



THE OAS AND THE REPOLITIZATION OF THE CUBAN QUESTION IN THE AMERICAS

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ABSTRACT

This working paper addresses the way the Cuban issue is dealt with at the OAS general secretariat. Since Luis Almagro's election as secretary general in 2015, scholars and experts alike have indeed pointed the fact that the role of the OAS general secretariat has shifted as Almagro's politics have become very much attuned to those of the White House and State Department under president Donald Trump. This was not to be expected as his candidacy had been largely promoted by former Uruguayan president José Mujica, and even supported by Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro. The objective of this paper is to try and understand the newfound policy of the secretary general, which I will analyze as a form a re-politization of the institution and of the function of secretary general.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this article is to show to what extent the action of the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, on Cuba - and the Venezuelan and Nicaragua cases, although these won't be addressed as such here - since 2015 led to a re-politization of the issue and the organization. Most literature on international organizations has pointed out that they tend to tackle issues in technical ways, to avoid conflict and thus "manage" or "govern" the world order in a "depoliticized" way (Waltz 1979, Keohane 1989, Barnett and Finnemore 2004). But recent scholarship has shown that international organizations rather undergo processes of both politicization and de-politicization, just as other bureaucracies (Petiteville 2016, 2017). I understand the notion of politicization as the crafting of a debate around an issue, which generates collective mobilizations, polarizations and cleavages, ideological controversies and conflicts (Petiteville 2016). Politics are generally deflected by specific processes within international organizations: their technicisation and reliance on "objective" expertise or universal norms, their avoidance of conflict, and time dilatation (Louis and Maertens 2021).

The OAS is a specific type of international organization, dominated by one superpower in a continental context of great power asymmetry. Indeed, the US is both the provider of the greater share of the organization's budget¹ and it home to its headquarters. Because of the history of US military and political intervention on the sub-continent, the OAS has often been portrayed and perceived as a very political and politicized organization, one which would advance the specific interests of the American power. Now, many scholars and experts have argued that the US influence had diminished over the year (Boniface 2002, Shaw 2004), and especially in the 2000s thanks to the emergence of left-of-center governments in many South American nations and to the crafting of new regional bodies such as ALBA, CELAC and UNASUR, which excluded the US (and Canada) (Lopez-Levy 2009, Gratius 2018). These new organizations favor a more autonomous regional integration based on cooperation and complementarity and they strongly supported the principle of national and regional sovereignty (Legler 2013). Which is why they all included Cuba despite existing political debates as far as the nature and legitimacy of Cuba's political regime. Although we cannot state that these new processes of integration were not politicized – as they entailed a break from US domination and were often driven by leftist governments – they intended to overcome the historical polarization about the Cuban issue on the subcontinent.

Since Luis Almagro's election as secretary general in 2015, scholars and experts alike have pointed the fact that the role of the OAS general secretariat has shifted as Almagro's politics have become very much attuned to those of the White House and State Department under president Donald Trump (Marcetic 2019, Pensack 2020). Indeed, the new secretary general has – among other things – implemented a policy which consists in stigmatizing and sanctioning the Venezuelan and Cuban governments. This was not to be expected as his candidacy had been largely promoted by former Uruguayan president José Mujica, and even supported by Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro. The objective of this paper is to try and understand the newfound policy of the secretary general, which I will analyze as a form a re-politization of the institution and of the function of secretary general. The Cuban case, and its articulation with the Venezuelan situation, have been key in that process. Indeed, since 2015, the OAS policy has retaken the anti-communist undertones of the 1960s. It once again emphasizes the need for a total institutional break, not only with the Cuban government, but also with those considered its allies in the hemisphere and beyond.

I will first come back to the history of OAS resolutions on Cuba so as to show to what extent the Cuban question had been somewhat depoliticized, as far as its management within the inter-american system, at the turn of the 21th century. I will then show that Luis Almagro's election as secretary general of the OAS has changed this situation and that his actions have led to the re-politization of the Cuban question, which in turn has participated in the heightened political polarization on the continent. Finally, I will point out some of the consequences this position has had on how the way democracy is conceptualized in certain political and institutional circles on the subcontinent.

I won't discuss the authoritarian characteristics of the Cuban, Nicaraguan and Venezuelan governments and their violations of human rights, which have been thoroughly documented elsewhere. This paper rather aims at discussing the specific way the OAS is dealing with these political regimes (associated with the left), without giving the same attention to other forms of political crises and democratic backsliding in the Americas today. This is problematic, because in the very polarized contemporary American context (both North and South), the OAS won't be able to legitimate its mission as far as human rights and democracy promotion if it does not conduct it everywhere according to the same rules and criteria. Indeed, research has shown that lack of consistency in the promotion of democracy and human rights leads to inefficiency (Pace 2009), and it can also backfire (Tezcür 2012). And powerful governments' actions are not trusted if they do not enforce consistent democratic policies at home too (Whitehead 2016).

1. 59% in 2020 according to Larry Luxner, « Nestor Mendez discusses OAS priorities in wake of Venezuela, migrant crises, The Washington Diplomat, 29 août 2019, <https://washdiplomat.com/nestor-mendez-discusses-oas-priorities-in-wake-of-venezuela-migrant-crises/>

FROM ANTICOMMUNIST CONSENSUS TO FOREIGN POLICY PRAGMATISM

Between the 1960s and the mid-1970s, there was a shift from an anti-communist consensus against the Cuban government to the implementation of pragmatic foreign policies on the subcontinent. The opening of archives and the publication of recent works on the foreign policies of the different Latin American states allow to see that, despite political differences in Latin America, only the United States has conducted a policy of exception regarding Cuba for more than six decades.

An anticommunist consensus

New historiographical work on the inter-American system shows that the “Cuban question” was less divisive among Latin American governments than had been thought before the opening of diplomatic archives in many countries (Keller 2015, Karl 2016, Harmer 2019). While the literature (Lopez-Levy 2009, LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, Rabe 2012, Grandin 2006) seemed to pit governments relatively supportive of the Cuban revolution (whose leaders saw the OAS as an imperialist weapon²) against those who wished to overthrow it through sanctions or an invasion led by U.S. forces, recent work shows that, in fact, almost all governments on the subcontinent were opposed to the socialist turn taken by the leaders of the Cuban revolution in 1960 and 1961.

The work of historian Tanya Harmer (2019) is particularly stimulating in this regard. She recalls that only three out of 15 states had not broken off diplomatic relations with the USSR by the mid-1950s. All the governments were then marked by anti-communist positions and largely aligned with the position of the United States in the East-West conflict. On the Latin American continent, even progressive leaders who had initially recognized the legitimacy of the Cuban revolution (such as José Figueres in Costa Rica, Romulo Betancourt in Venezuela) supported the Cuban exile during the 1960s. Indeed, the policy of exporting the Cuban revolution, through the support given to guerrillas and social movements in the region, worried the political elites (Rabe 1988, Harmer 2019). The “communist threat” was, thus, understood both as an external threat (Soviet intervention) and as an internal threat (destabilizing traditional political elites).

Harmer shows that there was a consensus on the existence of this threat, although there were differences on how to deal with it. Some supported the principle of non-intervention, one of the pillars of the inter-American system, while others wanted to implement a policy of sanctions, or even promote a military intervention by the United States. On the contrary, several governments (Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia) argued that punitive measures would be counterproductive, in the sense that they would promote a closer alliance with the Soviet bloc and generate even stronger support for the Cuban experience among social movements and opposition parties in Latin America. On the other hand, some governments were interested in developing economic and commercial exchanges with Cuba, and thus benefit from the US. embargo policy (Marques Bezerra 2012).

In any case, it is particularly interesting to underline that all Latin American governments agreed with the U.S. Department that the circulation of communist ideas thrived on the widespread poverty of the continent’s population (Harmer 2019). At that time, there was a consensus on the need to implement development policies as well as redistributive social policies. All the countries of the subcontinent had then welcomed the launch of the Alliance for Progress (Rabe 2014), including the most conservative forces (e.g., the pro-Batista Cuban exile³).

These analyses make it easier to understand that the policy of sanctions against Cuba (Cuba’s suspension from the OAS in 1962, as well as the arms embargo and the suspension of the Inter-American Defense Council, followed in 1964 by restrictions on trade, the implementation

2. Fidel Castro, « la OEA no es más que un ministerio de colonias yankis », Speech at the Second National Assembly of the People of Cuba, Feb 4th, 1962, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1962/esp/f040262e.html>

3. See Patria, the pro-Batista newspaper founded by Ernesto Montaner in Miami, in the summer of 1959. Accessible at the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami.

of Article 6 of the TIAR and the severance of diplomatic relations) was not the sole result of pressure from the United States, but rather that of a common understanding of the threat posed by the Cuban revolution at that time. The desire expressed by Latin American governments for Cuba's return to the inter-American system in 2009 cannot be inferred as the sole effect of a loosening of North American hegemony on the subcontinent.

1975 : the silent turn

To account for the dynamics that led to the abolition of Cuba's suspension from the OAS in 2009, one should return to the silent turning point of the mid-1970s. Ten years after the implementation of a sanctions policy by the OAS, several countries had already re-established diplomatic relations with Cuba and others wished to do so. Most countries did not consider Cuba to be a threat in the hemisphere anymore. Thus, in 1974, the foreign ministers of Colombia, Costa Rica and Venezuela requested the suspension of the measures voted in 1964 but they did not obtain the necessary 2/3 qualified majority (14 votes out of 21). Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the twelve countries that voted in favor of lifting the sanctions requested to include a text of protest against the voting procedure and its consequences in the minutes of the meeting.

In this text, they criticize the fact that a blocking minority (three countries) supported by the abstention of six other countries, led to the failure of the request for suspension. They therefore warn that they no longer feel bound by Resolution I of the 9th Consultation Meeting of 1964, and therefore free to possibly re-establish diplomatic relations with Cuba⁴. They conclude by emphasizing that they do not intend to devitalize the inter-American system, but rather to restructure it to respond to the pressing problems of the subcontinent: "underdevelopment, poverty and violence", while respecting the central principle of non-intervention. Although the signatories of the text did not explicitly denounce the OAS' double standards, since Chile, Uruguay and Brazil (the three countries in the blocking minority) were all governed by military juntas at the time, the text is a blow to the legitimacy of the inter-American system.

In 1975, when Colombia, Venezuela and Costa Rica, accompanied by seven other countries, asked for a new vote on the "Freedom of Action" of the member countries with regard to Cuba at the 16th Consultation Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in San José, Costa Rica, this time they obtained a favorable vote from a majority of the countries, including the United States (with the exception of the negative vote of Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay (this time Brazil abstained along with Nicaragua)⁵. This vote allowed for the resumption of diplomatic relations with Cuba for those countries that wished to do so (Krepp 2017). It should be noted that several countries (Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, Panama as well as several small Caribbean countries) had already resumed relations with Cuba without waiting for this vote (Kruijt 2017).

Moreover, the creation of the Latin American Economic System (SELA) in 1975 already demonstrated the existence of an even greater desire for autonomy vis-à-vis the United States. This organization included Cuba and excluded the neighboring superpower, in a context in which the military regimes of the Southern Cone were still in power. The organization had its headquarters in Caracas, with Venezuela as its largest financial contributor (Balfour 1999). Thus, this country was already playing a major role in the subcontinent's claims to economic and commercial independence, using the extraordinary resources of oil, under the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-1978). As can be seen, the normalization of relations of all kinds with Cuba took place long before both the transitions to democracy and the so-called leftwing turns in Latin America. It was a pragmatic normalization as far as economic and commercial relations were concerned, which also benefited from the context of the rise of the Third World countries' coordination, with the Non-Aligned Movement. Indeed, contrary to what happened in the Cuban case, the OAS refused to take action against the Sandinista guerilla in 1978-

4. Proceedings of the 15th meeting of consultation of ministers of foreign affairs, Quito, Ecuador, 8-12 novembre 1974, <http://www.oas.org/council/MEETINGS%20OF%20CONSULTATION/Actas/Acta%2015.pdf>

5. Proceedings of the 16th meeting of consultation of ministers of foreign affairs, July 29th, 1975, San José Costa Rica, <http://www.oas.org/council/MEETINGS%20OF%20CONSULTATION/Actas/Acta%2016.pdf>

1979 and even issued a resolution advocating “for the replacement of Somoza and leaving the solution of the conflict in the hands of the Nicaraguan people” (Shaw 1999). All these elements show that Latin American states had much more leeway as far decision-making at the OAS than what scholars had thought (Shaw 2004).

The relative depoliticization of the Cuban issue from the 1980s onwards

This pragmatic normalization is at play until the 1990s. As early as the 1980s, Cuba was involved in the negotiations conducted by the Contadora Group to find a way out of the crisis in Central America, thus partially bypassing the OAS (Heller 2003). In 1994, it was Cesar Gaviria, former Colombian president of the center-right and then secretary general of the OAS, who expressed the wish that the organization take the Cuban question in hand and begin a process of full reintegration of Cuba into the inter-American system (Gaviria 1994). In 1996, the OAS General Assembly passed a resolution for “Freedom of Trade and Investment in the Hemisphere”, which was a clear and unanimous rejection (except for the negative vote of the United States) of the Helms-Burton Act, passed the same year in the US. Congress, to strengthen sanctions against Cuba (Heller 2003). In 1998, Cuba joined ALADI, the Latin American Integration Association, after joining the Association of Caribbean States in 1994. Governments, both right and left, were thus not only tolerating the existence of the Cuban communist regime, but building new regional cooperation organizations with Cuba (Heine and Weiffen 2014), well before Hugo Chavez became president of Venezuela. Of course, this process accelerated after Chavez won the presidential elections in 1998 and crafted an alliance with the Cuban government. After 2004 and the creation of ALBA, Cuba was a member of eight of the continent’s ten regional organizations (Gratius 2018). Moreover, the possibility of welcoming Cuba back into the OAS was regularly discussed during José Miguel Insulza’s mandate until the lifting of the 1962 suspension⁶.

Indeed, from the 2000 onwards, there was a bipartisan consensus on the failure of the policy of sanction and isolation pursued by the United States (Griswold 2009) and by the OAS since the 1962 resolution on the suspension of Cuba from the organization (Gaviria 1994, IACHR 2001) a consensus that can be also found in the academic literature (Lowenthal 2009, Legler 2012, LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015). The 1990s and 2000s were also marked by a growing desire for autonomy vis-à-vis the United States. Latin American support for the principle of non-intervention norm is thus not the hallmark of left turns. As early as 1992, Mexico and many small Caribbean countries opposed the Washington Protocol (which included the possibility of suspending a member of the organization for failure to comply with democratic norms), against what they perceived as an intrusion into their internal affairs (Ribeiro Hoffmann 2019). At the time, they were not yet benefiting from the oil subsidies granted under the Chavez and then Maduro governments as part of the Petrocaribe cooperation. And we must also underline that the newfound regional organizations like CELAC and UNASUR, which competed with OAS and included Cuba were supported by right-wing government as well as by left-wing ones.

Thus, in 2009, when the members of the OAS voted unanimously to abolish the resolution suspending Cuba from the organization, this decision was as much the result of new power politics on the sub-continent, with the left-wing turns, as that of more long-term economic, political and diplomatic processes. Nonetheless, other long-term issues were still at play at that time. Long-term divisions still existed between governments which continued to support the Cuban government (in Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina) and others which were looking for a renewed strategy to promote democracy and human rights on the island. Engagement thus meant rather different things for different countries, between support for the socialist experiment on the one hand and the implementation of non-coercive democracy promotion on the other hand (Merke 2015). All in all, there was a convergence over the necessity to adopt a more pragmatic and less polarizing approach, based on dialogue, cooperation and negotiation.

6. « Insulza : cuando llegué a la OEA no se hablaba de Cuba », CNN en español, 25 May 2015, <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2015/05/25/insulza-cuando-yo-llegue-a-la-oea-no-se-hablaba-de-cuba/>

LOGICS OF RE-POLITICIZATION AT THE OAS GENERAL SECRETARIAT AFTER 2015

I will here show that, after his election in 2015, the new OAS secretary general has inaugurated a new era as far as the international regime (Legler 2012) in the hemisphere: whereas the institutional design of inter-american democracy promotion is state centric (Legler and Tiekou 2010), Almagro has promoted civil society participation. Now, this participation departs from the kind, which had been promoted earlier on: that of the “insider civil society” (Smith and Korzeniewicz 2006), i.e. well-established knowledge-based NGOs and foundations, focused on creating expertise, with connections to the political world. Although Luis Almagro also relies on this “insider civil society”, he has opened the door to “militant, combative civil society groups” (Legler 2012), who work to provoke the demise of authoritarian governments through different means, some of them coercive and even violent. He has also relied on conservative executives to push his agenda within the OAS, especially at the Permanent Council. How can we explain this turn of events? How did it translate concretely? Finally, what does it tell us about the leadership of the secretary general and the OAS as an international organization?

The reemergence of a Cold War discourse

When Almagro is elected secretary general of the OAS, few expect his mandate to become a crusade against some Latin American governments in particular. Almagro himself puts special emphasis on the need for dialogue and negotiation:

We are also living in a world of uncertainty in which power is expressed in the most diverse and increasingly less conventional ways, in which we must advance a positive agenda to help the OAS rise to the occasion and prevent the Hemisphere from relapsing into Cold War practices, which we must avoid by every means. To do so, we have to shore up the negotiation, mediation, and consensus-building skills of this OAS, which brings together all countries of the Hemisphere. (Excerpt from his swear-in speech, May 28, 2015)

The new secretary general even warns against “relapsing into Cold war practices”, which lead to open violent confrontation at the expense of the people of the Americas. He presents himself as a diplomat intent on opening dialogues and wary of the sanctions strategy. One of his objectives is to greet Cuba back into the OEA⁷; he even stresses Cuba’s capacity to bring its expertise to the continent’s development agenda. As far as Venezuela, Almagro very clearly positions himself against the sanctions diplomacy implemented by the United States, as it hinders the necessary dialogue between different sectors of the society⁸. He thus proposed to work with all countries “without exceptions” and “put an end to unnecessary fragmentations” (Gaudan 2015).

Nonetheless, less than a year into his first mandate, the secretary general started acting in a way which contradicted his early speeches. He put pressure on Nicolas Maduro’s government in order to send OAS observers to the Venezuelan elections, which took place in December 2015. He openly supported the Venezuelan opposition. And he publicly insulted Maduro, calling him a “dictadorzuelo”. So much so that his former mentor, José Mujica, sent him an open letter, making clear that their political paths had diverged too much to keep working together⁹. Three years later, Luis Almagro was expelled from the Frente Amplio¹⁰. In 2017 and especially 2018, Luis Almagro also started developing a new discourse about Cuba, reformulating some of the tropes of the Cold War era, especially those which were put forward by the Latin American governments and led to Cuba’s suspension from the OAS¹¹.

7. « Almagro : « OEA debe hacer mea culpa por haber expulsado a Cuba », El Pais (Uruguay), 27 ay 2015, <https://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/almagro-oea-debe-mea-culpa-haber-expulsado-cuba.html>

8. See his interview « Luis Almagro : ‘Cuba puede aportar mucho a la OEA’ » in El Comercio, March 21, 2015, <https://www.el-comercio.com/actualidad/entrevista-luisalmagro-cuba-secretario-oea.html>

9. See subrayado.com.uy/pelea-almagro-y-mujica-provoca-renuncia-asesores-la-oea-n51064 and the open letter can be found here : <https://www.facebook.com/unetvhn/posts/1497046300424079>

10. CNN en español, « Luis Almagro es expulsado del Partido Frente Amplio en Uruguay », CNN en español, December 15, 2018, <https://cnnspanol.cnn.com/2018/12/15/almagro-expulsado-frente-amplio-uruguay-partido/>

11. I have selected all of Luis Almagro’s official speeches and press releases on the Cuban situation. And I have added his more

TABLE 1 : CUBA'S INFLUENCE ON THE HEMISPHERE ACCORDING TO OAS SECRETARY GENERAL'S SPEECHES (2015-2021) (TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH ORIGINAL)

HOW CUBA IS DEFINED POLITICALLY	ITS EFFECTS ON THE HEMISPHERE	NEED FOR ACTION
<p>Authoritarianism/totalitarianism</p> <p>«Cuba is a perfect example of a captive nation. The communist dictatorship not only enslaves, tortures, murders, persecutes, intimidates and forces its people into exile, but also exports its totalitarian practices to the rest of the region.»ⁱ</p> <p>« stay in power through brute force and fear»ⁱⁱ</p> <p>“state terrorism against its citizens”ⁱⁱⁱ</p>	<p>Exportation of authoritarian practices</p> <p>«Cuba today controls the Venezuelan civilian intelligence service, as well as the military intelligence service; it controls the Bolivarian National Guard, as well as colectivos, armed gangs, who are asked to do the governments dirty work, shooting and terrorizing demonstrators.»^{iv}</p>	<p>Need for confrontation</p> <p>Unfortunately, those who look the other way, those who support these actions of the dictatorship, are supporting this violent solution, sometimes saying that they do not support a violent solution they are doing so. (...) Permissiveness won't solve anything, it has never existed in any part of the world that a dictatorship has ended, dictatorships end when they are confronted and they are ended by those who confront them and that is why we especially welcome the resolution that has been approved today)^v</p>
<p>Human rights violations</p> <p>« Cuba is the longest-lived dictatorship in the Americas, the absence of rights is flagrant. They call themselves a dictatorship of the proletariat, but in reality it is a dictatorship against the proletariat and against the workers, where the basic right of independent unionization does not exist and forms of forced labor persist, some of which we have denounced in the framework of medical missions) »^{vi}</p>	<p>Creates polarization and violence</p> <p>“ When there is a dictatorship, it is completely dysfunctional in the rest of the hemisphere ”^{vii}.</p> <p>« dictatorships are the origin and the root cause of polarization in this hemisphere »^{viii}</p> <p>“ Cuba is a « central lab » of «destabilization»^{ix}</p> <p>«their old methodology of exporting polarization and bad practices, to essentially finance, support and promote political and social conflict»^x</p>	<p>Need to fight back</p> <p>« In democracy, we still have the need to seek mechanisms to fight impunity, and to confront phenomena and bad practices that threaten the preservation of human rights, such as organized crime, drug trafficking and corruption »^{xi}</p> <p>« The responsible path for Venezuela is that of R2P, the irresponsible path is that of Hands Off Venezuela. Today, we have to ask for all hands on Venezuela, because we have to solve the most important humanitarian crisis that the continent has ever had. (...)»</p>
<p>Economic failure</p> <p>« the clearest and most pathetic example of political, economic, social and productive failure. Complete destruction of the productive apparatus, complete destruction of the economic variables and complete destruction of the full exercise of sovereignty by the people »^{xii}.</p>	<p>Use of Venezuela for Cuban purposes</p> <p>There is an “occupation army in Venezuela”^{xiii}</p> <p>The Cubans have been intervening in Venezuela for years. It is the only military intervention that has ever happened in that country. The Cubans are a parasite that keeps sucking the carcass out of Venezuela's dead economy »^{xiv}</p>	<p>Drive Cuba out of Venezuela</p> <p>For too long the Cuban dictatorship has enjoyed impunity; the OAS is working to put an end to this state of affairs»^{xv}.</p>
<p>Organized crime and drug trafficking</p> <p>« The Cuban dictatorship was the first to make the State work in the logic of drug trafficking. They came out of a very Cuban methodology, finding 6 or 7 scapegoats, including war heroes such as General Ochoa »^{xvi}</p>	<p>Organized crime and drug trafficking</p> <p>“Corruption, crimes against humanity and drug trafficking, that is the complete dictatorial combo of the Venezuelan dictatorship. It was not even invented by the Venezuelan dictatorship, the origin is the Cuban dictatorship, those old leftovers of the Cuban dictatorship were introduced into the logic of the 21st century, in a process that we could call the «thousand steps», for the installation of the Venezuelan dictatorship»^{xvii}.</p>	<p>Organized crime and elections</p> <p>«What does drug trafficking and organized crime mean in political terms? It means money, money that is pumped into the democratic system and then pierces it like gruyere cheese. If there is one thing I would like to do more than anything else in the world, it is to go after Bolivarian money in every campaign in the hemisphere, from Canada to Tierra del Fuego. It is what would clean up the political systems of the hemisphere the most, what would generate the best conditions for the functioning of democracy, to clean up that money pumped into campaigns and political activities during all those years»^{xviii}.</p>

i. « Luis Almagro : ‘Cuba es un ejemplo perfecto de nacion cautiva’, Radio Television Marti, July 16th, 2019, <https://www.radiotelevisionmarti.com/a/luis-almagro-cuba-siguen-siendo-una-amenaza-a-los-derechos-humanos/242744.html>

ii. Speech at the United Nations about Cuban political prisoners, NY, Oct. 16th, 2018

iii. <https://www.dw.com/es/almagro-acusa-a-cuba-de-terrorismo-de-estado-contra-sus-ciudadanos/a-57021304>

iv. Speech at the inauguration of the new academic year in Santiago de Chile, June 9th, 2020

v. Speech at the Permanent Council on the political situation in Venezuela, Washington D.C., Dec. 9th, 2020

vi. Speech at IDEA : presidential dialogue : Latin America, now or never ?, Washington D.C., Nov. 17th 2020.

vii. Speech at the book presentation : international law of democracy, Washington D.C., Sept. 29th, 2020

viii. Speech at « Foro : defensa de la democracia en las Américas », Miami, May 5th 2021

ix. Speech at the Foro : defensa de la democracia en las Américas, Miami, May 5th 2021

x. Press release, 16 october 2019, https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-081/19

xi. Speech at the conference on organized crime, Miami, Oct, 23rd, 2018

xii. Speech at « Foro : defensa de la democracia en las Américas », Miami, May, 5th 2021

xiii. This formula has been intensively quoted by journalists in media outlets, by experts of think tanks and by activists. See for instance, Infobae, 19 July 2017, <https://www.infobae.com/america/eeuu/2017/07/19/luis-almagro-ante-el-senado-de-los-eeuu-venezuela-es-el-pais-mas-corrupto-del-continente-toda-la-estructura-del-estado-esta-tomada-por-el-narcotrafico/> But the OAS transcript of Luis Almagro's speech at the Senate hearing does not mention it. See Statement of OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro to U.S. Senate Hearing on Venezuela

xiv. 9 juillet 2017 https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=S-020/17

xv. « Cuba en Venezuela, la conquista del siglo XXI » CASLA Institute, Washington DC, June 9th 2020

xvi. « Cuba en Venezuela, la conquista del siglo XXI » CASLA Institute, Washington DC, June 9th 2020

xvii. Conference on the interamerican system of human rights (Boston University), Oct, 30th, 2020

xviii. Conference on the interamerican system of human rights (Boston University), Oct, 30th, 2020

xix. Speech at « Foro : defensa de la democracia en las Américas », Miami, May 5th 2021

general speeches (general statements, statements on Venezuela, speech on democracy and the interamerican democratic system) in which Cuba is mentioned, as those often point out to Cuba's negative influence on the hemisphere (in total 29 speeches). I have both taken into consideration his official speeches (available on the OAS website) and the press releases, as well as his speeches in other kinds of venues. The table is a short synthesis of the ideas he develops in his speeches.

Cold war discourses about Cuba have been marked by five characteristics: 1/ an emphasis on the Cuban government's ideology (marxist-leninist) and its incompatibility with representative democracy; 2/ a focus on the violations of human rights and due process; 3/ the idea that Cuba was a Soviet proxy, not an autonomous communist regime; 4/ the idea that the mere existence of the Cuban regime posited a security threat to the hemisphere, as the Cuban government was exporting its revolution abroad and supporting Soviet-led communist expansion; 5/ the fact that social policies were needed to steer state action towards reformism and prevent revolutionary dynamics (and especially undermine Cuban communist propaganda and agitation). These perspectives have led to the exclusion of Cuba from the OAS, as we have seen in the first part of this chapter, but they have also led to the promotion of the Alliance for Progress. Anticommunism and the focus on security went hand in hand with a reflection on the social roots of political upheavals and the necessity to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

Luis Almagro's speeches about Cuba only feature three of these five dimensions. Interestingly enough, the dimensions that are being ignored are the ideological and social ones. Indeed, the anticommunist repeal of the Marxist-leninist ideology is not mentioned and the social underpinnings of revolutionary warfare in Latin America are not addressed, thus ignoring the political debates, which took place at the time and still bear weight in contemporary Latin American politics. On the contrary, the three other characteristics of Cold War discourses about Cuba (Cuba as a human rights violator, as a Soviet proxy and as a security threat) are reformulated and combined with new elements. In this table below, I have synthesized all the elements that can be found in the secretary general's speeches since he took office in 2015 in three categories: the way he defines the Cuban regime, the effects that this regime is deemed to have on the hemisphere and the way to deal with them.

As we can see, the Cuban political regimes is being defined as "dictatorial", "authoritarian", or "totalitarian". It is relevant to point this fact, because the notion of authoritarianism has become hegemonic in social sciences and most expertise, because of the intense controversies, ideological inconsistencies and strategic uses of the notion of totalitarianism for Cold War purposes (Traverso 1998, Guilhot 2005). Moreover, Cuba is being singled out as "perfect example of a captive nation", "the longest lasting dictatorship" and "the first one to be based on drug trafficking".

The threat posed by the Cuban regime, another trope of the Cold War, is also put to the forefront. It builds on old discourses (Cuba as a threat to democracy, human rights and security) but with two new components. First, Cuba is deemed to be exporting bad practices, as far as both repression and propaganda, which lead to social conflict. In this perspective, the contemporary political polarization of the Americas (stemming from many different dynamics, including fascist, racist, populist and religious ones) is simply and purely ascribed to Cuba. Secondly, the Cuban regime is now seen as a threat to security, not only because it is deemed to be exporting its know-how as far as social repression, but also corruption, drugs trafficking and organized crime. In that perspective, only leftist regimes seem to be prone to have their states penetrated by these dark networks. Emblematic cases like Mexico under Enrique Peña Nieto, Colombia under Alvaro Uribe or Honduras under Juan Orlando Hernandez are simply disregarded. In this perspective, Cuba is not only defined as an authoritarian regime *per se*, but also as a regime, which bears a strong and bad influence on other Latin American countries, thus endangering the whole hemisphere and creating the need for a specific regional response. Particular emphasis is put on the criminal nature of the Cuban government's activities and its exportation to Venezuela. The Cuban government is explicitly presented as responsible for the present political and economic crisis in this country. The Venezuelan government is conceived as a puppet of the Cuban government, which reminds of the Cold War trope that Cuba was a Soviet proxy.

As a result, political and diplomatic coexistence is presented as undesirable, and strong actions as necessary. At the core of this vision is the idea that you cannot negotiate with dictatorships, as it would be both immoral and inefficient (Clemens 2011). In Luis Almagro's

terms, coexistence is an equivalent to “permissivity” or “looking away”¹². He argues and these policies fail to put an end to dictatorships and that “confrontation” is the only way to make this happen. In his texts, confrontation is rather presented as a set of institutional solutions to put pressure on authoritarian regimes’ elites, but he does not completely rule out the possibility of an external intervention, if within the confines of international law¹³.

Interestingly, the secretary general presents the confrontational policy as the only legitimate one although these types of policy have been criticized for their inconsistency and inefficiency. Indeed, scholars and experts have shown that sanctions have often disproportionately hit the population, rather than the elite and the government (Kuntz and Jackson 1994, AAWH 1997, Napier 2010). They have also demonstrated that sanctions and isolation do not lead to regime change (Fontaine and Ratliff 2000, Borer and Bowen 2007). And they have finally pointed out that these politics have also had an adverse effect on security in the US. and the hemisphere (Pape 1997, Clemens 2011, Russo and Haney 2012). On the contrary, research has shown that a less ambitious strategy, focused on policy change rather than on regime change can achieve results (Jentleson 2006, Bach, Espach and Rosenau 2017). How can we then explain the secretary general’s confrontational stance and his emphasis on coercive diplomacy?

Explaining the Secretary General’s newfound confrontational stance

Different explanations have been given to the Secretary General’s unexpected change, but so far none seem very convincing. First, Almagro has been accused of siding with Donald Trump, in order to keep the US Congress fund the OAS, as Trump wanted to slash funds for multilateral organizations (Shifter and Raderstorf 2017). I believe this argument is misleading. Almagro’s tougher stance on Venezuela (fall 2015) pre-dates Trump’s election by more than one year (on the 8th of November 2016). Now, Trump’s policy as far as Cuba and Venezuela can be rightly seen as key in reinforcing Luis Almagro’s positioning on both issues, *after* his first moves, since he gave priority to the OAS in dealing with Venezuela rather than to other regional institutions (Palestini 2021).

Another hypothesis suggests that Almagro came from a rather conservative political background and tended to change sides on certain issues (Marcetic 2019) and that this would explain his recent repositioning. This hypothesis is interesting, but it needs to be refined. Indeed, between 2010 and 2015, Almagro has generally acted in tune with José Mujica’s government. If his record as far as human rights defense was already prominent at the time he became the OAS secretary general, his actions consisted in confronting the legacy of Uruguay’s dictatorial past, advocating in favor of refugees and supporting the depenalization of marijuana, all moves associated with rather progressive leanings. Now, it is true that Almagro rather came from a rightist political tradition as he first joined the Uruguayan Foreign Service as a member of the National Party (a broad center-right to right-wing coalition). This early political socialization would need to be studied in order to understand to what extent it was downplayed during Almagro’s mandate under Frente Amplio and how it reemerged when he became the OAS secretary general, but this exceeds this paper’s research objectives.

I rather argue the Secretary General’s activism in the Venezuelan case and then his interactions with Cuban exiles are key to understand his new stance on Cuba. Luis Almagro indeed first got involved in the resolution of the Venezuelan crisis. At the time, his stance on Venezuela was softer than the Obama administration’s, which inflicted sanctions on top

12. No es con permisividad, jamás ha existido en ninguna parte del mundo que se haya terminado una dictadura, las dictaduras se terminan cuando son confrontadas y son terminadas por quienes las confrontan y por eso saludamos especialmente la resolución que ha sido aprobada hoy. http://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discursos/discursos_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=20-0081

13. « OAS chief : ‘Military intervention’ in Venezuela cannot be ruled out, DW Sept 15th, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/oas-chief-military-intervention-in-venezuela-cannot-be-ruled-out/a-45496823>. After the media picked up his quote, Luis Almagro repeatedly said he had been misquoted and/or misunderstood. At the same time, this other interview in Americas Quarterly testifies to the fact that he would not disagree with an intervention, if it took place within the limits of international law: “Luis Almagro: Venezuela cannot become another Rwanda”, Americas Quarterly, Sept. 20th, 2018 <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/luis-almagro-venezuela-cant-become-another-rwanda/>

Venezuelan officials in order to protest against human rights violations in Cuba in March 2015¹⁴. He took a more active role at the end of 2015 only, when he voiced concern about the upcoming legislative elections, and then in 2016, after president Maduro maneuvered in order to constrain and marginalize the new majority at the national assembly (after his party lost the December 2015 elections). Almagro's conflictive stance was surprising, given his former political credentials and the polarization in Latin America on the Venezuela crisis, but it radicalized in tune with the majority of OAS members. The unexpected 2017 OAS sanctions are indeed explained by Stefano Palestini as the consequence of the alignment of preferences of MERCOSUR (with its two strongest states, Argentina and Brazil) and the US. (Palestini 2021). Palestini explains that threats to democracy posed by incumbents are rarely sanctioned, especially when they take place in powerful states like Venezuela. But, in 2017 the political context had changed in the Americas. Indeed, some of the more powerful countries of the hemisphere had either elected or reelected right-wing presidents (Enrique Peña Nieto in Mexico (2012), Mauricio Macri in Argentina (2015), Donald Trump in the United States (2016), Michel Temer in Brazil after Dilma Rousseff's impeachment (2016)) and the Lima Group had managed to build a wide coalition of countries : twelve at first (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru), then fifteen (with Haiti, Guyana and Santa Lucia) and finally nineteen (with the US., Barbados, Jamaica and Granada). These countries supported the Group's endeavor to find a solution to the Venezuelan political crisis, by trying to broker a deal between the opposition and Maduro's government. In this continental context, although Luis Almagro's activism can be underlined (with the open support given to Leopoldo Lopez for instance), his position is in tune with the majority of the governments of the hemisphere. But progressively, this position evolves and become much more confrontational as his discourse over Venezuela goes far beyond a condemnation of the breach of the political order and starts to stigmatize all progressive governments in the region.

I argue that this more confrontational stance is correlated with the place Cuban exiles have managed to carve for their perspectives at the OAS. Luis Almagro's first moves as far as Cuba indeed take place in a context in which exiled Cubans have built a new discursive framework to understand the Cuban regime as the mother of all evils (i.e. as the force responsible for most political turmoil) in Latin America, and is especially responsible for the Venezuelan crisis. This discourse builds on existing credible evidence that high-ranking Cuban officials are assessing the Venezuelan government on many state issues such as defense and security, electoral matters and political institutions (see reports and publications by CASLA 2019, FHRC 2019, Werlau 2019). Now, this discourse is crafted so as to bestow the origins of the Venezuelan social and political crisis to the Cuban government, thus stripping Nicolas Maduro of political agency and responsibility.

Despite the fact that this interpretation is highly contested, Almagro's first official discourse on Cuba, at the United Nations on the 16th of October 2018, specifically mentions that Cuba has been exporting repression methods and specific political know-how to Latin America¹⁵. In other speeches, Almagro underlines the fact that witnesses have mentioned that they have seen and/or heard Cuban officials while being detained – and sometimes badly treated – after the 2018 protests in Nicaragua and in many different times and places in Venezuela¹⁶. He thus endorsed the interpretation provided by both Venezuelan and Cuban exiles, i.e. that the Cuban issue is intrinsically connected to the Venezuelan one, and more broadly that progressive governments all tend to become dictatorships. Evidence shows that this endorsement can be linked to Luis Almagro's regular interactions with the exile community and the lack of counter discourse.

14. « Deeply concerned Obama imposes sanctions on Venezuelan officials », The Guardian, March 9th, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/09/obama-venezuela-security-threat-sanctions>

15. Speech on Cuban political prisoners, Oct. 16th, 2018, United Nations. http://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=18-0091

16. Ibid

The role of the Cuban exile organizations at the OAS

Civil society had already carved itself a space at OAS before Luis Almagro's tenure. Since the early 1990s, Canada and a few other countries, including the US, had been especially intent on opening the OAS to civil society organizations. Since 1998, civil society organizations had been granted observer status at the Permanent Council and offered a space to share their perspectives during the new Summits of the Americas (Shamsie 2000). Now, as I underlined earlier, the civil society involved was mostly what Smith and Korzeniewicz (2006) have called an "insider civil society", i.e. civil society organizations, with relatively strong connections to the political world and legitimate resources, expertise and know-how, intent on co-building and co-implementing the guidelines delineated by the organization.

Luis Almagro has inaugurated a new era as far as civil participation at OAS. Although he still relies on the "insider civil society", he has opened the door to more "militant, combative civil society groups" (Legler 2012), which - in the Cuban case - are interconnected due the specificity of Cuban American networks, which encompass both political actors (congressmen, senators, governors) and civil society actors (NGOs and foundations). Combative civil society groups are generally thought to be positioned on the left-hand side of the political spectrum, but in this case, they are mostly anti-communist think tank leaders and activists. These activists have been regularly invited to the OAS headquarters in Washington D.C. during Luis Almagro's mandate, and he has also participated in events, which they organized. He has also regularly commented about his stands in such events in the social media.

Scholars have already shown the critical importance of exile organizations on the crafting of foreign policy in the United States. On the Cuban case, there are quite a few studies, which testify to their importance (Haney and Vanderbush 2005, Vanderbush 2009, Badella 2014 and 2016). Now, these organizations have also become very active at the OAS. Just like exiles have been regulars at Congressional hearings, especially since the 1980s and onwards (Vanderbush 2009), they have become regulars at the OAS general secretariat. The following section does not mean to question the right of Cuban exiles (or Venezuelan exiles for that matter) to be heard in such an important venue as the OAS, its rather means to stress the fact that only specific organizations have managed to be heard.

I have put together the most exhaustive list I could of both speeches and events, in which the secretary general has participated since he took office in 2015, as far as Cuban issues. The objective of this table is to objectify the networks with which he has been working so as to shed light on the particular political position he has sided with. Three elements are striking here: first, the lack of either discourse or action concerning Cuba during the first two years of Luis Almagro's mandate (May 2015-May 2017) and the subsequent importance the Cuban question has taken; secondly, the regular secretary general's participation in civil society organized events ; and finally the especially restricted circles with which he is been working on this issue from 2018 and on.

There are hundreds of organizations in the Cuban diaspora whose main objective is to promote a transition process in Cuba. One part of those, an extreme minority, supports the legitimacy of the Cuban government and denounces US. interference in Cuban affairs. As for the others, there are split in two major positions: an anti-communist position that favors a policy of sanctions, isolation and confrontation, and an anti-authoritarian position that advocates a policy of "engagement" on the grounds that the policy of sanctions and isolation is not effective and even counterproductive (Torres 1999, Garcia 1996). The anti-communist position is defended by historical exile organizations, which are both professionalized and politicized, and they have recently been joined by younger activists since the 2010s (Grenier 2018). They enjoy much political and institutional support, both in conservative think tanks (Heritage Foundation, Fundación Internacional para la Libertad, Voice of Communism Memorial Foundation) and in various political spaces (the city of Miami, the State of Florida, the US. Congress and the State department). The "anti-authoritarian" position is less represented in Florida, where it is regularly attacked and caricatured. It includes organizations (Cuba Study Group), parties in exile (social-democrat and christian-democrat), more informal collectives organized around

digital platforms (Cuba posible, 23 y flagler) and is upheld by think tanks such as the Brookings Institution¹⁷.

Depending on the periods and the political and social events in Cuba and the United States (migration flows, diplomatic incidents, economic crises), the popularity of these two positions has fluctuated among the Cuban diaspora. While in the Miami enclave, the anti-communist position has generally remained in the majority, despite inflections in the 2010s, the pro-engagement position was widely favored by younger generations of Cuban-Americans until the election of Donald Trump. While this election has led to a new polarization and a reclaiming of the anti-communist position, it has lost its hegemony in the past twenty years. Yet the OAS Secretary General has almost exclusively been interacting with representatives of the pro-sanctions position.

Except for the Cuban artists mentioned in the table and Cubalex (an organization of lawyers who defend the rights of people under arrest or incarcerated)¹⁸, the other organizations that appear in the table are all positioned on the right-hand side of the political spectrum. Internationally, they have supported or sought the support of political figures such as Donald Trump (United States), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), Ivan Duque (Colombia) or Jeanine Añez (Bolivia). In terms of relations between Cuba and the United States, they all promote a policy of isolation (embargo, sanctions) and confrontation. Some of them have campaigned for a US “humanitarian” intervention after the repression of the July 11 2021 demonstrations¹⁹. And most promote a model of transition based primarily on criminal justice and the building of cases to be presented in national or international courts, rather than the more traditional transitional justice process of uttering the truth, building memory and crafting reconciliation. One of their model is the international criminal courts created for Yugoslavia and Rwanda²⁰.

The point here is not to judge the relevance or not of the position of these organizations, but to underline their belonging to the same conservative political world, with converging Cold Warrior views regarding the management of the Cuban political situation: coercive diplomacy, lack of negotiation and a transitional justice based on criminal law. It is thus necessary to stress the fact that despite the growing diversity of organizations and positions in the Cuban diaspora, the Secretary General has chosen to connect the OAS General Secretariat with one specific political line only. Even more surprisingly, the Secretary General has bestowed legitimacy on one of the most controversial figure of the Cuban exile in Miami, Alexander Otaola, an alt-right social media influencer, by participating in his show in 2020. Otaola is particularly controversial for his histrionics, racism and his systematic practice of denigrating those who do not share his positions, invariably calling them “communists”²¹, and placing them on a “red list” (a black list of communists), which lends his show a McCarthyist taste. And eventually, it is also relevant to underline that the OAS’s connection with this one political line has been reinforced by the nomination of Cuban-American conservative Carlos Trujillo, as US. ambassador to the OAS, under US. president Donald Trump²². Indeed, Trujillo is a political ally of Cuban American conservative Florida Senator Marco Rubio, who in turn, has consistently supported the most conservative civil society exile Cuban leaders.

17. See FIU’s list of Cuban-American institutions and organizations : <https://cri.fiu.edu/cuban-america/org-institutes/>

18. Cubalex et les artistes dont le nom apparaît sont associés à ce réseau, mais de façon plus périphérique et leur position en matière de sanctions est moins unanime. L’association Cubalex ne défendait par exemple pas l’embargo tant que l’association travaillait à Cuba. Et elle n’est pas active, depuis l’exil de 14 de ses membres aux Etats-Unis, sur cette question.

19. Tim Padgett, Call for US. military intervention amid Cuban protests sparks Miami exile debate, WLRN, 13 July 2021, <https://www.wlrn.org/news/2021-07-13/call-for-u-s-military-intervention-amid-cuba-protests-sparks-miami-exile-debate>

20. See the online presentation of Justice Cuba, one of the main organizations, which intends to build cases before the fall of the communist regime, so as to anticipate the transition and steer the transitional justice process towards a criminal justice dynamic : <https://justicecuba.wildapricot.org/>

21. Tim Padgett, « Can a racist demagogue be a serious defender of human rights », WLRN, 3 December 2020, <https://www.wlrn.org/commentary/2020-12-03/hola-otaola-can-a-racist-demagogue-be-a-serious-defender-of-cuban-rights>

22. Mary Ellen Klas, Patricia Mazzei « Carlos Trujillo named as US. ambassador to the Organization of American States », 26 October 2017, <https://www.tampabay.com/florida-politics/buzz/2017/10/26/carlos-trujillo-names-as-u-s-ambassador-to-oas/>

TABLE 2: SPEECHES, PRESS RELEASES AND EVENTS ATTENDED BY SECRETARY GENERAL LUIS ALMAGRO ON CUBA

EVENTS/ YEARS	SPEECHES AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY L. ALMAGRO	CIVIL SOCIETY INVOLVED (including think tanks, foundations and parties)
2015	Tweets favorable to more opening towards Cuba (April 12th, May 26th, June 16th) ²³	
2016		
2017 May 10 July 22	Meeting with civil society, including Cuban exiles <i>Message from secretary general on anniversary of the death of Oswaldo Paya (PR)</i>	Justice Cuba (with Directorio Democrático Cubano)
2018 Feb. 10 March 8 Sept. 28 Oct. 16 Oct. 23 Dec. 7	Presentation of a documentary on Oswaldo Paya <i>Message from secretary general about the Oswaldo Paya prize (PR)</i> Meeting with Cuban exile organizations <i>Speech about the crisis of political prisoners in Cuba (at the UN)</i> 3rd presidential debate (about organized crime in Latin America) Speech at the first Conference on human rights in Cuba	Voice of Communism Memorial Foundation, Cuba Decide Asamblea de la Resistencia Cubana, Justice Cuba IDEA, Catedra N. Mezerhane (Miami Dade College) Cubalex, Cuba decide, M.A.R. por Cuba, Justice Cuba
2019 Feb. 7 May 6 May 14 June 5 June 26 June 27 July 16 Aug. 22 Oct. 16 Oct. 28 Dec. 18	Conference "The new Cuban constitution and the Inter-American democratic charter" at the OAS Conference on artistic freedom in Cuba Speech about the use of Cuban doctors and the exportation of the Cuban model Endorsement of the US. treasury sanctions against the Cuban government Forum on crimes against humanity in Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela Meeting with Cuba Decide Endorsement of the notion of « captive nation » to describe Cuba Speech about the necessity to democratize Cuba and Venezuela Statement about the role of Cuba and Venezuela in destabilizing Latin America ²⁴ Speech about the Cuban medical missions Signature of the Agreement on Democracy in Cuba Conference on the obscure reality behind the Cuban Medical Missions	Cubalex, Cuba Decide, Transparencia Electoral América latina Revista La Hora and artists Cuban Defenders (Press conference on Crimes against Humanity in Cuba) Casla Institute, Cuban Defenders Cuba Decide, Fundacion x la democracia, JuventudLAC Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation ODCA seminar Cuba Decide, Directorio Democrático Cubano Cuban Defenders
2020 May. 7 June 9 Sept. 17 Dec. 10	Interview with influencer A. Otaola in his show Speech about Cuban intervention in Venezuela « Cuba en Venezuela, la conquista del siglo XXI » ²⁵ IDEA : 5th presidential dialogue : Latin America, now or never ? Speech about the need to fight the spread of the authoritarian virus ²⁶	"Hola Ota-Ola" CASLA Institute IDEA ²⁷ Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation (Conference on human rights and democracy in Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua)
2021 March 23 May 5	Press conference about repression in Cuba Conference on the defense of democracy in the Americas	Cuba Decide Interamerican Institute for democracy, Radio y TV Martí, Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba

23. He tweeted before and after he took office (May 26th).

24. Statement of the OAS general secretariat, https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-081/1925. https://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=20-003926. Speeches and other documents of the Secretary General (in spanish only), « Día de los derechos humanos, conferencia sobre derechos humanos y democracia en Cuba, Venezuela y Nicaragua, https://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=20-0080

27. IDEA is a network of former Latin American presidents. It is presented as bipartisan, but active members almost exclusively belong to right wing parties.

The relationship the Secretary General enjoys with these exile organizations translates in very concrete consequences: indeed, as the OAS general secretariat is prevented by the obstruction of the Cuban government to draft reports on the human rights situation on the island, it often relies on evidence handed over by the exile to craft its discourse and policies as far as Cuba. As a consequence, the wording they use to frame the political and human rights situation on the island are to be found in most of the Secretary General's speeches ("captive nation", "a state based on drug trafficking", "state terrorism" or "slave labor"). Although most international NGOs (like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch) agree that Cuba's record as far as human rights is problematic, their framing is quite distinct and they refuse to use those terms, which they deem false and counterproductive²⁸.

One can therefore question the support given by an OAS Secretary General to this one political line, well beyond the OAS mandate - legitimate and inscribed in the inter-American institutions - of defense of democracy and human rights. Indeed, partisan politics have consequences on the framing of possible modalities of action to deal with Cuba as well as Venezuela. The discursive support and legitimacy given by Luis Almagro, with all the social and political capital he enjoys as the OAS Secretary General, to hardline confrontational politics, sometimes verging on war-mongering positions, once again raises questions about the autonomy of the OAS in relation to US power, something Susanne Gratius already pointed out in her research (2018)²⁹. All the more when this same Secretary General asks for more US leadership in the organization. But it also questions the OAS autonomy as far as politicized organized interests. And finally, it also raises questions of the general secretariat of the OAS' ability to maintain a balanced and diplomatic position, when it systematically sides with conservative political networks in the Americas and elsewhere³⁰.

3. THE CRAFTING OF THE OAS GENERAL SECRETARIAT AS A POLITICAL AND MORAL AUTHORITY

This third and last part will address one of the effects of the Secretary General's stance as far as Cuba, and more generally Venezuela and Nicaragua, in the Americas. Very recent research has shown that Secretaries General's activism does not have an impact on the way the Permanent Council of the OAS deals with pressing political issues in the hemisphere. Indeed, this activism is for instance "neither sufficient nor necessary" for the enforcement of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (Palestini 2021). This enforcement is rather inconsistent, depending upon "the preferences of the executives of the most powerful member states" (Boniface 2002, Palestini 2020, 2021). I thus argue that this activism serves another purpose: that of crafting the Secretary General as a kind of political and moral authority in the Americas, with the legitimacy to distinguish between good and bad democratic practices, and between good democratic government and bad authoritarian rule, thus contributing to grant - partial - autonomy to the function of Secretary General and the action of the OAS from its members states (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 2004). It also contributes to reposition the OAS as the major regional organization in the Americas, and give its leadership back to the US.

This interesting excerpt from one of Almagro's speeches formulates one of his objectives as the OAS Secretary General : to shed light on Cuban and Venezuela human rights abuse *with a purpose*.

« We at the OAS are intentionally illuminating, the terrible tragedy that the Venezuelan dictatorship imposes on the people of Cuba and Venezuela. We want the world to see

28. See for instance José Miguel Vivanco's tweet (Jan. 11, 2021) about calling Cuba a terrorist sponsor and his « Written testimony to the US. House Western Hemisphere Committee on Cuba », July 22th, 2021, as well as Amnesty International's call (2020) for a more balanced political vision at the OAS in the wake of Luis Almagro's reelection.

29. For Susanne Gratius, the return to hostile relations shows the « still hegemonic position of the United States in (the) inter-American system » in Gian Luca Gardini, Simon Koschut, Andreas Falke (eds), *Interregionalism and the Americas*, Lexington, 2018, p. 147.

30. Luis Almagro has been constantly working and debating with conservative parties and governments in the Americas en Europe (for instance FAES - José Maria Aznar's foundation - in Spain, ODCA - the Organization of Christian Democrats in the Americas, the new right-oriented South American organization PROSUR)

clearly the abuses committed by the Cuban regime on its own island, in Venezuela and elsewhere on the continent. »³¹

These few sentences are worth an analysis. Here Almagro is being clear that he is putting special emphasis on Cuba and Venezuela (*iluminando intencionalmente*), for the world to see (*queremos que el mundo vea*). He is also binding the two situations, in both directions: the Cuban and Venezuelan people are first presented as tragically affected by the Venezuelan dictatorship, and secondly the Cuban regime is pointed out as being responsible for abuse committed in Cuba, in Venezuela and in other parts of the continent. The Secretary General's objective is here first and foremost to expose what is presented as a tragic situation, to communicate it to the "world". In doing so, he is also assigning responsibilities in moral and political terms, to the Cuban and Venezuela governments.

Luis Almagro's purpose is twofold: both delegitimize the Cuban and Venezuelan governments *and* stage that delegitimation in order to steer the OAS towards a new perspective, that of being an arbiter of democracy and human rights in the Americas. The opposition between the way José Miguel Insulza understood his function as Secretary General and the way Luis Almagro understands it is very telling.

"There is one thing that will not change: this is a body consisting of 34 states, not a supranational power. I am not the president of the OAS, nor the president of the Americas. I am the Secretary General that implements the resolutions of the Permanent Council, and this is something that no one will change."³²

José Miguel Insulza presents himself as a kind of facilitator between 34 states and the legal embodiment of the decision-making process between these states. He embodies the realist approaches to international organizations, in which these organizations are perceived as having no autonomy of their own. On the contrary, Luis Almagro explicitly contradicts José Miguel Insulza's statement, in an interview given to *El País* in 2018, claiming that the Secretary General has "powers according to the OAS Charter, the Inter-American Democratic Charter, and Resolution 1080 for the defense of democracy, for the defense of security, and regional stability."³³ He is here promoting a wider and more normative interpretation of the Secretary General's mandate (see Kille 2013 on Secretaries General's leadership).

Moreover, Luis Almagro understands the OAS as an international organization, with its own norms and principles, above and beyond the governments, which are part of it.

« (...) democratic states must act more in favor of democracy and human rights. Governments come and go. Changes are inevitable. But principles remain and the OAS remains defending those principles. The Organization is much more than an individual, than a member state, than diplomats, than officials. Let us not forget for whom and for what the OAS has existed all this time. For what and for whom it will continue to work in subsequent decades. The peoples of the Americas. The OAS will be what the people want the OAS to be »³⁴

31. I translated from the Spanish : « En la OEA estamos iluminando intencionalmente el flagelo, la terrible tragedia que significa la dictadura venezolana para los pueblos de Cuba y de Venezuela. Queremos que el mundo vea claramente los abusos cometidos por el régimen cubano en su propia isla, en Venezuela y en otros lugares del continente » : « Cuba en Venezuela, la conquista del siglo XXI » CASLA Institute, Washington DC, 9 June 2020, http://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=20-0039.

32. Quoted in Patricio Zamorano, « The OAS and the crisis in Venezuela : Luis Almagro in his labyrinth », Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 28 April 2017 <https://www.coha.org/the-oas-and-the-crisis-in-venezuela-luis-almagro-and-his-labyrinth/>

33. Moisés Naím, « Sometimes failures can also bring progress towards democracy », *El País*, 3 July 2018, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2018/06/29/inenglish/1530282967_359823.html

34. I translated from the Spanish version: " (...) los Estados democráticos debemos acentuar el hecho de actuar en favor de la democracia y los derechos humanos. Los gobiernos van y vienen. Los cambios son inevitables. Pero los principios permanecen y la OEA permanece defendiendo esos principios La Organización es mucho más que un individuo, que un estado miembro, que los diplomáticos, que los funcionarios. No olvidemos para quién y para qué la OEA ha existido todo este tiempo. Para qué y para quién seguirá trabajando en décadas subsecuentes. Los pueblos de las Américas. La OEA será lo que la gente quiere que la OEA sea", http://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=19-0013

In Almagro's perspective, the Secretary General thus embodies a kind of distinct, autonomous authority, which gives voice to *the people*, not only to the member states. He thus becomes an interpreter of those voices. This justifies the fact that internal procedures can be somewhat overlooked (Zamorano 2017), in defense of a greater good, which the Secretary General, with the support of like-minded governments, must uphold.

« We must never forget these principles. The geopolitical configuration that used to be based on bullying and against wills has fallen apart. Today we are building a geopolitical architecture based on principles. Some will be on the side of principles, others will not. That is the logic that we have to face in the Organization and that we have been facing for a long time »³⁵.

This quote is especially interesting for two reasons. First, despite the Secretary General's constant invocation of the Inter-American democratic charter and other pro-democracy instruments as the best ways to defend democracy, he actually states here that his policy on that matter has much more to do with the building of power politics: "a geopolitical architecture", with those who will "be on the side of principles" and "those who will not". Moreover, he presents the struggle in favor of democracy and human rights as a black or white alternative³⁶. Here, the "principles" are presented as universal and the opposition between those who will defend them and the others as a moral divide between a good side (morally unquestionable) and a bad side (prone to "bullying"). This logic justifies an ongoing action, which is thought off as a kind of crusade, which he proposes to carry out with or without approval :

*"We will not retreat an inch in our fight against dictatorships. If everybody likes it, fine, and if nobody likes it, fine too »*³⁷.

In that sense, there is a blatant contradiction between the will to create "consensus" and support "political dialogue" (terms, which are used in the paragraphs just before this quote) and the statement according to which he won't consider those who disagree with his perspectives, methods and actions. Luis Almagro here seems to be considering his job at that of a truth bearer:

*"Our reports have always been based on facts, we do not issue opinions, we do not have political opinions, we cannot have political opinions, we are not ideological"*³⁸.

while consistently rejecting other approaches, like those which are part of most diplomatic routines, grounded in low-key negotiations between parties and behind doors³⁹.

Nevertheless, based on facts, we must mention here that other events and processes could have raised the concern of the Secretary General. Here is a small table of relevant cases of repeated human rights abuse and attack against democracies, which are either only mentioned "in passing" in the Secretary General's communication (although they are generally addressed by the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights - IACHR) or not addressed at all, although they have marred the American continent's political record in recent years.

35. I translated from the Spanish version : Nunca debemos olvidar estos principios. La configuración geopolítica que antes se armaba con base a bullying y en contra de voluntades, se desmoronó. Hoy estamos construyendo una arquitectura geopolítica con base en principios. Unos estarán de lado de los principios, otros no lo estarán. Esa es la lógica que debemos enfrentar en la Organización y que hemos enfrentado durante mucho tiempo », http://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=19-0013

36. Almagro himself had actually used this dichotomy to describe his fight for human rights in this interview: Franco Ordoñez, "Uruguayan diplomat makes OAS a player, again", McClatchy, 13 March 2016, <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article65423642.html>

37. I translated from the original in Spanish : « Nos vamos a ceder un ápice en nuestra lucha contra las dictaduras. Si les gusta a todos muy bien y si no le gusta a nadie, muy bien también ». Reelection speech, http://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=20-0030

38. I translated from Spanish: "Nuestros informes han estado basados siempre en hechos, nosotros no emitimos opinión, no tenemos opinión política, no podemos tener opinión política, no somos ideológicos". Speech at the book presentation « Derecho Internacional de la democracia », Washington D.C., Sept. 29th, 2020.

39. « Almagro : Election would lead Venezuela to 6 more years of dictatorship », Miami Herald, 21 janvier 2018.

TABLE 3. RELEVANT OCCURRENCES OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE OR ATTACKS ON DEMOCRACY WITH LESS VISIBILITY

DATE & COUNTRY	EVENT	OAS SECRETARY GENERAL'S PUBLIC RESPONSE
Sept. 2021 Brazil	President Bolsonaro's policies as far as human rights and democratic institutions threaten the rule of law, endanger people's lives and the environment (the Amazon) ⁴⁰	No statement, no tweet Constant praise of president Bolsonaro's support on the OAS policy on the Venezuelan case
May 2021 El Salvador July 2021 El Salvador	Dismissal of the attorney general and the judges of the Constitutional chamber Deportation of Mexican journalist, harassment of the media and anti-transparency measures (on public information)	Statement (May 2nd, 2021). No follow-up since then. No statement, no tweet
Jan. 2021 The US.	Mob attack on the US. Capitol & president Trump's intent to organize an "auto-coup"	Statement (on the Capitol only, no mention of president Trump's repeated attacks on the democratic process) ⁴¹
June 2020 The US.	George Floyd's murder (and more generally police killings in the US.)	No statement, no tweet
Oct. 2019 Bolivia	Violent repression against protesters during contested electoral process	No statement against violence (press releases and tweets on the electoral process and against the incumbent president)
Oct. 2019 Chili	Violent repression against protesters (including torture, sexual abuse and deaths)	Statement (Oct. 24 th) endorses IACHR's condemnation of human rights violation during protests in Chile while at the same time accusing the Venezuelan and Cuban governments to have instigated the protest ⁴² . Later public speeches supported President Piñera's actions ⁴³ .
Oct. 2019 Ecuador	Violent repression against protesters	Statement (Oct. 8 th) which calls for the protection of the freedom of expression, but at the same time condemns protesters' violence ⁴⁴ . No condemnation of police violence. Later public speeches supported President Moreno's actions ⁴⁵ .
May 2019 Brazil	Widespread violence in Brazilian prisons leading to more than 60 deaths	No statement, no tweet
March 2018 Brazil	Murder of activist and politician Marielle Franco	One tweet (March 15 th). No follow up despite evidence of involvement of president Bolsonaro's entourage
Jan. 2018 The US.	D. Trump signs an executive order to keep Guantanamo prison open despite well documented violations of human rights	No statement, no tweet (despite Feb. 23 rd , 2016 tweet welcoming Obama's decision to close the prison)

It is important to underline that the OAS Secretary General generally addresses most human rights concerns (like the Ayotzinapa murders in Mexico in 2014, the widespread social and political violence in Colombia and Peru, journalists and community leaders' murders in Honduras and Mexico), although there are blatant exceptions like George Floyd's murder by the police in the US. or the horrendous situation of Brazilian prisons. Now, a different weight is given to his statements, whether they are published as tweets or as Secretariat General's press releases. Social violence is generally addressed in tweets and the political processes, which are responsible for that violence are most often downplayed or ignored. Moreover, attacks on democratic institutions are unevenly addressed : Brazil and the US., which have

40. See Human Rights Watch, « Brazil : Bolsonaro threatens democratic rule », Sept. 15th, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/15/brazil-bolsonaro-threatens-democratic-rule>, as well as US. senators' note : « Top senate democrats sound alarm on Brazil's democratic decline », Sept. 28th, 2021, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/chair/release/top-senate-democrats-sound-alarm-on-brazils-democratic-decline-and-creeping-authoritarianism-under-president-bolsonaro>

41. OAS press release, E-001/21, January 6th, 2021.

42. OAS press release, C-088/19, October 24th, 2019.

43. José María del Pino, « El secretario general de la OEA defendió a Sebastián Piñera y acusó a Cuba y a Venezuela por las protestas en Chile », El Clarín, January 9th, 2020, https://www.clarin.com/mundo/secretario-general-oea-defendio-sebastian-pinera-acuso-cuba-venezuela-protestas-chile_O_Y5-Wx_KL.html

44. OAS press release, E-078/19, October 8th, 2019.

45. El Universo, « Luis Almagro felicita a Ecuador por aislar las protestas sociales », Oct. 30th, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8A8DSxtVk4>

strongly supported Luis Almagro's activism against the Cuban, Venezuelan and Nicaraguan governments, are almost completely spared from criticism. And finally, there is a clear imbalance as far as the importance given to democratic backsliding, depending on the political leaning of the governments concerned. Right-wing governments (the US. under Donald Trump, Brazil under Jair Bolsonaro and El Salvador under Nayib Bukele) are much less scrutinized than left leaning governments.

This newfound activism of the OAS Secretary General has not generated new forms of institutionalization of the democratic norm, as it did for instance under João Clemente Soares Baena, who played a leading role in the crafting of resolution 1080 in 1991. There are talks as far as making OAS instruments more effective to defend democracy and human rights⁴⁶, but so far, no concrete steps have been taken. Luis Almagro rather relies on the reformulation of the debate about democracy and human rights in the hemisphere, opposing "dictatorship" and "democracy", and using the OAS general secretariat as a political platform, together with the mainstream media and the social media, in order to name and shame. By doing so, Luis Almagro has crafted new discursive power politics, which have put the OAS back under the spotlights.

Although we might rejoice at the liveliness of debates about democracy within regional organizations, the OAS Secretary General's stance has rather led to an increased polarization within the organization and in the Americas more generally. Within the OAS, his activism has alienated quite a few countries at the Permanent Council and created mistrust, especially on the Cuban case (see Ronald Sanders, OAS ambassador for Antigua and Barbuda, 2020b, 2021). It has for instance led to the adjournment of a meeting on human rights in Cuba in July 2021 after the social uprisings of July 11th and 12th were repressed by the Cuban government. 13 countries out of 34 sent a letter expressing their rejection of what they saw as a divisive and conflictive policy, which did not promote peace and cooperation in the hemisphere⁴⁷. This shows that there still are institutional mechanisms, which *de facto* limit the general secretary's powers, when the representatives of OAS member states reject his steering of the Organization.

Luis Almagro's broad interpretation of his role has been especially criticized by Caribbean states, who have repeatedly voted against his positions and his broad interpretation of his mandate, especially as far as the setting of priorities (Sanders 2020a). Beyond the OAS, Amnesty International (2020) has been very critical of the Secretary General's actions and tried to raise member states' concern when Almagro was seeking reelection in 2020. The organization sent a letter to the representatives of OAS members, so as to draw attention to the need to elect an impartial and independent representative to the position of Secretary General. Indeed, the NGO deplored the lack of consideration of the OAS for the massive human rights violations committed in others countries than Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have shown that the dispassionate, bipartisan and pragmatic policy towards Cuba that had been pursued since the mid-1970s was quickly called into question after the election of Luis Almagro as Secretary General of the OAS. This reversibility of the OAS position on the subject is to be linked to several factors. First, the Secretary General's position as far as Cuba is correlated to his stance on the Venezuelan issue. Indeed, his activism on Cuba only intensifies after the 2017 institutional crisis in Venezuela. As that time, the proximity developed by the Secretary General with the pro-sanctions organizations of the Cuban exile led him to endorse their narrative, which emphasizes the role played by the Cuban government in the Venezuelan crisis and in the upholding of the Venezuelan government. This narrative frames

46. See the propositions mentioned in the introduction for instance. Eduardo Gamorra, an FIU political science professor, also mentioned during that conference that José Miguel Insulza had asked for a report about possible earlier warning mechanisms, which would allow to better assess the threats and thresholds as far as democratic backsliding. But, to his knowledge, the report has never really been discussed or implemented.

47. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/latin-americas-resurgent-left-caribbean-spurn-us-policy-cuba-2021-08-02/>

the Cuban state as thoroughly criminal agent, thus making it into an enemy, with whom it would be morally questionable to negotiate. In that perspective, the Cuban government can only be part of the problem, and not part of the solution as some voices nevertheless advocate (Zamorano 2017, Rendon 2020, Stuenkel 2021). As these exile organizations have monopolized access to the Secretary General, despite the existence of other perspectives, their views have become hegemonic in his discourse.

Now, the weight of Cuban civil society actors needs to be understood in the new political context of the second part of the 2010s. From 2015 and on, general elections (and a presidential destitution) indeed led right-wing presidents to govern powerful countries, both in the US and Latin America. The role played by some of these new presidents, such as Donald Trump in the US and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil in the defense of the OAS's role in the hemisphere and of Luis Almagro's activism on the Cuban and Venezuelan issues, has reinforced the Secretary General's position on those issues, leading to an imbalanced focus on democratic backsliding and human rights abuse under left-leaning governments.

A third factor is the Secretary General's broad interpretation of his mandate, which allows him to push forward some of his priorities at the OAS Permanent Council and in other venues, and promote his sanctions oriented perspective as far as Cuba, as well as Venezuela and Nicaragua. This activism has been successful as it has moreover been supported by executives with an interest in the sanctioning of regimes associated with 21th century socialism, such as in Colombia and Brazil.

By upholding this non-compromising stance, the Secretary General has repoliticized the Cuban issue and the role of the General Secretariat. He has also crafted a renewed public image for the Organization, which has regularly made it into the headlines of both mainstream and social medias since Luis Almagro's election. Moreover, this new discourse has given the Secretary General political prominence and has allowed him to be reelected at the OAS secretariat, mainly thanks to right-leaning governments' support. But his activism has not translated into efficiency as far as the Cuban or Venezuelan question. Both countries are facing deep crises, which are met by an ever-stronger polarization in the hemisphere. We must conclude, that rather than blatant declarations, there is still a need for a lower-profile multilateralism, involving political engagement, dialogue and negotiation.

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