The Special Summit: So Many Initiatives, So Few Institutions

Richard Feinberg

As the “Special” Summit of the Americas, scheduled for mid-January in Monterrey, Mexico, rapidly approaches, there is no shortage of good ideas. Worthwhile proposals abound on themes as varied as immigrant remittances, HIV/AIDS, educational standards, hunger elimination and anti-corruption. Nor did the previous three conclaves of hemispheric leaders lack creative initiatives. The first Summit in Miami manufactured 164 action items, Santiago recorded 141 and Quebec hit 245 agreed goals.

The frustrations with summitry have not been for lack of interesting initiatives. The shortfall has been elsewhere: the too-frequent failure to transform leaders’ pledges into practical programs backed by adequate financial resources and a committed instrument of implementation.

Summit pageantry has not been matched by the creation of institutions designed to transform ideas into programs. Instead, Summits have handed off their many mandates to pre-existing regional institutions, notably the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) – but without granting these already overburdened agencies new resources.

Happily, the OAS and IDB have responded vigorously to some of the most important Summit mandates. To advance the centerpiece of summitry, namely the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the premier regional institutions have significantly beefed up their respective trade units. While the democracy promotion units in the IDB and OAS have origins independent of summitry, Summit mandates have helped to raise their prominence and increase their budgets. The Summits have also given a boost to efforts to open select OAS and IDB activities to representatives of civil society organizations. Additionally, foreign ministers, who are chiefly responsible for organizing Summits, compose the OAS’s supreme governing body. In a series of formal resolutions passed at its annual meetings, the authoritative General Assembly has directed the OAS to consider Summit mandates as binding.

Yet, the capacity of the OAS is severely undercut by its skimpy annual budget, which falls short of $US 100 million – pathetic in comparison to the depth of the problems assigned to it.

In contrast, the IDB’s annual activity budget runs into the many billions of dollars. Many IDB programs – from trade integration to corporate social responsibility – coincide with Summit mandates. But more direct IDB engagement with summitry is constrained by several factors. The IDB is run by ministries of finance that have kept
Bolivia

Bolivia’s newest President, Carlos Mesa, was sworn in on October 17, replacing President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who was forced to resign on the same day after facing nation-wide demonstrations that paralysed the country and claimed the lives of an estimated 80 civilians. The demonstrations were sparked by a proposed government plan to sell natural gas to the United States via a pipeline through neighbouring Chile. Critics of the plan claimed that the forecasted $US 500 million to be generated annually by the exports would go directly to the elite and foreign investors, and would not improve the situation of the country’s poor (Washington Post, 10/21/03).

This latest demonstration is one in a series of protests that plagued outgoing President Sanchez de Lozada, who was elected in 2002 with only 22.5 percent of the popular vote. Sanchez de Lozada was highly unpopular with many sectors, including the indigenous communities who make up over half of the country’s 8.5 million inhabitants. Protesters contend that Bolivia’s high and pervasive poverty, endemic racism and social exclusion have been made worse by Sanchez de Losada’s open market policies. His backing of the US-led program to eradicate coca production, a long-time traditional product and key cash crop, has also caused ongoing clashes with Bolivian farmers.

According to the constitution, the new president can remain in office until 2007, but President Mesa, who was vice president in Sanchez de Lozada’s government, has said that he will call elections sooner rather than later. In the meantime, he faces many challenges as he attempts to lead this divided country. Less than a week into the presidency, Mesa had taken tentative steps to quell the discontent. In an effort to break ties with the old government and largely discredited political parties, he has created a new Ministry for Indigenous Affairs and appointed a new 15-member cabinet comprised of academics, independents and two indigenous people. He has promised to investigate the deaths of the civilians killed in the recent nation-wide demonstrations, and has agreed to hold a national referendum on whether to sell the country’s natural gas reserves abroad (Miami Herald 10/19/03, Economist, 10/23/03).

However, President Mesa must continue to move quickly. Key opponents, including Indigenous leader Felipe Quispe and opposition congressman Evo Morales, have given the new president a short time period to reverse key government policies and begin to address poverty, or face another wave of demonstrations. Meanwhile, the US government has sent a message to President Mesa underlining their commitment to the coca eradication policy and urging the new government to safeguard “clear rules” for foreign investors, issues which some analysts claim are closely linked to ongoing US aid (NYT, 10/23/03, LatinNews Weekly Report, 10/21/03). In these early stages President Mesa has the tentative support of many factions within the divided Andean nation, but reconciling these distinct sets of interests will continue to be a challenge.
pledges of action remain unfulfilled, the whole Summit process will increasingly be perceived as “only empty rhetoric,” and the other functions of Summits will also suffer. The entire edifice of summitry requires at least some degree of transformation of words into deeds.

Here’s the simple Feinberg rule for successful summitry: no initiative should be approved by leaders unless accompanied by corresponding resources and a capable bureaucracy or public-private coalition committed to its implementation. And don’t forget measurable outcomes and monitoring procedures to ensure public accountability.

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**Brazil: From Cancún to Miami**

Florencia Jubany

One immediate consequence of the abrupt and sterile conclusion of the WTO ministerial meeting at Cancún was the announcement by the United States and the European Union that they would favour trade liberalization through bilateral agreements. For its part, Brazil also announced that its post-Cancún strategy would consist of pursuing market access negotiations through bilaterals, leaving the negotiation of better discipline in subsidies to be dealt with at the WTO, presumably through the G-22 (now known as the 20).

Several members have left the G-22 since Cancún, leading Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim to refer to it jokingly as the “G-X”. The G-22, a sizeable coalition of major developing countries led by Brazil, India and China, was an ad hoc creation to push for substantial reform of agricultural subsidies in the US, EU and Japan. It was made up of 13 Latin American, 6 Asian and 3 African countries, representing the majority of the world’s population, 70% of the world’s rural population, and 27.9% of agricultural exports. They staked all on a confrontation with the United States and Europe over what they saw as an unacceptable offer on agricultural subsidies.

Domestic support for Brazil’s strategy was high in the weeks following Cancún, but it is quickly eroding. US officials wrote damning articles blaming Brazil for the Cancún debacle, including one by US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick in the Financial Times (22/6/03). The US then successfully pressured several G-22 countries to abandon the coalition. It all took a toll on the Brazilian government at home. Veja, the country’s leading news magazine, asked “Courage or Stupidity?” (13/10/03) in a front cover report on the government’s negotiating stance. An editorial in the influential O Estado de São Paulo (3/10/03) condemned “a diplomatic strategy that is as wrong as it is dangerous”. Opposition to the current strategy within Brazil is coming mainly from the agricultural sector, which questions the future of the G-22 and worries that Brazil will be isolated in multilateral and regional negotiations.

There is also opposition from competitive industrial producers, and from within the Lula government itself.

**“Light” or “Comprehensive” FTAA?**

Tensions between the US and Brazil were most recently played out in Port of Spain (October, 2003) at the preparatory meeting for the FTAA Trade Ministerial to be held in Miami on November 20-21, 2003. Brazil and the US are currently co-chairs of what was meant to be the last phase of negotiations to conclude a Free Trade Area of the Americas by 2005. But rather than ironing out their differences as many had expected, the two major economies of North and South America are struggling over competing visions of the FTAA. The debate boils down to whether countries want to negotiate a “comprehensive” FTAA, or a “light” FTAA.

In Port of Spain, the United States obtained ample support for comprehensive negotiations that would include not only market access but also regional rules for government procurement, investment, services, and intellectual property. Costa Rica gathered support from 13 countries to endorse the US proposal (Mexico, Canada, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Panama, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador). All of these countries either have a bilateral free trade agreement with the US or are in negotiations. As a corollary to failed WTO talks, the US officially announced at Port of Spain that it would not include agricultural subsidies and anti-dumping in hemispheric negotiations.

Brazil is pushing for what it calls “FTAA light” or “ALCA possivel” (a FTAA that is possible, realistic) under which only matters related to business facilitation and some regulatory issues would be discussed at the hemispheric level. Market access would be left for bilateral negotiations (Brazil hopes for a bilateral Free Trade Agreement with the US). Sensitive issues for Brazil, and of interest to the US, such as government procurement, investment, services, and intellectual property would be dealt with at the WTO. Brazil emerged somewhat weakened and isolated from the Port of Spain meeting, with only its Mercosur partners (further weakened when Uruguay presented its own separate proposal) and
most of the Caribbean supporting its bid for a lighter agreement.

The rationale for Brazil’s position is twofold. First, Brazil does not want an agreement that infringes on the capacity to set domestic policies. Second, discussions on priority issues for Brazil such as agricultural subsidies and anti-dumping measures were excluded from negotiations by the US, thus reducing Brazil’s incentives to broach matters that it deems sensitive such as investment, services, government procurement and intellectual property. In other words, if the US can simply exclude sensitive issues from hemispheric negotiations, then so can Brazil.

An FTAA Without Brazil
Addressing the Brazilian Congress on October 23, 2003, Peter Allegier, US deputy trade negotiator and co-chair of the FTAA negotiations, reiterated his government's determination to conclude the FTAA, with or without Brazil. While some Brazilians believe Allegier is bluffing, including Adhemar Bahadian who is co-chairing the trade negotiations with Allegier on behalf of Brazil (O Globo, 24/10/03), others are taking US warnings seriously. Marcos Jank, a leading Brazilian trade expert, noted that Brazil’s main vulnerability stems from the overriding desire of many South American and Caribbean countries to gain access to the US market and attract US investment, without necessarily demanding major concessions in return (O Estado de São Paulo, 19/10/03). At least four Latin American members of the Brazil-led G-22 coalition have abandoned it since Cancún in favour of closer trade relations with the US.

Should Brazil stay out of the FTAA, it could expect to see some diversion of trade and investment to countries that are in. Since it is difficult to imagine Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay passing up the opportunity of increased access to the US market, Mercosur as we know it would probably disappear. Moreover, by not joining the FTAA, and absent a bilateral deal with the US, Brazil would miss out on a huge advantage over powerful competitors (such as China) in the US market. While an FTAA without Brazil is possible, it is unlikely. It is in everyone’s interest to keep engaged the country that, excluding NAFTA, accounts for approximately 50% of the region’s GDP and 40% of its population.

Stalemate at the Port of Spain and Cancún meetings does not bode well for the FTAA Ministerial in November or for the conclusion of negotiations by the 2005 deadline. Without agreement on multilateral negotiations in agriculture and subsidies, hemispheric negotiations will continue to stumble on the same two issues, so crucial to Latin American countries. Sadly, countries like Brazil also have competitive industrial sectors that could greatly benefit from better access to the US market. Their interests have been somewhat lost in Brazil’s current negotiating strategy.

It is regrettable that the acrimony between the US and Brazil in the days following Cancún seems to have carried over into FTAA negotiations. Parties need to be prepared to moderate their positions if FTAA negotiations are to move forward anytime soon. A gesture must come from the co-chairs, which are also the largest economies of the region and where there is most domestic resistance. A compromise position would involve a “re-dimensioning” of the level of ambition in all areas, as the Caribbean countries have proposed. The question is not only whether Brazil can bend but also, can the United States - under all the protectionist pressures of a presidential and congressional election season - offer a balanced FTAA?

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Uncertain Future for the Concertación Coalition in Chile?
Patricio Navia

Grounded on solid common views on democratic governance, and putting tactical and historical differences aside, parties from the socialist left and Christian Democratic center united in 1988 to form a coalition aimed at providing a peaceful transition to democracy in Chile. The Concertación parties successfully provided presidents Aylwin (1990-94) and Frei (1994-2000) with enough political support to govern effectively. The center-left alliance scored consecutive electoral victories, carrying overwhelming majorities of the popular vote in all elections since 1988. Even in the highly contested 1999 election, the Concertación ended up winning a third consecutive presidential election. That year, socialist Ricardo Lagos became the first non-Christian Democratic president of Chile since the democratic restoration. The 2000 municipal election and 2001 parliamentary election also produced electoral victories for the Concertación. Yet, the wear-and-tear suffered by all governments holding power for a long time has eroded support for the Concertación. In addition, because the center-left coalition was initially created to put an end to the dictatorship and guarantee a peaceful transition from authoritarianism, once democracy was consolidated—in the sense that no reversion to authoritarian government was possible—the Concertación had fulfilled its foundational mission. As a result, the coalition has been pressed to find a new unifying cause to reinvent itself and remain successful in the new decade.
In addition, the 1999 economic crisis and the slow economic recovery that ensued brought about new tensions. Many Concertacionistas who initially opposed the economic model implemented by the Pinochet dictatorship, and embraced later by the Aylwin and Frei governments, ended up conditionally accepting the “model” because of its positive results. However, the 1999 economic recession and the subsequent difficult economic times have fueled previously silent discontent within the Concertación.

With Pinochet out of the picture and with the golden days of sustained economic growth behind, the two pillars that held the Concertación together have weakened. The upcoming 2004 municipal and 2005 presidential/legislative elections will present a major challenge for the Concertación parties. Yet, the Concertación will most likely survive until the end of 2005 for three major reasons. The outcome of the elections will have a greater effect on the Concertación’s survival after the current presidential term comes to an end in March of 2006.

The first reason why the Concertación will remain unified until March 2006 is that control of the executive power in a country with a very strong presidential system creates incentives for coalition partners not to withdraw their support from the president. Abandoning the coalition would be extremely costly in terms of executive appointments, which include cabinet posts, ambassadorships, regional government posts and hundreds of positions in government agencies. The pressure on the part of party militants who seek to hold on to their jobs obtained by presidential discretionary appointments has already proven to be a successful disciplinary tool for the president. When General Pinochet was placed under house arrest in London in October of 1998 and the Frei government decided to actively seek the release of the former dictator, the Socialist Party expressed its discontent with the government’s decision, but did not abandon the Concertación. To be sure, most socialists wanted Pinochet to be extradited from London to Spain and many socialist leaders traveled to Spain to testify against Pinochet in the investigation led by Spanish judge Baltazar Garzón, who had asked the British Government for Pinochet’s arrest. The Socialist Party decided not to leave the Concertación because of electoral concerns, and because of the many high and medium level posts that socialists had in the Frei government.

Since 2000, because President Ricardo Lagos commands the support of the leftist Concertación parties—comprised of the Party for Democracy (PPD) and the Socialist (PS) and Radical Social Democratic (PRSD) parties—the only party that could credibly threaten to abandon the Concertación coalition before the end of Lagos term is the centrist Christian Democratic Party (PDC). The PDC’s decision not to abandon the Concertación is mostly the result of the second and third reasons: electoral rules and presidential popularity.

The electoral system in place in Chile is a proportional representation 2-seat district arrangement. The 19 senatorial districts and 60 Chamber of Deputies districts elect two legislators each. That creates incentives for parties to form coalitions and run as multi-party coalitions. Since 1989, the Concertación has remained a unified coalition. The rightwing parties have formed electoral coalitions for all the elections as well, but because they have lost and because there are no incentives for the opposition to maintain the coalitions after an election, the two rightwing parties, the Independent Democratic Union (UDI) and the National Renewal (RN) have failed to act as a unified coalition at times other than during elections. The so-called binominal electoral system guarantees one seat to a party/coalition that can secure 1/3 of the vote in a district regardless of what other parties/coalitions do.
Thus, the threshold to secure a seat is rather high (for a proportional system), making it more difficult for parties to break with existing coalitions. If the Christian Democratic Party were to break away from the Concertación coalition, that party would have a hard time securing seats in the upcoming 2005 parliamentary elections.

Third, because President Lagos’s popularity remains high (stable over 50% during the last year), breaking away from the president’s coalition would mean giving up the electoral benefits that a popular president can represent for the coalition. With the 2004 Municipal elections less than a year away, the PDC would be foolish to renounce the electoral dividends from President Lagos’s popularity. Moreover, because the 2005 presidential elections will necessarily depend, at least in part, on the popularity of the outgoing president, if Lagos’s popularity remains strong, Lagos’s successor will benefit. The PDC will make every effort to make sure that the Concertación remains unified and Lagos supports the PDC candidate as the coalition’s presidential candidate.

The future of the Concertación remains an open question after the end of Lagos’s six-year term in March 2006. Despite anticipated difficulties in agreeing on a presidential candidate, Socialists and Christian Democrats will likely put aside their differences and file a unified slate of candidates for the December 2005 election. If the Concertación wins the presidential race, the same three reasons that have held that coalition together since 1989 will continue to explain its unity. If, on the other hand, the Concertación loses the presidential race—and it seems likely if the rightwing candidate Joaquín Lavín remains ahead in the polls—the incentives for the leftist parties to abandon their Christian Democratic partners will be strong. Yet, provided that there are no major changes to the electoral rules, the same incentives that have forced the two right wing parties to form a new alliance every time an election nears will induce Christian Democrats and Socialists to revive the Concertación, even if under a new coalition name, and face the elections as a unified slate.

El Salvador: Peace Accords, Elections and the Military

Antonio Martinez-Uribe

El Salvador is commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Peace Accords that ended twelve years of armed conflict. These accords were extremely important for the political life of the country as well as for the process of democratization. One of the main elements of the Accords was to recognize elections as the only legitimate means to attain power. The military, which in the past dominated national politics and controlled the security and police forces as well as the intelligence apparatus, returned to the barracks and were subordinated to the democratically elected civilian authorities. Its mission under the constitution was to defend national sovereignty and the territory. Equally important was the incorporation of former guerrilla members into public life through the creation of a political party, the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), which has been gaining momentum at the legislative and municipal levels. With presidential elections approaching in March 2004, a potential conflict is developing in El Salvador between a society that is trying to democratize itself and a state, which is increasingly penetrated by the military.

The FMLN Gains Strength

Since the signing of the peace accords, five elections have been held. In 1994, there were presidential, congressional and municipal elections. Subsequently, there were two congressional elections, two municipal elections and one presidential election. Next year, in March 2004, there will be presidential elections once again. The governing party, the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA), which represents the business and financial sectors, has held the presidency for three consecutive terms since 1989.

Meanwhile, the former guerrilla movement, the FMLN, in spite of its internal conflicts has been consolidating its electoral and political strength. In the municipal and legislative elections of March 2003, the FMLN showed itself to be the most popular electoral force in the country. It was able...
to retain municipalities coveted by ARENA, such as the capital city of San Salvador, Santa Tecla and Sayapango, where the FMLN has governed since 1997. The FMLN also governs other important urban centres and currently has 31 of 84 deputies in Congress, which gives it a plurality of seats in this body. It is also interesting that the FMLN was able to win in March despite opposition from the largely oficialista and conservative (pro-ARENA) news media. With the FMLN looking like it could win next year’s presidential elections, the political right is doing whatever it can to forestall this victory.

Central America

In a report published by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in September 2003 violence is identified as a social problem that threatens the development of nations, undermines the quality of life and undermines social cohesion. Although violence is a global phenomenon, according to PAHO, the Americas is one of the areas with the highest levels. There are approximately 120,000 people murdered each year in the Americas. In Central America, for instance, homicides per 100,000 population range from 55 in Honduras to 45 in El Salvador. It is also worth noting that these rates are closely associated with youth gangs, which are reported to be responsible for most of the violence in these countries (PAHO News Release 25/09/03).

In Honduras and El Salvador there are approximately 30,000 young people involved in gangs known as maras. Most maras have their own dress code and language and are usually armed. Gangs are for the most part found in urban slum areas where little or no police surveillance exists. In El Salvador, some gang leaders have international connections with the drug trade. For that reason, after a long debate on October 2, 2003, the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly approved (79 of 84 deputies) a law that prohibits youth gangs and punishes its members with a sentence of 3-5 years in prison. If the crime committed involves robbery, extortion, kidnapping or sexual assault, the sentence could be up to 10 years in prison (Univisión 3/10/03). Also, this past August, the Honduran Congress approved a similar law against youth gangs, which has led to operations along its borders with Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua intended to prevent gang members from escaping to these countries to avoid detention (Miami Herald 03/10/03).

Thus far, the governments of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala have implemented programmes against youth gangs, namely the Operación Libertad in Honduras, the Plan Mano Dura in El Salvador and the Plan Escoba in Guatemala, in an attempt to reduce the rates of violence in their societies. Though, it is premature to assess the effectiveness of these programmes, it is important to underscore that some sectors of society, including academics and non-governmental organizations, have fiercely opposed these anti-gang programmes for being repressive and unconstitutional.

Political Parties and the Authoritarian Past

In the past, the military dominated the national political scenario. Following a long and turbulent period of coup d’états and counter-coups, the military founded a political party, the Partido de Conciliación Nacional (PCN), in the 1960s in order to give the country at least the façade of democracy. In this respect the military “institutionalized” their political dominance by creating a party to use in the electoral arena. Of course, elections during this period were fraudulent: in the end a military officer was elected president together with a Legislative Assembly and Supreme Court of Justice that were subservient to the military and the oligarchy. It was precisely this situation, which denied any possibility of respect for political liberties and human rights, which triggered the civil war of the 1980s.

Today only four parties compete on the electoral stage: ARENA and the FMLN, which are leading the polls, a coalition made up of the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC) and the Centro Demócrata Unido (CDU), representing different Christian democrat groups, and the PCN, which continues to have strong ties with the military. Leading up to the 2004 election, the political scenario offers cause for concern. With the war over, the peace accords were supposed to lead to a democratic process that protected political liberties, improved the living conditions of the population, and substantially strengthened the institutionalization of the rule of law.

One indicator that democracy has only been partially consolidated in El Salvador is the new protagonistic role that the armed forces are adopting vis-à-vis social conflicts. The Peace Accords established that the military should not involve itself in matters of public security, except in emergency situations. However in 1994, President Armando Calderón Sol ordered the armed forces to patrol with the National Civil Police (PNC). Since then, those operations have been expanded under the current administration of Francisco Flores Pérez. In addition, President Flores has in the last year done at least three things, which demonstrate the militarization of the state: 1) the approval of the National Defence Law (Ley de Defensa Nacional), in September 2002, which reintroduces old concepts of national
security that expand the range of activities undertaken by the military and which had supposedly been overcome by the peace accords; 2) the approval of the Law Against Youth Gangs (Ley Anti-Maras), which has been openly opposed by academic, social and legal sectors and which gives protagonist roles to the military in leading the repression against youth gangs; and, 3) sending troops to Iraq, which has also been criticized by important sectors of the armed forces.

The Future – Lessons from the Past

Therefore, it seems that the military is increasing its control of important areas of the State. This can be seen in the police forces, where the new director of the PNC (National Civil Police), Ricardo Meneses, has a military background. In addition, the old party of the dictatorship, the PCN, continues to represent much of the armed forces - although today there is also support within the military for ARENA, the CDU and the PDC. Surprisingly, there is an important group of military personnel, which also supports the FMLN. This shows, on the one hand, the diversity of political preferences within the military institution and, on the other, a conflict within the political class (be it from the right, the centre or the left) about the role the armed forces should play.

The problem in El Salvador is understanding what role the armed forces should play in the consolidation of democracy. It is widely accepted that the role of the military should be reduced, because if it increases there is the potential of returning to the dictatorial system of the past. Therefore, whether or not the FMLN wins the next presidential elections, if alliances are made with the military, and if the military increases its control of the state apparatus, El Salvador could find itself with a party of the left (like the parties of the right) that could impose its policies by force and not reason. The real threat is that in El Salvador there are “authoritarian” civilians that are looking for the support of anti-democratic elements within the military.

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A New Round in the US-Cuba Conflict

Ana J. Faya

Disagreement within the US on its policy towards Cuba has recently increased, putting the US-Cuba conflict under the spotlight once again. As a consequence of the impending 2004 presidential election in the US, new incidents are likely to arise between Washington and Havana.

On the tenth of October, after months of speculation, US President George Bush announced his decision to tighten sanctions against Cuba. Although the Bush Administration had earlier announced a major review of the US’s Cuba policy, the president’s speech did not herald any new or dramatic initiative – underscoring the paucity of official thinking on Cuba. Bush announced greater enforcement of US travel restrictions – with particular emphasis on targeting those US citizens who travel to Cuba via third countries; an increase in the number of legal immigrants that the US would accept; new or enhanced TV and radio transmission; and the establishment of a “Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba” – the only new element in the announcement. The Commission will be co-chaired by Cabinet secretaries Colin Powell and Mel Martinez. This is the first time in US history that a Secretary of Housing and Urban Development has been given a foreign policy role.

Abstract

The European Union Perception of Cuba: From Frustration to Irritation

By Joaquín Roy

Fidel Castro dramatically selected the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of his failed attack against the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953, for his rejection of any kind of humanitarian assistance, economic cooperation, and political dialogue with the European Union (EU) and its member states, signalling one of the lowest points in European-Cuban relations. Just days before the anniversary of what later history would recognize as the prelude of the Cuban Revolution, the European Union’s Foreign Relations Council issued a harsh criticism of the regime’s latest policies and personal insults against some European leaders (notably, Spain’s José María Aznar), in essence freezing all prospects of closer relations. The overall context was, of course, the global uncertainty of the U.S. occupation of Iraq in the aftermath of the post-September 11 tension. Having survived the end of the Cold War and the perennial U.S. harassment, the Castro regime seemed to have lost its most precious alternative source of international cooperation, if not economic support.

Available online at: http://www.focal.ca/images/pdf/Cuba_EU.pdf
responsibility, and the first time a Cuban American will be involved directly in the US policy towards the island. The Commission’s duties were described as “identifying ways” to plan for “the elements of a comprehensive program to assist the Cuban people” in achieving a democratic society.

But only a few days later, the US Senate followed the lead of the House of Representatives by voting in favour of a resolution lifting the travel ban to Cuba. US agricultural interests, and the tourist industry have been trying to expand their business ties with Havana’s official “entrepreneurs.” Increasingly, lawmakers from both chambers in Congress are supporting them. The number of political leaders that consider current US policy as inefficient and obsolete in its efforts to generate change in Castro’s regime is growing. The probability that such political leaders are reacting, in part, to the commercial opportunities open to Europeans and Canadians, but denied to Americans, should not be overlooked.

However, at a moment when polls signal a decline in his approval rating, President Bush has rejected the strong domestic current supportive of lifting the travel ban and the embargo, in favour of trying to secure the Florida vote. In that state, some sectors of the Cuban-American community have lobbied for a hardening of US policy towards Cuba, and have threatened to withdraw their support for Bush’s re-election campaign.

Given the history of the Bush administration’s foreign policy up to this point, the quagmire of the war in Iraq, and a weak economy, the president, in the midst of a re-election campaign may well need a scapegoat to distract attention from his policy failures. Taking harder-line measures against Cuba, and provoking a response from Castro, may be part of Bush’s electoral strategy. A new cycle of aggression and response could begin that will justify maintaining the current policy, and at the same time win Florida for the Republicans. Observers of the 2000 US Presidential election cannot forget that a thinly balanced Florida can determine the outcome of the entire election.

Up to now, initiatives by US authorities demonstrate the revival of measures taken against the Cuban regime, including the inspection of charter flights to Cuba out of Miami (and planned extension of this practice to other airports) in order to limit the taking of remittances to Cuba to $3000, the legal maximum. The State Department has announced that the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba will seek to have operational plans within six months. Once again, a high-ranking civil servant noted the potential that Cuba has to produce biological weapons. The White House has stepped up its public criticism of Castro by Undersecretary of State for Latin America, Roger Noriega and National Security Advisor, Condoleeza Rice.

The Cuban government responded dryly to the speech made by President Bush. As a result, of Washington’s present position, Castro has deployed his arsenal of arguments explaining his political, social and economic strategy exclusively in terms of what is required for the conflict with the United States. High-ranking Cuban officials have held meetings in more than 170 neighbourhoods in order to explain the damage that, according to Cuban authorities, the embargo has caused the island. It should be remembered that in March, Fidel Castro justified the incarceration of 75 dissidents and the execution of three hijackers by “the interference of the US in domestic affairs.” The tactic of justifying all the grave economic and political problems experienced by Cuba in terms of its bilateral conflict with the United States – without consideration of other internal or external factors – continues without apparent end.

In Washington, electoral interests are hidden behind the intensification of the embargo and the travel ban. In Havana, a totalitarian and stagnant model of government is hidden behind the defence of national sovereignty. This context may well be a catalyst for more troubles. It is likely that new incidents, real or fabricated, will be provoked between the US government and that of Fidel Castro’s as each respond to domestic political imperatives. The international community – Canada included – should be prepared to face an escalation of tensions.

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Observing the Observers: Elections in the Americas

John W. Graham

Since 1990, the year that Canada joined the Organization of American States (OAS), 19 of the 34 members of the OAS have had one or more of their elections monitored by international observers. In this period the OAS alone has conducted 76 observations. Other groups such as the Carter Center, NDI (National Democratic Institute), IRI (International Republican Institute) and IFES (International Foundation for Election Systems) have also been engaged in multiple elections in the region. Millions of dollars have been invested and hundreds of Canadians have been involved. Clearly, a prolific and high profile activity, but has it done any good? Has it positively changed the course of democratic evolution in the Americas or is it just a clever and expensive smokescreen for electoral tourism?
Although there are some caveats, including, until very recently, the exploitation of observer missions for purposes of political patronage by Canadian ministers, the answer is a resounding "yes." Overall, the investment has been amply rewarded.

The usual mandate of an observer mission was to assess whether an election can be endorsed as genuinely free and fair. The approval of international observers, and most particularly of the OAS, helps to establish legitimacy, both internally and externally. In many circumstances it has become the sine qua non for loans from the Bretton Woods institutions and bilateral development assistance. For countries undergoing a transition from authoritarianism to the tentative beginnings of a democratic system, the observer process has been critically important and, if accompanied by long-term technical assistance, has been shown to play a decisive role in facilitating that transition. In countries where a democratic culture has been all but extinguished by dictatorship or has never matured, expert technical assistance must start from scratch to encourage the building of reliable voter registration lists, printing and transport logistics, ballot and counting security systems, a legal framework, rules for media participation, public education, transparent computer programming, and training programmes for these and many other essential activities. The function of election observers is to assess not only the fairness of the count and the integrity of the process, but also to determine whether the electoral infrastructure is capable of providing a reasonably accurate result.

The most spectacular vindication of this process was the Nicaraguan election of 1990. The Sandinista leader, Daniel Ortega, had agreed to invite the OAS (and others) to observe in the firm expectation that the OAS would be endorsing a Sandinista victory. When it became apparent that he had lost, Ortega had second thoughts and was eventually persuaded to accept the victory of Violeta Chamorro through the diplomacy of former US President Jimmy Carter and President Carlos Andrés Pérez of Venezuela. However, these individual efforts would have been futile if the observers and the advance preparations had not delivered a highly credible verdict. More groundbreaking occurred in the Dominican Republic elections of 1994 when the OAS (together with IFES and NDI) blew the whistle on election manipulation, which had deprived the opposition of victory. A similar pattern was followed when the OAS withdrew from President Fujimori’s 2000 elections in Peru, setting the stage for intense Inter-American pressure, and ultimately, the resignation of Fujimori and the return of Peruvian democracy. Other notable successes have been in Paraguay, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Ecuador and Guyana.

Not all observations have moved the democratic process forward. Initially successful in facilitating the relatively free election of Aristide in 1991 and the 1995 return to a democratic system, Haiti, once again, under Aristide has relapsed and shown itself almost impervious to reform. However, the evidence is in that advance preparation and election observing have contributed significantly to a more robust (if still imperfect) democratic culture in the Americas. In many countries, the electoral process is in better shape than other components of democracy. However, it is less often understood that these successes could not have taken place without disciplined attention to the professionalism and neutrality of the observers and technical experts. The system works because the observer missions (OAS, Carter, IFES and NDI) have developed a high level of credibility. The OAS cannot dispatch observers wherever they choose. Each mission must be invited by the state holding the election and each mission must solicit funding from the donor community, including a sometimes niggardly Canadian government. Repeated invitations to perform this delicate and intrusive role underline the importance of a high level of credibility.

When observers assess an election, the value of that assessment is a function of the experience and quality of the persons engaged in the process. Observers in the Americas must also have the necessary language skills and willingness to accept remote and rustic assignments. The presence of competent observers often has a deterrent effect on sectors of the electorate who might otherwise engage in irregularities and a confidence-building impact on an unstable environment. The notion that quality control of OAS missions and hence selection of observers must be managed by the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD) of the OAS has not always been respected by some Canadian ministers to the point that Canadians, including some politically designated observers have not been accepted. Fortunately, this problem now appears to have been resolved.

So successful has the system been that traditional election observation is becoming obsolete. Observation by external bodies is being replaced by well-trained domestic non-party organizations. However, where uncertainties, corruption or instability still call for outside observation (as in Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Venezuela, Haiti, Jamaica and others), this approach is being rethought. Four years ago a New York Times editorial complained that election observation is "...too narrowly focused on election day itself." That focus is beginning to shift from detailed accounts of what is happening at polling stations to pre-identified weak spots in the process – such as abusive government control of the media,
election transport, election financing, intimidation, lack of transparency in the computer registration of voters, and improper security of ballots.

New ideas are being tested. In Colombia the OAS suggested, and the candidates agreed, that an observer should be attached fulltime to each major presidential candidate. The principal observer organizations are already sending in teams many months in advance to determine the tilt of the electoral playing field and to identify the major deficiencies.

The challenge for observer missions is to find the resources from donors up to a year ahead of the election date, to emphasize the importance of long-term as opposed to short-term observation, to draw increasingly on domestic observers, and to discriminate between necessary and unnecessary requests. The challenge for those of us in North America is to clean up our electoral role model. Chads in Florida, patronage in Canada, gerrymandering in Texas and the carnival in California confuse the message.

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