

## US IN LATIN AMERICA: KEY CURRENT INTERESTS AND METHODS OF THEIR ADVANCEMENT

### США У ЛАТИНСЬКІЙ АМЕРИЦІ: КЛЮЧОВІ АКТУАЛЬНІ ІНТЕРЕСИ ТА МЕТОДОЛОГІЇ ЇХ ЗАХИСТУ

### США В ЛАТИНСКОЙ АМЕРИКЕ: КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ИНТЕРЕСЫ И МЕТОДОЛОГИИ ИХ ЗАЩИТЫ

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**Abstract.** *The present article reviews the current set of interests of the United States of America in respect of Latin American countries. The author believes that the key groups of interests pursued by the US in Latin America are as follows: political and security interests, economic interests, and combined interests, the most important of the latter being the interests relating to combating drug trafficking.*

*The author believes that the economic interest, albeit being a secondary one in terms of formal hierarchy of interests, is in fact one of the core US interests in the region at present. The US is interested to preserve its influence upon the Latin American market, and further engage the Latin American workforce and industrial capacities to the benefit of the US economy. The US pursues its interests in Latin America, inter alia, through various integration projects, including NAFTA, CAFTA-DR, FTAA, and a range of free trade areas.*

*The article also addresses the interest of the US in the field of prevention of drug trafficking, which constitutes an important area of cooperation between the US and the Latin American countries concerned. The author argues that, despite the fact that the current outcomes of the ongoing war on drugs may be perceived as controversial, the issue in question serves as a strong factor contributing to the growth of the US influence over, and its presence within, the region.*

*The article also reviews key methods used by the US to further its interests in Latin America, including the classical methods and those relating to soft power.*

**Key words:** *US, LAC, interests, methodologies, politics, economy, NAFTA, FTAA, soft power.*

**Анотація.** *У статті розглядається сучасний комплекс ключових інтересів США у регіоні Латинської Америки. Виділяються такі основні групи інтересів, як політико-безпекові, економічні та комбіновані, з яких найбільш значущими є інтереси у сфері протидії наркотрафіку.*

*Констатується, що економічний інтерес, попри його формальну вторинність, є одним з основних для зовнішньої політики США у Латинській Америці на сучасному етапі. США зацікавлені у збереженні свого впливу на величезний латиноамериканський ринок та подальшому залученні людських та виробничих потужностей регіону до про-*

цесу розвитку економіки Сполучених Штатів. Економічні інтереси США просуваються на тлі широкого комплексу інтеграційних проєктів, серед яких НАФТА, ДР-КАФТА, ФТАА та низка двосторонніх ЗВТ.

Досліджується інтерес США у галузі боротьби з торгівлею наркотиками, що обумовлює розбудову і розвиток важливого сегменту діалогу США та ЛАКБ. Визначено, що, попри неоднозначність проміжних підсумків війни з наркотиками, проблема наркотрафіку становить важливий чинник збільшення впливу та присутності США у регіоні.

Розглядаються методи реалізації інтересів США у країнах ЛАКБ. Зокрема, виділяються класичні методи та сучасні методи м'якої сили.

**Ключові слова:** США, ЛАКБ, інтереси, методології, політика, економіка, НАФТА, ФТАА, м'яка сила.

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается современный комплекс ключевых интересов США в регионе Латинской Америки. Выделяются такие основные группы интересов, как политико-оборонные, экономические и комбинированные, из которых наиболее значимыми являются интересы в сфере противодействия наркотрафику.

Констатируется, что экономический интерес, несмотря на его формальную вторичность, является одним из основных для внешней политики США в Латинской Америке на современном этапе. США заинтересованы в сохранении своего влияния на крупный латиноамериканский рынок и дальнейшем вовлечении человеческих и производственных мощностей региона в процесс развития экономики Соединенных Штатов. Экономические интересы США продвигаются в контексте широкого комплекса интеграционных проєктов, в частности, НАФТА, ДР-КАФТА, ФТАА и ряда двусторонних ЗСТ.

Исследуется интерес США в области борьбы с наркоторговлей, который обуславливает формирование и развитие важного сегмента диалога США и ЛАКБ. Определено, что, несмотря на неоднозначность промежуточных итогов войны с наркотиками, проблема наркотрафика являет собой важный фактор увеличения влияния и присутствия США в регионе.

Рассматриваются методы реализации интересов США в странах ЛАКБ. В частности, выделяются классические методы и современные методы мягкой силы.

**Ключевые слова:** США, ЛАКБ, интересы, методологии, политика, экономика, НАФТА, ФТАА, мягкая сила.

**Problem description.** Contemporary studies of the American influence in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are of significant scientific and practical interest. Having preserved for a long historical period the status of a key military, political and economic player in the region, the US nevertheless more and more frequently encounters challenges to its influence on the LAC states. The aforementioned status of the US in Latin America is undermined by both internal and external regional factors – in the first place, the growing impact of other global power centers such as the EU, China, and the RF. Therefore, attempts become relevant to understand how the US is trying to respond to the modern challenges and preserve representation of its interests in the LAC.

**The aim of the article** is to explore the principal contemporary interests of the US in Latin America, and to identify the methods used by Washington to promote these interests in the region.

**Analysis of the latest publications.** The US policy in the LAC is one of the traditional spheres of academic interest both for North American and for Latin American researchers, which fact is explained by high practical relevance of this subject for the politics and economics of all

participants of inter-American relations. The specific nature of US involvement in the LAC affairs, the place and role of this superpower in the development of the Latin American sub-system of international relations became the topic of studies by such scientists as P. Meyer, J. Bagley, J. Livingston. The US economic interests in the LAC are furthermore discussed by S. Khan, N. Soroka, and others. B. Bagley, J. Hornbeck, and others put a special focus on studying the problem of combating trans-border drug-related crimes and drug trafficking, which is a serious aspect of inter-American relations and at the same time one of the spheres of promotion of US interests in the region.

At the same time, it should be acknowledged that researchers' interest in the problems of inter-American dialog is currently lower in Ukraine than in the West. However, respective works of such Ukrainian scientists as N. M. Vesela, O. I. Kovaliova, Yu. P. Palii, and A.V. Bredikhin, should be mentioned.

**Presentation of the key material of the study.** The end of the Cold War and development of new realities in Latin America led to a new agenda for the US in the region. The issue of defining and protecting the principal US interests in Latin America became more relevant.

In a researcher's opinion, at the current stage the following key interests of the US in the LAC can be identified: political, security, economic, and specific interests placed at the junction of these main issues.

Based on the results of analysis of the US strategic thinking heritage, the formal priority focus of Washington in Latin America is a set of interests in the political and security sphere. First, the US is interested in the stability of friendly political systems and governments. Second, it is interested, as in the times of bipolar world, in preventing political forces, which the United States considers hostile, from coming to the region. During the Cold War, this force was represented by the Communist ideology and its supporters. At present, the key problems the US is trying to overcome within the framework of protection of its political interests in the region also include international terrorism, trans-border crime, and other challenges for the US national security, which in one way or another are manifested in the LAC. However, despite a significant formal status of this interest in the hierarchy of foreign political priorities of the US in the LAC, it should be mentioned that, in fact, the political interests of Washington in the region are focused mostly on the area of maintaining a regular dialog with Latin American states, and they are not related to any form of political struggle in the spirit of the Cold War times.

Another key interest of the US in Latin America that can be named as the second in terms of its formal status and the leading in terms of its significance, is the economic interest. More specifically, the US is interested in cooperation with Latin American states that brings profits and facilitates development of the US economy. This being said, one can assume that the Latin American region performs three functions: it is a large market for sales of products made in the US, a large investment object, and an important link of American economy being a supplier of raw materials and labor force as well as a kind of an "assembling station" for American corporations.

Trade takes the leading place in the context of economic cooperation between the US and Latin America and is one of its main driving forces. It is estimated that its volume reaches approximately one trillion dollars a year. At present, Latin American countries account for approximately a quarter of the overall American exports. According to the results of 2015, the US exported to Latin America nearly \$422 billion worth of goods and services [31]. It should also be mentioned that according to the US government experts, every billion received from export creates workplaces for approximately 5,600 Americans [29]; hence, the Latin American market alone makes it possible to maintain approximately 2.4 million workplaces in the US.

In its turn, in 2015, Latin American countries exported to the US almost 43% of all its products in the amount totaling 412 billion dollars [24]. This fact makes it possible to state that for every country in the region but Cuba, the US is a trade partner number one or number two in terms of significance. It can also be claimed that the majority of countries in this region have critical dependence on the American market whereas trade between the United States and Latin America is an important aspect of cooperation and a large factor of economic development for both sides.

In addition to trade, investment cooperation is developing dynamically. One should mention that American investors actively invest money in Latin America. Today, the US is one of the leaders in terms of direct investments in the region, although it does not take the first place (losing ground to the EU). For instance, approximately 30% of direct foreign investments to Mexico are of “American” origin, the same is true about approximately 15% – to Columbia, and nearly 33% – to Central American countries [21]. In the author’s opinion, these figures fail to show the complete picture of the US penetration in Latin American economy. It should also be mentioned that the US brings its production and other facilities to Latin America, which makes it possible to save on labor force and transaction costs [27]. According to the data for 2015, out of 25 largest transnational corporations working in Latin America, 10 were US-owned companies [17]. At the same time, D. Trump’s coming to power in the US and his initiatives concerning the transfer of production facilities back to the United States will hardly change the aforementioned realities since the economic advantages of investing in the LAC and using it as one of the links in the US economy form a strong objective factor that will continue to dictate the logics of behavior of the American entrepreneurship community.

These realities give us grounds to state that the economy in the US and Latin America is characterized by a high degree of mutual penetration. This results in a trend toward integration of the US economy and economy of Latin American states. The author believes that economic integration is becoming one of the important formats of representation of American interests, which is used by the US to ensure connection of the LAC to its national economy and to strengthen its presence in the region.

In this vein, Washington offered a number of projects to Latin American countries in the integration sphere; the key projects included the initiative for creation of the NAFTA and FTAA (or Free Trade Area of the Americas).

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) became an important explicit step toward strengthening the economic and political influence of the US in the southern hemisphere by means of integration. NAFTA, which includes the US, Canada, and Mexico, is the key free trade zone in North America. The organization has a clear regional protectorate nature; stimulating commodity exchange inside the block by eliminating the barriers for free trade and flow of capital, it discriminates external manufacturers and suppliers.

NAFTA became a powerful instrument of the US influence on Latin America. Involvement into this association of such a leading country in the region as Mexico, enabled the US to institutionally strengthen its influence on this state and – indirectly – on the entire LAC region.

At the same time, one should mention the controversial nature of Mexico’s participation in NAFTA both for this country and for the further dynamics of the US influence on Latin America. On the one hand, large manufacturers of industrial products (e.g. automobiles, pharmaceuticals, technical equipment) came to the country and brought certain elements of their production cycle. The US was able to receive a large number of labor migrants, and mutual trade increased significantly. On the other hand, the most polluting production facilities were moved to Mexico, which significantly deteriorated the environmental situation. Negative consequences for the en-

vironment were furthermore strengthened by the fact that, in view of the growing competition in the agricultural sector caused by the appearance in the Mexican market of subsidized American products, local agricultural producers were forced to actively use more environmentally aggressive technologies of growth stimulation. According to the Carnegie Fund's estimates, Mexico's direct losses alone from the deteriorated ecological situation amount to approximately 36 billion dollars per year whereas adding new lands to the turnover results in the annual loss of 630,000 hectares of forests. In terms of labor resources, the most mobile and educated people began to leave the country in the first place, which could not have a positive impact on Mexico's economic development. In financial terms, having become an attractive place for short-term investments, Mexico went through a brief investment boom in the mid-1990s, yet this boom was replaced with a serious financial crisis whose consequences continued to be seen throughout the following decade. Having opened its market for the NAFTA partners, Mexico faced competition from their subsidized agriculture, which resulted in a loss of 1.3 million jobs in the agricultural sector [3, p. 23–27]. The mixed effects became visible also in the trade and economic sphere. After signing the NAFTA agreement, Mexico ended up with a significant surplus in trade with the USA. Whereas in 1994 Mexico had a surplus in trade with its northern neighbor totaling 1.3 billion dollars, in 1995 the surplus reached 16 billion dollars; as of 2015, the positive balance of Mexican-American trade fluctuated at the level of around \$58 billion. However, this surplus does not create the desired positive effect for Mexican economy since, in fact, it is formed by the tax-free added value received from the processing of American semi-finished products and raw materials by the American companies located in Mexico. In general, participation in NAFTA rendered Mexico dependent on the US economy, which had a destructive impact on the less protected, structurally balanced, and technologically intensive Mexican economy. Therefore, this projection of trade and economic interests of the USA in the Latin American region had a controversial effect in Mexico.

In the international politics dimension, the obvious US hegemony in this structure had a mixed impact on Mexico's status in the context of its relations with the rest of the Latin American countries. Powerful LAC countries, first of all, Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela, which are moving towards the establishment of a common free trade market in South America (Mercosur), are forced to increasingly distance themselves from Mexico. The Mexican example (as a negative one) is actively used in the Latin American scientific, social, and political discourse. In general, Mexico's participation in this integrational organization distanced this country from the rest of the countries in the region in the foreign political sense, and led to its partial isolation.

Nonetheless, one can say that NAFTA has been implemented as an ideology and a form of integration as well as a specific regional trade group. NAFTA enabled the USA to tie Mexico to the US economy and solidify its political and administrative influence on one of the largest and most influential Latin American countries. At the same time, NAFTA helped to actually exclude Mexico from the integrational processes in Latin America on which the USA has no impact. It was done regardless of the displeasure of a certain part of the population, enterprises and managerial elites of all participants of the bloc, the most influential part of which support NAFTA. This, combined with the deep mutual penetration of economies of the member states, ensures the further prospects for the existence of this structure. The author believes that this all is in line with the American interests, and objectively facilitates strengthening of the USA's impact in the region.

At the same time, the significance of NAFTA experience for the US politics concerning promotion of its interests in Latin American countries is not limited to the foregoing. For instance,

after the introduction and beginning of activities under NAFTA, the American administration initiated expansion of its effect on the entire Latin American region. It was suggested that the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA, or ALKA in Spanish transcription) should be established. In other words, NAFTA became a kind of a prototype for the Pan-American free trade area project.

It should be mentioned that the US foreign political department for the first time presented the idea to develop a region-wide organization of not only political but also of economic nature (the idea to create a union “from Arctic to Antarctic”) in the 1960s. However, at that time it was not supported by Latin American countries. As a result, for a long time the US focused on bilateral relations with the countries in this region by developing and using special approaches to each individual partner. Such a position looked even more logical from the viewpoint of the American foreign policy effective at the time, which made it possible to separate Latin American countries, differentiate them, and in this way strengthen the USA’s presence in the region. The attitude of Washington to economic integration strengthened against the background of a gradual growth of Latin America’s own integrational projects. Seeing the threat presented by Latin American integration to its position of a leader and an arbiter in the region, the USA placed its stake on directing these integrational processes so as to make them controlled by Washington.

Another important motive that forced the USA to do this was the historical aspiration of the US leadership to consolidate the economic potential of this hemisphere under its own patronage, to develop the Pan-American economic system on the basis of preferential relations in the trade and investment sphere. The model for a new integrational group was supposed to be based on NAFTA.

The first top-level meeting at which the specific task related to the FTAA (ALKA) establishment was discussed took place in 1994. Thirty-four countries of North and South Americas (except Cuba) supported the idea of gradual elimination of trade and investment barriers in order to create all necessary conditions for the FTAA launch by 2005. The FTAA was supposed to become a half-planetary financial and economic zone with the population of over 800 million people and the total GDP exceeding 13 trillion dollars [1, p. 26].

However, they did not succeed in achieving this ambitious goal at once. On the one hand, at the beginning of the XXI century, economic conditions for the USA were not favorable for implantation of this unprecedentedly large-scale project. On the other hand, differences in the participants’ goals were rather deep. For instance, not all Latin American countries and integrational associations assessed the prospect of the FTAA as positive from the point of view of their interests. Later on, the global economic crisis became an additional powerful factor having a negative impact on promotion of this integrational initiative. Not only did it force the participants of the process to transfer the focus of their active attention to their own domestic affairs having moved the integration agenda lower in the list of priorities and tasks, but it also narrowed the integration resource base.

At the same time, the USA had to deal with the consolidated opposition from a number of Latin American countries and the existing groups. For instance, there was an opposition to the FTAA from the South American common market, Mercosur. One of the main disagreements between the USA and the Mercosur association (as well as with other Latin American regional associations) referred to the US governmental subsidies for domestic farmers. In the opinion of Latin American states, it significantly harms the South American export of agricultural products and runs contrary to the principles of market relations. Furthermore, representatives of Latin American countries had a concern that a gap between the competitive power of their goods and

products and that of goods and products manufactured in the US economy is too large, and this can potentially lead to the local business losing its positions [2, p. 31].

A consistent position of several Latin American countries became another factor that had a significant negative impact on perception of the prospect of this association in Latin America. These countries were afraid that the USA would place the leading role in the free trade zone. The example of NAFTA, the introduction of which as described above had a mixed effect in Mexico, was also taken into consideration. Among the countries that actively opposed the establishment of ALKA within the timelines identified at the end of XX century were such big Latin American players as Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. The concerns of Latin American partners of the USA were not only of economic but also of political nature. For instance, the then president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez (and later also his political followers in the LAC region) strongly opposed the establishment of ALKA since, in his opinion, this structure could enable the USA to officially control its southern neighbors [10].

In view of these circumstances, the implementation of the ALKA idea came to a dead end. It became obvious, among other things, during the “meeting of two Americas” that took place in November 2005 in the Argentinian town of Mar del Plata. The meeting was attended by leaders of 34 countries (except for Cuba), who had to discuss the problems related to the FTAA (ALKA) establishment. At the very beginning of the meeting, participants split themselves into two diplomatic camps. One included the US President and heads of the supporting countries, where the majority was formed by small Central American and Caribbean countries (the main group being members of NAFTA and CAFTA-DR), and the second included the leaders of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela (the main group being the Mercosur members). The meeting was held in the environment of deep controversies, tension, and massive anti-American demonstrations. In general, the summit ended in a failure: it demonstrated that at this stage, the way to the continental free trade zone could not be continued, and its participants had diverse interests and, as a result, belonged to different camps. A group of 26 states participating in the process agreed on the feasibility of holding a similar summit one year later, but it was never organized [2, p. 34]. One can say that, regardless of the efforts of American diplomacy, the idea of development of the Pan-American free trade zone was temporarily frozen.

However, it seems that despite the aforementioned factors, the creation of such structure as the FTA/ALKA, i.e. a kind of its “own” international market, remained an important task for the USA for the future. The establishment of the trade and investment zone that would cover the Western hemisphere would significantly help the USA to strengthen its regional “rear area” by consolidating economic, military and political assets of the countries in this region under the control of Washington, which would enable the latter to secure its role of the economic and political “super-leader” of XXI century. These considerations became particularly important against the backdrop of such adverse circumstances for the United States as the global economic crisis, the EU strengthening with its own currency, which became a significant rival for the US dollar over the recent several years, growth of China’s importance as well as development of other integrational structures in the increasingly globalized world. Furthermore, the existence of the inter-American military and political system created after World War II, which functions under the “umbrella” of the Organization of American States (OAS), still enables the USA to keep Latin American countries within the orbit of its influence, and this is an additional tool of the “vertical” integration. Hence, it can be concluded that the USA will continue, in one form or another, to implement the idea of establishment of ALKA (or a similar association) in the practical sphere in the upcoming decades.

As discussed above, simultaneously with the work on creating a large regional economic community, the USA was promoting its own local integration project in the LAC, which had the same goal – to secure the US economic interests and political influence in the region.

First, the USA continued to work on changing its economic positions in the Caribbean and Central America. This region traditionally depends on the USA politically, and therefore the US integrational projects here were progressing much more efficiently compared to the rest of Latin America. As of today, a multilateral integrational association has been created in the region known as DR-CAFTA (Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Area). This free trade area was introduced in 2003 under the name of CAFTA and initially encompassed the USA, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras. In 2004, they were joined by the Dominican Republic. In general, the free trade area conditions were similar to those under NAFTA and envisaged a gradual mutual decrease of the trade tariffs, creation of the most favorable conditions for the participating states' enterprises, and liberalization of investment laws [18].

Second, work continued on developing bilateral free trade areas. For instance, in 2004, the USA signed a free trade agreement with Chile. Since 2009, the free trade regime has been implemented in relations between the USA and Peru. Similar agreements were signed with Columbia and Panama; both agreements came into effect in 2012 [22].

The introduction of free trade areas in all cases significantly revived trade between the USA and Latin American countries that signed respective agreements. More specifically, during the first five years after implementing a free trade agreement with Chile, the commodity turnover between these two countries increased by more than 140% [19]. In general, at the beginning of the current century, the total trade volume between the USA and its partners under free trade agreements reached approximately half a trillion dollars. This facilitates the economic development of the USA and Latin American countries, and strengthens the American positions in the economic and political life of these countries. At the same time, local integrational projects – bilateral and multilateral – are leading step by step to the general regional integration with the United States. Even if the FTAA project is never resumed, it can gradually happen so that all Latin American countries or a majority of them will find themselves in free trade relations with the US.

Therefore, trade, investments and international integration are important elements of the methodology of promotion of the US interests (primarily, economic) in the LAC region.

Specific US interest in Latin America is placed at the intersection of politics, security and economy. It refers to such a sensitive sphere as combating drug trafficking.

The drug trafficking problem has an objective nature. The United States, the population of which has high living standards and incomes, is a large consumer of drugs, whereas comparatively poor Latin American countries act as producers. The USA is the world leader in terms of drugs consumption. According to experts, the amount of drugs sold in the USA every year totals \$150 billion. The Americans spend approximately 40 billion dollars per year on cocaine alone [5, p. 18]. The main drugs consumed in the United States are heroin, cocaine, and marijuana. According to the economic logics, demand stimulates respective supply whereas the huge profit margin makes drug trafficking extremely attractive for criminals both in Latin America and in the USA.

The principal suppliers of heroin to the US market are Mexico, which produces 9% of all heroin on the planet, and Columbia, which is responsible for 1% of global production thereof. Cocaine is produced by three leading countries, where the coca crop is traditional, and where mountainous conditions make its growth possible: Columbia (45% of the American market), Peru (35–40%), and Bolivia (15–20%). Marijuana for the US consumers is grown mostly in

Mexico, whose criminals annually “supply” to the United States around 1,100 tons of this plant; Mexico also accounts for the production of 80% of methamphetamine sold in the USA. The countries for cocaine and heroin transit are the Caribbean and Central American countries. In all of them, growth, processing, transportation and sale of drugs are a highly profitable business controlled by mafia groups, drug cartels (*such as Mexican Los Zetas and Sinaloa*) as well as rebel armed groups functioning in Columbia (first of all, FARC – the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and Peru (*the Shining Path group*). Mexican drug cartels alone earn on drug trafficking from 18–20 to 39–50 billion dollars per year [13, p. 10–12]. Access to financial and armed resources at this scale turns the respective criminal groups into a serious trans-border player at the regional level, struggle with which requires significant systemic and closely coordinated international effort.

Drug trafficking has a considerable negative impact on the USA. It is estimated that the number of drug addicts in the United States at present exceeds 20 million [26]. Every year, 30 to 50 thousand people die in the USA because of drug consumption; in total, from 2004 to 2014, drug overdose resulted in the deaths of almost half a million US citizens [32, p. 101]. Tens of billions of dollars that could go to economy and the state budget are spent on drugs and crime financing.

Consequently, drug trafficking presents a significant challenge to security of the United States; combating drug trafficking took a serious place in the context of foreign political activities aimed at promoting the interests of Washington in Latin America.

It is only natural that the US government is consistently working on overcoming this acute problem. Since 1971, the USA has been officially waging the “war on drugs”, that is, implementing a set of political measures aimed at decreasing the demand for drugs and reducing their accessibility. The latter aspect of these activities is directly related to the tasks of the US foreign policy in Latin America. Within the framework of the war against drugs, the US actively cooperates with the governments of producing and transit states to reduce the areas under drug crops, destroy production, disorganize transportation and sales networks, fight mafia cartels as well as military-political groups involved in drug trafficking. The United States provides financial and military support to local governments for combating drugs. For instance, within the framework of the Dignity Plan supported by the United States, in the early 2000s Bolivia was able to significantly reduce the area sown with coca. Thanks to the Columbia Plan of the US, which was adopted in 2000, this country began to receive a large-scale support from the US for organization of efficient armed forces and conducting military operations against drug cartels and FARC. Within the framework of the Merida Initiative approved in 2007, Mexico received \$2.5 billion for provision of training and technical equipment to the armed structures involved in the “war on drugs” [8].

However, despite the huge financial expenses, results of the “war on drugs” are ambiguous. Destruction of plantations in the most “problematic” districts results in the growth of raw materials for drugs in other places, which leads to geographic “spread” of the drug business and its expansion to the previously safe places (such as individual regions in Argentina and Brazil). Elimination of large cartels in the 2000s resulted in fragmentation of the drug business, its acquiring a “network” character, and upgrade of criminal actions against the law.

When talking about this aspect of ensuring the US interests in the LAC, one should mention that drug trafficking and fight against it have serious negative consequences for Latin America. One of the main consequences is lower security and higher physical violence in the producing and transit countries. For instance, in Mexico since 2006, when this country started the official war against drug trafficking, more than 100,000 people were killed in the armed clashes between the competing drug gangs and law enforcement officers [20]. Over a period of

20 years, from the mid-1990s to the mid-2010s, more than 15,000 people were killed in the course of special anti-drug trafficking operations of governmental and the US forces in Columbia [9]. With the growth of drug traffic in all producing and transit countries, crime and murder rates have significantly deteriorated. As of the beginning of the 2010s, an average murder rate in Latin America was the worst among all regions worldwide and totaled 33 persons per 100,000 [15] (for comparison, an average murder rate in the world is 6.2 persons per 100,000 a year). It should be noted that the highest indicators are reported for the producing and transit states. In 2014, the sad “leadership” was held by Honduras with 85 murders per 100,000 people [23], and in 2015 it was outdone by El Salvador with 103 murders per 100,000 people. They are followed by such transit states as Jamaica (45 murders per 100,000), Belize (34 murders per 100,000 people) and Guatemala (30 murders per 100,000 people) as well as the producing country Columbia (27 murders per 100,000 people) [7]. These figures are related to production, transportation, and sales of drugs as well as the fight of criminal groups for control of the drug flows.

Furthermore, the society in respective countries finds itself under the deforming impact of drug trafficking. Immense amounts of money circulating in the drug trade and belonging to criminal cartels criminalize the economy and society in these countries, corrupt their politics, and disrupt the psychological and business climate. All this does not facilitate democratic reforms and normal economic development of Latin American counties.

At the same time, it should be mentioned that vulnerability of a number of countries (first of all, Columbia, Peru, Mexico and Central American countries) to drug trafficking creates elements of objective dependence of Latin American countries on the USA and its politics. Paradoxically, the drug trafficking challenge is one of the factors that strengthens the United States’ impact on the region. The USA objectively has to interfere in order to solve this problem on the ground, which necessitates the increase of its military and political presence in the LAC, which respectively strengthens the efficiency of the tools the US uses to promote and protect its own interests. In general, it can be said that the problem with drug trafficking and combating will remain one of the relevant problems in the dialog between the US and Latin America in the future, and at the same time – one of the important spheres of their cooperation.

The US protects these basic interests in the region using a wide range of methods and means that include the classic “tough” and the modern “soft” methods of influence. The “tough methods” include bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, the military power factor, and economic policy. The “soft” methods of influence, so-called “soft power”, include active public and media diplomacy, cultural impact, and information policy.

In terms of politics and diplomacy, the US has accumulated an immense volume of bilateral relations with Latin American countries. These relations are actively used by the United States for achieving their own agenda in the region. The scale and intensiveness of inter-state, inter-governmental, inter-departmental, inter-party and other contacts existing between the United States and Latin American countries are very significant. In the author’s opinion, this is natural since the Western hemisphere is the domain of the US exclusive interests, and the United States is the leading driving force not only in the region but in the contemporary world as well. In the entire context, it can be said that relations with the United States are either the key or an important element of foreign relations of any country in this region even if such country has a critical or hostile attitude to the USA, for instance, modern Cuba or Venezuela under Presidents Chavez and Maduro. At the same time, a majority of the LAC countries are connected to the USA in one or another form of “special relations”, “special partnership” and the like.

One of the important elements of the ways of exercising the American influence in the LAC is multilateral diplomacy. Inter-American conferences are the oldest forum for a political dialog between the USA and Latin American countries. The first such conferences were organized

under the auspices of the USA as far back as 1889-1890. Later, in 1948, based on the inter-American conferences the Organization of American States was created that became the key international forum for the Western hemisphere [25].

The US frequently used the Organization of American States and the inter-American dialog in general to promote its political and security agenda in Latin America. More specifically, it involved the OAS for countering the “Communist expansion” in the Western hemisphere. When a revolution broke out in Cuba, and Cuba turned toward the Soviet Union and Marxist ideology, the US mobilized its diplomatic potential in the OAS to demand Cuba’s exclusion from the Organization, which was done in 1962. In 1964, the USA managed to persuade all OAS members except Mexico to sever diplomatic relations with Cuba. The purpose of it was to block Cuba and place it in isolation, thus decreasing the probability of shaking the region and leading to its “communization” as a result of its destabilizing politics and the role as the Soviet Union’s outpost. In another situation, when a threat of the leftist revolution emerged in the Dominican Republic in 1965, the OAS was used for provision of political support for the American intervention presented as the OAS peacekeepers.

Using a similar scheme, with the help of this organization the US diplomats ensured legitimization of international intervention aimed at preventing instability and undemocratic transformations in the member states. In accordance with the amendments introduced to the OAS mandate in 1991, the Organization is officially authorized to interfere in domestic affairs of American countries where democracy is under threat. This OAS mandate was used for respective interventions during political crises and revolutions in Haiti (1991), Peru (1992), Guatemala (1993), Paraguay (1996), Ecuador (2004), Honduras (2009) etc. [6].

The USA also used the inter-American dialog to support its economic integration projects mentioned above. For instance, the FTAA (ALKA) idea was announced in 1994 in Miami during the summit of the Organization of American States.

It should be mentioned that it would not be correct to see the OAS exclusively as a US instrument. In practice, the inter-American dialog became a “two-way road” where every side received some benefit. It was not only the US that promoted its interests using this format, but also Latin American countries were able to present their opinion on the issues relevant for them and to achieve better understanding among themselves and with the United States.

More specifically, within the framework of the Organization of American States, principles of peaceful co-existence were formulated for supporting international stability. More specifically, under the auspices of the inter-American dialog, such international documents were developed as the Treaty to Avoid or Prevent Conflicts between the American States, the Convention on Duties and Rights of States in the Event of Civil Strife, and others. Within the context of inter-American conferences and the OAS is the development of numerous international legal norms that are applied in the Western hemisphere, as well as their codification. Within the framework of this format, Convention on Private International Law (1928), Pan-American Convention of Air Navigation (1928), American Convention on Human Rights (1969), Inter-American Convention on International Commercial Arbitration (1975) and dozens of other key international legal documents were developed.

Despite the change of epochs and official rhetoric, military force remains one of the main “trumps” of the United States in a dialog with Latin America, one of the main means of protection of the USA’s interests in the region. The USA is objectively the strongest country in the region, and no country in the Western hemisphere can ignore this fact. Furthermore, elites in a number of Latin American countries at present see the US as a defender and a guarantor of their independence that not only safeguards foreign security, but also supports internal stability. For instance, the US provides consistent military assistance to Columbia and Mexico in their fight

against rebel groups that for a long time have been fighting against the central governments. Such assistance includes both financial support, provision of weapons and equipment, training of local military personnel, and direct participation of Americans in military operations.

In this context, the USA exercises wide-scale military presence in Latin America. US military bases are one of the main forms of such presence. In the early 2010s, there were 22 military bases and similar objects present in the region [30]. The United States preserves one of its oldest overseas bases – Guantanamo base in Cuba. Large US military bases are present in Honduras (Soto Cano), on the islands of Aruba and Curacao, and in Colombia. At the same time, it should be mentioned that the USA is gradually moving away from the “classic” model of using military bases as its influence outposts. Responding, on the one hand, to public and political resistance of part of the Latin American society to the US military bases, and on the other hand, reducing the expenses, in the early 2000s, the USA started the process of “dispersal” of its military presence in the region. Pentagon’s new approach reflects the principles of the “networking centrism” concept, and envisages creation of a well-coordinated network of military facilities, posts, and mini-bases scattered over the territory of Central America and the northern part of South America. This network is used for performing intelligence functions (including technical), communication, military and police cooperation with Latin American countries, and for creating an infrastructure for prompt deployment of mobile forces. The key link of this network are the so-called “cooperative security locations” (CSL) – military bases and facilities that are jointly used by the USA, its private military subcontractors, and the hosting partner states. Within the framework of this change of concept, the USA has closed its large military bases in Panama (1999) and Ecuador (2009), instead having opened a number of “cooperative security locations” in other countries of the region, namely in Columbia, El Salvador, and Peru [4]. Other US military facilities in Latin America within this network include approximately 20 radar stations [28], big military training centers located in Peru and Chile, a military Center for humanitarian assistance in the province of Chaco in Argentina [30] and others. It stands to reason that all or the majority of the US military facilities in Latin America are used not only by the military, but also by the intelligence community of the United States.

Furthermore, the “network centrism” of military presence and the cost saving are supported by a package of agreements on military cooperation and access of the US armed forces signed with the majority of Caribbean and Central American countries. Among other things, within the format of military access, the US military personnel have a right to use Panamanian airports, Salvadoran ports and other infrastructure in the region, suitable for military operations [11].

In general, it can be said that the USA retains considerable military presence in Latin America. In the context of representation of the US interests, such presence plays a dual political role. First, it safeguards the special status of the USA as the most powerful country in military terms in the region, and creates a huge potential for exercising political influence on all Latin American countries. Second, it is actively used as a current tool in the US politics – more specifically, for supporting friendly democratic regimes and combating terrorism, rebel movements, and drug trafficking.

The economic methodology of promoting US interests consists of a vast spectrum of leverages. One should mention such specific feature of this methodology as the US granting preferential regimes of trade and economic cooperation to those partners that it wants to support for political or economic reasons. For instance, in order to support friendly governments in Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, and in order to reduce their economic losses from fighting drug trafficking, the United States unilaterally granted significant commercial preferences to these countries. In 1991, within the framework of the Law on Trade Preferences for Andean Countries, the USA lifted its import tariffs first for 5,600 commodity groups from these coun-

tries, and in 2002 – for 6,300 commodity items. As a result of introduction of such unilateral preferences, exports from these countries to the USA increased several times within just a few years. During the period of implementation of the Law, the Andean states achieved a huge surplus in their trade with the USA, which exceeded 10 billion dollars a year.

Moreover, the United States widely provides economic assistance to Latin American countries. Annual expenses of the US budget on assistance to Latin America fluctuate at the level of \$1–2 billion (for instance, in 2011 it totaled nearly \$1.9 billion, and in 2015 it exceeded \$1.3 billion). According to the estimations, from 1946 to 2014, the USA spent a huge amount of money on supporting Latin American countries totaling \$160 billion [12]. Economic methods of influence have an effective impact on Latin American governments that are interested in US assistance coming to their countries as well as proceeds from trade. These methods strengthen pro-American orientation of the US partners, enhance its political stability and economic potential, and facilitate advancement of American interests.

An important instrument of promoting the US interests in Latin America is the “soft power” means. The US actively works in the region using the methods of “public diplomacy” and information influence to solve a number of political tasks. More specifically, it is trying to improve its own image in the eyes of the Latin American population, propagate American values, and explain the goals of the US policy in the region. An important task of the US “public diplomacy” is countering anti-American attitudes and stereotypes that are deeply rooted in perception and the political discourse in Latin America. Within the framework of this policy, the US governmental structures, and the Department of State in the first place, work in conjunction with non-governmental organizations and private-public partnerships allocating money for numerous projects that are implemented in Latin America.

Simultaneously, the USA is transforming itself into an even more influential source of information for Latin American countries. All large American media holdings and channels (CNN, ABC, NBC, FOX, etc.) regularly broadcast in Spanish and Portuguese paying significant attention to local developments and their interpretation from the point of view of the United States [16]. All these steps facilitate the increase of the USA’s role in Latin America, and the growth of its capacity to influence the countries in this region in terms of “human dimension”.

**Conclusions.** The USA is the key player in Latin America in geopolitical, military, strategic, and economic terms. The United States exercises significant impact on the region’s development, its economic and political life. The principal US interests represented in the region are political, economic, and security. The USA is interested in stability of political regimes in Latin America and their democratic orientation. The United States actively promotes the ideology of market liberalism and free trade at the level of the Western hemisphere. To achieve this goal, the USA works to create the Pan-American Free Trade Area and simultaneously develops bilateral and multilateral formats of free trade and economic integration with Latin American countries. An important interest of the USA in the region that is placed at the intersection of political, economic, and security interests is combating drug trafficking and the system of drugs delivery to the illegal market in the US. To fulfil its interests in Latin America, the USA uses a wide range of classic and soft methodologies, which include political, diplomatic, power-based, economic, and information means.

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