

BACKGROUND

No. 2674 | APRIL 4, 2012

A New Agenda for American Leadership at the Sixth Summit of the Americas

Ray Walser, Ph.D.

Abstract

President Obama will participate in the Sixth Summit of the Americas in Colombia on April 14 and 15. This summit, the Obama Administration believes, offers an opportunity to showcase a policy of accomplishments and innovations. Critics see a distracted Administration that is long on rhetoric and short on achievements, and which lacks a serious strategy for advancing U.S. interests and values in the region. The upcoming summit is an opportunity to restore confidence among allies and foster cooperation among those who are willing, while giving those who oppose U.S. interests and values reasons to reflect on the consequences of their actions. President Obama needs to project a U.S. policy that is neither hegemonic nor negligent, and which highlights the unique and positive role that the U.S. plays in hemispheric and global affairs.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/bg2674>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

The Sixth Summit of the Americas—to be held on April 14 and 15 in Cartagena, Colombia—represents perhaps a final chance for the Obama Administration to redefine a message of U.S. leadership and dynamism in 2012 and beyond.¹ President Barack Obama’s visit will highlight, according to Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman, “a clear record of progress” in advancing a “new era of equal partnerships” in the Americas.² Skeptics, however, see an anemic and distracted Administration that is long on goodwill and rhetoric but short on concrete achievements, and lacking a serious strategy for genuinely advancing U.S. interests and values in the region.

President Obama needs to project a vision of a U.S. policy that is neither hegemonic nor negligent, that highlights the unique and positive role the U.S. plays in hemispheric and global affairs, and builds on the traditions of inter-American peace and collective security in order to keep the Americas as free as possible from destabilizing and dangerous currents in Iran, the Middle East, and elsewhere.

TALKING POINTS

- The Sixth Summit of the Americas in Colombia in April 2012 will focus U.S. attention on Latin America and the Caribbean. The event highlights the successes and the challenges of the region.
- Confronted with a range of democratic, security, trade, and energy issues, President Obama needs to commit to a comprehensive strategy of liberty, freedom, and responsibility directed at advancing U.S. values and interests.
- Key attention must be focused on strengthening democratic institutions, combating criminal threats, and advancing a more prosperous, more connected, and more secure region.
- President Obama must pursue pragmatic, bipartisan efforts to support friends, leverage influence, and expose the insidious threats posed by organized crime, democratic decay, and extra-hemispheric threats, such as Iran.
- Without strong, successful hemispheric partners, U.S. success on the global stage will become increasingly difficult.

Sixth Summit—at Cartagena

Serving as host for the Sixth Summit of the Americas, a gathering that is emblematic of Western Hemisphere cooperation and unity, and which began in Miami in 1995, will be Colombia and its centrist, and generally pro-U.S., president Juan Manuel Santos. After decades of internal conflict arising from drug trafficking, insurgency, and paramilitary activity, Colombia, with its 40 million citizens, has experienced a remarkable recovery. It has become, in the words of U.S. State Department officials, “a net exporter of security.”³ Colombia hopes to demonstrate that it has become more stable, more secure, and more prosperous and that it is endowed with resources and human capital that are making it a Latin American powerhouse in the 21st century—with a potential to be the second-largest economy in South America (after Brazil).

There are a number of positive elements that hemispheric leaders will certainly wish to celebrate and that give rise to fresh confidence. These include relative economic success in the global economic recession. In 2010, gross domestic product (GDP) in Latin America grew an average of 6 percent. In 2012, GDP will be lower, probably around 3.7

percent, which is still relatively good. Macroeconomic policies and fiscal discipline in many nations are sounder than those of the U.S.⁴ Larger Latin American enterprises (*Multilatinas*), such as CEMEX and Embraer, along with an emerging energy giant like Brazil’s national oil company Petrobras, are muscling forward in the world of international business.

Overall, the region is endowed with extensive agricultural and energy resources and is well positioned to meet rising global demands for energy, food production, and even manufacturing. Poverty levels have declined from 42 percent in 2002 to 33 percent in 2012, thanks largely to economic growth and innovative social policies known as conditional cash transfers. The region’s middle class has expanded substantially, opening the way for everything from an explosion of Wal-Marts to greater citizen mobilization and the expansion of civil society. The demand for quality education, safer environments, rule of law, and government accountability and transparency are on the rise. Finally, all governments with the exception of Cuba follow basic electoral tracks, although continuity (*contuismo*) and concentrations of executive power are a rising problem in several states. Certainly,

inequality, poverty, and social exclusion persist. Personal security appears to be on the decline, with Latin America and the Caribbean leading the world in homicides. Many of the regimes of the Americas can be classified as “flawed democracies.”⁵

Leaders from the participating countries belong to a range of regional groupings that includes the anti-American Bolivarian Alternative for the People of Our Americas (ALBA), led by the Castros of Cuba and President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, the recently formed Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which excludes the U.S. and Canada, as well as more focused regional bodies, such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Central American Integration System (SICA), and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The Summit of the Americas is the only encounter for all heads of state.

The U.S. State Department remains upbeat, seeing the summit as an opportunity to showcase “the remarkable ways countries are coming together in pursuit of common goals.”⁶ For Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson, the summit represents the “apex of a trend toward coming

1. Peter Hakim, “The Next Summit of the Americas: A Preview of Cartagena, Colombia,” *Inter-American Dialogue*, January 12, 2012, at <http://www.thedialogue.org/page.cfm?pageID=32&pubID=2839> (accessed March 23, 2012).
2. Wendy R. Sherman, “U.S. Policy and Engagement in the Americas,” talk at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 28, 2012, at http://coacounciloftheamericas.org/articles/4006/U.S._Under_Secretary_of_State_Wendy_R._Sherman_Discusses_U.S._Engagement_in_the_Americas/ (accessed March 23, 2012).
3. *Ibid.*
4. Luis Alberto Moreno, Inter-American Development Bank, speech before the representatives of non-regional IDB members, Israel, January 25, 2011, at <http://www.iadb.org/en/news/speeches/2011-01-25/consultative-meeting-with-nonregional-idb-member-countries-in-israel,9073.html> (accessed March 23, 2012).
5. Jose Miguel Insulza, “The Latin-American Decade: Visions of Development and Global Insertion FLASCO,” inaugural speech before the 41st regular session of the OAS General Assembly, San Jose, Costa Rica, April 26, 2011, at http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/speech.asp?sCodigo=11-0055 (accessed March 23, 2012).
6. Roberta S Jacobson, “Remarks to CCAA’s 35th Annual Conference on the Caribbean and Central America,” December 1, 2011, at <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/rm/2011/178405.htm> (accessed March 23, 2012).

together in the Americas.” The central theme for the summit is “Connecting the Americas: Partners for Prosperity.” Key topics will include regional integration and cooperation, democracy and human rights, reduction of poverty and inequality; natural disaster preparedness and response; confronting transnational crime, and access to technology, especially in the areas of rural education and health care.

In the lead-up to the summit, the most controversial issue has been a contentious debate over whether Cuba should be invited. The issue of Cuba’s non-attendance was widely publicized by Cuba’s friends, notably Chavez and Bolivia’s Evo Morales at the previous summit in Trinidad. At a February 2012 meeting of ALBA leaders, Ecuador’s Rafael Correa proposed boycotting the summit if Cuba is not invited to participate.⁷ Both the U.S. State Department and the Organization of American States (OAS) had opposed the idea of including Cuba because of its refusal to abide by core democratic values. In early March, President Santos of Colombia visited Havana to confer with Raul Castro on this summit dilemma. Santos, as the host, did not

deliver an invitation to Cuba, ending speculation that the Communist regime might participate in the summit.

The deteriorating health of Hugo Chavez, who underwent a new round of cancer surgery in Havana on February 28, might also mean that the contentious leader will be sidelined from the event.⁸ The absence of Chavez from the summit will certainly remove some of its theatrical interests, but might encourage a more constructive dialogue.

Obama’s Latin America Policy in the Balance

In March 2011, President Obama stated that “Latin America is more important to the prosperity and security of the United States than ever before.”⁹ Yet, a perusal of the daily actions and policy decisions of the President does not entirely substantiate this claim. The Administration argues that its “pragmatic approach marks a clean break from ideologically-driven, outmoded definitions of foreign policy” and asserts it is building a better future with “equal partners.”¹⁰ It also argues that it has “reversed the dangerous depletion of good will toward

the United States that had occurred during the prior decade.”¹¹ Or more recently, “our policy has moved light years beyond a traditional and reactive approach to the Americas.”¹²

If this coming together is so prevalent, why are the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean making unprecedented efforts to assert diplomatic independence and to diversify their foreign ties? U.S. efforts to improve relations with Cuba, Bolivia, and Venezuela have largely gone unreciprocated.

The Obama Administration’s generally liberal internationalist outlook has also contributed to moments of ethnocentrism and wishful thinking that tends to minimize historical, cultural, and psychological differences; recurring impediments that contribute to the phenomena of personality cults, populism, and autocracy; and the persistence of a love-hate relationship with the U.S.¹³ President Obama’s readiness to move beyond “bankrupt ideologies” and “stale debates” also reflects a certain uneasiness with perennial tensions between authority and freedom, between the individual and the collectivist state, and between myth and reality in the Americas.¹⁴

7. Andres Oppenheimer, “Obama Should Take the Offensive on Cuba,” *The Miami Herald*, February 15, 2012, at <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/02/15/2643434/obama-should-take-the-offensive.html> (accessed March 13, 2012).
8. Antonio Maria Delgado, “Noriega: Chavez Cancer Progressing Faster than Expected,” *The Miami Herald*, November 9, 2011, at <http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/11/09/2494843/noriega-chavez-cancer-progressing.html> (accessed March 23, 2012).
9. News release, “Remarks by President Obama on Latin America in Santiago, Chile,” The White House, March 21, 2011, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/21/remarks-president-obama-latin-america-santiago-chile> (accessed March 23, 2012).
10. Dan Restrepo and Moises Naim, “Hard Talk: Does Obama have a Foreign Policy for Latin America?” *The Americas Quarterly*, Winter 2011, at <http://www.americasquarterly.org/node/2157> (accessed March 23, 2012).
11. Arturo Valenzuela, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, “Priorities for U.S. Assistance in the Western Hemisphere,” testimony before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, April 13, 2011, at <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/rm/2011/160643.htm> (accessed March 23, 2012).
12. Sherman “U.S. Policy and Engagement in the Americas.”
13. Edmundo Paz Soldan, “How Garcia Marquez Explains Latin America,” *Foreign Policy*, March 2, 2012, at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/29/how_garcia_marquez_explains_latam_america (accessed March 23, 2012).
14. David Rothkopf, “The Iceman Leadeth: The Cool Diplomacy of Barack Obama,” *Foreign Policy*, March 12, 2012, at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/03/12/the_iceman_leadeth?page=full (accessed March 23, 2012).

Another under-discussed shortcoming has been the inability of the Obama Administration to deliver on the promises it made for progress on critical measures to reform a broken immigration system, substantially reduce demand for illicit drugs, reestablish gun control laws, or enact bold legislation, such as cap and trade, in order to combat or mitigate climate change. While the flux of illegal migration has slackened, the steady use of criminal deportations and workplace apprehensions has generated fresh problems abroad, especially in Central America.

Looking back, the Obama Administration has promoted a wide array of flexible, “soft-power” initiatives constructed around micro-initiatives. Many Obama-era programs are modest in aims and limited in impact. They have not required legislative approval and were cobbled together with existing resources and established bureaucratic structures. Obama initiatives for Latin America are designed, its authors argue, to be incentive-based rather than threat-conscious, emphasizing “win-win” arrangements, and encouraging getting “to yes.”¹⁵

The Administration has attempted to highlight development assistance and project U.S. soft power as

much as it does “smart power” (the latter consisting of soft power *and* hard power smartly applied).¹⁶ It targets persistent inequalities within the Americas with the hope of fostering social inclusion, improved access to health and education, and the empowerment of minorities. Programs featured by the Obama Administration include Bush-era holdovers, such as the Millennium Challenge Compacts, far bolder and broader than any Obama-era initiative, and Pathways to Progress, which currently involves 15 states and seeks to make social inclusion a part of economic growth and integration.

New ventures, such as the Microfinance Growth Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Inter-American Social Protection Network, and 100,000 Strong in Americas, an educational initiative to encourage student exchanges, set out to reach the grassroots.¹⁷ The Obama Administration is also attempting to make educational opportunities a key point in its relationship with Brazil.¹⁸ It has also launched a pilot program with El Salvador designed to promote what it views as more equitable, more sustainable development: the Partnership for Growth.¹⁹ The Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas, which began with

the most recent Trinidad Summit, sets the goal of transitioning to a clean energy future that focuses on renewable energy, energy efficiency, energy poverty, infrastructure, cleaner and more efficient use of fossil fuels, sustainable forests and land use, and climate change adaptation.²⁰

The Obama Administration has also enlarged its focus on historically marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, people of African descent, women, homosexuals and transgendered people, young people, and those with disabilities in the region. The “war on drugs” has been replaced by a more diverse campaign for “citizen security” sustained by the Merida Initiative for Mexico, the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), and the Colombia Strategic Development Initiative (CSDI), the replacement for Plan Colombia. These counter-drug measures include judicial and prison reform, communities at risk, and other efforts that concentrate on the social base that contributes to criminality.

Former Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Arturo Valenzuela stated that the Administration’s goal was figuring out how to “catalyze networks of practical partnerships, among all

15. Robert Kagan, “Obama’s Year One: Contra,” *World Affairs*, January/February 2010, at <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/articles/2010-JanFeb/full-Kagan-JF-2010.html> (accessed March 23, 2012).
16. “Joseph Nye on Smart Power,” Harvard Kennedy School, July 3, 2008, at <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/news-events/publications/insight/international/joseph-nye> (accessed March 23, 2012).
17. U.S. Department of State, “Remarks by Secretary Clinton at Pathways to Prosperity Meeting,” March 4, 2010, at <http://archives.uruguay.usembassy.gov/usaweb/2010/10-069EN.shtml> (accessed March 23, 2012).
18. Roberta S Jacobson, “Remarks on U.S.-Brazil Relations on the Eve of President Dilma Rousseff’s First Visit to Washington, DC,” March 12, 2012, at <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/rm/2012/185622.htm> (accessed March 23, 2012).
19. U.S. Department of State, “Partnership for Growth: El Salvador 2011-2015,” *Fact Sheet*, November 3, 2011, at <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/fs/2011/176636.htm> (accessed March 13, 2012).
20. Matthew Rooney, “Advancing Clean Energy Cooperation and Climate Change Cooperation in the Americas,” U.S. Department of State, DipNote, April 13, 2011, at http://blogs.state.gov/index.php/site/entry/clean_energy_americas (accessed March 23, 2012).

capable stakeholders.”²¹ Such networks can often become a diplomat’s or bureaucrat’s delight. They rely heavily on conferences, mentoring sessions, exchanges of best-practice information, town hall discussions, outreach activities, and channels for collaboration. By constructing stronger networks for activism, the Administration hopes to foster a constructive environment of goodwill and more effective performance by assistance recipients.²²

Useful and well-intentioned, these initiatives are easily buried in the inner pages of the Latin American press. The former editor of *Foreign Policy* and current columnist for Spain’s *El País* Moises Naim feels the Administration’s priorities too often read like “a wish list of development policies.”²³ Chris Sabatini of the Council of the Americas labeled them “feel-good, small scale projects.”²⁴ He added to the critique most recently in the pages of *Foreign Affairs* when he spoke of the tendency to focus “excessive attention on small countries of little geostrategic influence and fostering the facile notion that political and economic liberalization are the necessary and sufficient

criteria for the advancement of all major U.S. interests.”²⁵ A more conservative analyst, such as Hudson Institute’s Jaime Daremblum, stated bluntly that “unlike Bush—and Bill Clinton, and George H.W. Bush, and Ronald Reagan—Obama has not spearheaded a major regional initiative of his own.”²⁶ Moises Naim said that current U.S. policy toward Latin America is “well-sounding, well-meaning, but cliché-ridden and, ultimately, irrelevant.”²⁷

The most traumatic events of the past three years and greatest direct threats to the Western Hemisphere were caused either by nature—the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti that claimed an estimated 230,000 lives, and the immensely destructive earthquake in Chile the following month—or by the ravages and violence of criminal gangs and networks in Mexico, Central America, and elsewhere that have claimed tens of thousands of lives and created a profound sense of insecurity among the citizens of those areas with little sign of abating.

There have been a series of regular incidents and modest diplomatic crises that include the heated

dispute over the U.S.–Colombia military basing agreement (2009), the removal of President Manuel Zelaya in Honduras and the ensuing political tempest (2009), the clash with Brazil over its, and Turkey’s, proposed nuclear-enrichment-cooperation deal with Iran (2010), the alleged U.S.-backed “coup” against Ecuador’s President Rafael Correa (September 2010), and the Wikileaks crisis with Mexico (December 2010) that forced the reassignment of the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Carlos Pascual. The unfolding internal inquiry into Operation Fast and Furious, a law enforcement sting operation that went awry, has also troubled relations between the U.S. and Mexico.²⁸ The Obama Administration and the U.S. Senate have been at frequent loggerheads over ambassadorial appointments and confirmations.²⁹ The highest sense of urgency continues to attach to the continued deterioration of security conditions in Mexico and Central America. Predictions for the future of the northern tier of Central America remain dire. This was evidenced by the March 2012 visit of Vice President Joe Biden to Mexico

21. News release, “U.S. Policy: What’s New? by Secretary Arturo A. Valenzuela to the Americas Conference,” U.S. Department of State, September 14, 2010, at <http://brazil.usembassy.gov/valenzuela.html> (accessed March 26, 2012).
22. Anne Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 1-368, at <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/7712.html> (accessed March 26, 2012).
23. Moises Naim, “Mientras Washington duerme,” *El País*, September 19, 2010, at http://www.elpais.com/articulo/internacional/Mientras/Washington/duerme/elpepiint/20100919elpepiint_8/Tes (accessed March 26, 2012).
24. Christopher Sabatini, “Obama’s Latin American Policy: Talking Like It’s 1999,” *Huffington Post*, April 7, 2010, at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christopher-sabatini/obamas-latin-american-pol_b_529619.html (accessed March 26, 2012).
25. Christopher Sabatini, “Rethinking Latin America: Foreign Policy is More than Development,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2012, at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137101/christopher-sabatini/rethinking-latin-america> (accessed March 26, 2012).
26. Jaime Darenblum, “The Obama Effect in Latin America,” Hudson Institute *Pajamas Media*, February 9, 2012, at http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=publication_details&id=8717 (accessed March 26, 2012).
27. Restrepo and Naim, “Hard Talk: Does Obama have a Foreign Policy for Latin America?”
28. Ray Walser, “Operation Fast and Furious Has Harmed U.S.–Mexican Relations,” Heritage Foundation, The Foundry, July 27, 2011, at <http://blog.heritage.org/2011/07/27/operation-fast-and-furious-has-harmed-u-s-mexican-relations/>.
29. Nicholas Casey, “U.S. Sway Clipped in Latin America,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 7, 2012, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203315804577205333030004566.html> (accessed March 26, 2012).

and Honduras, where he reassured Mexican and Central American leaders of continued strong support in the fight against organized crime and sought to fend off critics calling for drug decriminalization or legalization.

The U.S. also faces a new era of budgetary constraints. Although the latest federal budget for fiscal year (FY) 2013 calls for deficits exceeding \$1 trillion, it envisions significant cutbacks in foreign assistance and defense spending to the detriment of America's foreign and defense commitments.³⁰ While the Department of State notes that its total foreign operations and assistance budget is less than 1 percent of the total federal budget, it is challenged to use its shrinking resources more effectively. Prior to taking office, President Obama promised to double the foreign assistance budget by 2012.³¹ For the Western Hemisphere, however, the projected assistance budget for FY 2013 will, in fact, fall from \$1.85 billion to \$1.65 billion.³² By way of contrast, it is estimated that Venezuela under Hugo Chavez has lavished \$80 billion on regional friends in ALBA since 2006, with Cuba receiving an estimated \$5 billion in oil and other support annually, roughly 15 percent of Cuba's current GDP.³³

A Game Plan for the Summit

At the 2009 Summit of the Americas in Trinidad, President Obama came as a relative neophyte with a notion that regenerating better relations was comparatively easy. In April 2012, he must do more to articulate views and policies that resonate with the American people. The President must deliver a policy that reflects U.S. readiness to engage actively in the Americas, and support transitory diplomacy with a genuine strategy aimed at enhancing democracy, prosperity, and peace in the Americas. He must articulate how he envisions the rebalancing of U.S. strategy, or its "Asia Pivot," will impact relations in the Americas. He must show how the U.S. as a whole will work not only with governments but also reach out to the real drivers of change in the Americas—idea makers, innovators, entrepreneurs, and organized communities and civil society. President Obama should recognize that despite statist and collectivist tendencies, it is the unending quest for "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" that is still the most powerful force driving national politics and shaping the U.S. role in the world.

Although the upcoming summit will stress the equality of all American states, not all nations

carry the same geopolitical weight. Without slighting Barbados, Belize, or Surinam, President Obama needs to devote greater attention to pivotal countries like Mexico and Brazil. By hosting Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff in Washington in an official visit on April 9, just days before the summit, the White House is signaling the importance it attaches to the U.S.–Brazil connection.

Moreover, President Obama should recognize that with the exception of Ecuador, the U.S. is now linked from Canada to Cape Horn by free trade agreements (FTAs) with all Pacific-facing nations. The U.S. needs to solidify commercial and trade ties with this significant array of Pacific Rim partners. Powerful underlying forces of geography and proximity will influence Americans' way of life and policies even in an age of rapid globalization.

While it is generally argued that little can be done in an election year, President Obama should focus on rebuilding bipartisan consensus at home. He should reach out to key House and Senate leaders. Inviting House Foreign Affairs Chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Representative Connie Mack (R-FL), Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), or Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) to participate in the summit delegation

-
30. "President Obama's 2013 Budget Delivers Tax Hikes, More Spending, More Debt," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2656, February 28, 2012, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/02/president-obamas-2013-budget-delivers-tax-hikes-more-spending-more-debt>.
31. "The Obameter: Double U.S. Spending on Foreign Aid to \$50 Billion a Year by 2012," *Tampa Bay Times*, August 11, 2011, at <http://www.politifact.com/truth-ometer/promises/obameter/promise/170/double-us-spending-on-foreign-aid-to-50-billion/> (accessed March 26, 2012).
32. U.S. Department of State, "Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations," Fiscal Year 2013, at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/185015.pdf> (accessed March 26, 2012).
33. Frank Bajak, "Chavez' Beneficiaries Gird for Lost Aid," Associated Press, February 25, 2012, at <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5j5vlgT WGxzsSN6iYa25FY2AoTrQQ?docId=13be572dc5034b55a8db542c004aef47> (accessed March 26, 2012).

would constitute an important step toward rebuilding bipartisan consensus.

Advancing Democracy Against Authoritarian Headwinds. During the 2008 campaign for the presidency, Barack Obama promised in Miami that “the first and most fundamental freedom that we must work for is political freedom. The United States must be a relentless advocate for democracy.”³⁴ Yet, from many quarters there is a widespread feeling that the Obama Administration, with its penchant for realism and preference for “leading from behind,” has not lived up to this commitment, nor placed the full force of its actions and policies behind a democracy agenda.³⁵

The challenge to democratic governance in the Americas has become increasingly complicated, as authoritarian-minded leaders have undercut traditional safeguards, such as checks and balances, a free press, and an independent judiciary, to monopolize political power. Support for democracy in the Americas requires careful monitoring and a persistent and innovative policy directed at guarding the essentials of liberty and freedom in the Americas.

Without doubt those determined to undercut the democratic order have become more skilled and craftier in having their way. There

is now substantial literature and numerous case studies devoted to what has been called the democratic backlash, and sometimes competitive authoritarianism.³⁶ Threats to democracy that have emerged often take a more subtle course as illiberal leaders strive to undercut democracy with maneuvers and pseudo-legality to concentrate executive power, eliminate checks and balances, intimidate media and civil society, and perpetuate their hold on power. Nicaragua and Ecuador are exemplary case studies of such contemporary challenges.

From youthful Marxist-Leninist rebel to aging *caudillo* (strongman), Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega has been able to dominate Nicaraguan politics for over three decades. His success has been achieved in large part with massive financial assistance from Hugo Chavez. In 2011, Ortega engineered his re-election to a second consecutive term as president with almost textbook precision. Although specifically restricted by the Nicaraguan constitution from pursuing a second consecutive term, the wily Ortega managed to assemble a rump of the Supreme Court that overturned the restriction, in effect ruling Nicaragua’s constitution unconstitutional. He then moved to elections by bypassing the required legislative approval, a

move the former U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua, Robert Callahan, called “illegal, illegitimate and unconstitutional.”³⁷ While the November 2012 elections may have delivered Ortega an impressive majority of votes, they were deeply marred by a lack of transparency, and incidents of fraud intended to award Ortega’s Sandinista Party a supermajority in the legislature. In essence, the fragile defense mechanisms of democracy in Nicaragua—an impartial electoral tribunal, an independent judiciary, a representative legislature, and an active civil society—were all targets for Ortega. While U.S. Ambassador-designate to Nicaragua Phyllis Powers admitted that the Obama Administration is concerned about the “serious erosion of democracy,” there is little evidence it has taken any tough steps to respond to Ortega’s ploys.³⁸ Senator Rubio has rightly charged that the Administration failed to deliver a forceful message on democracy or to develop a pro-democracy counter-response.³⁹

In September 2010, Ecuador’s President Rafael Correa found himself embroiled in an ugly police strike that turned into a dangerous riot and appeared for a time to endanger the president’s life. In the aftermath of the incident, Correa claimed to see the hand of the United States.

34. Jeff Zeleny, “Obama, in Miami, Calls for Engaging with Cuba,” *The New York Times*, May 24, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/24/us/politics/24campaign.html> (accessed March 26, 2012).

35. Kim R. Holmes, Marc A. Thiessen, and Clifford D. May, “The Obama Doctrine at Year Three: An Assessment,” panel discussion at The Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, February 22, 2012, at <http://www.heritage.org/events/2012/02/obama-doctrine> (March 26, 2012).

36. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “Competitive Authoritarianism: The Emergence and Dynamics of Hybrid Regimes in the Post-Cold War Era,” paper for the University of Michigan, August 26, 2010, at http://sitemaker.umich.edu/comparative.speaker.series/files/levitsky_with_bib.pdf (accessed March 26, 2012).

37. Robert J. Callahan, “Future of Democracy in Nicaragua,” testimony before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, December 1, 2011, at <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/112/cal120111.pdf> (accessed March 26, 2012).

38. Phyllis M. Powers, statement for the record before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, February 7, 2012, at http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Phyllis_M_Powers_Testimony.pdf (accessed March 26, 2012).

39. Marco Rubio, “U.S. Silent as Ortega Assaults Democracy,” *The Miami Herald*, January 9, 2012, at <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/01/09/2581471/us-silent-as-ortega-assaults-democracy.html> (accessed March 26, 2012).

Several months later, he expelled the U.S. Ambassador because of questions concerning the integrity of Correa's officials raised in a purloined confidential cable made public by Wikileaks.⁴⁰ The September 2010 incident also sparked a feud with Ecuador's press and Correa's latest efforts to curb press freedom. Following Correa's lead, Ecuador's legislature passed an "insult law" that criminalized defamations of public officials and institutions, and aimed to muzzle the media. An Ecuadorian court proceeded to slap a \$42 million fine and three-year jail sentences on the owners of *El Universo*, the country's second-best selling newspaper, and on commentator Emilio Palacio. According to the International Press Association, the thin-skinned Correa is engaged in a "systematic and hostile campaign to do away with the independent press."⁴¹ After an enormous outcry by foreign media and human rights watchdogs, President Correa relented and pardoned the pressmen while leaving a dark cloud of uncertainty over freedom of speech in his country.

In fact, in the Americas, assaults on the press continue to grow alarmingly. They take the form of murders of journalists in Mexico and Honduras, often by criminal

elements. In Venezuela, the Chavez regime recently closed 35 private radio stations and aims for clear dominance over the media in advance of the October 2012 presidential elections. Measures against the media by governments include withdrawal of advertising to force soft censorship, the drafting of ambiguous laws directed against defamation, and waging executive vendettas against opposition journalists. A stand for press freedom in the Americas by President Obama would help set a vital benchmark for freedom of expression in the Americas.

The Administration's reference point must continue to be the complete Inter-American Democratic Charter. As Dan Fisk of the International Republican Institute recently testified, the charter promises the people of the Americas "a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it...it is the normative standard for the hemisphere."⁴² To monitor this standard, the Obama Administration should develop a set of consistent democracy indicators with the help of academics, members of civil society, human rights experts, and foreign observers to provide early-warning signals of imminent threats to democracy. The

Administration should not retreat from strong support for democracy promotion in spite of counter pressures and the recent Egyptian imbroglio. Sustained support for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) family is imperative.⁴³

The Administration also needs a series of graduated and consistent responses for emerging threats to democracy that range from applying pressure via the OAS and public diplomacy to the strategic withdrawal of ambassadors and actions in multilateral banks and reductions or terminations in U.S. assistance programs. While opponents will argue that such actions smack of unilateralism, the U.S. can do a better job of tracking, criticizing, and countering those who abridge rights considered universal. A lack of clarity and the absence of a sense of direction increase the perception of U.S. indifference or weakness.

Finally, the Obama Administration must redouble its efforts to work inside and outside the Western Hemisphere with parties in other democracies that readily share American values and principles and to promote continuous dialogue among all pro-democracy forces. The need for a functioning community united by a genuine respect for security and liberty has long

40. Simon Romero, "Ecuador Expels U.S. Ambassador Over WikiLeaks Cable," *The New York Times*, April 5, 2011, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/06/world/americas/06ecuador.html> (accessed March 26, 2012).

41. "Ecuador's Autocrat Cracks Down on Media Freedom," *The Washington Post*, July 28, 2011, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ecuadors-autocrat-cracks-down-on-media-freedom/2011/07/27/gIQA5BRtfl_story.html (accessed March 26, 2012).

42. Daniel Fisk, "The State of Democracy in the Americas," testimony before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, and Global Narcotics, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, June 30, 2011, at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112shrg68242/html/CHRG-112shrg68242.htm> (accessed March 26, 2012).

43. U.S. State Department, "Executive Budget Summary: Function 150 & Other International Programs," Fiscal Year 2013, February 13, 2012, at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/183755.pdf> (accessed March 26, 2012).

been a recommendation that finds favor with conservative audiences and offers a way forward outside double-standard-prone multilateral institutions.⁴⁴

Venezuela: Critical Hemispheric Pivot

When President Obama took office, a key goal was to improve relations with Venezuela and President Chavez. Senior advisors urged a change in tone and diplomatic style. No longer was the bully George W. Bush in office. They urged Americans to stop “obsessing” and to avoid Cold War-like “Manichean thinking” when dealing with Chavez.⁴⁵ At the Trinidad Summit, a jocular Obama encountered a beaming Chavez. Before leaving Trinidad, President Obama observed that he was confident that the U.S. and Venezuela could find areas where the two could “work in common.”⁴⁶ Soon after Trinidad, the U.S. and Venezuela restored full diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level.

U.S. values and interests are challenged by the regime of President Chavez. On October 7, 2012, Venezuelans will have the chance to choose between increasing socialism, government mismanagement and corruption, along with an

increasingly anti-American foreign policy and a more positive, accountable, and responsible alternative. U.S. policy must support free and fair elections, work to protect voter secrecy, and assist democratic alternatives for Venezuela.

Three years after President Obama took office, relations have steadily deteriorated. Even the CIA’s World Fact book reports that the Obama Administration is reluctant to address

a weakening of democratic institutions, political polarization, a politicized military, drug-related violence along the Colombian border, overdependence on the petroleum industry with its price fluctuations, and irresponsible mining operations that are endangering the rain forest and indigenous peoples.⁴⁷

Chavez blocked an improvement when he rejected the Administration’s nomination of Ambassador Larry Palmer in mid-2010. In May 2011, the Obama Administration slapped modest sanctions on the Venezuelan national oil company (PDVSA) and on Venezuela’s military arms company. The names of four senior

government officials were added to the “drug kingpins” list, joining designated General Henry Rangel Silva, who Chavez defiantly elevated to the position of Minister of Defense in December 2011.⁴⁸ The role of Venezuela as a transshipment point for Colombian cocaine continued unabated. Chavez also continues to be the biggest single supporter of the Castro regime in Cuba and in 2011 Venezuela became the largest foreign market for Russian-made arms.⁴⁹

On the global stage, Chavez has aligned with Iran, Syria, and with Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi until his demise. The cooperation with Iran and the shameful support of Syria continues to expand. In February 2012, Venezuela began making oil deliveries to Syria to help drive Bashir al-Assad’s armor as it shelled cities and killed civilians in resistance centers such as Homs. Before the international press, Chavez demonstrated neither concern for the atrocious human rights situation nor for the massacre of civilians. In an interview in December 2011, President Obama went on the record to express growing concerns for the Venezuelan situation.⁵⁰ The proposed reset policy of 2009 had clearly failed.

-
44. Kim R. Holmes, “Time for a New International Game Plan,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2231, January 22, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2009/01/time-for-a-new-international-game-plan>.
 45. Dan Restrepo, “US-Venezuela Policy: A Reality Based Approach,” Center for American Progress: The Americas Project, December 2006, at <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/12/pdf/venezuela.pdf> (accessed March 26, 2012).
 46. Barack Obama, press conference, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, April 19, 2009, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/press-conference-president-trinidad-and-tobago-4192009> (accessed March 26, 2012).
 47. Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook: Venezuela,” February 21, 2012, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ve.html> (accessed March 13, 2012).
 48. “U.S. Sanctions Venezuelan Officials for Allegedly Helping FARC Rebels,” CNN World, September 8, 2011, at http://articles.cnn.com/2011-09-08/world/venezuela.ofac.list_1_farc-rebels-venezuelan-officials-venezuelan-government?_s=PM:WORLD (accessed March 26, 2012).
 49. General Douglas M. Fraser (USAF), “Posture Statement,” before the Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, March 30, 2011, at http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/files/serve?File_id=fcc6b631-6b51-4bdb-b0a0-6b97ea36cb58 (accessed March 26, 2012).
 50. Reyes Theis, “Venezuelan Govt’s Ties to Iran and Cuba Have Not Served Its Interests,” *El Universal*, December 19, 2011, at <http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/111219/venezuelan-govts-ties-to-iran-and-cuba-have-not-served-its-interests> (accessed March 26, 2012).

On February 12, 2012, Venezuela's democratic opposition organized the nation's first ever presidential primary. The process drew an extraordinary 3 million voters out of 18 million registered voters. In polarized Venezuela, beset by a multitude of problems, the selection of Henrique Capriles Radonski as the opposition candidate to Chavez is a potential game changer.⁵¹ Capriles's strengths are his young age, government experience, energy, and readiness to view politics in Venezuela as a positive-sum game. He has promised to emulate Brazil's popular Lula da Silva by following a social democratic course and protecting the social gains made on behalf of the poor. He also promises a major reorientation of foreign policy. "At stake in the October 2012 presidential elections," reported Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, "is whether the essential characteristics of President Chavez's 12 years in power—the weakening of democratic institutions and representative democracy, and virulent anti-U.S. foreign policy—persist and even deepen, or begin to reverse."⁵²

From the start, Chavez and his followers have engaged in vile and poisonous attacks that include manifest anti-Semitism, which merit rebuke by all democratic leaders. The future of democracy in Venezuela lies in the balance as Chavez seeks his third full presidential term.

However, the battle for control of the executive is marked by extreme uncertainty over Chavez's health and his battle against a recurring cancer. In the backdrop are succession issues in the event of Chavez's incapacitation or death and the ability of the Chavista regime to continue without its popular, almost mythical, leader.⁵³

It is a clear but unspoken assumption that the U.S. would—from a national-interest standpoint—be much better off with a more democratic, less anti-American leader at the helm in Caracas. Moreover, the potential upside of a change is far more positive than the current uncertainties beneath upheavals and governance issues in the Arab world. These include a potential breakup of the anti-American coalition of ALBA and increased pressure for real change in Cuba. Yet, the challenge for the Obama Administration and for American foreign policy in general is how to support or advance a peaceful democratic change in Venezuela in a nation ruled by an elected leader who declares himself an open and unyielding enemy of the U.S. The hazards of appearing to intervene directly in Venezuela and further fueling Chavez's already rampant nationalism must be balanced with a natural desire to support fellow democrats with moral and material assistance, particularly when they face an uneven electoral playing field.

A need remains for an Obama policy, as political scientist Tom Carothers puts it, that pursues a "transformational narrative" that posits democracy as a key priority or leitmotiv of foreign policy.⁵⁴

At the Cartagena Summit, President Obama must signal that the U.S. is closely monitoring Venezuela's electoral process. He must indicate that the U.S. supports a free and fair process, electoral transparency, and a robust international observation mission that needs to be on the ground prior to October 7. He should also state that the legitimacy of the elections will be gauged by the conduct of the campaign and reiterate that free and fair elections entail equality of access to the media, freedom from government-sponsored intimidation and harassment, and protection of the secrecy of the vote.

In the event of an electoral change, which is a distinct possibility, the U.S. must be prepared to pressure Chavez to accept the will of the electorate and establish a Friends of Venezuela process to aid a democratic transition. As former U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) official Jose Cardenas correctly points out, the U.S. is the only player positioned to mobilize a multinational effort to defend the democratic process in Venezuela should conditions radically deteriorate.⁵⁵

51. Jackson Diehl, "Venezuela's Hugo Chavez Faces an Uprising at the Ballot Box," *The Washington Post*, February 19, 2012, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/venezuelas-hugo-chavez-faces-an-uprising-at-the-ballot-box/2012/02/17/gIQAfApFOR_story.html (accessed March 26, 2012).

52. James R Clapper, "World Wide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community," unclassified statement before the Select Committee on Intelligence, U.S. Senate, February 16, 2012, at http://www.dni.gov/testimonies/20120216_SASC%20Final%20Unclassified%20-%202012%20ATA%20SFR.pdf (accessed March 26, 2012).

53. Jose R. Cardenas, "Preparing for a Post-Hugo Venezuela," *Foreign Policy*, Shadow Government, July 15, 2011, at http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/15/preparing_for_a_post_hugo_venezuela (accessed March 26, 2012).

54. Thomas Carothers, "Obama's Reclaimed, Revitalized Democracy Policy," *Democracy Digest*, January 13, 2012, at <http://www.demdigest.net/blog/2012/01/obamas-reclaimed-revitalized-democracy-policy/> (accessed March 26, 2012).

55. Jose R. Cardenas, "What Happens Next in Venezuela?" *Foreign Policy*, Shadow Government, February 24, 2012, at http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/02/24/what_happens_next_in_venezuela (accessed March 26, 2012).

Liberty for Cuba

Fifty-two years after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the liberation of Eastern Europe, Cuba remains the great anti-democratic outlier. In May 2008, an optimistic candidate Obama promised to “pursue direct diplomacy, with friend and foe alike, without preconditions.”⁵⁶ He called for a “new beginning with Cuba.” Between 2009 and 2011, the Obama Administration delivered two tranches of liberalization measures designed to open unlimited movement for Cuban Americans, allow major increases in remittances, and slacken restrictions on licensed travel, that is, regulated tourism. Calling visitors the best ambassadors, the Administration has continued to bank on the ability of people-to-people contacts to erode the solid foundations of political tyranny. This has been acceptable to the Castro regime because it reduces tensions and the Cubans’ sense of isolation, and increases the flow of scarce dollars, while allowing Cuban security to keep close tabs on well-policed visitors.

President Obama should demonstrate that the U.S. stance on Cuba is consistent with the same values and principles he has vocally supported during the Arab Spring. Only a dismantling of Cuban totalitarianism will lead to a full restoration of relations between Cuba and the U.S.

Under Raul Castro, the Cuban regime has sought to camouflage its

deplorable human rights record. It sent into exile most of its prominent political prisoners unjustly imprisoned in the “Black Spring” of 2003. While the regime moved forward with a program of limited economic liberalization that allow sales of property, self-employment, and independent farming—perhaps dramatic changes considering the island’s draconian Communist past—it continues a cynical game of repression. It has, however, switched its repression tactics to a lower intensity pattern of temporary arrest, harassment, beatings, and intimidation.

Raul Castro is trying to prepare the Cuban Communist Party for the next generation of leadership, allowing a degree of self-criticism, adding more women and minorities, and trying to root out corruption. Yet, he has made clear that there is no space for any organized opposition, nor has he recognized a plurality of political interests. Freedom of assembly, opinion, speech, and travel are still fully constricted. Citizens can still be incarcerated simply for being considered dangerous to regime.

The arrest and conviction of USAID contractor Alan Gross for “espionage” has been a serious setback for the Obama Administration’s goal of improving relations with the Cuban regime. Gross’s efforts to deliver computer equipment to Jewish groups in eastern Cuba represented the more aggressive side of democracy promotion but was not espionage.⁵⁷ Sentenced to 15 years in prison, Gross is held as a

hostage to Cuba’s political intolerance and paranoia. Repeated efforts to obtain his release by prominent Democrats—Governor Bill Richardson and Senator Patrick Leahy to name two—have failed to soften Raul Castro’s heart.⁵⁸ Critics of the Administration argue that if it were serious about gaining Gross’s release, it would apply pressure and threaten to restrict travel and remittance flows to Cuba, a step the Obama Administration has thus far been unwilling to make. Even at the summit, without the presence of Raul Castro, the shadow of the Gross case and the memory of an American citizen unjustly imprisoned in Havana should animate the actions of an American President.

In March 2011, in Santiago, Chile, President Obama sounded less ambivalent, promising to “seek ways to increase the independence of the Cuban people, who I believe are entitled to the same freedom and liberty as everyone else in this hemisphere.”⁵⁹ At Cartagena, he must perform heavy lifting, since others are either allied with the Cuban regime or have decided that criticizing Cuba’s still-deplorable human rights record or demanding it undertake real democratic change are no longer part of their foreign policy. Left-leaning democrats like Brazil’s Dilma Rousseff suddenly go mute and weak-kneed when visiting revolutionary artifacts like the Castro brothers. President Obama should demonstrate that the U.S. stance on Cuba is fully consistent with America’s values and principles.

56. Jeff Zeleny, “Obama, in Miami, Calls for Engaging with Cuba,” *The New York Times*, May 24, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/24/us/politics/24campaign.html> (accessed March 26, 2012).

57. Juan O. Tamayo, “Details of Cuba’s Case Against U.S. Subcontractor Alan Gross Leak Out,” *The Miami Herald*, January 26, 2012, at <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/01/26/2609266/details-of-cubas-case-against.html> (accessed March 26, 2012).

58. Mary Beth Sheridan, “Richardson Rebuffed in Effort to Free Alan Gross,” *The Washington Post*, September 11, 2011, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/richardson-comes-up-empty-handed-in-effort-to-free-alan-gross/2011/09/11/gIQAurZeKK_story.html (accessed March 26, 2012).

59. News release, “Remarks by President Obama on Latin America in Santiago, Chile.”

Markets, Trade, and Economic Freedom Should Lead the Way

Latin America and the Caribbean represent an immensely important trading partner and a huge market with more than 580 million consumers and a \$6 trillion economy—equal in size to China's. Nearly 50.5 million residents of Hispanic and Brazilian descent in the U.S. create a natural bridge between the various countries. In 2010, U.S. exports to the region totaled \$301.8 billion, 22 percent of U.S. global exports, second only to Europe, and well over three times the value of goods exported to China. Exports to the region have grown at an annual average rate of 7.2 percent since 2005, and have generated approximately 1.9 million export-related jobs.

The Obama Administration can bring additional economic dynamism to the summit by capitalizing on existing free-trade agreements and broadening participation for countries ready to lower trade barriers in the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

At the summit, the Obama Administration can keep trade on the agenda by highlighting the expanding dynamics of trade and opportunity and building confidence at home and abroad that existing trade agreements, including NAFTA, Central America (CAFTA), and

those with Chile, and Peru are working as intended. One of the keys is to rebuild the foundations of economic trust and demonstrate that reciprocal liberalization continues to benefit all parties. A recovering U.S. and expanding Latin American economies need to speak a common language on key issues, such as competitiveness, innovation, education, productivity, and regulation reform.

For the past two years, President Obama has highlighted fresh efforts to expand the number of export-related jobs.⁶⁰ The President's ambition is to double the number by 2015. The State Department says it is paying closer attention to what it calls "economic statecraft" in an effort to use its diplomats to push back against corruption, red tape, favoritism, distorted currencies, and intellectual property theft.⁶¹ Although the details remain sketchy and many are wary of backdoor protectionism, the Administration has also promised to put in place a world class trade enforcement system.⁶² The President must commit to rapid implementation of the FTAs with Colombia and Panama which were passed in October 2011.

In the run-up to the summit, the Administration has indicated that a central feature of trade policy will be the creation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which the

Administration promises will "drive a new wave of high-standard, socially responsible, growth-generating trade liberalization throughout the greater Pacific." Forward-looking friends of freer trade strongly recommend that the TPP be broadened beyond the present proposed membership of Chile and Peru to include Mexico, Canada, and other nations, as long as they are genuinely committed to reducing trade barriers.⁶³ The Administration should also—before and after the summit—"move aggressively to consolidate the welter of free-trade agreements it currently has into a larger market."⁶⁴ As Eric Farnsworth of the Council of the Americas recommended, "existing Western Hemisphere agreements should be put under one umbrella" in order to unlock the full potential of existing agreements.⁶⁵

The Obama Administration must also continue to pursue a nuts-and-bolts approach to facilitating trade and investment opportunities. This means exploring a broad range of practical ideas for market-access agreements, tax treaties, and export-licensing reform. It will mean continued efforts to innovate and promote the export of U.S. cultural products. Recent attention paid to streamlining the visa application process was a step in the right direction. Additions to an updated visa waiver program

60. The White House, "Executive Order 13534-National Export Initiative," March 11, 2010, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/executive-order-national-export-initiative> (accessed March 26, 2012).

61. Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Keynote Address at Global Business Conference," Washington, DC, February 21, 2012, at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2012/02/184284.htm> (accessed March 26, 2012).

62. News release, "Remarks by the President to UAW Conference," The White House, February 28, 2012, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/28/remarks-president-uaw-conference> (accessed March 26, 2012).

63. Enda Curran, "Mexico Pushes to Join Pacific Talks," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 20, 2012, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203358704577234720753312052.html> (accessed March 26, 2012).

64. Sabatini, "Rethinking Latin America."

65. Eric Farnsworth, "What Now for Hemispheric Trade?" *Poder360*, December/January 2011, p. 18, at <http://www.as-coa.org/article.php?id=3829> (accessed March 26, 2012).

are critical, as is greater attention to accelerating and enlarging issuance of resident visas for engineers, researchers, innovators, and others in demand by U.S. firms, universities, and research centers and keeping the U.S. a magnet for talent. Those concerned about the economic viability of the Caribbean urged that the Administration also work toward an updated Trade and Investment Framework Agreement with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Although China has surpassed the U.S. as Brazil's largest trade partner, U.S.-Brazilian trade in goods continues to rise substantially. Total trade grew from \$28.2 billion in 2002 to \$64 billion in 2009. The U.S. continues to run a trade surplus with Brazil; it was \$14 billion in 2009. The U.S. and Brazil can work together on a large range of trade and commercial issues, many of which were identified during President Obama's visit to Brazil in March 2011.⁶⁶ The development of sectoral agreements on clean energy technology or autos has the prospects of making freer trade more attractive to Brasilia.⁶⁷ Another need is for a bilateral tax treaty to eliminate double taxation on investment. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, Brazil is the only country with a GDP greater than \$1 trillion that does not have a taxation treaty with the U.S.⁶⁸

President Obama should also bore down to the core factors that sustain economic growth. These time-honored and empirically proven factors include enhanced economic freedom, protection of property rights, and rule of law.⁶⁹ Economic freedom creates the environment of innovation, entrepreneurship, and individuality that drives sustained development by giving individuals the confidence and opportunities they require to succeed. The President must also speak out against the range of threats to cherished freedoms and equal opportunity that include currency manipulation, government subsidies (of which the U.S. is also a major offender), dumping, as well as abandonment of international arbitration in investment disputes and biased judgments of law that inflict punitive and unrealistic damages, as recently occurred against Chevron in Ecuador.

From Green Energy to Energy Development and Security

By April 2012, the price of gasoline for the American consumer may approach record highs. Energy policy in the U.S. and its energy relations with the rest of the Americas is a critical topic, vital to the recovery of the U.S. economy, and one that requires substantial attention at the Sixth Summit.

A balanced mix and realistic market-based strategy for America's energy future based on the greater security of domestic and Hemispheric sources for petroleum, gas, coal, nuclear, and other clean energy will build confidence in the future and solidify ties with Hemispheric energy partners and consumers.

For the Americas, the Obama Administration's approach to energy policy has been focused primarily on promoting and delivering government subsidies and loans to clean energy, along with research and development grants to non-carbon energy producers. It is modest reflection of the much larger domestic effort to "pick winners" in the race for 21st-century energy supply. At home, the Administration continues to encourage "commercializing politically preferred technologies" and these same preferences tend to prevail in its foreign energy policy.⁷⁰

The Obama Administration is quick to throw at Americans frightening, but often misleading, statistics that warn that the U.S. annually consumes 20 percent of the world's petroleum production, but contains only 2 percent of the world's proven reserves.⁷¹ In other words, a resource-short future is just around the corner. This pessimism is being countered by the expansion of

66. Samuel W. Bodman and James D. Wolfensohn, "Global Brazil and U.S.-Brazil Relations," Council on Foreign Relations *Task Force Report* No. 66, July 12, 2011, at <http://www.cfr.org/brazil/global-brazil-us-brazil-relations/p25407> (accessed March 26, 2012).

67. Eric Farnsworth, "The Next Chapter in Trade," *Poder360*, July 20, 2011, at http://www.poder360.com/article_detail.php?id_article=5809 (accessed March 26, 2012).

68. Bodman and Wolfensohn, "Global Brazil and U.S.-Brazil Relations."

69. Terry Miller, Kim R. Holmes, and Edwin J. Feulner, 2012 *Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation and Dow Jones & Company, Inc., 2012) pp. 121-122, at <http://www.heritage.org/index>.

70. Mike Brownfield, "Reaction Roundup: Heritage Responds to Obama's 2013 Budget Proposal," Heritage Foundation, The Foundry, February 13, 2012, at <http://blog.heritage.org/2012/02/13/reaction-roundup-heritage-responds-to-obamas-2013-budget-proposal/> (accessed March 26, 2012).

71. David Kreutzer, "Wind Power Addiction?" *Town Hall Magazine*, July 23, 2010, at http://townhall.com/columnists/davidkreutzer/2010/07/23/wind_power_addiction/page/full/ (accessed March 26, 2012).

massive new recovery ventures and the exploitation of existing technologies, such as nuclear power, that continue to attract commercially viable investments and increasing energy output in the U.S.

With only grudging support from Obama's Administration, the U.S. has already reduced its dependence on foreign petroleum from 60 percent of the oil that America consumes to less than half the petroleum it consumed before. The Energy Information Administration (EIA) predicts, in fact, that net petroleum imports will shrink to 43 percent of total U.S. liquid fuel consumption by 2035.⁷²

More than 80 percent of America's energy today comes from fossil fuels. It is also estimated that about 75 percent to 80 percent of world energy will still be derived from carbon-based sources two decades from now. In his recent investigation of the global energy situation, *The Quest*, Daniel Yergin argued that "the outline of a new world oil map is emerging, and it is centered not on the Middle East, but on the Western Hemisphere."⁷³ He points to Canada, Brazil, and the U.S. as dominant players on this new map offering the potential for the U.S. to achieve even greater energy security. Still, the White House urges Americans to fight for the "clean energy future that's within our reach."⁷⁴

On January 18, 2012, President Obama, siding with environmentalists, denied the permits needed to move forward with the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline. If and when constructed, the pipeline will transport heavy crude oil from Canada's abundant tar sands to refineries on the Gulf Coast. The Keystone project would have created thousands of jobs and reduced dangerous dependence on oil from more volatile sources, including Venezuela, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia.

The Obama Administration determined that because of potential environmental impact in the "uniquely sensitive" Sand Hills in Nebraska, construction on the proposed route failed to serve "national interest."⁷⁵ Others saw the decision differently. "President Barrack Obama's decision to block the Keystone XL pipeline... was motivated by his desire to mollify one of the more extreme segments of his constituency in an election year—not by a long term vision of nurturing the vital U.S.–Canada energy relationship."⁷⁶

The Canadian reaction was one of disappointment. In late January 2012, Prime Minister Stephen Harper traveled to Beijing. High on his agenda was discussion of Canada's future energy exports. The upcoming summit will be the first face-to-face meeting since President Obama fumbled the ball on the

Keystone XL. He needs to repair the damage.

Unveiled with fanfare at the 2009 Summit, the Energy and Climate Partnership 2009 requires an overhaul and upgrade in order to create a high-powered, public–private strategy aimed at mapping and securing deeper, more effective cooperation on energy development and security. It must begin with oil and gas and radiate toward cleaner sources from nuclear to renewable energy sources, such as bio-fuels, solar, tidal, and wind power. The Administration needs a comprehensive, bipartisan strategy for "getting to yes" on the Keystone Pipeline, integrating clean energy across the U.S.–Mexican border and for advancing work already done with Brazil's energy sector. Colombia, too, is on line as a major energy producer and the FTA will help. The Administration must also devote attention to the Caribbean where new challenges and opportunities include building underwater grids and the conversion of electrical generation from oil to liquefied natural gas. A more balanced and realistic market-based strategy for America's energy future will build confidence in the future and solidify ties with hemispheric energy partners and consumers.

72. U.S. Energy Information Administration, "AEO2012 EARLY Release Overview: Energy Productions and Imports, 1980–2035," January 23, 2012, at http://www.eia.gov/forecasts/aeo/er/early_production.cfm (accessed March 26, 2012).

73. Daniel Yergin, "Oil's New World Order," *The Washington Post*, October 28, 2011, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/daniel-yergin-for-the-future-of-oil-look-to-the-americas-not-the-middle-east/2011/10/18/gIQAxw7L_story.html (accessed March 26, 2012).

74. Weekly address, "Taking Control of our Energy Future," The White House, March 3, 2012, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/03/03/weekly-address-taking-control-our-energy-future> (accessed March 26, 2012).

75. U.S. Department of State, "Denial of the Keystone XL Pipeline Application," Media Note, January 18, 2012, at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/01/181473.htm> (accessed March 26, 2012).

76. Vaclav Smil, "Nice Oil Imports You've Got There. Shame if You Lost Them," *Foreign Policy*, February 29, 2012, at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/29/nice_oil_imports_you_ve_got_there_would_be_a_shame_if_you_lost_them (accessed March 14, 2012).

Salvaging the Inter-American System

Several Members of the U.S. Congress have introduced measures aimed at reducing the roughly \$60 million that the U.S. provides the OAS. Feeling that U.S. interests and values are being poorly served by the regional body, the Members seek to reduce contributions to the OAS, or exit it entirely. Yet, either of these moves would accomplish the objectives of Chavez and ALBA, who also want to destroy the last remaining symbol of hemispheric unity. Without the OAS, the U.S. would have the United Nations and voluntary communities of nations as the only alternative to bilateral relations. Other components of the inter-American system—the Inter-American Development Bank and the inter-American defense system, weak as it may be—would also soon be called into question. With the Inter-American Democratic Charter as its guide, the U.S. must work to ensure that those who are elected democratically govern democratically.

Efforts at reform of the OAS need to focus on a range of issues from financial management, staffing, and democracy support to improving the quality of leadership. Many believe the time has come to replace current Secretary General Miguel Insulza with a former elected president from one of several OAS member states in order to bring greater energy, stature, vision, and leadership to the body. The critical challenge is developing an institution that is more than a debating society and a haven for socially conscious diplomats hungry

for a Washington assignment or a punching bag for anti-Americans like Hugo Chavez.

The crux of the challenge was outlined nearly a decade ago by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice when she stated that “the Democratic Charter must become the core of a principled, effective multilateralism for the Americas. Together, we must insist that leaders who are elected democratically have a responsibility to govern democratically.”⁷⁷ In the Bush Administration, efforts were made to establish a mechanism within the OAS that would monitor threats to democracy and serve as a form of early warning when democratic breakdowns occurred. The idea was resisted by Chavez who claimed the U.S. wanted to establish a dictatorship over the region and by other Latin states as an unwarranted extension of OAS authority.

Double standards within the OAS were reflected in Honduras in June 2009. Those responsible for removing President Manuel Zelaya and conservative defenders of constitutional order argued the action was justified by a lurch to the left and a series of major violations of the Honduran constitution that led to Zelaya’s expulsion from office and the country. They argued, as did this author, that the measures taken, albeit draconian, were consistent with the national constitution.⁷⁸ The Obama Administration, on the other hand, sided with the majority in the OAS, called the events of June 2009 a coup, and joined in expelling Honduras from the OAS and levying a series of punitive measures

against the interim government. Yet, before and after June 2009, leaders in Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela engaged in widespread and systematic dismantling of the safeguards and protections of representative democracy with scarcely a word of protest or response within the OAS. While the Obama Administration later recognized the legitimacy of the November 2009 elections and restored full relations with the government of Honduran President Porfirio Lobo Sosa, the damage was done. The current state of polarization, institutional weakness, corruption, and criminality in Honduras has its origins, at least in part, in the turmoil of 2009 and 2010.

As it develops its democratic strategy, the Obama Administration must also rebuild confidence in the integrity of the OAS. The Administration should begin by identifying what has worked before and pinpointing those elements with which genuine democrats identify. In the past, OAS electoral observation missions have often gained international respect for their quality and integrity. These missions should continue. Additional attention should be paid to strengthening the authority of those elements that serve as watchdogs for the rights of the people, not governments, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Recent reports by the commission, such as its 2010 comprehensive report on Venezuela, angered Chavez but provided documentation of his government’s tendency to minimize rights, concentrate executive power, and collapse independent elements of society. The 2010 report argued that observance

77. “Remarks by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the General Assembly of the Organization of American States,” Organization of American States, June 5, 2005, at http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/speech.asp?sCodigo=05-0110 (accessed March 26, 2012).

78. Ray Walsler, James Roberts, and Israel Ortega, “U.S. Should Endorse Honduras Elections Results,” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2711, November 30, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2009/11/us-should-endorse-honduras-elections-results> (accessed March 14, 2012).

of “other fundamental rights cannot be sacrificed for the sake of realizing economic, social and cultural rights in Venezuela.”⁷⁹ The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is an active voice that needs to be preserved.

There is little doubt that the chief obstacle to strengthening the OAS is not the readiness of the U.S. to press for a commitment to stronger democracy enforcement, but the absence of agreement or political will by member states. Deeply wedded to principles of non-intervention and inclined to suspicions about the U.S., OAS member states often balk when it comes to challenging the actions of their peers. As OAS Secretary General Insulza has often declared, the organization can only be as effective as its members desire it to be. Several Latin American leaders, like Chavez and Ecuador’s Correa, call for even more toothless bodies in new organizations like CELAC as they work to undercut the credibility of the OAS’s democracy and human rights monitoring.

The Obama Administration cannot abandon the search for a better democratic mechanism. It should adopt, as a minimum goal, the issue of a voluntary or peer review process or the establishment of a democracy rapporteur. The U.S. can also collaborate with other OAS members to

either reinforce or establish monitoring bodies or observatories beyond the OAS framework. Progress on a democratic minimum should be forthcoming at Cartagena.

Combating Transnational Crime

Whether it is the shock of nearly 50,000 homicides in Mexico since December 2006, or the horrific February 2012 prison fire in Honduras that claimed 358 inmates, many of whom were locked up without trial because of a clogged and ineffective justice system, the sense of insecurity in the region is palpable. It is difficult to calmly discuss issues of trade, clean energy, or the environment when much of the region appears engulfed in a sanguinary Hobbesian conflict without rules or quarter, or what Robert Kaplan once described as signs of the “coming anarchy.”⁸⁰ While U.S. security experts continue to debate the nature of the threat—criminal insurgency, asymmetric warfare, “net-war,” or third-generation warfare—America’s partners in Mexico and Central America often view the U.S. as a net exporter of insecurity.⁸¹ The consumption of an estimated 800 to 1,000 metric tons of cocaine (not counting with heroin, methamphetamines, and marijuana) generates an estimated \$35 million in revenue.

Against these massive amounts of criminal profits, U.S. security and counter-drug assistance seems insufficient.

Few issues are more complex, or difficult to resolve, than the persistent linkages of transnational crime, drug consumption and abuse, and citizen insecurity in the Americas. President Obama needs to advance a multi-faceted strategy to strengthen security abroad while committing to enhanced drug-demand-reduction efforts at home.

America’s neighbors’ unease and uncertainty about present policies has been reflected in various studies and hints that the time has come for a discussion of “market alternatives” and legalization as the pressure mounts from abroad and at home to consider the possibility of legalizing marijuana. The Obama Administration does not want drug policy to become a wedge issue at the Sixth Summit, and sent Vice President Joseph Biden to Mexico and Central America in early March 2012 to try to quiet the questioning.⁸² Biden reiterated the Administration’s view that legalization of marijuana is not the correct policy choice.

The White House blows hot and cold on the issues. Senior officials have pronounced the war on drugs a failure and confessed it is, after all, a

79. Rory Carroll, “Chavez Furious as OAS Rights Watchdog Accuses Him of Endangering Democracy,” *The Guardian*, February 25, 2010, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/25/oas-report-chavez-human-rights> (accessed March 26, 2012).

80. Robert D. Kaplan “The Coming Anarchy,” *The Atlantic*, February 1994, at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1994/02/the-coming-anarchy/4670/> (accessed March 26, 2012).

81. Colonel Robert Killebrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas and Beyond,” Center for a New American Security *Prism* Vol. 2, No. 3 (June 2011), at http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/images/prism2-3/Prism_33-52_Killebrew.pdf (accessed March 14, 2012); John Arquilla and Dave Ronfeldt, “Networks and Networks: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy,” RAND Corporation, 2001, at <http://faculty.cbpp.uaa.alaska.edu/afgjp/padm610/networks%20and%20netwar.pdf> (accessed March 26, 2012); and Max G. Manwaring, “State and Nonstate Associated Gangs: Credible ‘Midwives of New Social Orders,’” Strategic Studies Institute, May 22, 2009, at http://www26.us.archive.org/stream/StateAndNonstateAssociatedGangsCredibleMidwivesOfNewSocialOrders/14-StateAndNonstate_djvu.txt (accessed March 26, 2012).

82. Randal C. Archibold, “U.S. Remains Opposed to Drug Legalization, Biden tells Region,” *The New York Times*, March 5, 2012, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/06/world/americas/us-remains-against-drug-legalization-in-mexico-biden-says.html> (accessed March 26, 2012).

war on the American people. Yet they continue to employ the supply reduction, interdiction, and anti-kingpin efforts they previously questioned. While the Obama Administration has undertaken to redefine the “war on drugs” as a campaign for citizen security, it has shied away from any major resource commitment on the scale of the previous Plan Colombia. In fact, as the fiscal crisis in the U.S. grows, resources are trending downward.

Capabilities gaps between criminal organizations and state institutions remain substantial.⁸³ When a helicopter of Guatemala’s armed forces was involved in a fatal crash, the government lost one-third of its airborne capability. The most recent International Narcotics Control Strategy Report warned that security gains in Colombia were not irreversible. General Douglas Fraser, the commander of the U.S. Southern Command, reported that forces under his command are spread thin and miss interdiction opportunities because ships and other assets are needed in other theaters.⁸⁴ The largest reduction in assistance to the region in the State Department’s FY 2013 budget request will take place in the area of counter-narcotics assistance. The Obama Administration seems to be trying to extinguish a raging four-alarm fire with an unreliable garden hose.

In general, the White House prefers to see drug consumption as more

of a social and health issue rather than one of criminality, morality, or national security. It has turned away from the Puritanical or prohibitionist “Just Say No” stance in favor of a more nuanced approach aimed at mitigating and reducing drug harm. Furthermore, the White House prefers maintaining a low profile when tackling consumption at home. At its start, the Obama Administration removed Office of National Drug Control Policy Gil Kerlikowske from cabinet status. President Obama has yet to show genuine indignation and outrage at the barbarism and slaughter occurring not only in Mexico and Central America, but also in the U.S. Drawing on the analogy of consciousness-raising and shame-inducing campaigns against “blood diamonds,” the White House should play a less passive role in directing public attention to the toll that drug consumption takes in form of human lives and its costs at home and abroad. While it might run against certain cultural norms, Washington in general needs to be more aggressive in its efforts to deglamorize habits of abuse and dependence that have become a way of life for far too many people in the U.S.

President Obama can seek areas of common ground with fellow leaders by directing fresh attention to joint anti-money-laundering and anti-corruption efforts and to strategies for strengthening of law enforcement and judicial institutions. They

need to agree on a set of strategic guidelines for future security cooperation, along with appropriate benchmarks. Recently, a National Security Council official promised that the President was ready to engage in a “robust dialogue” on how to combat transnational criminal organizations.⁸⁵ There is need for a coordinated, intelligence-driven strategy to concentrate manpower and resources on the highest-value, most violent targets in order to disrupt or sever existing supply chains. The President can highlight best-practice operations, such as the very successful Joint Task Force–South at Key West, Florida, which draws strong multinational participation.⁸⁶ He must also press his counterparts to look deeply and honestly at their national institutions and respective political cultures in order to fight persistent corruption and impunity. The battle against organized crime is and will remain central to U.S.–Latin American relations. It merits more than cursory discussion at the Cartagena Summit.

Global Responsibility, Global Peace

The Cartagena Summit cannot be isolated from the wider global context of U.S. leadership and responsibility in global affairs. While many might wish to keep a compartmentalized focus on hemispheric issues, as the leader of the free world, President Obama must adopt a wider

83. U.S. Department of State, “FY 2013 Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations,” March 2012, at <http://www.state.gov/f/releases/iab/fy2013cbj/index.htm> (accessed March 26, 2012).

84. Brian Bennett, “U.S. Military’s Ability to Stop Drug Smuggling Declines,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 2012, at <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/mar/08/world/la-fg-us-drugs-20120308> (accessed March 26, 2012).

85. Press briefing, “Briefing on Vice President Biden’s Trip to Mexico, Honduras,” The White House, March 2, 2012, at <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/03/20120302165719ellenaj0.2497479.html#axzz1p7AKtGuF> (accessed March 26, 2012).

86. Evan Munsing and Christopher J. Lamb, “Joint Insurgency Task Force–South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success,” National Defense University Strategic Perspectives No. 5 (June 2011), at http://www.ndu.edu/inss/docuploaded/Strat%20Perspectives%205%20_%20Lamb-Munsing.pdf (accessed March 26, 2012).

view. He must seize the moment to renew efforts to enlist real support against the gravest threat to global security.

In March 2011, he highlighted the role of democracy in the Western Hemisphere and the transitions made from military rule to democracy in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile as an example of hope for a more stable and democratic future that merited study by those reshaping politics in the Arab Spring. Faced with an Iran intent on developing a nuclear weapons capability that threatens Israel with extinction and could cause permanent instability in the Middle East, the President must appeal to his fellow presidents to stand with the U.S. and others before Iran reaches the point of no return.

President Obama must encourage hemispheric friends and partners to join the U.S. to help maintain international peace through a diplomatic offensive aimed at Iran and its ambitions to obtain a nuclear weapon.

If the Obama Administration seriously hopes to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon through non-military means, it needs support from every friendly nation in the hemisphere. In short, the U.S. needs Brazil, Mexico, and others to play their part as responsible global stakeholders. Recalling Iraq in 2003, the U.S. will also need broad global support if it undertakes military action and wishes to avoid the same international backlash experienced by the Bush Administration. For a presidency that has staked much on building a global architecture of multilateralism this is a must.

President Obama should buttress his arguments by underscoring the continued commitment of Latin American nations to preserving an environment free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. This tradition of peace was enshrined in the Treaty of Tlatelolco (1967) and all Summit participants are signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Twenty-two are members of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). President Obama must be forthcoming in order to reinforce a message focused on the critical nature of achieving an end to Iran's drive for a nuclear weapon and warn in the starkest terms of the consequences of Iran's failure to reach an acceptable and verifiable agreement on the nuclear issue. While Washington's focus is often on Russia, China, and the European Union, Latin American nations have a part to play in applying diplomatic pressure and in complying with tightening financial and commercial sanctions on Iran. They must not allow the war-threatening Iranian regime a safety valve in the Americas.

The reverse of the coin is also important. President Obama should not be afraid to expose the shameful and irresponsible behavior of those in the region who have ceased functioning as responsible actors and are aligning with rogue regimes and tyrants. He needs to shine a light on the behaviors, such as ALBA's diplomatic support for Syria. He cannot dance around the fact that Iran has achieved a strategic beachhead in the Americas, nor can he ignore the fact

that elements of Iran's Revolutionary Guard have already plotted to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington. Most recently, his Director of National Intelligence warned that Iran might target the U.S. itself and the Latin American/Caribbean region could become a platform for terror attacks against the U.S.⁸⁷

Venezuela's relationship with Iran represents a latent but growing threat to U.S. and inter-American security. Chavez has proclaimed an "axis of unity" with Iran. Ties between the nations continue to deepen on the commercial and military fronts. The mullahs and the *Chavistas* share a desire to see the U.S. humbled and weakened in the international arena. Senator Lugar recently warned that "countries that support Teheran, such as Venezuela, could be tempted to serve as proxies for Iran around the world and in coordination with Iran openly challenge the United States."⁸⁸ The Senator added that "the chances of Venezuela serving as Iran's surrogate in the hemisphere through terrorism or other coordinated action are increased by its chaotic state of affairs."⁸⁹

Thirty years after the Falklands War between the United Kingdom and Argentina, President Obama needs to address gathering tensions over the Falklands. Argentina continues a campaign of economic pressure aimed at isolating the islands and punishing the islanders and Britain for the defense of the principle of self-determination. The Obama Administration recognizes

87. Clapper, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence."

88. Senator Richard G. Lugar, "Growing Risk Posed by Iran-Venezuela Axis," *The Miami Herald*, February 15, 2012, at http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/02/15/2643399_growing-risk-posed-by-iran-venezuela.html#storylink=twuser (accessed March 26, 2012).

89. Steven Johnson, "Iran's Influence in the Americas," Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2012, at http://csis.org/files/publication/120312_Johnson_Iran%27sInfluence_web.pdf (accessed March 26, 2012).

de facto British administration of the Falklands, but does not take a position regarding sovereignty over the islands. The State Department argues that the dispute “is a bilateral issue that needs to be worked out directly between the governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom.”⁹⁰

At the summit, Argentina’s President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, who has decried the “militarization” of the South Atlantic and called for the United Nations to address the issue, will likely attempt to maneuver President Obama to fall in line and side with Argentina’s demand for negotiations that she believes will lead to recognition of Argentina’s claim to full sovereignty over the islands, an act that would offend the United Kingdom deeply and further undermine the “special relationship” with America’s vital transatlantic partner.

Time to Advance U.S. Interests and Values

Michael Shifter, president of the Inter-American Dialogue, observed that for the Obama Administration “putting more energy and political capital into what is now a listless policy” would constitute a good start in approaching the region.⁹¹ Liberals tend to believe that it is the role of the U.S. to align its policies in order to fit with the preferences and interests of an international majority. They want a U.S. President who recognizes that the U.S. represents just one-third of the population of the Americas and 5 percent of world

population. With 34 nations represented at Cartagena, President Obama has already highlighted the fact that there is “no senior partner or junior partner,” only “engagement based on mutual respect.”⁹² Realists and conservatives believe instead it is the foremost task of diplomacy to defend and advance U.S. values and national interests. Clearly this cannot be done without cooperation, but it also requires the hardheaded pursuit of U.S. values and interests.

The Sixth Summit of the Americas is an opportunity to restore confidence among friends and foster cooperation among the willing, while giving those who deride or dismiss U.S. interests and oppose U.S. values reasons to reflect upon the costs and consequences of their actions. To make use of this valuable opportunity, the U.S. and President Obama should:

- **Emphasize enduring support for democracy.** Democratic governance must be a center point for U.S. policies. This includes aggressive support and funding for democracy promotion and developing a system for tracking violations of democratic principles and a graduated but articulated scale of responses. Democracy funding should be increased, not reduced. President Obama should also publicize the increasing abridgement of press freedom.
- **Stand up for free and fair elections in Venezuela.** President Obama must deliver a clear

message that the U.S. expects Venezuela’s October 2012 presidential elections to be free and fair and peaceful. If defeated, Chavez must commit to respecting the constitutional order. U.S. policymakers should begin contingency planning for a potential transition.

- **Advance liberty for the Cuban people.** President Obama should express disappointment with the region’s tolerance for Cuban repression and refusal to press for democratic changes. He must reiterate that future openings by the U.S. require a reciprocal opening to pluralism and democratic change on the island. He must secure the release of Alan Gross.
- **Solidify the U.S.–Colombia alliance.** President Obama should take the opportunity of being in Colombia to press his counterpart for swift implementation of the FTA, and express America’s commitment to a long-term security relationship as well as determination to see the FARC rebels abandon armed conflict and move toward real peace.
- **Develop a revised energy security strategy for the Americas.** It is time to alter the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas in order to focus on strategies and policies aimed at enhancing energy development and security in the Americas, thereby helping to cushion the

90. Nile Gardiner, “Obama Administration Knives Britain in the Back over Falklands,” Heritage Foundation, The Foundry, January 23, 2012, at <http://blog.heritage.org/2012/01/23/obama-administration-knives-britain-in-the-back-over-falklands/#idc-container>.

91. Michael Shifter, “The Importance of the Summit in Cartagena,” *El Colombiano*, February 28, 2012, at <http://www.thedialogue.org/page.cfm?pageID=32&pubID=2883> (accessed March 26, 2012).

92. David Rothkopf, “Brazil’s New Swagger,” *Foreign Policy*, February 28, 2012, at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/28/brazil_s_new_swagger?page=0,1 (accessed March 26, 2012).

Western Hemisphere from global disruptions.

- **Take a stand against “blood drugs.”** President Obama must draw direct attention to the deadly connection between drug consumption at home and looming insecurity in Mexico and Central America. He should embrace a direct and active role in a demand-reduction effort in the U.S. The Administration should sustain strong civilian and military counter-narcotics cooperation with Mexico, Colombia, and Central America.
- **Expand the Trans-Pacific Partnership to Mexico and Canada.** President Obama should commit to broader participation in the TPP and to an ongoing

effort aimed at harmonizing the TPP with existing FTAs.

- **Advance an economic freedom agenda.** The U.S. needs to recommit to an agenda for future policy based on enhanced economic freedom, enhanced sanctity of private property, and rule of law.
- **Update the inter-American system.** President Obama should press for a peer review mechanism or democracy rapporteur as a first step toward strengthening the OAS.
- **Address the gravest threat to peace—Iran.** President Obama must urge friends in the Americas to play the role of responsible stakeholders in the international system, especially with regard to

Iran, and exert stronger pressure on nations whose anti-American agendas undermine international stability and peace.

The two-day conference of heads of state is a snapshot moment with limited chances of altering major policies or repairing fissures within the Americas. The authentic value of the Sixth Summit of the Americas resides in the capacity of the American President to articulate and defend the essential values and interests of the exceptional nation he represents.

—**Ray Walser, Ph.D.**, is Senior Policy Analyst for Latin America in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.