

PERCEPTIONS OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR IN THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND POSITIONS OF SOME LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES (MEXICO, BRAZIL, ARGENTINA)

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In response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the majority of Western nations condemned Russian aggression, opened their borders to Ukrainian refugees, provided military, economic, and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and imposed sanctions against Russia to isolate it internationally and diminish its economic and military power. Russia has responded by increasing its outreach to the Global South, capitalizing on local sensibilities and existing anti-Western biases to secure favorable positions in international organizations and discover new economic opportunities. This paper focuses on three major countries in Latin America, a region where Russia has begun to regain the influence it lost following the fall of the Soviet Union since the turn of the twenty-first century. These states – Mexico, Brazil and Argentina – are attempting to maintain conditional “neutrality” towards the war. Such neutrality is displayed to varying degrees by a mix of condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine with rejection of sanctions policy and arms supplies to Ukraine, shifting the blame to both sides (or to NATO/the United States), reproduction of Russian narratives about threats to Russian security from Ukraine, and a general reluctance to openly confront the Russian Federation. Consequently, these countries were not included by the Russian government in the [list of unfriendly states](#) (i.e., those that imposed or supported sanctions against Russia), but quite the contrary, they were included in the [list of 52 countries](#) with which Russia resumed air traffic on April 9. This position has been long-standing since Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico have systematically abstained from voting on UN General Assembly resolutions on Ukraine for the past eight years. Nevertheless, these countries are not overly dependent on Russia economically or politically, so they have the potential to change their stance on the Russia-Ukraine war. In this paper, we will examine the background and peculiarities of the positions of Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico on the Russia-Ukraine war.

MEXICO

The Mexican stance on the Russian-Ukrainian war can be described as neutrality, bordering on support for the aggressor. Mexico condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine but provides no military support and is not prepared to join the policy of sanctions and the international isolation of the Russian Federation. The discourse of most political elites is dominated by the view of the Russian-Ukrainian war as a conflict with no clear culprit that can be resolved through concessions and dialogue. Mexico continues to view Russia as a potential counterbalance to its reliance on the United States. However, Mexico's actual trade and economic ties with Russia are limited, whereas strategically the relations with the United States play a far greater role due to their geographic proximity, trade, socio-cultural and historical ties. Hence, this position is susceptible to change.

Mexico's foreign policy is characterized by a tradition of non-interference and an focus on peaceful resolution of conflicts, stemming, among other things, from the historical experience of invasions and colonialism.

Modern Mexico is guided by Estrada's isolationist foreign policy doctrine of non-interference in the affairs of other countries, especially neighboring authoritarian regimes. The president [highlights](#) Mexico's neutrality and the inadmissibility of a Cold War resurgence. Invoking [pacifism](#), Mexico has declined to provide Ukraine with military assistance or impose economic sanctions against Russia. Additionally, the Mexican government is generally wary about supplying weapons to other countries and is active in the international arena to prevent the illegal arms trade, especially in light of domestic security concerns.

Anti-Americanism, reluctance to engage in direct confrontation with Russia, desire to maintain toom for dialogue and cooperation.

Relations with the United States are a crucial factor in determining Mexico's position on Ukraine. Trade, diaspora, historical and cultural ties bind Mexico and the United States together closely. Since the American-Mexican War of 1846-1848, however, there has been a tendency toward anti-Americanism and a search for ways to diversify Mexico's economic, commercial, and foreign policy dependence on the United States. Amid the debate surrounding the migration issue, Mexico resents that President Biden [has still not yet allocated](#) the promised \$4 billion for the development of southern Mexico, despite allocating billions of dollars in aid to Ukraine in a timely manner.

Fearing accusations of "pandering to the United States," Mexico's political elites are reluctant to join the United States and European countries policy in their policy against Russia in the Russian-Ukrainian war. At the same time, since the Cold War, Mexico has developed a perception of the Soviet Union as a counterweight to U.S. dominance in Latin America, which has fueled pro-Russian sentiment. This is vividly illustrated by the UN General Assembly's consideration of a resolution [to expel the Russian Federation from the Human Rights Council](#) on April 7, 2022, during which Mexico abstained in an effort to maintain relations with Russia.

The president's populism and the specifics of his engagement in diplomacy cause inconsistencies in Mexico's stance on international issues.

President López Obrador is a populist who is guided by “the best foreign policy is a good domestic policy” principle and has limited interest in international affairs. In Mexican foreign policy, there is a tension between the president's populist and unbalanced statements and Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard's subsequent “clarification” of them. So, while the Mexican delegation at the UN is working with other countries to condemn Russian aggression and help resolve the conflict (on March 2, 2022, the Mexican representative to the UN General Assembly supported a resolution condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine), the president is making statements of neutrality at home, and a party in parliament creates a friendship group with Russia. On September 16, López Obrador [proposed a peace plan](#) between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, consisting of a five-year ceasefire, direct negotiations between presidents Zelensky and Putin, and the creation of a special committee at the United Nations, which will include Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Pope Francis, and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. At a meeting of the UN Security Council, Marcelo Ebrard [presented](#) this plan on behalf of President Obrador, but omitted the section about the five-year truce. Notably, Ebrard intends to run for president of Mexico in the future, indicating that the approach of Mexican elites has room for improvement.

Mexico has limited economic relations with Russia.

The extent of Mexico and Russia's commercial ties is limited to the agricultural, aviation, and energy industries. A number of cooperation agreements in the fields of science, technology, innovation, and tourism continue to be symbolic. In 2020, Russia [ranked 35th](#) among Mexico's trading partners, with a total trade turnover of \$1291.8 million. Russia's investment in Mexico is also modest: in 2017, Russia invested only \$1 million, compared to \$31,726 million in total direct investment in Mexico that year.

Mexico [imports 65%](#) of all nitrogen fertilizers, of which [Russia's share](#) in 2020 ranked first at 23% or \$341 million. Mexico is also one of the largest importers of Russian civilian aircraft among Latin American countries. Until 2020, the Mexican budget airline Interjet used only [Russian planes Sukhoi Superjet 100](#). In the energy sector, an [agreement was concluded with the Russian company Lukoil](#) on the purchase of a 50% stake in the Zone 4 project, located in the Gulf of Mexico, a strategic region for hydrocarbon production.

Exports from Russia to Mexico increased significantly in 2021 due to the [purchase of a Russian vaccine](#) Sputnik V, after a similar request was denied by the U.S. However, delays in deliveries and unfulfilled promises have opened the door for Russia's image as a savior nation to deteriorate.

Mexico imports arms from Russia, but in minor amounts.

Between 2012 and 2016, Latin America accounted for 6% of Russian arms exports, with Mexico accounting for less than other countries – 0.06%. Since 2000, Mexico [has implemented only six agreements on arms purchases](#) from Russia, and the last one (three Mi-17 helicopters) took place in 2011.

Mexico's information space is partially influenced by the Russian Federation.

The TV channel Russia Today en Español has been broadcasting throughout Latin America since 2009 and the Spanish-language channel Sputnik since 2014. According to SimilarWeb analytics, RT en Español had approximately twenty million visitors in October 2021, with Venezuela, Mexico and Argentina accounting for close to 40% of the site's traffic. Russia also makes extensive use of Spanish-language bloggers who disseminate favorable news, such as the YouTube channel "Ahí les Va," hosted by an RT presenter. At the same time, according to [recent polls](#), 60% of Mexicans have a negative view of Putin, while 20% have a positive view (Moreno, 2022). Mexicans do not rely solely on Russian television channels for their information intake; they also watch Western programming, including American programming.

ARGENTINA

Argentina's position on the Russia-Ukraine war is relatively favorable for Ukraine, as it clearly condemns the Russian invasion and supports Ukraine-related resolutions at the UN General Assembly and provides humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Yet, Argentina does not participate in Western sanctions against Russia and continues to view Russia as a (potential) strategic ally, balancing between different partners.

Multi-vector policy, the perception of Russia as a potential strategic partner.

Argentina's strategic partnership with Russia was initiated during the tenure of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015), representing the Peronist party Front for Victory. It was marked by a strengthening of regional cooperation with Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Brazil, rapprochement with China and Russia, and deterioration of relations with the United States. As early as 2004, Argentina announced a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with the Russian Federation to replace U.S. influence, which was advantageous for Russia, which was seeking allies in the region. President Mauricio Macri (2015-2019) reestablished and enhanced Argentina's relationship with the U.S., while continuing to develop a strategic partnership with Russia, notably by signing energy and trade cooperation agreements in 2015. The current president, Alberto Fernández, is also equally devoted to strengthening relations with Russia. Only 20 days before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Fernández visited Moscow, where he declared he wanted "to turn Argentina into a Russian entry point into Latin America," agreed to Russian participation in the modernization of Argentine railroads, as well as Russian investments in the Argentine electricity, gas, oil, chemical industry and banking sector. At the same time, as part of a multi-vector approach, Fernández continues to strengthen Argentina's cooperation with the U.S. Thus, in order to maintain ties with various partners and gain economic benefits, Argentina is currently trying to maintain neutrality in international conflicts.

Argentina's political elites have condemned Russian aggression against Ukraine in statements and speeches, as well as in votes at the UN.

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine commenced on February 24, the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs [issued a position](#) condemning Russia's armed aggression and urging on Russia to cease military action on Ukrainian territory and deescalate the conflict.

Argentine President Alberto Fernández responded to the invasion with a series of tweets in which he expressed his deepest condolences for the escalation of the war in Ukraine, emphasized the importance of dialogue in order to reach a just resolution, and called on Russia to “cease its actions” and all parties to the conflict to return to the negotiating table. Argentina supported a UNGA vote to condemn Russia’s aggression against Ukraine on March 2, 2022, as well as a resolution to expel Russia from the Human Rights Council on April 7, 2022. Nonetheless, Argentina’s position on the Russian-Ukrainian war in the Organization of American States was fundamentally different. Argentina [refused to sign](#) the February 25, 2022 “The Situation in Ukraine” Declaration condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, explaining that the OAS is a regional organization whose mandate does not include the Russian-Ukrainian war. This is evidence of Argentina’s limited policy and the widespread belief among Latin American countries that the war in Ukraine is not a priority issue for the region, and that developing cooperation with the Russian Federation has the potential to yield positive results.

Argentina has refused to impose political and economic sanctions on Russia along with Western countries.

The Argentine government has refused to impose sanctions against Russia in order to maintain its policy of multi-vectorism and viewing Russia as a strategic ally and has criticized this strategy as ineffective for promoting peace and ending the war.

Argentina has been providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

In the first three months of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Argentine government sent three shipments of humanitarian aid, as well as psychological and legal aid specialists to the border between Poland and Ukraine.

Argentina’s trade relations with Russia are limited and are not a decisive factor in the development of relations with Russia.

The Russian market accounts for only [1% of Argentina’s total trade](#). [The increase in Russian imports](#) in 2021 by \$651 million (292% more than in 2020) is primarily due to the spot purchase of Sputnik V, the first vaccine approved for use in Argentina. Nevertheless, Russia is the fifth largest fertilizer supplier, accounting for 7% of Argentina’s total fertilizer imports.

Argentina has intensified military cooperation with Russia over the past two years.

In the past two years, the Argentine government has negotiated [the purchase of equipment](#) for the army, as well as an agreement to hold Argentine military training at Russian centers, along with the study of the Russian language. Russia also offers Argentina to buy MIG-35 jets and open maintenance centers in Argentina, but similar propositions also come from other countries – the United States, China and Denmark. The last time Argentina purchased Russian aircraft was in 2010, when it purchased two MI 171 helicopters.

Shifting responsibility for starting the war to the United States and NATO.

Argentine political elites frequently blame NATO and the United States for the war in Ukraine, legitimizing the Russian viewpoint that NATO's expansion to Russia's borders poses a strategic threat. They also believe that providing weapons to Ukraine prolongs and escalates the war, and [criticize](#) Volodymyr Zelenskyi for deliberately delaying negotiations, which has led to a large number of deaths.

Argentina's position on the Russia-Ukraine war is influenced by its dependence on the IMF.

A need to respond to Russia's invasion of Ukraine coincided with intense negotiations between Argentina and the United States over a debt restructuring agreement with the IMF (2018). This suggests a lack of active confrontation with the United States and the EU and has likely moderated Argentina's diplomatic stance on the Russia-Ukraine war from pro-Russian to more neutral.

The Falkland Islands issue is a negative factor in relations with Ukraine's key ally, the United Kingdom.

President Fernández frequently mentions the need for Argentina's restoration of sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), which remain effectively under British control since the 1982 war. This worsens Argentina's relations with the UK and also leaves political elites indifferent to Russia's occupation of Ukrainian territory.

BRAZIL

Brazil's position on the Russian-Ukrainian war is the least favorable for Ukraine because Brazil avoids direct condemnation of Russian aggression, blames Ukraine itself for the war, criticizes the actions of Ukrainian authorities and Western allies and openly lobbies for sanctions against Russia to be lifted. The reasons for this position are deep-rooted relations between Brazil and Russia, the ideological proximity of Brazil's current political regime to the Russian Federation, Brazil's reliance on fertilizer imports from Russia, the presence of a powerful pro-Russian lobby, and the president of Brazil's personal affinity for the president of the Russian Federation.

Brazil's foreign policy is based on multi-vectorism and non-interference.

Brazil's foreign policy tends to uphold the principles of multi-vectorism, non-interference, and peaceful resolution of conflicts. It supports strengthening the role of international organizations and Brazil's influence within them, and it aspires to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Multi-vectorism has been manifested in the development of Brazil's relations with the United States, EU countries, China, Russia and India. President Jair Bolsonaro, the "Trump of the tropics," in 2019 initiated a closer relationship between Brazil and the U.S. of Donald Trump. At the time, the U.S. recognized Brazil as a major non-NATO ally, and trade facilitation agreements were reached. Under President Biden, Brazilian-U.S. relations deteriorated and Bolsonaro began to cultivate closer ties with Russia: a week before the full-scale invasion, he paid a "solidarity visit" to Moscow, where he discussed trade and "geopolitical" issues with Putin.

Brazilian officials' position on the Russian-Ukrainian war is vague.

Brazilian representatives use the Russian term “military operation” and do not acknowledge that Russia is actually at war with Ukraine. On February 24, the Brazilian Foreign Ministry issued an [official statement](#) expressing grave concern over “military operations by the Russian Federation against targets in Ukraine,” calling for an end to hostilities and the start of negotiations that would lead to a “diplomatic solution based on the Minsk Agreements.” Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro avoids directly condemning the Russian invasion, and emphasizes a neutral stance. Brazil supported the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia’s aggression against Ukraine on March 2, 2022, but tried to [soften its wording](#), including replacing “condemnation of the Russian invasion” with “regret over the Russian invasion.” The representative of Brazil abstained in the vote for the resolution to expel Russia from the Human Rights Council on April 7, 2022. The Brazilian representative also did not leave the room during Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov’s address to the UN General Assembly, as did the representatives of the majority of countries supporting Ukraine. At the September 30 meeting of the United Nations Security Council, Brazil joined China, India, and Gabon in [abstaining from voting](#) on a resolution condemning and refusing to recognize illegal referendums in Ukraine's temporarily occupied territories.

Brazil justifies Russia’s aggression by the threat of NATO and equally blames Ukraine, Russia and the United States for the war.

There is a widespread belief among Brazilian political elites that the war was precipitated by an aggressive policy of NATO enlargement and that Ukraine’s accession to NATO poses a strategic threat to Russian national security. Brazil attributes some of the responsibility for the war to Ukraine itself. In particular, President Bolsonaro [criticizes](#) the competence of President Zelenskyi, [denies](#) that the Russian army committed massacres in the occupied cities, emphasizes the kinship between Russians and Ukrainians, and the desire of most Ukrainians to renew and strengthen cooperation with Russia. [Similar statements](#) were also made by the Bolsonaro’s key opponent in 2022 presidential elections and the former Brazil’s president from 2003 to 2010, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Brazil declined to join Western sanctions against Russia.

Not only has Brazil refused to impose sanctions against Russia and provide military or humanitarian aid to Ukraine, but it has also criticized the United States and European Union for taking similar actions. Brazil views the imposition of sanctions against Russia and the supply of heavy weapons and other aid to Ukraine as “interference in the Ukrainian crisis,” which only exacerbates the situation and delays the establishment of peace, while sanctions allegedly have a disproportionate impact on developing countries and contribute to a global food crisis.

Russia is actively developing political cooperation with Brazil.

Russia, which has been isolated from the global economy by Western sanctions, is attempting to find an alternative in the BRICS states: the Russian finance minister has already [called on the BRICS members](#) to strengthen the integration of payment systems

between countries and to work on the use of national currencies for export and import transactions, and Brazil plays a significant role in this, especially since the first Western sanctions in 2014. Vladimir Putin's visit to Brazil in 2014 was marked by a series of cooperation agreements and an action plan for energy and military cooperation. Following the February 24, 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the new wave of Western sanctions, the Russian finance minister [has already requested that the Brazilian economy minister](#) lobby international platforms and organizations – IMF, World Bank, G20 – to lift sanctions against Russia.

Brazil's total trade volume with Russia is modest, but Russia dominates in imports of agricultural goods.

Russia is not even among the top twenty [trading partners](#) of Brazil, but it plays an important role for agribusiness and agriculture. Since 2016, Brazil has been Russia's [main trading partner](#) in the Latin American region and is one of the top exporters of meat to Russia. The president of Brazil attributes his reluctance to sever ties with Russia to his reliance on Russian fertilizer imports: Brazil [imports 85% of the fertilizers](#) necessary for the production and export of soybeans, corn, sugar, and cotton. Russia supplies Brazil with 23% of its total fertilizer imports, while Belarus provides the remaining 7%.

Brazil and Russia cooperate intensively in the military sphere.

In 2008, Brazil and Russia signed a [defense technology cooperation agreement](#) for the joint development of fighters and satellites, as well as the joint use of submarines, satellites, mapping systems, and remote guidance technologies. In 2013, Brazil signed an agreement to purchase Russian anti-aircraft systems. Subsequently, the Russian state corporation Rostec and the Brazilian defense and technology company Odebrecht signed a memorandum on technical cooperation, agreeing to establish a joint venture to manufacture helicopters and anti-aircraft equipment. In 2014, representatives of the Brazilian Armed Forces participated as observers in exercises of the Russian Armed Forces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **In order to develop trade cooperation with the countries of the region**, it is essential to increase exports of agricultural products, paper products, steel, and fertilizers. This is especially important for cooperation with Brazil, which imported \$16.62 billion worth of fertilizers in 2021, while Ukraine's share was only \$12.58 thousand.
- **The development of energy cooperation with Mexico is promising.** Taking into account the experience of Ukrainian power equipment manufacturers' participation in the construction of hydroelectric power plants in Mexico, there is an opportunity to expand this cooperation and participate in the development of Mexican hydroelectric power.
- **In the future, Ukraine could expand its military-technical cooperation with Mexico, Brazil and Argentina**, particularly in the areas of re-equipping and modernizing their armed forces. They could benefit from Ukrainian military experience, while Russia loses its reputation as an effective military partner.
- **A speech by Volodymyr Zelenskyi should be organized at the Organization of American States**, where Ukraine is a permanent observer. Communication through the OAS could have a positive effect on the countries of the region with a neutral stance.
- In the case of Mexico, it is necessary to strengthen ties with the part of political elite, that is more favorable to Ukraine, specifically **by increasing communication between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and Mexico and by inviting the Mexican Foreign Minister to Ukraine.**
- **In cooperation with Argentina, it is recommended to intensify existing inter-parliamentary contacts within the framework of parliamentary friendship groups**, organize visits of Ukrainian parliamentarians to Argentina, and conduct a phone call between the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi and the President of Argentina Alberto Fernández.
- **A phone call between the foreign ministers of Ukraine and Brazil should be initiated, as well as a bilateral visit by representatives of parliamentary friendship groups.** The last political contacts between Ukraine and Brazil at the level of foreign ministers took place back in 2017, and meetings of the presidents – in 2019, both in the framework of international events.
- **It is necessary to produce original content in Spanish and Portuguese for the social networks of Ukrainian embassies in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil.** The majority of the content on the social media pages of embassies consists of subtitled speeches by the President of Ukraine, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other officials. The development of infographics, videos, and messages with basic information about Ukrainian history and culture, positive experiences, and prospects for cooperation with

Ukraine, as well as the introduction of a separate rubric to debunk the prevalent Russian propaganda messages in the region, are required.

- **Resources such as the official [Ukrainian website](#) or the presidential fundraising platform [United24](#) should be translated into Spanish and Portuguese** and their materials should be distributed via the respective embassies.
- **The Ukrainian diaspora in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico should be more actively involved in spreading a favorable image of Ukraine.** This includes, for instance, posting text and video interviews with notable citizens of the respective countries of Ukrainian descent in the social networks of the embassies and highlighting their significant contribution to the development of the country, drawing positive attention to Ukraine through these personal stories.
- It is recommended to **expand humanitarian assistance cooperation with Argentina** to further involve Argentine specialists in medicine, psychology and rehabilitation to work with Ukrainian refugees. As an extension of the existing humanitarian visa program for Ukrainians, it is also advisable to initiate establishing asylum programs for Ukrainians in Argentina.

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