

History will never pass over its memory of the Cuban missile crisis, a cold war military-nuclear standoff between the former USSR and the U.S., which threatened to convert the cold war into a full-fledged hot war. When Strategic experts are suggesting a looming new “Cold war 2.0” between the U.S. and China, the world will have to adjust with many such crises in the new emerging global order.

Even before COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. was losing its soft power in the Latin American region to China. The pandemic proved to be a boon for China and a bane for the U.S. While the U.S remains quite busy at its home to contain the splinter spread of the lethal virus, China used its ample resources, time and energy to make heavy inroads into the region.

These days have been quite busy for Chinese diplomats. China is asserting its supremacy from Indo-pacific to the Himalayan border in a very aggressive manner and is well aware of the cost involved in its costly aspiration of continental and maritime superpower status in the 21st century.

Amid deep Chinese forays in Latin America, India is struggling to challenge rising Chinese hegemony and finds it difficult to sit on the space vacated by the United States in the region. Chinese crude and defence diplomacy have made the dragon’s grip strong and steady while big democracies succumb to give a befitting reply to Beijing’s hegemony.

India can find a new proliferating market in Latin America for its latest defence equipment lashed with the latest technologies and can prove to be a booster in the “Make in India” programme. India had already unveiled its new strategy for the export of defence products in Latin America. Chile is expected to participate in EXPONAVAL 2020, scheduled to be held in the last month of this year.

Amidst this looming global and regional strategic rebalancing during COVID pandemic, it is worthwhile to assess the whole gamut of bilateral relation between the two most exploited regions on the planet, that is India and Latin America. While Latin America has been in American influence in the past, China threatens India’s position in the future.



PM Narendra Modi with Argentina President Mauricio Macri / Image source: DNA

India-Latin Relation: Current Status

Octavio Paz, the Mexican Nobel Laureate and Ambassador to India in the 1960s said: “India did not enter me through my mind but through my senses.” It appears Latin America and India have a ‘sense’ about each other but their minds are still to be made up.

India-Latin America relations are currently at a moderate level but moving at a much faster speed, especially in the 21st century. Experts claim that exchange and cooperation of culture, governance, trade and commerce between India and Latin America have been unsatisfactory, insufficient and conservative. Even today India-Latin America relations are quite limited, calculated and constrained to diplomatic and economic affairs as if we have no convergence beyond trade and commerce and even commercial relation is quite insufficient and constitutes one-sixth of China.

There have been barriers in interactions between the two great societies and its people. The major argument for this limited engagement is barriers of distance, language and absence of communication. However, it is not a sufficient reason to justify the limited cooperation between the two of the most exploited regions on the planet. If the distance is the barrier in

trade and cultural exchange why do the U.S.A. and India enjoy robust and more comprehensive relation? How did China make heavy inroads in Latin America when the distance is a barrier? Further, when it was a barrier of language for India it was the same for China and other countries. How did they address it?



Image source: FSG

The Latin Land

Latin America with a population of 580 million, a GDP of \$5.6 trillion (two times larger than India's), and 6 percent of global merchandise trade, Latin America is clearly a part of the world that Indian policymakers cannot afford to neglect.

India is much younger than its Latin American counterparts. India got independence in 1947 while many of the Latin American nations got independence in the early 18th century. While India, the largest democracy in the world also one of the most successful experiments in the

history of democracy anywhere in the world, sustained as democracy, the Latin American countries went through several upheavals from democracy to autocracy, military regime and then coming back to democracy and many more political and economic fallouts. In short Latin American countries have seen it all.

India's efforts for Latin-American cooperation

India-Latin America relations can be divided into three phases post-independence. The first phase from 1947 to 1960s, which is also called the "period of bare acquittance or not in acquittance". The second phase from the 1960s to 1990s which is also called the "Period of Solidarity". The third phase starts from the 1990s and is called "Period of strategic Engagement" and it also coincides with Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation called LPG in India and emergence of India as an important player in global political spectrum especially in 21st century.

Despite giving so much importance to the region, Nehru couldn't pay enough heed to the region in the first phase as India was busy in Kashmir, Indo-China, Indo-Pak and other internal skirmishes.

India tried to give a boost to Latin-Indian relations when in late 1968 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited ten Latin American countries within the span of three weeks. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had said in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil "I have come here half-way around the globe on the wings of friendship".

The 1990s was a watershed period for many developments which happened during the time including fall of Berlin wall in 1989, disintegration of Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR), economic hardships of the global economy due to sustained slowdown and the triumph of capitalism over socialism.

The disintegration of the USSR led to the death of the bipolar world and birth of the unipolar world and created a strategic vacuum in the global polity. This created economic and political problems for third world countries and second world countries including Central Asian and Eastern European Countries which were part of erstwhile USSR, had to go through "Shock Therapy" for transforming economic models from socialist credentials to capitalist credentials.

The relevance of NAM was questioned so was questioned the role of India as the leader of the third world. India was searching for Partners as the USSR was disintegrated and Russia was weak, unable to support economically when India was going through its most serious

economic crises. Brazil was an obvious choice for India due to similarity in polity, economy and common economic, strategic and governance challenges.

Latin America had experienced the dominance of the U.S.A. over a long period of time and in a unipolar world, it didn't want the increasing influence of the U.S.A. and interference in domestic policies. Latin America was searching partners to diversify its political, economic and strategic relations with many emerging countries and one of them obviously was India.



Image source: MEA India

India and Brazil: shining in the darkness

India and Brazil share a very close and multifaceted relationship at bilateral level as well as in plurilateral fora such as BRICS, BASIC, G-20, G-4, IBSA, International Solar Alliance, Biofuture Platform and in the larger multilateral bodies such as UN.

After Independence Brazil was the first country in Latin America which established diplomatic relations with India. Diplomatic relations were established in 1948, with both countries opening the embassies in the same year, during the 1950s-1960s the idea of south-south cooperation got currency and Brazil and India started raising voice for global south and cooperating at global forums. India spearheaded NAM and Brazil became an

observer at the Non-Aligned Movement and a close partner of India within the G77.

In 1968, in a major boost, Brazil hosted the first state of the head visit from India and here started the deep collaboration of the two. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi termed the new capital of Brazil as the “vision of the future”.

The global and regional developments of 1990s such as the disintegration of USSR and emergence of the unipolar world forced Brazil to search for alternatives and LPG reforms in India provided the platform for better India-Brazil cooperation and since then relations between the two growth giants have been of multidimensional cooperation from trade, commerce, IT, environment to science and technology. The relationship culminated into a strategic partnership in 2006.

India views Brazil as an “ideal strategic global partner”. The two countries have common worldview and aspirations and face similar challenges. Both of them are role models for democracy in their respective regions. Over the years, India and Brazil have built up a rapport in working together in many global fora and multilateral negotiations.

Now, India will wait for signals from the new Bolsonaro administration to revive their strategic partnership. Until then, India will focus more on economic diplomacy: Brazil is the biggest economy in Latin America and the largest trade partner of India in the region with a bilateral trade of US\$ 8.6 billion in 2017-2018. Brazil’s significance for India can be understood from the fact that on the 71st Republic Day celebrations in 2020 Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was the chief guest.

Muito obrigado por seus votos, estimado Primeiro-Ministro [@narendramodi](#). Se Deus quiser, logo estarei plenamente recuperado para seguir trabalhando no estreitamento dos laços de amizade e cooperação entre o Brasil e a Índia.

— Jair M. Bolsonaro (@jairbolsonaro) [July 8, 2020](#)

The way ahead: Cooperating during COVID and beyond

The journey of India-Latin America relations has been a mixed bag of successes and failures. We shall have to confess that the two lands are yet to enjoy the vibrancy in the relationship and are too far from the potential.

The first forty years after the establishment of diplomatic relations witnessed hesitations in political and economic engagement. Though the next thirty years witnessed a period of sustained and rising collaboration the two geographies haven't come out completely from "the hesitations of history" and yet to realise the unbounded collaborations where "sky will be the limit".

Economic cooperation deserves the maximum attention as limited trade and commerce have been the primary focus area and the parameter of the relationship since the last seventy years. However, it is well accepted in academia that other paradigms of relations such as tracing historical connection, defeating geographical distance through technological cooperation, cooperating for a sustainable and more inclusive world, environmental collaboration, establishing higher diplomatic convergence in global and regional interests at international platforms for south-south and north-south cooperation, engaging for better political and governance exchanges and establishing closer people to people contact through preferred tourism and cultural exchanges need trust in the third decade of 21st century.

This certainly should be the way ahead for the two most exploited lands so that they can lead the world in the new post-COVID world order for the prosperity and security of its people through deeper collaboration and mutual partnership.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team

Facebook Comments