



May 29, 2009

## **Secretary of State Clinton in El Salvador and Honduras: Defining Obama's Latin American Policy**

by [Ray Walser, Ph.D.](#)

Recently, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton specified the three guiding "D's" of U.S. foreign policy: defense, development, and diplomacy. When she heads south for the inauguration of El Salvador's new president and the May 31-June 2 annual high-level meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS), the secretary needs to pack a fourth "D": democracy.

### **El Salvador's New President: The End of an Era**

Although incoming President Mauricio Funes of the leftist Farabundo Marti Front (FMLN) has sent some hopeful signals that he intends to pursue a Brazilian-style social democratic course, he will be under heavy pressure to veer sharply to the radical left.

In attendance at both events will be Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. Notwithstanding his fawning public relations offensive aimed at winning over President Obama at this past April's Summit of the Americas, Venezuela's populist president wants to put the FMLN and Funes in his hip pocket. He hopes to lure Funes into becoming an active member of ALBA, his "Bolivarian" coalition, along with Cuba, Bolivia, and Nicaragua. With Honduras leaning in Chávez's direction and Guatemala troubled by political and security turbulence, Chávez sees himself as the arbiter of Central America's future development.

The challenge for the Obama Administration is to face the reality that, with the end of the 20-year reign of the pro-U.S. National Republican Alliance (ARENA) in El Salvador, the U.S. has lost a close regional ally. The Administration must look seriously at deteriorating economic and political conditions in Central America, where poverty, violence, drugs, and vendetta politics raise the specter of lawlessness, un-governability,



and potential instability.

The foundation of a viable U.S.-El Salvador relationship rests on respect for the democratic process, preservation of the rule of law, and open, market-friendly policies. Mutual cooperation in areas such as counter-drug and anti-gang activities--hallmarks of previous years--need to be preserved. If El Salvador becomes another Latin platform for advancing an anti-American agenda, it will negatively impact negatively future levels of U.S. assistance through the Millennium Challenge project and USAID as well as on U.S. immigration matters.

### **Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas: The Market Way Is the Only Way**

Last year, the Bush Administration launched a new initiative: Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas (PPA). The PPA marked an attempt to re-energize U.S. government and regional efforts to enlarge a free-trade area in the Western Hemisphere and create positive momentum for open-market policies.[\[1\]](#) It offers a platform for a coalition of willing countries to advance freer trade, open investment markets, effect more efficient and less costly regulation, enhance regional competitiveness, and promote greater economic opportunity.

By agreeing to attend a ministerial meeting for the PPA in El Salvador, Secretary Clinton lends continuity to a key initiative of the previous Administration.[\[2\]](#) Hopefully, follow-up actions will include kindling congressional movement on the free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama.

### **The OAS: Defending Democracy or Appeasing Castro?**

The concept of a unified hemisphere living working harmoniously was enshrined first in the 19th century's Pan-American Union--the philosophical precursor to the Organization of American States (OAS). Since the late 1940s, the foreign ministers of the Americas have met annually in the OAS's General Assembly to resolve differences of



opinion.

This year's gathering of the world's oldest regional organization takes place in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. In that steamy economic hub, delegates will work through a jungle of agenda items--105 in all. The meeting's central theme, "Toward a Culture of Non-Violence," aptly reflects the chief concern of the region's citizens, who are all-too-often besieged by drug traffickers, criminals, and corrupt officials. Additionally, Western Hemisphere diplomats also promise to give high priority to assisting the continuing failed state of Haiti.

It is Cuba, however, that has everyone abuzz. Pressure to return Cuba to the OAS is being applied by the ALBA coalition. Leaders like Evo Morales of Bolivia and Hugo Chávez urge Latin American states to impose a deadline for Cuba's re-entry or create an alternative body "for Latins only" if Cuba is kept out.

The campaign by the left for Cuba's re-entry into the OAS begins with a possible repeal of the 1962 expulsion resolution. OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza of Chile argues that the expulsion was a result of Cold War politics and is an artifact of a bygone era.<sup>[3]</sup> Insulza ignores the continuing totalitarian nature of the Cuban system, which still adheres to a destructive Marxist-Leninist model that is incompatible with the principles and spirit of the OAS charter.

Secretary Clinton promises to fight to link any revision in Cuba's OAS status to movement by the Castro regime to comply with the democratic governance provisions of the 2001 Inter-American Democratic Charter. As the *Miami Herald* recently argued, "Unilateral OAS readmission of Cuba will sacrifice principles to appease a dictatorship and lead Americans to ask whether the continued existence of the OAS--and U.S. membership and financial support for it--would serve any useful purpose."<sup>[4]</sup>

For its part, Cuba says it has no interest in rejoining the OAS. Its foreign minister denounced the body as a tool of "U.S. Empire" and



"anachronistic." [5] Other nations like Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Venezuela are itching for sustained conflict with the U.S. to distract attention from their homegrown assaults on democracy.

### **Recommendations**

- **El Salvador.** Secretary Clinton should remind President Funes that El Salvador is an important anchor for peace and prosperity in Central America. She should also make clear that either reverting to the polarizing politics of the guerrilla 1980s or joining Hugo Chavez's anti-American club will have negative consequences for U.S. bilateral relations and for the people of El Salvador.
- **Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas.** The secretary should strongly recommit the U.S. to the pro-trade, pro-market PPA coalition and work for congressional approval of the pending U.S. free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama.
- **Cuba.** Secretary Clinton must stand firm against an unconditional return of Cuba--one that fails to pass the democratic bar--to OAS membership. She must also work to enlist other democratic regimes in applying pressure upon Cuba's leaders to begin a peaceful transition to political and economic pluralism and encourage enhanced support for Cuba's growing domestic democratic movement.

### **Into the Lion's Den**

A triad of key challenges--market-based growth and development; protections of citizen security against drugs, crime, and violence; and preservation of basic political freedoms and liberties--sit atop the real agenda for the Americas. Even as she descends into the despotic lion's den created by Latin America's latest breed of pseudo-democratic strongmen Secretary Clinton needs to deliver a strong message regarding where the U.S. stands on democracy

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[1]Daniella Markheim and James M. Roberts. "Finding Pathways to Progress in the Americas," Heritage Foundation, *WebMemo* No. 2103, October 17, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/tradeandeconomicfreedom/wm2103.cfm>.

[2]U.S. Department of State, *Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas*," at <http://www.pathways-caminos.gov/> (May 29, 2009).

[3]The original act of suspension makes interesting reading focusing on non-democratic nature of Cuba's communist system. See Pan-American Union, "Eight Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs," at <http://www.oas.org/columbus/docs/OEASerCII.8Eng.pdf> (May 29, 2009). A fuller explanation of Insulza's historical-based justification for the repeal of the ban can be found in an interview with the Council of the Americas at <http://www.as-coa.org/article.php?id=1620> (May 29, 2009).

[4]Editorial, "No Freedom in Cuba, No OAS Membership," *Miami Herald*, May 28, 2009, at <http://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/editorials/story/1069071.html> (May 29, 2009).

[5]"Cuba Is Proud to Be Outside the OAS," *Granma*, May 26, 2009, at <http://www.granma.cu/ingles/2009/mayo/mar26/OAS.html> (May 28, 2009).