant in the country's agenda (Tokatlian, 2021). The exit from Afghanistan would also cause a loss of confidence in the region towards the US, against the abandonment of allies and the lack of support to defend human rights (Rodriguez, 2021). Finally, for many governments in the region, it "confirmed the importance of the principle of non-interference in other countries internal affairs" and involved several lessons for the region´s own challenges with regard to human rights, failed States, and the failed "war on drugs" in Latin America (Osborne, 2021; Tokatlian, 2021).

In this paper, I aim to analyze which direct or indirect implications the US withdrawal had for Latin America, especially in the economic sphere, an aspect less addressed. My point is that there were few direct economic effects, due to the lack of relevance of trade and investment links between Afghanistan and Latin American countries, but it reverberated through the global system and its real and potential effects on topics of common interest. A reverberation is defined as "a continuing effect; a repercussion",[1] or "an effect or impact that resembles an echo".[2] As peripheral and semi-peripheral regions, and despite the absence of international wars in the region, several Latin American countries share with Afghanistan an insertion in the global economy which includes illicit activities or activities at the margins of legality, like the production, transit and exports of drugs, or the privatization of war, or to be parts in the struggles between the great powers, especially the United States and China.

The outbreak of war in Ukraine puts the US exit from Afghanistan in a new perspective. On the one hand, the hegemonic struggle gains a greater intensity and moves, maybe temporarily, in a space different from that of Central Asia or Asia. On the other hand, the consequences of the Russian invasion and of the sanctions applied by the Western powers this time have pervasive global effects in the economic and financial spheres as well as for global value chains, and a very much dee-

[1] From Google dictionary (2022).

[2] Merriam-Webster (2022).

per impact on Latin America. Nevertheless, the Tunxi initiative launched by China (31/03/2022) and the recent hearings at the US Congress (12/05/2022)[3] underline that new developments are in progress.

This paper is organized as follows: in a first section we briefly introduce the Afghan economy and show the weak links it maintains with Latin America. The second section discusses some immediate reactions in Latin America and examines a direct effect of the US exit, related to Colombia's involvement in Afghanistan, through the participation of military personnel. The third section deals with the reverberations of the US exit on the "war on drugs", which involves several Latin American countries as well as Afghanistan, and the fourth section approaches the possible impacts on the international infrastructure initiatives in both regions. The last section concludes.

The Afghan economy and its links with Latin America

With an area of 652 864 km2, Afghanistan is the forty-second biggest country in the world, the 11th in Asia, after Myanmar but well ahead of Thailand. On a Latin American scale, its size would rank it behind Chile (thirty-ninth country by area). Its landlocked geographical position in Central Asia (Map 1) as well as its orography and arid to semi-arid weather imply significant difficulties for communications and more generally, for economic and social development. The characteristics of its territory, coupled with its history of repeated invasions maybe explain "the fierce tribal and microgeographical independence and

[3] China's Activities and Influence in South and Central Asia, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. (2022)

mutual hostility which characterizes the structure of Afghan society in recent centuries” (Holt, 2005, p. 9).

Map 1. Afghanistan and neighboring countries

Source: Wikimedia Commons (n.d.)

It shares borders with countries of the former Soviet Union -Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan-, independent since 1991,[4] but also with powerful regional neighbors, Iran, Pakistan, as well as China, with which Afghanistan has a narrow boundary with the Xinjiang Province, the Wakhan Corridor. The region is extremely complex to understand, due to the multiple historical, cultural, religious, and political influences that have shaped it and the interests that are mani-

[4] These countries declared their independence respectively on September 1, 1991 for Uzbekistan; September 9 in the case of Tajikistan and October 27 in the case of Turkmenistan. Levystone (2021).

fested there, due to the energy and mineral wealth with which these countries are endowed. (Levystone, 2021).

Due to this geostrategic position, Afghanistan has been called "the Heart of Asia", and due to its history, it has been dubbed the "graveyard of Empires", because, in a modern repetition of the hardship suffered by the Macedonian army of Alexander the Great -329 B.C.E.- (Holt, 2005), several modern-day "empires" have tried to conquer and maintain control of the country, attempts that have ended in costly failures –the British Empire, the Soviet Union, and finally the United States.

The Afghan population has been estimated in 38 million in 2019 (CIA, 2022), with only 26% urban. It comprised several ethnic groups and languages.[5] The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) calculates in 2.6 million the Afghan refugees registered in the world[6] and in 3.5 million the Afghan population internally displaced (UNHCR, 2022).[7] Indeed, since the establishment of the Republic in 1973, Afghanistan has lived through many years of civil wars and foreign interventions. The most significant moments were the Soviet-Afghan war, when the governmental army of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, supported by the military intervention of the Soviet Union (1979-1989), fought against a mujahideen rebellion, the

[5] Among these groups, "the 2004 Constitution cited Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkman, Baluch, Pachaie, Nuristani, Aymaq, Arab, Qirghiz, Qizilbash, Gujur, and Brahwui ethnicities; Afghanistan has dozens of other small ethnic groups", CIA (2022). The main languages spoken in the country were Afghan Persian or Dari (official) 77%, Pashto (official) 48%, Uzbeki 11%. CIA (2022). The Afghan population is almost 100% Muslim, and predominantly Sunni (84.7 - 89.7%) with a Shia minority (10 - 15%) CIA (2022).

[6] 2.2 million of them are registered in Iran and Pakistan (UNHCR, 2022).

[7] War casualties have been estimated in several million people.

Afghan Civil War which followed and led to the creation of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan by the Taliban (1996-2001), and the 2001-2021 US and western occupation following the 9/11 attacks in the US.

Afghanistan Basic Data and Human Development Indicators

For ease of comparison, the level of human development of Afghanistan is close to that of Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas. With a HDI level of 0.511 in 2020, Afghanistan ranked in position 169 at the world level, against Haiti, which ranked 170, with a HDI at 0.510. Although the Afghan Gross National Income Per Capita was higher than Haiti's, at 2 229 US$, vs 1 709 US$ for the Caribbean nation, and life expectancy index was slightly higher in Afghanistan, several Afghan indicators show much worse health and education outcomes. The part of the population living below the national poverty line is higher in Haiti -58% against 54%- but the percentage of people living in severe multidimensional poverty is higher in Afghanistan -24.5% vs 18.5% in Haiti. That is also the case of malnutrition for children below the age of 5, which concerns 38.5% of children in Afghanistan against 21.9% in Haiti. Both countries show very poor education levels, with a low level of literacy rate among adults, only 43% of the population aged 15 and above for both countries, but lower levels of population with at least some secondary education in Afghanistan. These contrasts may be due to the high number of internal refugees in Afghanistan, but the roots of it are to be found in how women are treated. The education records for the female part of the population are much lower than men's, as is the estimated Gross National Income PC for women, which is only a fourth of men's (table 1), whilst these gaps are much less relevant in Haiti. As a result, the Gender development index in Afghanistan (0.659) is much lower than Haiti's GDI (0.875).

Table 1. Afghanistan and Haiti: some social indicators from the Human Development Index

	Afghanistan	Haiti
Rank, Human Development Index, 2020	169	170
HDI	0.511	0.510
Life expectancy at birth (years)	64.8	64
Child malnutrition, stunting (moderate or severe) (% under age 5)	38.2	21.9
Life expectancy at birth, female (years)	66.4	66.2
Life expectancy at birth, male (years)	63.4	61.8
Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)	47.9	49.5
Education index	0.414	0.456
Expected years of schooling, female (years)	7.7	9
Expected years of schooling, male (years)	12.5	10.4
Literacy rate, adult (% ages 15 and older)	43	43
Population with at least some secondary education (% ages 25 and older)	26.1	33.5
Population with at least some secondary education, female (% ages 25 and older)	13.2	26.9
Population with at least some secondary education, male (% ages 25 and older)	36.9	40
Estimated gross national income per capita, female (2017 PPP $)	819	1,410
Estimated gross national income per capita, male (2017 PPP $)	3 566	2 016

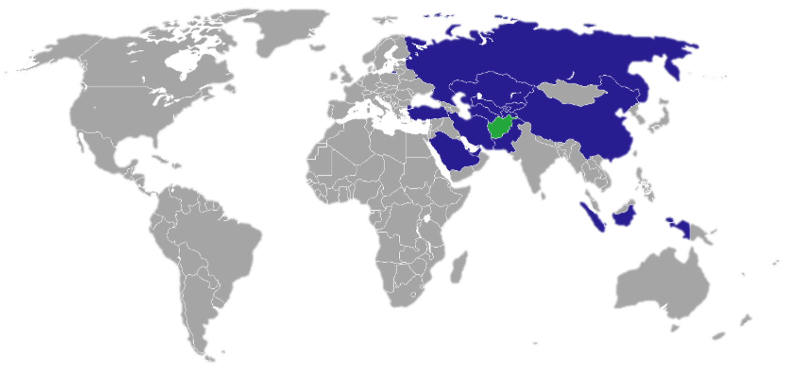
GDP per capita (2017 PPP $)	2 202	1 729
Gender Development Index (GDI)	0.659	0.875
Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)	69	51.7
Human Development Index (HDI), female	0.391	0.473
Human Development Index (HDI), male	0.593	0.54
Population living below income poverty line, national poverty line (%)	54.5	58.5
Population in severe multidimensional poverty (%)	24.9	18.5
Unemployment, total (% of labour force)	11.1	13.8
Vulnerable employment (% of total employment)	79.7	72.3
Youth not in school or employment (% ages 15-24)	41.8	27.6
Refugees by country of origin (thousands)	2 721.50	26.7
Net official development assistance received (% of GNI)	19.3	10.2
Median age (years)	18.4	24
Urban population (%)	25.8	56.2

Source: UNDP (2020)

Diplomatic links: no Latin American embassies in Afghanistan

Today, few countries have a diplomatic mission in Afghanistan (map 2): only fifteen, summing neighboring countries: Iran, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, or Uzbekistan (consulate), other Muslim countries, like Indonesia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, or the United Arab Emirates, and finally few great powers: the People's Republic of China (China), the Russian Federation (Russia) and the European Union (EU) through a Delegation. The US interests are represented by Qatar. After the US exit, twenty-six embassies closed (2021). No Latin American country has ever had a diplomatic mission in Afghanistan, but several nations of the region deal with the country through accredited embassies, located more or less close to it: Argentina, Brazil and Cuba through their embassy in Islamabad (Pakistan), Colombia and Peru, from their embassy in New Delhi, India; Costa Rica and Ecuador, from Moscow (Russian Federation); Chile, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela, from Tehran (Iran).

Map 2. Diplomatic missions in Afghanistan

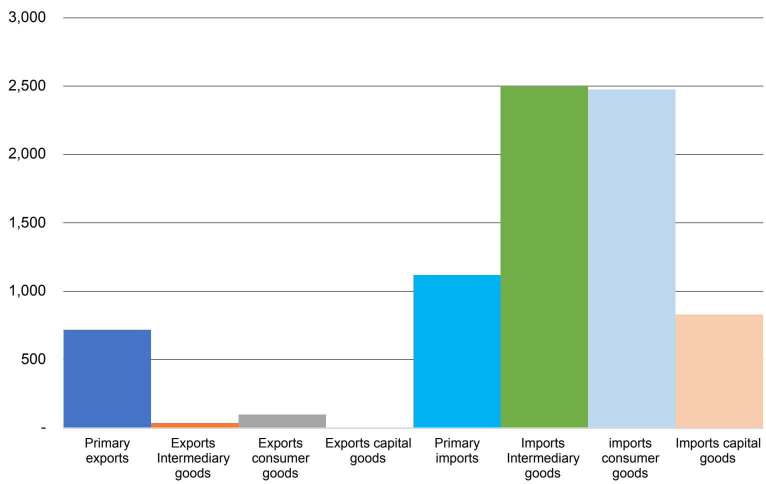


Source: Wikimedia.org (n.d.)

External trade: mostly irrelevant flows

If diplomatic relations between Latin America and Afghanistan are non-existent, bilateral international trade is very small and investment flows, unknown. The country explains a tiny share of world exports (0.01%) and 0.04% of world imports (WITS) and as a country at war, and a recipient of international aid, it shows an acute deficit in its trade balance, or at least, as we will see, in its "official" trade balance. Exports represented only 10% of imports in value in 2019 (figure 1), and they consisted mainly of primary products–grapes, vegetables saps and extracts, fruits, nuts, and coal and briquettes are the first items exported- and some consumer goods (WTO, 2022, p. 6).

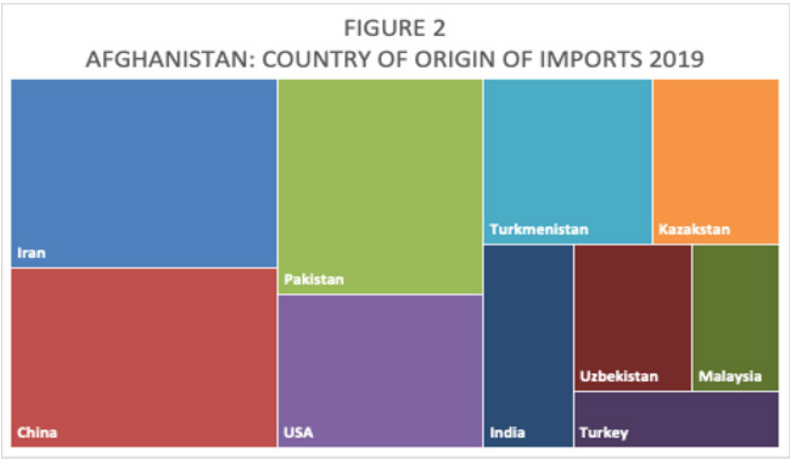
Figure 1. Afghanistan. Trade in goods: exports and imports, 2019 (US$ millions)



Source: WITS (2019)

The countries with which Afghanistan maintains its most important trade relations are first and foremost its close neighbors: the majority of the country's imports come from Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and India, although China and the United States were respectively the second and fourth suppliers in 2019, probably due to imports related to international aid. On the other hand, Afghan exports were much more concentrated and 47% went to India and 34% to Pakistan (Figure 3).[8]

Figure 2. Afghanistan: Country of origin of imports 2019

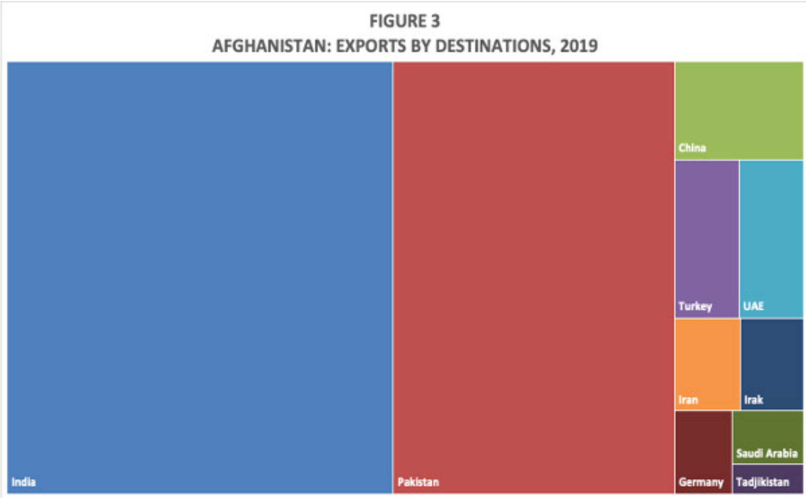


Source: WITS (2019)

Imports from Latin American countries are reported to be very sma-ll, and amounted to 9 794 000 US$, or 0.11% of Afghan imports, and come mainly from the two largest Latin American economies, Brazil and Mexico. Afghanistan doesn't report exports to Latin American partners and, as expected, no investment is registered. But the picture is somewhat different if we rely on mirror data (table 3). Trade is higher, and there were in 2019 more active bilateral relations, with nine Latin American countries declaring exports to Afghanistan and fifteen countries reporting imports.

[8] Data as reported by Afghanistan. Partner countries report different data. The UAE declares exports that far exceed the value of exports from other partners (Comtrade).

Figure 3. Afghanistan: Exports by destinations, 2019



Source: WITS (2019)

The main exporter, Brazil, sends mainly meat to the Asian country (91% of total exports), while Mexico's smaller exports comprise exclusively electrical appliances. Surprisingly, the first importers, Mexico and Brazil, report predominantly manufacturing imports from Afghanistan —for México electrical machinery and equipment and parts thereof (85), 37% of total imports, rubber and articles thereof (40), 32%, plastics (39), 14%— for Brazil, machinery and mechanical appliances and parts (84), 46%, tools and parts of base metal (82), 14% (Comtrade data). However, trade is very small for each partner.

Table 2. Latin American exports to Afghanistan 2019 (1 000 US$)

Mexico	4 918.32
Brasil	4 602.58
Argentina	257.4
Ecuador	10.27
Costa Rica	5.5
Total	9 794.07

Source: WITS (2019)

Table 3. Latin America: Trade in goods with Afghanistan, as reported by partners (mirror data) (US$)

Exports to Afghanistan		Imports from Afghanistan	
Brazil	32 459 656	Mexico	3 721 259
Guatemala	1 479 617	Brazil	473 012
Bolivia	167 756	Guatemala	165 260
Chile	114 804	Dominican Rep.	126 559
Uruguay	38729	Colombia	55 390
Mexico	19733	Peru	53 999
Colombia	5600	Ecuador	50 408
Ecuador	5549	Argentina	26 656
El Salvador	382	Uruguay	15 092
		El Salvador	13 113
		Costa Rica	11 388
		Bolivia	4 739
		Honduras	4 542
		Chile	1 534
		Nicaragua	1 482

Source: United Nations (UN) (2022). COMTRADE Database. Trade as reported by Afghanistan's partners.

Immediate political and diplomatic reactions in Latin America

As there is no direct economic –trade and investment- stake for Latin American governments, reactions have been concentrated on diplomatic declarations, which mainly consisted in measured support to, or criticism of the United States, or expressions of humanitarian concerns.

As expected, the Cuban and Venezuelan governments expressed critiques. The Cuban Foreign Minister, Bruno Rodríguez, criticized the interventionist policy of the United States, and said “It took 20 years with thousands of deaths and billions of dollars in expenses to confirm that the US has no right to rule the destiny of Afghanistan or any sovereign country” (Telesur, 2021), a declaration later emphasized in a recorded speech by the island’s president Miguel Díaz-Canel before the United Nations Assembly (Associated Press, 2021). Regarding the regional allies or partners of the United States, several of them signed the “Joint Statement on the Situation of Women and Girls in Afghanistan” promoted by the USA: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Paraguay.[9] Several countries also offered to -temporarily- receive Afghan refugees: Colombia, Costa Rica and Ecuador –offers which finally were not required by the USA. Mexico received some 200 refugees and Chile, 20 students related with a US Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (2021).

[9] This statement has been signed jointly by Albania, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, European Union, Honduras, Guatemala, Macedonia del Norte, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, Senegal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto de Argentina, 2021).

A direct effect: exposing the participation of Colombian soldiers (active and former) in Afghanistan

Colombian soldiers have participated in the Afghan war in two ways:

- **Officially.** The Colombian Armed Forces, with more than 400 000 troops, is the 1st in Latin America.[10] The Plan Colombia (1999) accelerated its growth and strengthened its ties with the US Army (Ospina-Valencia, 2021a). In 2008, Colombian troops joined the Spanish Armed Forces in Afghanistan in ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) (Martínez de Rituerto and González, 2008), and in 2017, NATO invited the Colombian armed forces to participate in the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) (Cesio, 2017); Monsalve, 2017). The country became the first NATO Latin American Global Partner (Whitney, 2018).

- **Colombian former** soldiers have been hired and taken to Afghanistan by multinational security corporations as security personnel but would have played a military role, in the context of the "privatization of war" which began to grow during the Bush Jr. Presidency, particularly with the Blackwater Corporation (Colotti, 2021).[11] At the end of the Cold War, a transnational market for military services was created. Private Military and Security Com-

[10] In 2015 Colombia had 451,124 soldiers, cadets and police and 402.308 in september 2020 (Ministry of Defense, in Ospina-Valencia, 2021a).

[11] Colotti argues that Private Military and Security Companies (PMSC) claim that they reduce the costs of interventions "because they have an intermittent cost and provide services at lower prices." In addition, "they avoid imperialist governments paying a high price in terms of soldiers killed in ground attacks, and reactions of rejection in public opinion as in the Vietnam war" (Colotti, 2021).

> panies (PMSC), mainly from South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Russia, and Denmark began offering specialized services related to war and conflict (El Espectador, 2021). Numerous Colombian ex-soldiers have been hired by these corporations. Why are they "competitive" in the international market? Three main reasons are mentioned: "Colombian soldiers are trained in irregular warfare tactics and spend long periods in combat areas", the weapons used by the Colombian army are the same been used by the US coalition in the Middle East and Central Asia, and finally, they are cheaper (El Tiempo, 2010). Furthermore, important numbers of young former soldiers leave each year the armed forces –around 10000-, there are few opportunities to work in civil activities at home, and their pensions are poor. (Turkewitz and Kurmanaev, 2021).

At the same time as United States withdrew from Afghanistan, the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse -07/06/2021- (Turkewitz and Kurmanaev, 2021) by Colombian mercenaries, highlighted that Colombia has become an "exporter" of (cheap) military manpower.[12] Other countries of the Middle East where they have been operating are Dubai, the UAE,[13] Iraq, Libya and Yemen. After the US exit

[12] See Ospina-Valencia (2021a, 2021b) for a critical appraisal of the current problems of the Colombian armed forces, ethics, and the links between extrajudicial executions, or "false positives", the privatization of war and the export of ex-soldiers, and the assassination of the Haitian President.

[13] "The most famous case of military recruitment in Colombia was carried out by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which in 2015 decided to expand its military force… It is estimated that 800 Latin Americans are now part of the UAE army, 450 of them Colombians." (El Espectador, 2021).

from Afghanistan, former soldiers have been demonstrating in Bogotá and Miami claiming veteran status. They ask to be recognized as soldiers and not as security guards (Euronews, 2022; Infobae, 2021).

Thus, if the fears expressed by Tokatlian (2021) about an eventual projection of terrorism in the region in 2021 due to Colombia's participation in the Afghan conflict have not materialized, the departure of Afghanistan had direct consequences in Colombia. It contributed to highlight the participation of former Colombian soldiers in this and other conflicts, gave rise to the expression of different domestic critical opinions about the armed forces, about the consequences of their growth during the internal conflict, or their future in a post-war period that should require less military force, and the international projections of this domestic problem.

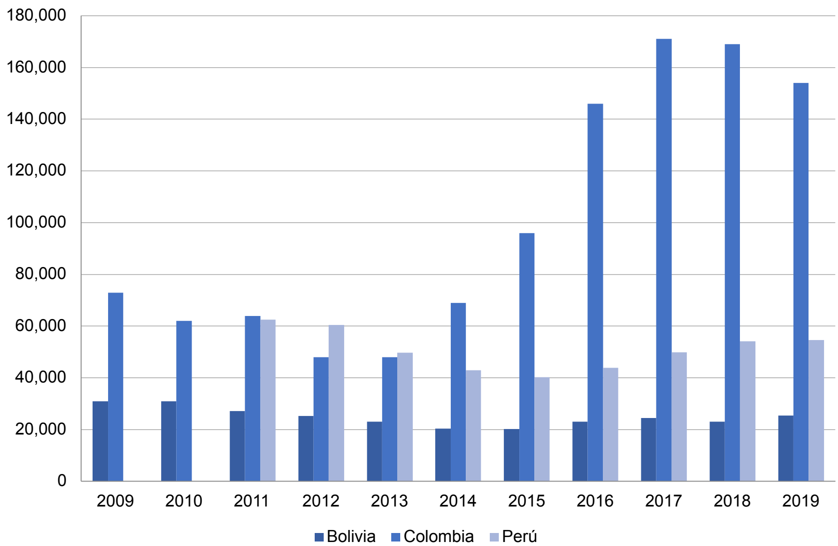
The "War on drugs"[14]: parallels between Afghanistan and Latin America

Afghanistan and Myanmar on one side, Bolivia, Perú, Colombia, Mexico, and other Latin American countries on the other side, share a common "problem" of deep consequences for their process of economic and social development, for their political stability and governance and their insertion in the global economy. They had become links in a very special type of "Global Value Chain": the production, refining, and distribution of illicit drugs, and as such, they have been the object of interventionist eradication policies on the part of developed

[14] These terms arose from a speech delivered by Richard Nixon in 1972. They signify the criminalization of drug production and consumption and a militarized approach to eradication.

countries where a majority of the consumers of these drugs are located, and specifically the United States.

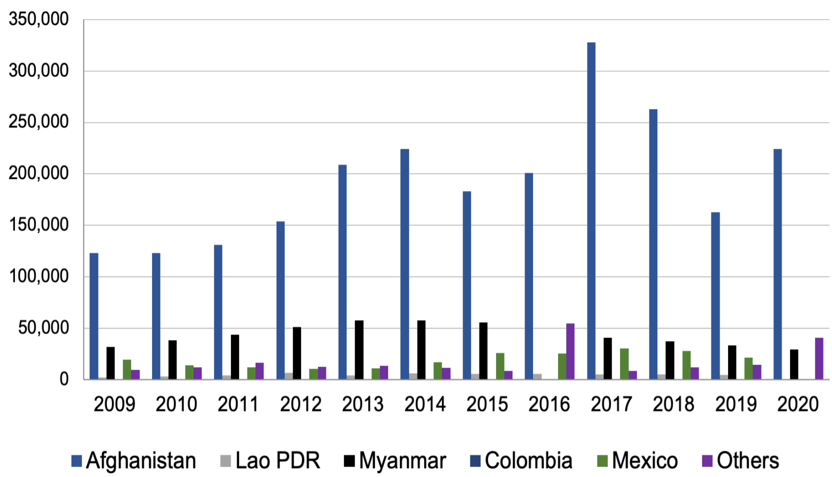
Figure 4. Global illicit cultivation of coca bush (has) 2009-2019



Source: UNODC (2021)

Figures 4 and 5 show the evolution of the production of illicit drugs of "natural" origin: Bolivia, Colombia and Peru are the main production areas of the coca leaf, later transformed into cocaine and other derivatives. In Asia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Laos are the main producers of the poppy flower from which opium and heroin are extracted. These countries compete as producers of heroin with Mexico and, to a lesser extent, Colombia. It can be seen that the cultivation of these plants, although they have suffered ups and downs, have not decreased, spreading particularly in Colombia and Afghanistan, where militarization has been higher. These facts confirm that the "war on drugs" specifically launched by the United States fifty years ago, has failed, both in Asia and in Latin America, and especially in Afghanistan and Colombia, a failure widely recognized during the last decades.

Figure 5. Illicit cultivation of opium poppy, (has) 2009-2021

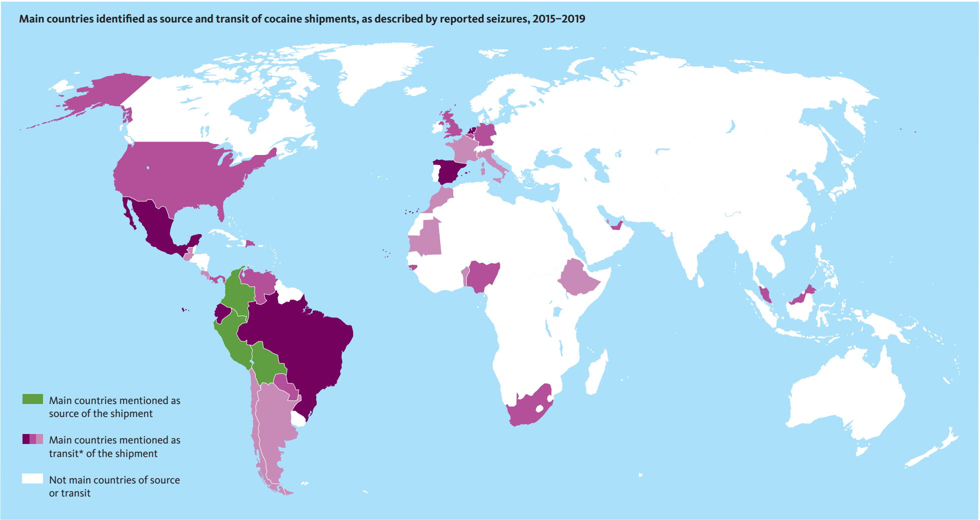


Source: UNODC (2020)

Maps 3 to 6 show which countries participate in the illicit drugs GVC as transit and destination countries (as reported in drug seizures). Cocaine shipments now travel throughout all Latin America, from their origin in the Andean countries; Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico stand out, followed by Venezuela and Paraguay and of course the United States, a place of transit as well as of final consumption. Several African and European countries have also been integrated to serve the European market. But the global cocaine market covers a much larger area (Map 4), developed countries or rich developing countries, including all of Eastern Europe and Russia, China, Turkey, India, Saudi Arabia, and Oceania.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

Map 3. Main countries identified as source and transit of cocaine shipments, as described by reported seizures, 2015–2019



Sources: UNODC elaboration.

* A darker shade indicates a larger amount of cocaine being seized with the country as source/transit of the shipment, according to the information on trafficking routes provided by Member States in the annual report questionnaire, individual drug seizures and other official documents, over the 2015–2019 period. The source may not reflect the country in which the substance was produced. The main countries mentioned as source or transit were identified on the basis of both the number of times they were identified by other Member States as departure/transit of seizures, and the annual average amount that these seizures represent during the 2015–2019 period. For more details on the criteria used, please see the Methodology section of this document.

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Source: UNODC elaboration (2019c)

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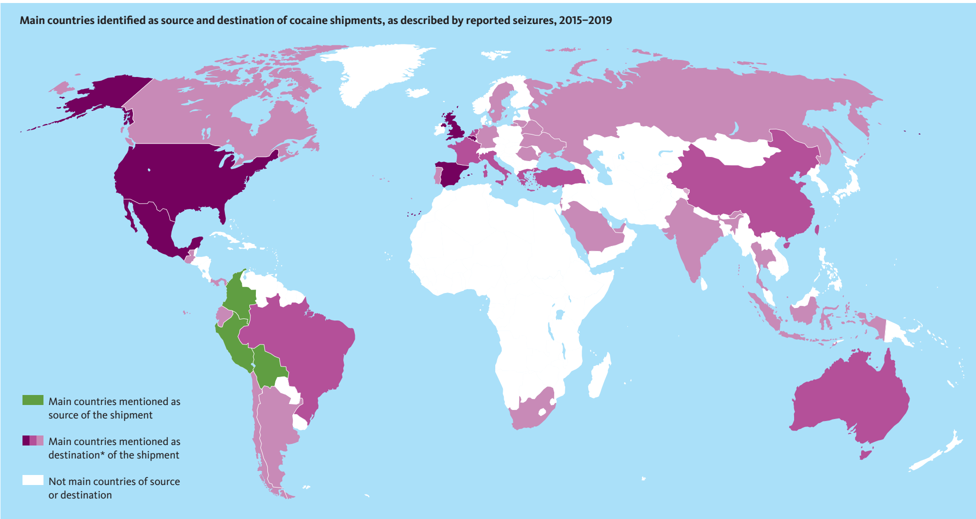
Map 4. Main countries identified as source and destination of cocaine shipments, as described by reported seizures, 2015–2019



Sources: UNODC elaboration.

* A darker shade indicates a larger amount of cocaine being seized with the country as source/destination of the shipment, according to the information on trafficking routes provided by Member States in the annual report questionnaire, individual drug seizures and other official documents, over the 2015–2019 period. The source may not reflect the country in which the substance was produced. The main countries mentioned as source or destination were identified on the basis of both the number of times they were identified by other Member States as departure or destination of seizures, and the annual average amount that these seizures represent during the 2015–2019 period. For more details on the criteria used, please see the Methodology section of this document.

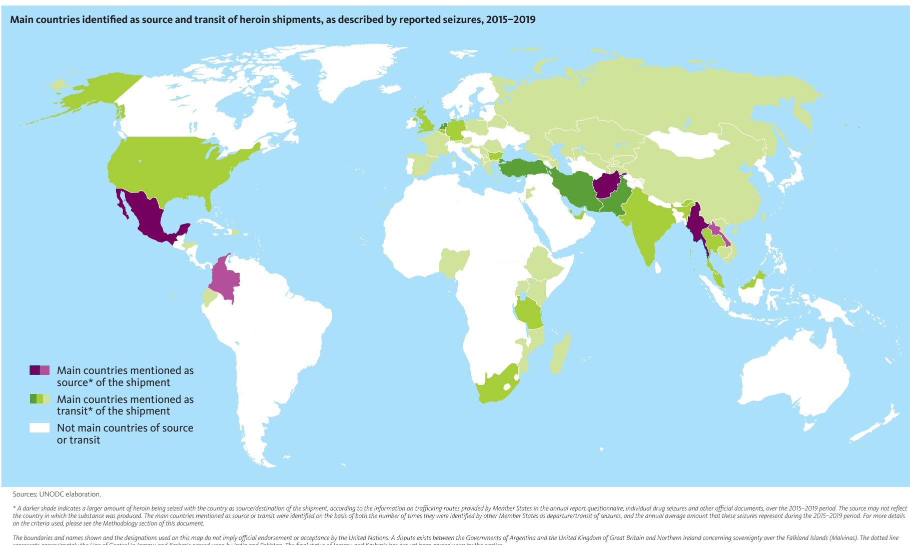
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

Source: UNODC elaboration (2019a)

* A darker shade indicates a larger amount of cocaine being seized with the country as source/destination of the shipment, according to the information on tracking routes provided by Member States in the annual report questionnaire, individual drug seizures and other official documents, over the 2015–2019 period. The source may not reflect the country in which the substance was produced. The main countries mentioned as source or destination were identified on the basis of both the number of times they were identified by other Member States as departure or destination of seizures, and the annual average amount that these seizures represent during the 2015–2019 period.
For more details on the criteria used, please see the Methodology section of this document.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

In addition to the producer countries (graph 5), the global distribution routes for heroin include the entire Eurasian continental mass, some countries on the east coast of Africa and in the Americas, the United States and Ecuador stand out in addition to the producer countries, Colombia and Mexico. As for the countries of destination, the United States again stands out as a main destination as well as the countries mentioned in the case of cocaine. The consumer countries are basically the same rich and relatively rich nations.

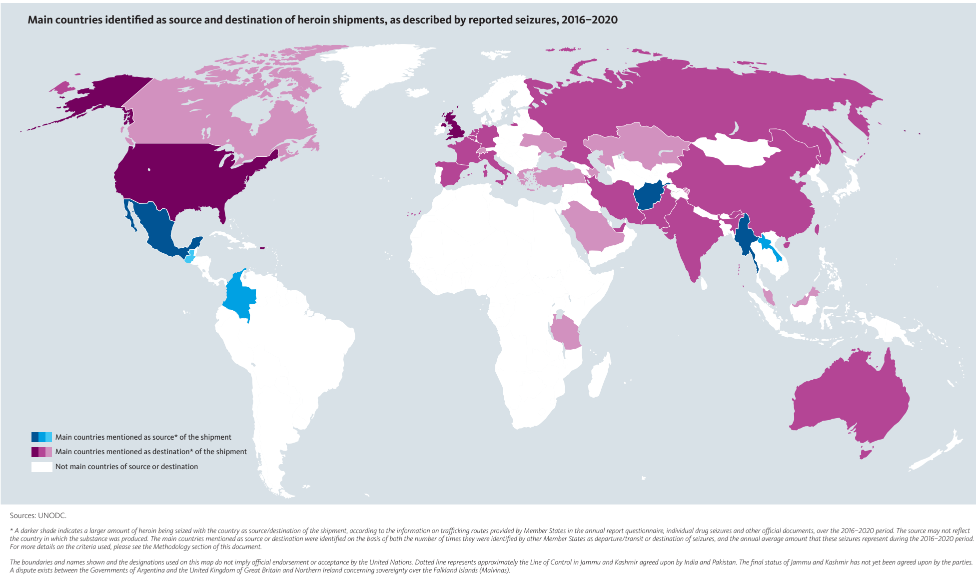
Map 5. Main countries identified as source and transit of heroin shipments, as described by reported seizures, 2015–2019



Source: UNODC elaboration (2019d)

*A darker shade indicates a larger amount of heroin being seized with the country as source/destination of the shipment, according to the information on tracking routes provided by Member States in the annual report questionnaire, individual drug seizures and other official documents, over the 2015–2019 period. The source may not reflect the country in which the substance was produced. The main countries mentioned as source or transit were identified on the basis of both the number of times they were identified by other Member States as departure/transit of seizures, and the annual average amount that these seizures represent during the 2015–2019 period. For more details on the criteria used, please see the Methodology section of this document. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas). The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The national status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

Map 6. Main countries identified as source and destination of heroin shipments, as described by reported seizures, 2015–2019



Source: UNODC elaboration (2019b)

* A darker shade indicates a larger amount of heroin being seized with the country as source/destination of the shipment, according to the information on tracking routes provided by Member States in the annual report questionnaire, individual drug seizures and other official documents, over the 2015–2019 period. The source may not reflect the country in which the substance was produced. The main countries mentioned as source or destination were identified on the basis of both the number of times they were identified by other Member States as departure/transit or destination of seizures, and the annual average amount that these seizures represent during the 2015–2019 period. For more details on the criteria used, please see the Methodology section of this document.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas). The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The national status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

In short, these maps underline the outstanding role of the United States in the flows and, above all, as the main country of final demand for these two drugs. Tokatlian (2021) draws a parallel between the failure of the fight against drugs in Latin America and in Afghanistan: in both cases, "prohibitionism" not only did not allow production and trafficking to drop, but brought their growth.

In the Afghan case, it bolstered the Taliban's income and financed their war with the established government. So, the US exit from this country "ratifies the painful lost war on drugs in all parts of the world" (Miranda, 2021). What impact may this failure have on the fight against drugs in Latin America? It can only impact the region if it leads the United States to change its approach, is that likely? We do not think so, due to the American political situation and because until now, repeated failures have not led to any change.

The broader picture in the context of the China-US rivalry: Infrastructure, BRI and B3W

Since the administration of Donald Trump and until today, the rivalry between the United States and China has expanded from the tariff wars and the confrontations in the field of technology and patents to now encompass ever broader domains. The BRI, launched by China in 2013, has become one of the most controversial symbols of the country's rise on the global stage. Its two initial elements, the Silk Road Economic Belt (land), with six corridors, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, became the "One Belt. One Road" in 2014, renamed as BRI from 2016 (BRI, 2022).

BRI defines itself as "a transcontinental long-term policy and investment program which aims at infrastructure development and acceleration of the economic integration of countries along the route of the historic Silk Road" (BRI, 2022) but it has expanded its geographical reach: since its creation, BRI has been incorporating a growing number of countries from Asia, Africa, and Europe. The Americas have been included late, after 2013. Five main themes integrate BRI: policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds. In what follows, we will refer exclusively to infrastructure, where Afghanistan and Central Asia, like Latin America, suffer severe lags that slow down the process of economic development, and which has recently become a terrain for competition between great powers. In Asia the ADB estimates that the annual infrastructure demand stands at over $1.7 trillion (ADB, 2017) and in Latin America, infrastructure spending needed by 2030 for the region to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals is estimated in 2.2 trillion US$ (Youkee, 2022).

In Central Asia, due to war and the US presence, the map of the countries participating in the BRI framework shows a white spot: Afghanistan (map 7). For this reason, it was said in 2021 that for China, the US exit would mean new opportunities: extending the BRI to Afghanistan would authorize a better connection between Asia and Europe and to resume projects in mining. Much would depend on the capacity of the Taliban de-facto authorities to control the country's territory and establish peace. But risks were also foreseen for China, as the Afghan border with Xinjiang could mean the propagation of extremism in Chinese territory. As for Latin and Central America, an increasing number of countries are participating in the BRI, already 21 in 2022, although three among the biggest economies, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico still do not participate.

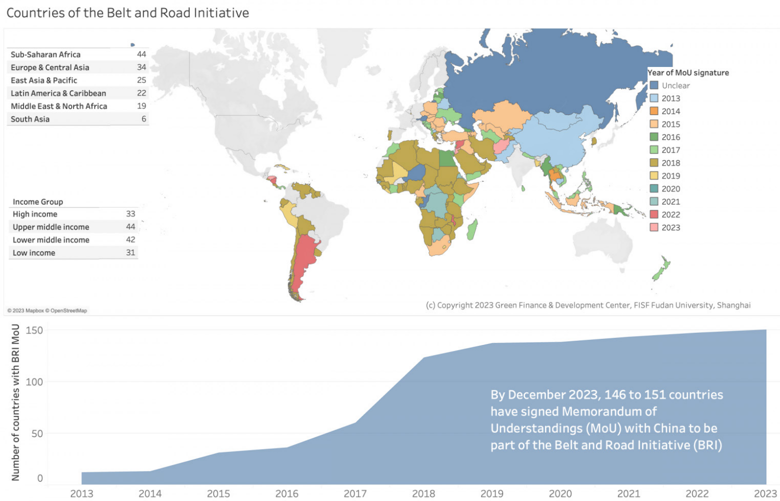
But the worldwide extension of the BRI has elicited a response from the United States and its developed allies, who launched the Build Back Better World initiative in 2021, within the framework of the G7 Meeting in Scotland. "It's evident that B3W is an initiative to counter the influence China has built as a result of the Belt and Road Initiative [BRI]" (Katherin Galindo Ortiz, in Youkee, 2022). The B3W presents itself as "a values-driven, high-standard, and transparent infrastructure partnership led by major democracies" (The White House, 2021). Its scope is global, it is intended to focus on climate, health and health security, digital technology, and gender equity and equality and it would work through mobilizing private-sector funding (Modi, 2021): in its objectives, B3W is therefore different from BRI. It also plans to apply a quality certification scheme proposed by the United States, Japan, and Australia which created in November 2019 the Blue Dot Network -BDN- (Arha, 2021).[15]

However, this proposal is only now being developed by the OECD, which is providing technical support… The prototype proposed in March 2022 "… aims to support and attract quality infrastructure investment to help bridge the estimated USD 2.5-3.5 trillion infrastructure investment gap, accelerate the transition to global net-zero emissions, and optimize the strength and the quality of future growth" (OECD, 2022).

[15] Beginning in 2018, principles for sound infrastructure investment have been discussed in several instances including the G7 summit (2018) and the G20 Osaka Leaders Summit (2019) (Arha, 2021).

In short, it seems that there is a long way to go before this initiative takes off, and the resources that it will receive are uncertain. Recently however, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has declared on the 50th anniversary of the Shanghai Communique[16] that China is "willing to consider coordinating with the U.S. 'Build Back Better World' initiative to provide the world with more high-quality public goods" and welcomes Washington to join its Belt and Road Initiative (Tian, 2022).

Map 7. Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative



Source: Green Finance & Development Center (2022).

Beyond the rhetorical declarations, certainly the huge need for infrastructure in developing countries offers opportunities for cooperation and complementarity between various initiatives (Keren

[16] The Shanghai Communique marked the normalizing of relations between the United States and China and was emitted during President R. Nixon's visit to China.

Zhu, in Youkee, 2022). However, the context of rivalry between great powers leaves little hope that they will come true.
In what follows, we will briefly introduce the progress and potential challenges of these projects in Afghanistan and neighboring countries, and simultaneous developments in Latin America. Regarding the impact of processes in Central Asia on Latin America, it goes without saying that it cannot be direct, but is part of the consequences that it could eventually produce on the initiatives of the great powers.

In August 2021, China was left in a unique position against Afghanistan as noted by one analyst "The American-backed government's collapse last August handed Beijing, almost by default, an unaccustomed leading role in the crisis, as the default superpower in residence" (Joles, 2022). Among the long-term benefits that deeper relations between the two countries would bring, the exploitation of the metal and rare earth reserves of Afghanistan was pointed out in the first place; in exchange for mining rights, it would allow China to strengthen the geographical diversification and the resilience of its supply chains in the face of increasing international competition. It would also give Afghanistan access to revenues other than those produced by drug trafficking. Secondly, the role that the country could play in the regional infrastructure stands out: by connecting its Central Asian enclaved neighbors -Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan- with the ports of Pakistan and India, and through its inclusion in the BRI, as a component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Mohseni-Cheraghlou and Graham, 2021).

However, security and stability are the priority objectives of China, who fears a destabilizing effect of the Taliban on Pakistan and Xinjiang, and the support of the de facto Taliban government for the

Uyghur separatist movements (Mohseni-Cheraghlou and Graham, 2021). In fact, there have already been several attacks on Chinese citizens in Pakistan in 2021 (Joles, 2022; Rosen, 2022).

For these reasons, progress in these aspects has been discreet since August 2021, despite a meeting in Doha in October 2021 between Foreign Minister Wang Yi and a Taliban delegation (Joles, 2022). China had already facilitated meetings with Taliban officials before their takeover, and shortly after taking Kabul, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid declared: "China is our most important partner and represents a fundamental and extraordinary opportunity for us … It is ready to invest and rebuild our country."(Mackey, 2021).[17] However, it took several months for an important initiative to take place on the part of China: it is the "Tunxi Initiative of the Neighboring Countries of Afghanistan on Supporting Economic Reconstruction in and Practical Cooperation with Afghanistan" (2022), which brought together Foreign Ministers or high-level representatives of China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, a meeting to which China invited the de-facto Taliban government (Zovak, 2022).

What is the content of the agreements? The parties commit to supporting the country in six fundamental areas linked not only to short-term emergency aid but also to a development perspective: "humanitarian assistance, connectivity, economy and trade, agriculture, energy and capacity building" (MFAPRC, 2022). We highlight the commitments in terms of connectivity, economy, and energy. Regarding the first point, the agreement proposes "exploring step by step new convenient channels to strengthen "hard connectivity" of infras-

[17] Interview with the Italian newspaper La República.

tructure and "soft connectivity of rules and standards with neighboring countries". China commits to extend "the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor to Afghanistan" and "to promote synergy between the Belt and Road Initiative and the development strategies of Afghanistan" (MFAPRC, 2022).[18] In economic matters, the initiative proposes "to explore the establishment of an economic cooperation belt around Afghanistan to improve Afghanistan's external development environment" and the use of local currencies for exchanges, a long-standing objective promoted by China. China mentions the support to its companies that want to invest in Afghanistan "when the security situation permits", the resumption of the Mes Aynak copper mining project and of the Amu Darya Oilfield, the development of the mobile network and the exploration and development of mineral resources (MFAPRC, 2022).

In short, the initiative materializes the expectations that were held about China's projects in Afghanistan: China could support a Taliban government through development and infrastructure, with the cooperation of neighboring countries, especially Pakistan, and with the objective of stabilizing and pacifying the country and the region as well (Joles, 2022).[19] Unlike the United States or Russia, China is helped in its relationship by the absence of past bilateral conflicts with Afghanistan (Mohseni-Cheraghlou and Graham, 2021) and by the lesser risk aversion of its enterprises.[20] Due to its geographical proximity,

[18] Pakistan approves the connection of Afghanistan with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

[19] This would strengthen a group centered around Pakistan and China, in opposition to India, an ally of the United States in the Quad.

[20] "In 2019, the value of Chinese FDI in Afghanistan was estimated to be worth more than $400 million, compared to only $18 million from the United States" (Mohseni-Cheraghlou and Graham, 2021).

security objectives predominate “relations with the Taliban are “not a luxury but a necessity,” … “economic incentives aim to extract security guarantees while seeking to ameliorate development challenges in Afghanistan for fear that poverty may drive instability” (Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili, cited in Rosen, 2022)

There are many risks for China: risk of new infrastructure facilitating drug trafficking or connection between regional Islamist groups, strengthening of Islamist groups in Pakistan, or the deterioration of the relationship between this country and Afghanistan, the culture of corruption installed in Afghanistan since the foreign occupation and the inability of the Taliban de facto government to establish and maintain security in the country. For these reasons, many analysts assume that China probably does not want to get deeply involved and suffer the fate of Russia and the United States (Joles, 2022). However, stability in the region is key to China: among low and middle-income countries, Pakistan has been the major receiver of Chinese lending in 2016-2020, with 233 900 millions US$ (Suzuki, 2022).

On the other hand, few believe the Western powers and the B3W can compete with China in the financing and construction of infrastructure in Central Asia and South Asia (Modi, 2021; Carrai and Yee, 2022) and this for several reasons: the low resources dedicated by the United States to infrastructure in developing countries, in decline since the 1990s, compared to the massive funding provided by China from several sources: “In 2019, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation capped its spending at $60 billion. China has already spent an estimated $200 billion on the BRI, and some project its overall investments will reach $1.3 trillion by 2027” (Carrai and Yee, 2022); the higher cost and shorter term of the private funds that Western financial institutions would be willing to contribute, compared to loans from Chinese public banks, and finally the low experience of the United States in terms of infrastructure building, always in relation to China.

What happened meanwhile in Latin America? We have already seen that the region enters the BRI belatedly: it is in the framework of the 2018 China-CELAC forum that a "Special Declaration on the Belt and Road Initiative" was signed. Between 2017 and 2018, sixteen Latin American countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding, and three in 2019; the recent entry of Argentina (February 2022) brought the total number of Latin American participants to 20. China's interest in the region is analyzed in terms of access to its abundant natural resources - minerals, energy, and food - that make it complementary to Chinese needs, the search for a better investment climate, compared to what African countries offer, thanks to better quality legal systems, and the role of Latin America as a market for Chinese manufacturing exports (Chiodi and Hoang Anh, 2022). As for the Latin American partners, they had very high expectations of diversification and strengthening of economic ties with China (Jenkins, 2021, p. 6). Among other motivations, last but not least, the desire to get out of the "growing irrelevance" from which they suffer in the international system and the search for greater autonomy also stand out (Chiodi and Hoang Anh, 2022).

Now, although Chinese sovereign loans to the region are estimated in US$137 billion since 2005 (The Dialogue and Boston University, in Youkee, 2022) and "Chinese banks have backed scores of infrastructure projects in the region through commercial loans and joint funds" (Youkee, 2022), Jenkins (2021) states that for the participating countries as a whole, BRI did not imply a significant qualitative leap in terms of results.

The author, who analyses the comparative impacts of BRI between signatory and non-signatory countries, disaggregated by objectives, points out that BRI did not imply a rupture but is part of a line of projects and plans previously established (Jenkins, 2021, p.11).

In terms of investment and infrastructure, data show an increase in commitments after the Global Financial Crisis, but this trend ends in 2015 and BRI, which begins in 2016, does not produce a notable aggregate impact. By differentiating between BRI and non-BRI countries, the author concludes that "participation in the BRI has not been a key determinant of the location of projects". (Jenkins, 2021, p. 21). Now, if BRI has not had a spectacular economic impact on the participating countries in Latin America, it should be noted that the period of analysis is very short, and that as of 2020, it coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and a subsequent review of the credit policies of Chinese lenders: Chinese lending to low and middle income countries have been falling between 2018 and 2020 (Suzuki, 2022).

Another possible explanation is that, unlike the countries that participated in the early years of BRI, "As the BRI expanded, it is possible that the Chinese resources available were spread more thinly, reducing the gains from participation… Although the broader conception of the BRI made it possible for LAC countries to join, it also reduces the advantages of involvement." (Jenkins, 2021, p. 22).

However, the perception of China's growing presence in Latin America has caused concern in the United States. The Build Back Better World initiative had an immediate precedent in the Americas with the "America crece" initiative launched in 2019 by the government of D. Trump, with purposes similar to those of B3W. First consultation around B3W were made during visits to Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador in September 2021, noting the degree of priority given to the region. Nevertheless, the aforementioned doubts about B3W are particularly valid in the Latin American context: timing is slow, and the amounts and forms of lending uncertain, at times that would require quick action.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have examined the direct and indirect impacts on Latin America of the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan in August 2021. In particular, we have chosen to privilege the economic impacts, which are less addressed. Direct effects are not very relevant. Trade and investment links between Latin American nations and the Central Asian country are very tenuous - although illicit ties of unknown importance cannot be ruled out. The indirect impact through the global economy has been unremarkable and we have not addressed it. The departure of the United States from Afghanistan had a direct observable impact in Latin America, as it contributed to revealing that, alongside the official participation of the Colombian army in coalition operations in this country, former Colombian soldiers who were recruited as personnel in the private international security market would have participated in military operations.

The most noticeable economic effects of the US exit can be analyzed as reverberations. Both Latin America and Afghanistan and Central Asia participate in two complex international issues. The drug economy, in which several countries participate both as producers and as transit zones, has been the object of militarized eradication efforts in both zones, largely unsuccessful. It constitutes a global value chain that implies considerable revenues and movements of funds, the study of which is beyond the objectives of this text.

In another area, both Latin America and Afghanistan and Central Asia, with their enormous infrastructure needs, participate in the struggle between great powers in which the new Western initiative, the B3W, seeks to counteract the influential Chinese BRI, which now seeks to include Afghanistan due to very pragmatic reasons of geographic centrality and regional security through economic development. If B3W is not likely to play a major role in Asia, there are no prospects of rapid application to Latin America either.

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