

## Latin America is fed up with Obama

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US influence is on the wane in Latin America and Obama is coming face to face with his unpopularity on his regional tour

Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 presidential election prompted a wave of enthusiasm across Latin America. His arrival in the White House was widely celebrated by the people and by several progressive governments.

However, by the [onset of his first tour of the region](#), the situation had changed. Though the disenchantment and disgust are not yet at the levels reached during the George W Bush administration, they have reappeared during the past year. Anti-Americanism is reborn throughout the continent.

Obama's arrival in Brazil [provoked protests](#), and a speech he was due to deliver in a public square was [moved to a theatre](#) instead. The Landless Workers Movement and its allies pronounced him "persona non grata". The ruling Workers Party (PT) forbade any protests by its affiliates, but many of them ignored it.

An indication of this turn of events is the change of posture by Brazil's former president, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. When Obama was inaugurated, Lula praised him; but when Lula finished his term, he declared that the US was still behaving like an empire under Obama.

Upon assuming power, Obama promised to promote a new era of attitudes towards Latin America. He offered to foster dialogue and negotiate mutual interests with the region's countries as "equal partners". The dialogue – he assured – would include all regimes, even those critical of Washington.

Such promises, however, seem to have vanished. The [coup in Honduras against Rafael Zelaya](#) – identified with the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America – and the [US military bases in Colombia](#) have damaged Obama's image.

The lack of a better effort at [closing ties with Cuba](#), the [expulsion of the Venezuelan ambassador to Washington](#) and the [fuss about Brazil's relationship with Iran](#) have further undermined the diplomatic situation. Just a few days ago, Brazil abstained in the UN vote for military intervention in Libya. Divergences over [Doha trade talks](#) and [Haiti](#) are also causes of friction.

Obama's tour takes place in a context of deteriorating US influence in the region. Those countries opposed to the [Washington Consensus](#) have distanced themselves from the White House and even confronted it on several occasions. They have implemented economic reforms, social transformations and diplomatic relationships rejected by the

empire. Brazil has become an emergent power and plays its geopolitical cards independently from the US.

At the same time, the presence of China, Iran and Russia in the region has escalated. Those countries have undertaken an important diplomatic offensive and have made significant investments. The Asian dragon's thirst for raw materials and energy resources has been increasingly satiated in South America. Beijing's investment projects have centred on copper, oil and iron and the transport sector. Many are new investments made through strategic alliances and other co-operation agreements backed up by governments.

The Asian dragon is, since 2009, Latin America's second trade partner. China is Brazil's first trade partner, displacing the US. Peru is the main destination of China's investment in the area, while Beijing is Peru's second trade partner after the US. "All of the oil that China might need to consolidate itself as a great power is here," Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez has said.

Tehran's growing ties with Latin America are a cause of worry for Washington. The issue is routinely discussed in the US Congress. Since his coming to power, in 2005, Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has spent more time in the region than both presidents Bush and Obama. Ahmadinejad reaches out to Latin America for support to counteract the US pressure against Iran's efforts to develop nuclear capacities. And he has received it.

Busily tackling crisis after crisis elsewhere in the world, one of Obama's main objectives in his Latin American tour is to reverse the deterioration of US hegemony and broaden its leverage. He is concerned about Iran and China's influence in the region, and wants to "bring order" to the US backyard. But unlike his predecessors, he has no specific plan for Latin America, so he will concentrate on promoting free trade and investment, tackling the drug trade and encouraging loyalty towards Washington's global objectives.

In the last few years, the White House has faced huge challenges to its position in Latin America. Its diplomacy has failed to revert the revolt. If Obama's tour hopes to bring order to the US backyard, it is looking like a formidable task.

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