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Making Civil Society Relevant (Again)

Philip Oxhorn

It seems that wherever one looks in the policy debates about hemispheric relations and the best ways to strengthen democracy in Latin America, the idea of “civil society” is inescapable. Whether it be in development projects, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank, discussions over how to revitalize the Organization of American States and democratize negotiations over the Free Trade Area of the Americas, or the guiding principals for development assistance in donor countries, increasing attention is being given to the idea that “civil society” must somehow be included. Yet what does this mean in practice? What is “civil society” and who does it represent? Perhaps more importantly, is civil society up to the task? And if it is not, what should be done?

This ambiguity also reflects how social science research has defined the term. Rather than focusing on real people with real needs, the tendency is to focus on intangible norms of “trust,” “associability” and “civic spirit.” Civil society’s foundation is seen as resting on the notion that rational (but largely faceless) individuals who decide to live together to further private, individual interests create civil society. Membership in any group becomes a function of interest maximization. Groups and group identities lose any sense of intrinsic value. Civil society becomes synonymous with “social capital,” following the lead of Robert Putnam’s influential work on Italy (Putnam 1993), and from this perspective it does not matter if people join bowling clubs, church choirs or, to take a “real” example from Latin America’s recent past, a human rights group resisting tyranny.

Yet there obviously is a big difference between a bowling club and a human rights group if you are a Latin American. And if you are poor, have darker skin or live in an indigenous rural community, you may not see yourself as a “rational individual” maximizing your personal interests, but rather as a member of a community trying to cope with a variety of pressing social needs to whom “civic spiritedness” has a very different connotation and the idea of trusting people outside your community, much less often corrupt state institutions, seems naïve at best, and dangerous at worst. Defined this way, “civil society” seems as alienating and remote as the authoritarian regimes that dominated the region for most of its history.

Somewhat paradoxically, civil society was quite relevant during the reign of dictators throughout Latin America in the recent past. Civil society organizations not only helped people cope with the repression and the economic upheavals associated with these regimes (Oxhorn 1995), they allowed them to mobilize against them to help usher in the current period of democratic rule through what the seminal study of transitions characterized as the “popular upsurge” (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986).
With the transitions to democracy largely over, the quality of democratic regimes suffers from numerous deficits and civil society appears to be in retreat (Agüero and Stark 1998; Oxhorn and Ducantenzeiler 1998). The challenge is to again make civil society relevant to Latin Americans, and in the process strengthen democratic regimes. A good example of how this might be accomplished relates to one of the most pressing concerns for most Latin Americans: the precariousness of their civil rights.

Democracy in Latin America has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in crime. As levels of political violence by the state have declined, there has been a marked increase of a different kind of state violence directed against the poor rather than the political opposition. In many cases this amounts to a de facto criminalization of poverty.

The root cause of this violence lies in the very low levels of legitimacy that legal systems enjoy due to abuses by elites, corruption and widespread perceptions that officials enjoy certain impunity regardless of what they do. This reflects not only the continued distrust of state institutions caused by high levels of abuse under authoritarian regimes, but also the fact that such practices often do not end with the transition to democracy. People are reluctant to cooperate with law enforcement agencies, even to the extent of reporting crimes. This often creates a vicious circle because the lack of citizen cooperation leaves few alternatives to applying more violence when effective law enforcement and crime prevention are dependent upon community involvement.

The solution is not in further repression, but a reinvigoration of civil society. The human rights networks established under authoritarian regimes have an important role to play in gathering information, struggling to ensure accountability and representing the rights of the poor—a role not too different from the one they played before the transition to democracy. Similarly, it is important that communities organize to involve themselves in community policing initiatives. Important examples of this can already be found in a number of countries. Civil society can actually help compensate for weak, corrupt state institutions in securing basic rights that are an essential cornerstone of democratic governance.

Of course, there is no guarantee that civil society can respond to such challenges. Just as the Catholic Church played a pivotal role in supporting popular sector organizational activity under authoritarian regimes, the state controlled by democratically elected governments has an important role to play in fostering the kind of partners in civil society that it can work with to resolve pressing problems. Ultimately, then, the challenge of making civil society relevant is also a challenge of the state.

Phillip Oxhorn is Associate Professor of Political Science at McGill University in Montreal.
Challenges and Opportunities for Democracy in the Americas: Making the Inter-American Democratic Charter Work

Maxwell A. Cameron

The nations of Latin America have built and sustained electoral democracies while simultaneously undertaking wrenching economic reforms, and they have done so in a spirit of closer hemispheric cooperation and integration. However, elected governments have been unable to achieve adequate levels of sustained economic expansion and job growth; crime and corruption have spread relentlessly; and extraordinarily high levels of poverty and inequality continue unabated or have worsened. In the words of former Peruvian Foreign Minister Diego García-Sayan “democracy has not reached the peoples’ stomachs.”

Persistent poverty, crime, corruption and misery provide fertile terrain for leaders impatient with the give-and-take of democratic politics, contemptuous of the rules that make it possible and eager to find quick solutions rather than lasting compromises. Once elected, such leaders often by-pass parliamentary institutions on the pretext of obtaining results infeasible within the niceties of democratic procedures. The desire for results is laudable, but it also provides a convenient excuse for the abuse of power, and, more often than not, allows intemperate personal ambition to masquerade as providential leadership. The examples of Peru’s Alberto Fujimori, Nicaragua’s former President Arnoldo Alemán, Haiti’s Jean-Bertrand Aristide and Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez come to mind.

As if the domestic problems of the region were not enough, the post-9/11 war on terrorism has altered the balance between the rule of law, public deliberation, and the prerogatives of executive power within the United States and abroad. The reassertion of realpolitik makes the defence and promotion of democracy abroad considerably more difficult.

In retrospect, the Quebec City Summit of the Americas in April 2001 was held at a unique moment in history. For a brief time, between the crucial transitional elections in Peru and Mexico and the terrorist attacks that were to come, the leaders were able to focus their attention on writing a democratic clause into their declaration and call for the negotiation of an Inter-American Democratic Charter. The sonorous phrases of the Charter now seem at variance with the harsh new realities of the Western Hemisphere.

Making the Charter Work

Can the Charter be made to work? At a recent conference held at the University of British Columbia under the auspices of the Liu Institute for Global Issues, with funding from the Human Security Program of the Department for Foreign

Ecuador

Less than two months into his first term, Ecuador’s president Lucio Gutiérrez is facing a split in the alliance that helped bring him to power. During last fall’s election campaign, Gutiérrez’s Patriotic Society Party (PSP) formed an electoral alliance with the Pachakutik movement, the political arm of the powerful Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), on a platform to reduce poverty and fight corruption. Despite the alliance’s electoral success, in recent weeks indigenous groups have expressed their disappointment with Gutiérrez and key supporters have threatened to withdraw their support, giving him one month to reverse his current policy course.

Since taking office on January 15, 2003, Gutiérrez has moved to comply with conditions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by increasing gasoline prices, electricity prices and cutting public sector salaries (Miami Herald 13/03/03). During his first official visit to Washington D.C. on February 12, Gutiérrez pledged his desire to be “best friends” with the United States, reiterated his support for Uribe’s hard-line approach to the conflict in Colombia and wooed international oil companies with promises of legal and political protection (International Press Service, 12/02/03). These positions run contrary to Gutiérrez’s election promises and conflict with the goals of the indigenous movement.

Despite their dissatisfaction, it is in the interest of indigenous partners to remain aligned with the government. It is the first time in Ecuadorian history that an indigenous party has been actively involved in governing at the national level and indigenous representatives currently hold two key cabinet posts. Recognizing this, many within the Pachakutik party maintain that while CONAIE and related social organizations may disagree with the Gutiérrez government, there must not be an end to the political alliance - a move that would marginalize the indigenous voice and benefit conservatives. Gutiérrez has asked for some breathing space, requesting that his detractors give him at least 6 months to a year to prove himself and fulfill his election promises (International Press Service, 21/02/03).
Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), three problems with the Charter were identified.

Gaps in the Jurisprudence of Democracy Defence and Promotion

The Charter calls for collective action when there has been an “unconstitutional alteration of the constitutional regime.” The idea was to acknowledge threats beyond the conventional military coup, but the Charter does not specify what counts as an alteration or when it might “seriously impair the democratic order.”

Such determinations involve political judgment and cannot be resolved a priori, however, political judgment can be improved by access to the best available evidence. Whereas reliable measures of economic performance are routinely gathered by international financial institutions and provide benchmarks for the assessment of performance on a range of policy dimensions, nothing comparable is available to policymakers in the area of democratic performance.

The Charter’s Catch-22

Colombian political scientist Fernando Cepeda says the “Charter protects incumbents more than democrats.” This is because it can only be applied when the Secretary General or the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS) determines that a situation has arisen in a country “that may affect the development of its democratic political institutional process.” Yet such a determination cannot be made unless, “with prior consent of the government concerned,” the Secretary General can visit a country and make a report. In other words, a government that does not want the Charter to be applied can simply refuse to invite the Secretary General to make an assessment.

The OAS is a club of states loath to criticize one another. For this reason it is important to develop—outside the OAS—an independent early warning system to sound the alarm when a problem appears on the horizon.

Harnessing Civil Society: “Friends of the Charter”

The Inter-American community has not yet learned to harness the power of civil society and public diplomacy to advance and defend democratic rights and freedoms. In an era of instant communication, closer economic integration and transnational linkages across civil societies and states, public diplomacy often requires unconventional tools, new partnerships and innovative strategies. The successful negotiation of the Charter was partially the result of the active engagement of civil society and success in implementing the Charter will require deeper and more sustained public involvement.

A more inclusive process of civil society consultation could help monitor and report on events and lobby governments to address the problem through the OAS where appropriate. Although the Charter extols the importance of civil society, it provides no mechanism for consultation with NGOs.

Recommendations

The Charter is a political not a legal document. Political initiative will be required to develop a plan of action to ensure it is used in a flexible and proactive way. The Inter-American system needs a Virtual Policy Network to provide expert advise on how to define and measure progress or backsliding on democratic reforms, to examine the events that might fall under the rubric of an “unconstitutional interruption or alteration of the democratic order,” and to offer insight into when such events might impair democracy.

The Inter-American system also needs an Inter-American Democratic Institute to commission thematic or country reports on progress toward the implementation of the goals of the Charter. Such an Institute would provide a vehicle for civil society involvement in deliberations on the application of the Charter and provide a much-needed early warning device.

Finally, an informal group of “Friends of the Charter,” composed of former officials in member countries, eminent persons, representatives of non-governmental organizations and staff from multilateral development banks could spur states and international organizations to act within the framework of the Charter, both in the context of the OAS and in the broader Summit of the Americas process.

The Democratic Charter was the major achievement of the Quebec City Summit of the Americas. Making the Charter work as an effective instrument for the defence and promotion of democracy must be a priority in the Summit process. The recommendations outlined here are intended to provide concrete measures that could be undertaken toward that end.

Maxwell A. Cameron is Professor at the Department of Political Science and the Liu Institute for Global Issues, University of British Columbia.
More Than Peace Negotiations or Full-Fledged War: Solutions for the Colombian Conflict

Hernando Gomez Buendia & The National Human Development Report Team for Colombia

The recent attacks on urban centres and the increasingly confrontational mood in Colombia following the failed “peace process,” are good indicators of the recent developments of the long running internal conflict. The conflict remains the main challenge to Colombia’s development and the stability of the region. This is mainly the result of the changing nature of Colombia’s war. Moreover, ideas and possible solutions to the widening war are equally stagnant, bringing the country to an impasse, caught between impossible peace negotiations and an improbable military solution. In response to this impasse, the National Human Development Report (NHDR) 2003 process commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) gives an alternative perspective on the conflict and its resolution, based on extensive cross-sectoral consultation.

In March, Uruguay began consultations with investors on a “market-friendly” restructuring of up to US$ 3 billion of its public debt. The government of President Jorge Batlle said that the bond swap was voluntary and that bonds would have extended payment terms, but would retain their face value and original denomination. Markets rejected these assurances and the Fitch ratings agency downgraded the country's sovereign ratings in anticipation of what it says would be tantamount to a default.

The announcement comes 15 months after Argentina’s default and devaluation reduced Uruguay’s export revenue and spurred a run on its banks. Uruguay’s reserves have fallen to a record low after the government continued to draw on them to pay international debt. The country has been drawing on reserves since the International Monetary Fund (IMF) withheld a US$380m loan disbursement last December.

Uruguay is seeking IMF approval of its new economic plan and an agreement to continue loan disbursements of US$760 million for 2003 and US$520 million for 2004. The IMF asked that Uruguay present an austerity program and that it find a “political solution” to its heavy public debt, which is currently close to 100 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP), as prior conditions for access to IMF credit. An IMF mission is expected to visit Uruguay in late March and is expected to make a final decision on loan disbursements by June.

A War of Losers

The ongoing-armed conflict is the most formidable problem to Colombia’s development. Apart from the 30,000 deaths each year, the conflict costs 3 percent of GDP each year. The war is a serious obstacle to foreign investment and limits economic development in Colombia. Historically the conflict had been confined to rural areas, fuelled by identity politics and peasant grievances. It was reinforced by the state’s failure to clarify and enforce property rights locally and the political system’s failure to include third parties. As the war became marginal to mainstream politics, the guerrilla forces gained in military power at the expense of political influence. Their dominant goal became to carve out their own “state” in territories they controlled. In response to unchecked guerrilla activities, armymilitaries forces emerged. The state’s patchy presence in the regions facilitated the territorial expansion of both groups, influenced by three main factors: (a) each actor’s overarching strategy; (b) the region’s class- power-ethnic structure and its related conflicts, and (c) rent-seeking by armed groups.

The regional expansion of the conflict meant that war became a failure for everybody. The FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and ELN (National Liberation Army) have failed to seize power after four decades of fighting. The paramilitaries have not eliminated the guerrillas in twenty years of fighting. In addition, the war has been a huge failure for the state, which was unable to defeat the guerrillas, contain the paramilitaries or do away with the causes of violent conflict. Instead of being directed by political vision and rationale, the conflict seriously degraded as the armed actors adopted six mutually reinforcing self-serving rationales: militarization, rent-seeking, territorial control, terror, criminal and non-political recruitment into the armed group. At the same time, the war spilled into the international arena by affecting international interests in Colombia, specifically those of the United States. Illicit crops and drug trafficking, petroleum, environmental concerns, human rights and indigenous communities, are, nowadays, affected by and part of the conflict.
The Dead End

Sadly enough, in the midst of such alarming challenges, public opinion, policies and government actions have oscillated between peace negotiations and full-fledged war. The pendulum-like movement between those two extremes, every four years or so, has brought the Colombian conflict to an impasse. On the one hand, a negotiated peace is impossible, as the political establishment does not feel threatened by the insurgency and therefore has no reason to negotiate reforms. Nor is there any possibility or any noticeable popular support for a revolution. On the other hand, a military defeat of the insurgency is not likely in the short term for a number of reasons: the guerrillas and the paramilitaries still provide some public goods locally; the inaccessible Colombian topography; the readily available rents financing the armed groups; and the absence of a military “big push” against the insurgency.

A Light at The End of the Tunnel?

Can alternate ways be devised to tackle the Colombian quagmire? According to the NHDR 2003 commissioned by the UNDP, quite a lot can be done.

The report, to be presented in June 2003, is part of a wide-ranging process of consultation and social participation involving all groups in society both nationally and regionally. The coordinating team has set up a National Consultative Committee and consultative committees in over 18 regions reaching over 2000 civil and religious leaders, mayors, governors, military officials, journalist, academics, cooperation workers, NGO workers, etc.

For the NHDR 2003 process, the solutions to Colombia’s conflict must come from a far more in-depth understanding of Colombia’s conflict. First, it is central to recognize that the actions of violent actors are far from irrational. To the contrary, they adapt means to ends on the basis of local incentives. Secondly, the process clearly explains the complex and multifaceted nature of each armed group, which at different times and to different degrees is: a political project; an armed force seeking power; a locally based power controlling vast territories; a way of life; an access to money and resources; a criminal organization and a massive violator of international humanitarian law.

On this basis, the process argues for a more sophisticated response to the violence that steers away from overly simplistic and extreme viewpoints. For example, the discourse of the guerrilla stresses that without an end to poverty and inequality war cannot end, while the right argues that without peace, reforms cannot be implemented. The report presents the case for peace, even without reforms; but also for reforms, even without peace. Moreover, the report dispels the widespread yet erroneous belief that the only way to end the war is through negotiation or military victory. Rather, it argues that there is a moral and ethical imperative to promote public policy reforms that enlarge people’s choices (specifically for combatants, victims and communities) and reduce the local incentives and triggers of conflict. The report does that by identifying good practices, nationally and internationally and advocating for reforms in thirteen policy areas. Local security schemes that protect citizens from violence, incentives to promote the dissociation of youth from armed groups, governance mechanisms that give municipalities better tools to respond to violence,

Caribbean

A new form of violence, kidnapping, is emerging in the Caribbean at a time when many countries are already struggling against a crime wave that has flooded the region. Although it is still nowhere near Colombia’s world record rates, the incidence of kidnapping in the Dominican Republic, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago has increased significantly. In Trinidad and Tobago alone, kidnappings rose from 4 recorded in 2000 to 31 in 2002 (Latin America Monitor, February 2003).

This new trend is taking a toll on the region’s national economies. As in Colombia, business people have become the primary targets of kidnappings, creating a less conducive climate for investment. The rise in crime rates also threatens to jeopardize tourism revenues, upon which the region is so dependant.

Not only do government authorities lack the resources to adequately deal with kidnapping and the illegal trafficking of drugs and small-arms with which it is associated, but, as Anthony Mainot of the Florida International University (FIU) points out, there is a suspicion among the public that, in some countries, the authorities themselves are involved in the kidnappings (Miami Herald Online, 17/03/03). As a result the problem is expected to grow in the region. Given the mobility of criminal organizations within the Caribbean Basin, the need for increased cooperation among security authorities has become a necessity.
and reforms that protect vulnerable groups such as internally displaced persons or women, are but a few areas included in the report. A single solution to Colombia’s violence does not exist. Peace can come about only through gradual, complementary and successive actions and reforms that one-day may allow Colombians to live in peace.

Hernando Gomez Buendía is the Coordinator of the UNDP’s National Human Development Report for Colombia in Bogotá.

The Political Economy of the Salvadoran Elections

Manuel Orozco

The political outcome of the legislative and municipal elections held on Sunday March 16, 2003, in El Salvador reaffirms the country’s political landscape of competitive party elections, but also raises questions about the country’s future agenda. While the drive towards free trade and privatization has characterized the agenda of the ruling party, Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA), the decline in growth rates, crime and the decline in popularity of current President Francisco Flores was demonstrated in the electoral results of Sunday’s elections.

From Division to Victory or Status Quo

Contrary to the expectations of many, including pollsters, the opposition party, Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), emerged triumphant in this election. It retained control of key municipal governments and the same number of legislators in the assembly (31 out of 84 seats). The ruling party, on the other hand, lost municipalities and two legislators (retaining 27 of 84). However, the conservative and traditional ally of ARENA, the National Conciliation Party (PCN), won 16 seats, three more than in 2000, which guaranteed the continuity of a conservative majority in congress.

The results caught some by surprise, because the FMLN had undergone serious divisions between orthodox factions within the party and reformist groups that highlighted a crisis of legitimacy. Prior to the election, a segment of the reformist groups had formed their own political coalition that ran independently. But they were only able to achieve less than 2 percent of the vote and one legislator as part of a coalition formed with two other parties. Moreover, public opinion polls showed less than 30 percent of the vote going to the FMLN.

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Another important result of the election was the FMLN victory in the city of San Salvador after a close battle between the two leading parties. For the FMLN, winning the capital municipality meant...
a continuation of its control of the most important city in El Salvador.

**A Loss for ARENA?**

To many observers, these electoral results are clearly a defeat for ARENA, which has ruled the country in three consecutive governments. However, discontent with the government has been widespread. Despite ARENA’s attempt to reorganize its leadership, it could not address key issues. First, the public perception remains that the economic situation has become worse since President Flores took office. El Salvador’s economic growth has not increased above 2 percent in the past four years. Second, crime has not improved and continues to affect predominantly the poor. In addition to domestic violence, youth gangs are a troublesome reality. According to police reports, three gang members die daily in turf fights and it is estimated that there are at least 30,000 young Salvadorans involved with these groups. Third, there is increasing discomfort over the effect of privatization on society. The attempt to privatize the health sector produced opposition among low-income sectors.

Overall, the electoral result is not simply a defeat for ARENA, but also a warning about the need to renew the social contract with the people. ARENA has lost the leadership in the assembly and as a result will face a major challenge in the upcoming 2004 election.

**Future trends**

The next twelve months will be critical with regards to various issues. First,

the debate over the possible ratification of a free trade agreement with the United States will most likely meet with opposition from the FMLN. Second, next year’s presidential elections have opened a window of opportunity for a victory by the FMLN. While a FMLN victory may be foreseen in light of the recent electoral contest, Salvadorans still tend to lean towards the right in presidential elections. On legislative issues, the FMLN will continue to face opposition from ARENA, the PCN and the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). More importantly, however, if the current head of the FMLN, Schafik Handal, were to be selected as a presidential candidate, voters would be less likely to vote for the FMLN and may prefer to abstain from voting altogether due to his lack of leadership. Electoral apathy and voter abstention in El Salvador continue to be a pressing issue as current levels of voter turnout remain at 41 percent – low enough to pose a predicament in the presidential elections next year.

Dr. Manuel Orozco is project director of Central America at the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, D.C.

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**Municipalities won/lost by party**

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<th>Party</th>
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<th>2003</th>
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<td>126</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMLN</td>
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<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCN</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDC</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPR</td>
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**Legislators per Party**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2003</th>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalición</td>
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Source: TSE, 17/03/03.
Cuba and the Non-Aligned Movement: Towards a More Prominent Role

Ana J. Faya

During the XIII Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Kuala Lumpur, Cuba was selected to assume the presidency after Malaysia’s term expires. There were no other candidates, so Havana will be once again hosting a NAM Summit in 2006.

The *troika*, an informal mechanism that governs the NAM, emerged at the 1997 ministerial meeting in New Delhi. It currently includes South Africa as the outgoing president, Malaysia as the incumbent and Cuba as the next president. As a member of the *troika*, Fidel Castro, from now on until three years after his NAM presidency expires, can intervene in the renewal process that this international group of 114 countries committed themselves to in Kuala Lumpur. In addition, as part of the *troika*, Castro is able to participate in the consultations, negotiations and the decisions of the NAM. This includes meetings with the Group of Eight (G-8) and the consultations regarding which country will assume the presidency of the NAM after Cuba.

As president of the NAM, Castro will also be able to conveniently assume a prominent international role amidst the domestic and international difficulties that Cuba is currently undergoing. The large group of African and Asian countries that are members of the NAM could join Caribbean countries in supporting the island’s efforts to join the Cotonou Agreement (see December edition of Spotlight on the Americas). Even though Cuba has already presented its petition for admission to the Agreement and the European Union (EU) has opened an office of representation in Havana, Cuba’s admission has yet to be discussed among the members of the EU. Cuba’s failure to make any favourable changes in the civil and political rights continues to be a problem for the EU. In fact, Cuban authorities have denied the visit of the United Nations special representative from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, who was scheduled to visit Havana as part of the decision adopted at the 2002 meeting of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

The NAM provides a network of international relations to the Cuban government in which discussions about human rights and democracy have not been main issues on the agenda. This forum would compensate for the political isolation experienced by the island in the western hemisphere, during a phase in which Latin-American countries have favoured regional initiatives to the detriment of their work in the NAM. Following the acrimonious circumstances that surrounded the unanimous vote of the Latin-American Group against Cuba during the Geneva meeting, Uruguay broke off relations with Cuba and relations with Mexico were seriously harmed.

The renewal of the NAM also provides the Cuban leader with a favourable platform to promote his ideas that are critical of Washington, globalization and, from a regional perspective, of the free trade agreement - one of the factors that has contributed to the isolation of the island in the region. Prior to the Summit in Malaysia, during an international event on Globalization and Development in Havana, Fidel Castro said “neoliberal globalization constitutes the most blatant re-colonization of the Third World. The FTAA... is the annexation of Latin America to the United States; a spurious union of unequal parties, in which the strongest will swallow up the..."
weakest, including Canada, Mexico and Brazil” (www.cubaminrex.cu, 14/02/03).

In addition, Cuba needs the support of an international umbrella organization that protects it against the policies of the Bush Administration. The advantages that the presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement will bring to the Cuban government are numerous. But, the NAM is no longer what it used to be, nor is Castro’s regime the revolution that supported the creation of the Movement in Belgrade forty-two years ago.

Ana J. Faya is a Researcher with the Research Forum on Cuba

Editorial

The Americas After Iraq

When the Bush administration threatened to render the United Nations “irrelevant,” walked away from a vote in the Security Council that it could not win, and went to war against Iraq without UN sanction, it committed an act on par with the refusal of the US Senate to ratify the Covenant of the League of Nations in 1919. It is no exaggeration to say that the future of the international system built since 1945 is at risk.

What does the war in Iraq and its aftermath mean for the Americas? At first glance, not much. Only a small number of countries from the region are officially participating in the “Coalition for the Immediate Disarmament of Iraq,” notably Colombia, El Salvador and Nicaragua, which are providing moral if not material support (CNN en Español, 18/03/03). However the process through which the US went to war, the way that it treated its hemispheric allies in this context and the impact of its actions on multilateralism beyond the UN, point to a fundamental shift in inter-American relations that will last for at least the duration of the Bush administration.

In the Americas, three countries in particular were caught in “friendly fire” from the US: Canada, Chile and Mexico. Chile, as one of ten non-permanent members on the United Nations (UN) Security Council, faced down considerable pressure from the United States and the United Kingdom to support a resolution to go to war with Iraq. In a meeting held on March 13 at La Moneda between President Lagos and the leaders of other political parties, there was agreement that Chile should support a peaceful solution within the multilateral framework of the UN and either abstain or vote against any resolution authorizing a war in Iraq (El Mercurio, 14/03/03).

On March 14, in a mark of its maturity on the world stage, Chile circulated an alternative proposal for resolving the impasse on Iraq to the members of the Security Council. Following consultations with other “undecided” non-permanent members and Britain, Chile recommended that a three-week deadline be set together with five specific objectives to be met by Iraq: allow 30 scientists to be interviewed by the UN inspectors outside the country; document the destruction of gas bombs or turn them over; deliver 10,000 litres of unaccounted for anthrax to inspectors; destroy all Al Samoud 2 missiles; and demonstrate that unmanned drones are incapable of delivering chemical weapons. However, the proposal was rejected by the US within hours of its release (El Mercurio, 15/03/03).

Like Mexico, Chile risks the deterioration of its relationship with Washington as a result of its position in the Security Council. In Chile’s case, the media has suggested that the Chile-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA), not yet passed by the US Congress, could fall victim to US retaliation. This scenario is relatively unlikely, as the Chilean FTA is a key part of the only coherent policy pursued by the Bush administration in the hemisphere - the negotiation of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA).
In Canada's case, support would have translated into a military contribution as was the case in Afghanistan. Neither Chile nor Mexico, nor many other countries for that matter, have to factor such concerns into their decision-making. Canadians have long referred to their relationship with the US, their closest ally and trading partner, as “the mouse sleeping with the elephant.” The Canadian government, worried by its declining relationship with Washington, sat on the fence for weeks before making a pronouncement.

This lack of support for the US from both Canada and Mexico was by no means a “sure thing.” However two years of deteriorating relations with the Bush administration, on significant issues such as migration and trade, meant that both countries had much less to lose.

Aggressive unilateralism by the US not only poses a threat to the UN system, but also jeopardizes its primary policy objective in this hemisphere – the establishment of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. In the wake of Iraq, legitimacy and trust in the US has been compromised and it will be harder to convince Latin America and the Caribbean that the US has their best interests in sight in promoting the FTAA.

Central America

In an effort to prevent an escalating tariff war, the Nicaraguan National Assembly voted on March 11, 2003 in favour of revoking, on a temporary basis, the 35 percent tariff on products from Honduras. In an address to the nation earlier in the month, the president of Honduras, Ricardo Maduro, had stated that Honduras' patience had run-out regarding the so-called patriotic tariff that Nicaragua had imposed in 1999. During his speech, President Maduro called upon the Nicaraguan government to lift the tariff, as it was detrimental to bilateral trade relations, as well as the process of economic integration in Central America. The President also stated that if the tariff were not lifted, the Honduran government would impose a similar tariff on all Nicaraguan products entering the country, in addition to a “highway fee” on trucks carrying Nicaraguan goods and further taxes on the use of port facilities (La Prensa de Honduras, 04/03/03).

The 82 Nicaraguan parliamentarians who voted in favour of revoking the tariff defended their decision by stating that the vote represented Nicaragua's commitment to the process of integration and was not the result of pressure imposed by Honduras (La Prensa de Nicaragua, 12/03/03). The patriotic tariff had originally been imposed by the government of Nicaragua in retaliation against Honduras for ratifying a maritime boundary treaty (the Ramírez-López Treaty) with Colombia, which, according to Nicaragua, encroached on approximately 130,000 kms² of its territorial waters.

In Honduras, the Nicaraguan decision to suspend the patriotic tariff was welcomed by President Maduro, who stated that Central America wins with this decision.

It is worth bearing in mind that the US has consistently pursued unilateral and multilateral options in the hemisphere simultaneously, for example the funding of the Nicaraguan Contras while negotiating the Caribbean Basin Initiative. The rest of the Americas have tended to view multilateral institutions of regional governance as a means of restricting the unilateral temptations of the United States. In waging war against Iraq, Bush has given the forceful unilateralism of the Monroe Doctrine a global reach: the national interest has become the interests of the president and his advisors; multilateralism has no intrinsic value and must serve specific “national interests”; and global action does not require global legitimacy, only military projection. As a result the scope for multilateral engagement in the hemisphere is much reduced.

FOCAL Abstracts

Argentina: Governance in Crisis
Paul Alexander Haslam

Although the origins of the crisis were to be found in poor economic policy decisions that led to a chaotic devaluation, its dramatic denouement in December 2001 and subsequent development over the course of 2002 were deeply conditioned by political factors. The Argentine crisis was and remains a crisis of governance in the most profound sense. It was neither predetermined nor unpreventable. It reflected a deep failure of the political class to adequately respond to the circumstances that confronted them. This failure was itself rooted in a tangled web of economic, political and socio-cultural incentives that touched every aspect of the political-economic system.

Understanding the reasons behind the Argentine debacle and why it unfolded in a sad parody of crisis over the course of most of 2002 is the purpose of this paper. The paper will use the concept of governance to identify and examine the factors that contributed to the crisis. This analysis then forms the basis for assessing to what extent the Argentine government has been able to master these challenges. It concludes with an assessment of the challenges for the future and recommendations for Canadian foreign policy towards Argentina.
The Impact of Migration in the Caribbean and Central American Region

Manuel Orozco

Central America and the Caribbean are experiencing the economic and social effects of new transnational actors, namely an emerging diaspora. These diasporas constitute important factors integrating their countries of origin in the hemispheric economy. This paper offers an analysis of these changes, with particular attention paid to the impact of migration on Central America and the Caribbean. It addresses the development of migration from this region as well as the transformation of these economies from agro-exporting to labour exporting societies. An important focus of this paper is on worker remittances as a major source of economic impact. It will also stress the importance of growing linkages beyond the family at the communal, social and political levels. The economic and business contributions of Central American and Caribbean citizens living in Canada and the United States are immense and signal a new type of relationship, not only in terms of labour mobility, but also in terms of trade and investment.

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