



| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p align="center"><u>From War to Peace: Honoring the Legacy of Inter-American Solidarity</u></p> |  |  |
| <p align="center"><i>World War II and Its Lasting Impact on the Americas and the Inter-American System</i></p> | | |

In 1945, the world emerged from the ravages of World War II, a conflict that reshaped global politics and spurred the creation of institutions aimed at preventing future devastation. This pivotal year witnessed significant events that intertwined the histories of the Americas, the global community, and the quest for lasting peace through the Inter-American System.

Key Anniversaries

- **Act of Chapultepec:** The Act of Chapultepec was adopted during the Inter-American Conference on Problems of War and Peace, held from February 21 to March 8, 1945, in Mexico City. The 80th anniversary of the adoption of the Act of Chapultepec occurred on March 8, 2025.
- **End of World War II:** The 80th anniversary of V-E Day will occur on May 8, 2025, and the 80th anniversary of V-J Day on September 2, 2025.

The Pivotal Role of Latin America and the Caribbean in World War II

During World War II, Latin America and the Caribbean played pivotal roles that shaped the course of the conflict in ways often overlooked. From political alliances to military engagements, the region's contributions were multifaceted and deeply impactful. The 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor shocked the region into action. Many countries swiftly declared war on the Axis powers, aligning with the Allies.

As the world plunged into war, eight Latin American countries—Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama—stood in solidarity with the Allies by signing the **Declaration of the United Nations** on January 1, 1942. This unity was a testament to their resolve and the growing geopolitical influence of the Americas. Mexico, after the sinking of two oil tankers, declared war on Germany in May 1942, further solidifying the region's commitment to the Allied cause.

- **The Caribbean** quickly became a strategic front. German U-boats and Italian submarines prowled the waters, targeting Allied shipping lanes and coastal installations. Their aim was to disrupt the crucial flow of oil and other supplies. The U.S. Navy responded by deploying destroyers to safeguard the region. The ensuing battles were fierce, but the Allies' superior anti-submarine tactics and improved coordination eventually pushed the Axis submarines out of the Caribbean, securing these vital waters for the duration of the war.
 - **The Battle of the Caribbean**, often overshadowed by larger conflicts, was a crucial campaign within the broader Battle of the Atlantic. Axis submarines aimed to cripple Allied supply lines, but through joint regional cooperation and

technological advances, the Allies secured these waters, ensuring the continuous flow of vital resources.

- **The U.S. Caribbean Defense Command**, headquartered in Panama, played a crucial role in training Latin American military personnel, distributing equipment through the Lend-Lease program, and opening service schools. At the height of the conflict, the U.S. stationed over 100,000 personnel in Latin America and the Caribbean, highlighting the region's strategic importance. Panama, with its vital canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, was a linchpin in the Allies' logistics network.
- **Brazil** emerged as a key player in the conflict. As the only Latin American country to send troops to the European Theater, Brazil's commitment was unwavering. The Brazilian Expeditionary Force, formed after the Casablanca Conference and the consequential Potemkin River Conference between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas, played a critical role in the Italian Campaign. Additionally, Brazil's air bases became essential hubs for Allied resupply operations, and its navy was instrumental in the Atlantic anti-submarine campaign.
- **Mexico's** contribution was equally significant. The country sent the Escuadrón 201, also known as the Aztec Eagles, a fighter squadron of 300 volunteers, to the Pacific Theater. These brave men flew numerous missions in the Philippines, aiding the U.S. Air Force and contributing to the eventual Allied victory in that region.



Members of the [Mexican Expeditionary Air Force](#) on Luzon Island, Philippines, July 1945. The Aztec Eagles' planes entered combat adorned with two nation's insignia, both the "stars and bars" of the United States and the triangular red, white, and green roundel of their home nation. *The National WWII Museum, Gift of Dylan Utley, 2012.019.234.*

Economically, the war caused significant upheaval. Latin American economies, heavily reliant on European trade, faced disruption. The United States stepped in, expanding its economic interests through programs like **Lend-Lease**, which modernized industries and provided a major economic boost to participating countries. This cooperation laid the groundwork for long-term economic relationships and bolstered regional stability.

The strategic importance of Latin America extended beyond military and economic realms. The **Good Neighbor Policy**, implemented by President Roosevelt in the 1930s, fostered a sense of unity and shared purpose based on non-intervention across the Americas. The Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA), established in 1940, furthered this goal by promoting economic

cooperation and disseminating pro-Allied information through media channels and in collaboration with the Pan-American Union. Latin American newspapers, reflecting both government and popular sentiment, frequently showcased their support for the Allies. Publications from El Salvador to Mexico echoed a shared commitment to democratic ideals and hemispheric solidarity.

In sum, Latin America's and the Caribbean's contributions to World War II were diverse and profound. From the Brazilian Expeditionary Force in Europe to the Aztec Eagles in the Pacific, and from the strategic waters of the Caribbean to the economic collaborations forged through Lend-Lease, the region played an indispensable role in the Allied victory. Their efforts ensured that the Americas were not merely bystanders in the conflict but active participants whose contributions helped shape the outcome of one of history's greatest wars.

The End of World War II, the Americas, and the United Nations

As the war drew to a close in Europe and the Pacific, Allied leaders convened at the **Yalta Conference** in February 1945. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin deliberated over the post-war landscape, laying foundations for the **United Nations (UN)**. Their discussions reflected a shared determination to establish a new international order that could prevent conflicts like World War II. The Yalta Conference marked a critical juncture where global powers committed to collective security and cooperation.

The **Inter-American Conference on Problems of War and Peace**, known as the **Chapultepec Conference**, brought together the United States and 19 Latin American countries in Mexico City in 1945. The conference aimed to establish a framework for post-war collective security and economic cooperation in the Americas, and to define the region's alignment with the soon-to-be-established UN. The Chapultepec Conference marked the culmination of nearly a decade of evolving hemispheric diplomacy. The **Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace, held in Buenos Aires in 1936** at the request of President Roosevelt, adopted a resolution supporting the peaceful settlement of disputes and the principle of non-intervention. This was followed by the **Eighth International Conference of American States in Lima in 1938**, where countries reaffirmed their commitment to collective action and hemispheric solidarity in the face of growing global tensions. These ideals were further reinforced during key wartime gatherings: the **Meeting of Foreign Ministers in Panama (1939)**, which declared a neutrality zone in the Western Hemisphere, and the **Third Meeting of Foreign Ministers in Rio de Janeiro (1942)**, which coordinated hemispheric defense and solidarity following the attack on Pearl Harbor.

During the Chapultepec Conference, Latin American nations expressed concerns about potential conflicts between the UN's global aspirations and the Pan-American tradition of regional solidarity. Out of these deliberations emerged the **Act of Chapultepec**, a formal resolution proclaiming the principle of collective self-defense through regional pacts. This concept was later reflected in Article 51 of the UN Charter, which endorsed regional security arrangements as key components of global peacekeeping.

Director Orson Welles attended a regional preview of the Inter-American Conference on Problems of War and Peace in Mexico City.

In 1941, Welles was appointed as a goodwill ambassador to Latin America by U.S. Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs Nelson Rockefeller, tasked with promoting cultural diplomacy and hemispheric solidarity during World War II.

Victor De Palma (photographer)



In April 1945, one month after the adoption of the Act of Chapultepec and as the Allies closed in on Germany and Japan, world leaders gathered in San Francisco for the **United Nations Conference on International Organization**. The conference culminated in the signing of the **UN Charter** on June 26, 1945, institutionalizing the global vision of peace and cooperation first championed at Yalta—and actively shaped by the Americas through their trajectory of regional diplomacy.

The Role of the Inter-American System

The events of 1945 profoundly influenced the Inter-American system, laying the foundations for the OAS and reinforcing regional cooperation. The Act of Chapultepec's principles of collective security resonated throughout the Americas, culminating in the **Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty)**. In 1947, the **Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Continental Peace and Security** convened in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Against the backdrop of World War II's aftermath and the looming Cold War, this conference adopted the Rio Treaty. This treaty was pivotal, establishing mechanisms for legitimate collective self-defense against threats from outside the region and facilitating joint actions in the event of conflicts between member states. The Rio Treaty solidified the commitment of American nations to mutual security and became a cornerstone of the Inter-American system.

The Inter-American System and the **Pan American Union (PAU)** provided an important regional framework for cooperation and conflict resolution in support of the UN's development. The PAU, founded in 1890 and later evolving into the OAS in 1948, promoted diplomatic dialogue and collective security among the countries of the Americas. The **Conferences of American States**, held intermittently until 1970, also played a crucial role in shaping the inter-American cooperation. These gatherings evolved into the OAS General Assembly following the entry into force of the **1970 Protocol of Buenos Aires**, which amended the OAS Charter and marked a shift toward a more institutionalized approach to regional diplomacy and cooperation.

With the above experiences in mind, the creation of the UN in 1945 marked an important moment in regional and international relations. It embodied a global hope to forge a path toward peace and cooperation in the aftermath of the most destructive war in history.

Conclusion: Reflecting on Key Anniversaries in 2025

As we mark in 2025 the 80th anniversaries of the pivotal events of 1945, it is an opportunity to reflect on their enduring impact. The Act of Chapultepec, the Rio Treaty, and subsequent developments in the Inter-American system laid frameworks for regional cooperation and collective security—many of which continue to guide today’s diplomacy and the advancement of human rights in the Western Hemisphere today.



[“V-J Day in Times Square” by Alfred Eisenstaedt](#): This iconic photograph captures a spontaneous kiss between an American sailor and a nurse in New York City’s Times Square on August 14, 1945, the day Japan’s surrender was announced.

Taken by *photojournalist Alfred Eisenstaedt*, the image became an enduring symbol of relief, exuberance, and the collective celebration that marked the end of World War II.

Accompanying YouTube [video playlist here](#).

