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## The Obama Administration and the Americas

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**B**arack Obama entered the U.S. presidency with a daunting agenda. At home he faced deep economic recession, a near collapse of the country's financial institutions, rising unemployment, decaying infrastructure, a dysfunctional health insurance system, and countless other accumulated problems. Abroad he inherited two costly and unpopular wars, the continuing threat from al Qaeda, dangerous confrontations with North Korea and Iran, strained relations with Russia, multiple challenges from a rising China, the specter of implosion in Pakistan, the festering Israel-Palestine impasse, the looming dangers of climate change, pandemics, and nuclear proliferation—and much more.

Few observers predicted, therefore, that the Obama administration would devote much attention to Latin America and the Caribbean. None of the region's countries poses an imminent threat to U.S. national security. None seems likely to be a source or target of significant international terrorism.

During the campaign, moreover, Senator Obama said little about Latin America. He confined himself to one dedicated speech on the region (to a Cuban American organization in Miami), a proposal to appoint a special ambassador for the Americas, suggestions during the “Rust Belt” primary

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campaigns that the North American Free Trade Agreement should be renegotiated, and a few statements expressing reservations about the Colombia and Panama free trade agreements pending ratification by the U.S. Senate.

After his election, however, Barack Obama and members of his administration quickly showed interest in Latin America and the Caribbean. As president-elect, Mr. Obama met with only one foreign leader, Felipe Calderón of Mexico. His first foreign visitor to Camp David was Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The new president also soon welcomed Chile's President Michelle Bachelet and Colombia's Álvaro Uribe to Washington. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's first meeting with a foreign head of state was with Haiti's President René Préval, and she then pushed successfully for expanded international assistance to Haiti. Vice President Joseph Biden visited Chile and Costa Rica in March. Secretary Clinton, Attorney General Eric Holder, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, and Michael Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, all traveled to Mexico by early April 2009, ahead of a trip by President Obama himself. All were notably receptive to Mexican perspectives, and their visits were well received.<sup>1</sup> The new administration also announced initiatives on Cuba, loosening restrictions on travel and remittances by Cuban Americans and opening up the possibility of U.S. investment in telecommunications networks with the island. The president himself called for a "new beginning" in U.S.-Cuba relations. The State Department began exploratory conversations with Cuban officials on a potential postal service agreement and resumed long-suspended bilateral consultations on migration.

No concrete actions were taken to approve the free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama, but administration officials quickly backed away from Mr. Obama's earlier skeptical posture. The president's announcement that he would press for comprehensive immigration reform was greeted warmly in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, and several South American countries. And President Obama's participation in April 2009 at the Fifth Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, won praise throughout the Americas for his consultative manner and his expressed interest in multilateral cooperation.

Why did the Obama administration take a strong initial interest in Latin America and the Caribbean? What was the content and what were the sources of its approaches? Are the Obama administration's policies in the Western Hemisphere likely to take fuller shape, be implemented, and endure? Or will they be attenuated or even abandoned, as has often happened to U.S.

policy initiatives toward Latin America in the past? What can and should the Obama administration do to improve U.S. policies toward and relations with Latin America and the Caribbean in the years ahead?

## **Putting Latin America on the U.S. Agenda**

The main reason for the Obama administration's early engagement with Latin America was the new team's perception that even though the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean raise no urgent issues for the United States, some of them, especially Mexico, are increasingly important to America's future. This perception was driven home early by Mexico's deepening problems, marked by a surge in homicides and confrontations between the Mexican government and the narcotics cartels, some of them near the U.S. border. Mexico's abrupt economic downturn, a consequence of the U.S. crisis—exacerbated by the outbreak of the H1N1 virus—compounded a sense of urgency.<sup>2</sup> The Obama administration found itself faced with a choice: plan emergency efforts to quarantine the United States from troubles in Mexico, or devise a more effective partnership with Mexico in order to help deal with that country's problems and their implications for the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Growing concern about Mexico helped concentrate minds in Washington. The administration's commitment to attend the Trinidad and Tobago summit was a preexisting reason to pay attention to Latin America. Doing so was reinforced by a calculation that a change in U.S. attitudes and rhetoric would be welcomed in the region and could therefore produce a quick foreign policy success.

In focusing on Mexico and preparing for the summit, U.S. policymakers recognized that Latin America matters to the United States today for four main reasons:

First, the borders between the United States and its southern neighbors have blurred because of massive and sustained migration and growing economic integration. It is projected that growth in the size of the U.S. labor force from now until 2050 will be entirely due to immigrants and their descendants, mainly from Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>4</sup> This demographic and economic interdependence has given rise to complex issues that have both international and domestic facets—the so-called “intermestic” questions—including narcotics, human and arms trafficking, health care, immigrants' remittances, driver's licenses, youth gangs, portable retirement pensions, drug trafficking and consumption, and bilingual education.<sup>5</sup> The

Obama administration knew from the start that it could not ignore these issues; the media focus on Mexico's troubles underlined their high salience for the U.S. public.

Second, Latin America matters economically to the United States as a prime source of energy and other key resources and as a major market for U.S. goods and services. The United States obtains nearly half of its energy imports from the countries of the Western Hemisphere, and more than half of these come from Latin American and Caribbean suppliers. There is great potential for expanded energy production in the Americas, from both renewable and nonrenewable sources.<sup>6</sup> The value of the goods and services the United States exported to Latin America in 2008 was \$273 billion—20 percent of all U.S. exports, four times the value of U.S. exports to China, and about equal to U.S. exports to the European Community. U.S. firms still have a competitive advantage in Latin American markets, arising from proximity and familiarity plus demographic and cultural ties. Building upon this advantage in a region of expanding middle-class consumption is more pressing at a time of economic stress at home.

Third, Latin American nations are increasingly seen in Washington as critical for confronting such transnational issues as energy security, climate change, crime, narcotics trafficking, and public health. The new administration recognizes that these challenges cannot be managed effectively without close and sustained cooperation from several countries of the Americas—bilaterally, regionally, and in global forums.

Fourth, Latin Americans share important core values with North Americans, especially the commitment to human rights, including free political expression, effective democratic governance, and the rule of law. The broad normative commitment throughout Latin America to democratic governance and the rule of law is noteworthy, in spite of uneven practice. The Western Hemisphere remains a largely congenial neighborhood for the United States and its values in an international environment that is often hostile.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Legacy**

When Obama took office, in January 2009, administration officials understood that despite Latin America's growing day-to-day significance for the United States, U.S. policies toward the region in recent years have often been ineffective and sometimes even counterproductive. The administrations of

both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush emphasized showy Western Hemisphere summits to induce and demonstrate high-level governmental attention to Latin America, but these meetings typically produced little beyond photo opportunities, rhetoric, and an occasional new program or process of consultation. Both administrations continued to talk about a proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) long after that goal became unachievable. After the September 11, 2001, attacks, Washington came to view Latin America mainly through an international terrorism and security lens, and in these terms the region was a relatively low priority. Washington wasn't focusing on the issues Latin Americans themselves considered most important: poverty, education, income distribution, and citizen security.

Many Latin Americans resented Washington's perceived inattentiveness and felt that Washington was still following something of a cold war script. They rejected significant U.S. policies during the Bush years, including the Washington Consensus economic paradigm and especially the invasion of Iraq. Hugo Chávez of Venezuela took advantage of this sentiment by stepping up his flamboyant anti-U.S. rhetoric; he also sought favor in the region by boosting subsidized petroleum sales and other economic assistance to Central American and Caribbean nations; making a timely purchase of Argentine government bonds; cooperating closely with Cuba to furnish medical and other social services in many countries; and making bold promises to finance energy infrastructure projects in South America.

Many Latin American and Caribbean countries, meanwhile, have been strengthening subregional integration, in part through formal institutions, but even more through trade and investment, Latin America-based multinational corporations, and professional and business networks. Many South American countries engage actively in various regional and world forums. Venezuela established the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América, or ALBA), with Bolivia, Ecuador, and eight Central American and Caribbean nations.<sup>8</sup> Brazil has taken a leading role in creating the Union of South American Nations (Unión de Naciones Suramericanas, or UNASUR) and the South American Defense Council. It is not yet clear how important these organizations will turn out to be in practice, but they clearly reflect a regional preference for intra-Latin American rather than Pan-American approaches.

Several countries—especially Brazil, Chile, Peru, Venezuela, Mexico, and Cuba—have been diversifying their international relationships beyond the Western Hemisphere, building ties with countries of the European Union,

members of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, and particularly with China, India, Russia, and Iran.<sup>9</sup> China has displaced the United States as the main export market for Brazil and Chile, and is expected to become Peru's main market in 2010. Brazil has developed a strategic alliance with India and South Africa, strengthened ties with the other so-called BRIC countries (BRIC stands for Brazil, Russia, India, and China), played a leading role in the G-20, the G-8, the Doha trade negotiations, and the Copenhagen talks on climate change, and offered itself as an intermediary in the Middle East and with Iran.

As the international activity and self-confidence of Latin American nations have grown, support for pan-American approaches to problem solving has waned. The Organization of American States (OAS) has often been ineffectual, and the Inter-American Democratic Charter has not produced many meaningful results. The Inter-American Development Bank has weakened in recent years, as liquidity in private international capital markets has increased, and as the Andean Development Corporation and the Brazilian National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) have gained importance. As extra-hemispheric actors have become more active and visible in Latin America, the influence of the U.S. government has been perceptibly declining. This was the state of inter-American relations that Barack Obama inherited.

## **Taking on U.S.-Latin American Relations**

With its decisive electoral victory and evident mandate for change, the Obama administration took up Latin America policy as part of its overall efforts to “reset” U.S. foreign policy. Key advisers posited that the severe international economic crisis might make inter-American approaches more attractive once again in much of Latin America. They believed that clear signals of a strong U.S. interest in regional ties could therefore yield dividends. This initial premise undergirded the new administration's first steps in the Americas.

The administration sought to gain the confidence of the U.S. public, of Latin Americans, and of the rest of the international community through its resolve and ability to reverse the deterioration of the U.S. economy. How well it succeeds in this aim will be highly relevant in Latin America, especially to those countries in the northern tier (Mexico and the Caribbean and Central American nations) that are especially dependent on U.S. investment, remittances, tourism, and trade.

Instead of reverting to soaring rhetoric about building a partnership reaching from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, the new administration emphasized that it would prefer to work with Latin American and Caribbean governments on a few issues that could be dealt with soon, if only partially, such as bolstering financial institutions, restoring credit and investment flows, and tackling the challenges of energy, the environment, and citizen security. The administration aimed to rebuild U.S. credibility without making promises it couldn't keep and creating unfulfillable expectations, by helping confront the underlying issues that have created space for Chávez and other radical populist movements.

Although it is a commonplace that Latin American countries always have been diverse, there has been a bipartisan tendency in Washington since 1990 to believe that convergence was occurring within the region toward democratic governance, market-oriented economics, and policies of macroeconomic balance. The U.S. policy community came to think of Latin American countries as mostly proceeding at different rates along the same path, with Chile blazing the trail. These convergent trends have been important (albeit sometimes exaggerated), but the Obama team recognizes that key differences still persist among the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and that some of these differences are growing. The most important differences lie primarily along five dimensions:

1. The level of demographic and economic interdependence with the United States
2. The degree and nature of openness to international economic competition
3. The strength of such key aspects of effective democratic governance as checks and balances, accountability, and the rule of law
4. The relative capacity of the state and of civil and political institutions beyond the state, such as political parties, the media, religious organizations, trade unions, and other nongovernmental entities
5. The extent to which the countries face the challenge of incorporating traditionally excluded populations, including more than 30 million marginalized, disadvantaged, and increasingly politically mobilized indigenous people, as well as Afro-Latin Americans and migrant workers.

Key U.S. officials understand that Latin American countries are moving on different trajectories and that their important structural differences need to be taken into account in U.S. policy. They recognize, therefore, that hemisphere-wide summits and broad regional initiatives are less likely to be effective than efforts that bring together smaller groups of variable composition, with comparable or complementary concerns.

## Changing Washington's Mind-Sets

Within its first hundred days, the Obama administration set out to reshape five important mind-sets regarding Latin America policy.

The first was a change of focus from the “war on terrorism” to confronting broadly shared challenges more salient in Latin America: economic growth, jobs, socioeconomic equity, citizen security, energy, migration, health, democratic governance, and the rule of law.

Second was a shift in the approach to another metaphorical war—the “war on drugs”: from concentrating on interdiction and eradication of supply to reducing demand and offering treatment to drug users in the United States.<sup>10</sup> The beginning of such a shift was suggested in the new administration's appointment as head of the U.S. Office of National Drug Policy (or “drug czar”) of the former Seattle police chief Gil Kerlikowske, known for his emphasis on treating the drug problem as a public health, not a criminal, issue. The incipient new approach was reinforced by low-key steps, mainly at the state level, to decriminalize the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes, and indications that the Department of Justice would not oppose such steps. The Obama team also began to acknowledge the role the United States itself has played in fueling and facilitating both the drug trade and the associated traffic in small arms and bulk cash.<sup>11</sup>

Third was acceptance that some of the key issues affecting U.S.–Latin America relations—particularly immigration, narcotics, small arms trafficking, trade, and energy conservation and development—require better U.S. performance at least as much and perhaps more than they do action by Latin American and Caribbean states.

Fourth was the recognition that Latin America's realities today do not call for smaller governments, but rather for more efficient governments that concentrate on citizen security, education, infrastructure, and other needs not being adequately provided by market forces. This turn away from market fundamentalism toward pragmatic, hybrid approaches—building on gradual changes of emphasis in the latter years of the George W. Bush presidency, and aligning with dominant Latin American currents—was doubtless reinforced by some of the measures the new administration needed to take domestically in response to the financial and economic crises.<sup>12</sup>

Finally the new administration turned away from overarching hemisphere-wide approaches to develop policies tailored to specific issues in four high-priority target regions:



1. The closest neighbors of the United States in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean
2. Brazil, the region's largest and most powerful country
3. The diverse and troubled nations of the Andean ridge, each posing a different challenge
4. Cuba, long a neuralgic issue for the United States, where changes in U.S. policy are overdue

In each of these cases, the Obama administration introduced new rhetoric and took modest, concrete steps toward signaling new policy directions. This declaratory phase of the administration's Western Hemisphere policy won immediate praise throughout the Americas and among those in the United States who closely follow inter-American affairs.<sup>13</sup> The initial contrast between the Obama administration's posture in Latin America and that of his White House predecessor was widely acclaimed. By mid-2009, hopes were high in many Latin American circles that a new era in U.S.–Latin America relations was dawning.

### **The Sources of the Obama Administration's Approach to Latin America**

Barack Obama came to the presidency with a life experience that was more international than that of most of his predecessors, but he was personally unfamiliar with Latin America, a region he had never visited, and his inner circle of foreign policy advisers did not include any Latin America hands.

Some elements of the Obama administration's approach to Latin America continued significant changes in U.S. policy that had been quietly introduced during the second term of George W. Bush. These changes were largely due to the work of Ambassador Thomas Shannon, a career diplomat who became assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs in October 2005 and fashioned a carefully nuanced case-by-case approach to the various populist and potentially populist regimes: those of Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, as well as Paraguay, Honduras, and El Salvador. In contrast to his predecessors in the first George W. Bush administration, who had a cold war– and Cuba-centered outlook, Shannon emphasized social and economic inequities as the root cause of many of Latin America's problems. Shannon paid special and deferential attention to Brazil, and sought multilateral cooperation. Ambassador Shannon's approach had been authorized by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as a means of keeping Latin American issues off

the desk of the President Bush, at the time preoccupied with the Iraq War. The Obama administration, however, positively embraced many of Shannon's innovations at the presidential level.

The Obama administration's initial approach toward Latin America and the Caribbean also reflected a high degree of consensus among nongovernmental experts on the region, evident in several reports published in the electoral and post-electoral window for external policy input.<sup>14</sup>

These reports recommended greater emphasis on policies directed toward mitigating poverty and inequality and citizen security and developing energy and migration initiatives; new approaches to narcotics trafficking, gun traffic, and immigration; increased cooperation with Brazil; and intensified partnership with Mexico. They generally counseled restrained, nonconfrontational responses to Hugo Chávez and new initiatives toward Haiti and Cuba, more because of their broader international symbolic significance than because of pressing bilateral concerns.<sup>15</sup> These reports reinforced think tank studies on other international issues ranging from climate change to immigration, narcotics, human rights, the Middle East, Europe and Asia—all of them recommending more multilateral policies; greater respect for international law, institutions, and opinion; and all rejecting the neoconservative ideology and rhetoric of the prior administration.<sup>16</sup>

The proximate cause for the Obama administration's quick start in addressing U.S.–Latin America relations, however, was the need to deal with growing troubles in Mexico. Mexico's difficulties galvanized the new administration's attention in a way that no bureaucrat or think tank report could have done.

### **Obama's First Year: From Auspicious Start to Growing Disappointment**

During the first months of 2009 there was consensus in Latin America that the Obama administration was off to a promising start in its approach to the Americas and in the international arena. The new administration was widely seen as being positively disposed toward multilateral approaches; given to listening rather than instructing or demanding; respectful of international law and opinion; open to dialogue, even with adversaries; willing to acknowledge U.S. co-responsibility for shared problems; explicitly committed to eschewing prior U.S. interventionist and paternalist practices; and inclined to avoid the bloated claims of many recent U.S. administrations that promised much more than they could deliver. The most applauded

moves by the Obama administration to transform America's foreign policy included the president's campaign pledge, reiterated on his second day in office, to close the Guantánamo Bay detention and interrogation facility, his eloquent Cairo overture to the Muslim world, the new U.S. efforts to engage Iran and North Korea, the conciliatory approach to Russia, and the priority accorded to achieving a just and secure peace between Israel and Palestine. The concepts and tone underlying these initiatives were also seen as shaping the administration's first steps on Western Hemisphere issues.<sup>17</sup> The president's statement in Port of Spain, that his administration sought to develop a new relationship without "senior and junior partners," epitomized what was fresh and attractive about the Obama vision.<sup>18</sup>

These perceived changes were welcomed throughout the Americas. The president's background as an African descendant who grew up in modest circumstances also made a powerful positive impression. President Obama's individual popularity as well as the more general image of the United States in Latin America increased strikingly, according to various public opinion polls.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the Obama administration's first year, however, the prevailing sentiment about its policies in Latin American diplomatic and political circles and among their U.S. counterparts was turning to disappointment. Critical comments were coming not only from the "usual suspects"—Fidel and Raúl Castro in Cuba, Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, and Nestor and Cristina Kirchner in Argentina—whom one would expect to be critical of U.S. policies, but also from Brazil's Lula, and from diverse and experienced Latin American analysts.<sup>20</sup> In the United States, the Obama approach to Latin America came under intense attack from editorial writers in the *Wall Street Journal* and from Republican political figures, most notably Senator James DeMint of South Carolina. For different reasons the new administration was also sharply criticized by a number of think tanks on the left.<sup>21</sup> Even initially sympathetic centrist observers expressed disillusion with the state of the Obama administration's policies toward the Americas after the first year.<sup>22</sup>

Several specific issues contributed to the expressed disappointment. The president's early call for a new approach to Cuba, so broadly welcomed throughout the Americas, turned out not to go very far. Resistance emerged within the Obama administration to the growing sentiment in the Organization of American States to lift the 1962 suspension of Cuba from that organization.<sup>23</sup> After its first steps reversing some of the sanctions on Cuba that had been imposed by the George W. Bush administration, the Obama

government indicated that any further U.S. measures toward rapprochement would require that Cuba make the next moves. Far from implementing a new beginning, the administration soon seemed to be reverting to the stance of several consecutive prior U.S. administrations: waiting for Cuba to change.

Suggestions that the United States was moving beyond earlier hegemonic attitudes soon seemed to be contradicted as well, when Secretary of State Clinton stated that China's and Iran's increasing activities in the region were a source of concern; by hints that some in the administration opposed Brazil's welcoming Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on a state visit; and then by more overt comments by Secretary Clinton that those in the hemisphere who cooperate with Iran should "think twice about the consequences," a warning that rankled many Latin Americans, even those wary of Iran, who found it heavy-handed.<sup>24</sup>

President Obama's early promise that comprehensive immigration reform would be a first-year priority gave way to a more limited commitment only to begin consultations in the first year, and then to growing indications that even this modest goal would likely recede into the future. After the administration acknowledged the need to regulate the export of small weapons from the United States to Mexico, President Obama himself suggested that this goal was unrealistic because of domestic politics, a comment he punctuated by signing the economic stimulus legislation despite a provision that made it legal to bring concealed weapons into U.S. national parks.

The Obama administration's approach to trade policy during its first year was confusing at best. The president explicitly rejected protectionism soon after taking office, but then accepted a "Buy American" provision in the economic stimulus legislation. The administration signaled willingness to proceed with free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama but continued to postpone any concrete action. It talked up energy cooperation with Brazil but preserved the subsidy for U.S. corn-based ethanol producers and a high tariff on imported ethanol. And it actively promoted enhanced partnership with Mexico but allowed Congress to end funding for the experimental program that had permitted Mexican truckers to enter the United States, leaving the United States in noncompliance with an important NAFTA provision.

Perhaps the most immediately damaging developments emerged from two issues that surely were not on the administration's to-do list at the outset. One was triggered by the forcible overthrow and deportation by the Honduran armed forces on June 28 of that country's constitutionally elected president, Manuel Zelaya. The Obama administration's first response, consistent

with its declaratory stance, was to reject this act, to push for a strong multilateral response from the hemisphere's nations through the OAS, and to impose some limited sanctions to give teeth to its rejection of the Honduran coup. Over time, however, Washington was reluctant to apply the harsher sanctions that some Latin Americans advocated. The administration hesitated in part because domestic critics, Senator DeMint foremost among them, were accusing it of intervening on behalf of Zelaya against Hondurans who were longtime friends of the United States. They charged that Zelaya was at best erratic and could credibly be portrayed as an acolyte and perhaps even a tool of Hugo Chávez.<sup>25</sup> Intense lobbying by those who had pushed the Cuba-centric and anti-Chávez agenda during the first George W. Bush administration polarized the Washington environment.

Neither the OAS diplomatic mission nor a second multilateral effort spearheaded by President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica was able to resolve the impasse in Honduras between Zelaya and the *de facto* regime that had replaced him, with the explicit blessings of the Honduran Congress and Supreme Court. Sentiment increased in many nations of the Americas for the United States to exercise its historic influence to restore the constitutional government—for example, by exercising its power as by far the main source of foreign exchange for the Honduran economy. The Obama administration sent Ambassador Shannon to Honduras in October 2009 to negotiate a solution, and he soon brokered an accord that was signed by both the *de facto* regime and Zelaya and hastily announced by Secretary Clinton. But the two Honduran parties interpreted this “agreement” differently, so no mutually acceptable solution ever actually took effect, and the *de facto* government, still unrecognized diplomatically by any nation, continued to organize the previously scheduled national elections. In these circumstances, Washington, while continuing to reject the *de facto* government, indicated its intent to recognize the eventual electoral victor as the legitimate authority in Honduras, provided that it would fulfill the commitments made in the negotiated accords to establish a “truth commission” and otherwise work to consolidate the country's deep divisions.

The U.S. government's pragmatic accommodation to Honduran realities was rejected by several of the larger South American nations because it did not restore the constitutional government and thus in effect accepted as legitimate elections that were carried out by an illegitimate regime. However, no Latin American government put forward a workable alternative approach or could exert any plausibly effective pressure to oust the coup's perpetrators

and supporters. The Honduran imbroglio showed above all the limits of multilateral approaches when there is little in-depth understanding of a local situation, when there is no shared disposition to take joint concrete measures, and when intense lobbying is undertaken in Washington on an issue about which very few are well informed.<sup>26</sup>

The second case that provoked Latin American criticism of the Obama administration was its handling of a ten-year agreement with Colombia, announced in August 2009, allowing access by U.S. military personnel, long capped at fourteen hundred, to seven Colombian military bases. The agreement had been negotiated after Ecuador's decision, in 2008, not to renew the agreement that had allowed U.S. access to its facility at Manta, which U.S. personnel had used for the previous ten years for surveillance of narcotics trafficking in the Andean regions and Central America. Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, and several other South American governments raised questions about the Colombia-U.S. accord, with some calling for transparency regarding all the agreement's provisions and seeking formal guarantees that U.S. military activities would be restricted to Colombian territory. Most of the expressed concerns diminished as both the United States and Colombia provided additional details about the agreement, and early in 2010 Brazil and the United States signed their own mutual security agreement, the first such agreement in more than sixty years. But the commitment to consultation and transparency that the Obama administration had projected at the Port of Spain summit was somewhat undercut by this incident.

The impression created by these episodes was reinforced by widespread disappointment regarding the administration's broader international approaches. Closure of the symbolically important Guantánamo prison, originally promised within a year and strongly applauded throughout Latin America, was postponed. In time the Obama administration came to make arguments couched in security terms for loosening legal barriers to coercive interrogation and prolonged incarceration without trial. To citizens of many Latin American countries this sounded like the discredited positions of the prior administration, and reminded some of actions taken by the region's authoritarian regimes in the 1970s and 1980s. The administration's initiatives to engage Iran and North Korea appeared to be faltering, in the absence of reciprocal interest. The even-handed approach toward brokering an Israel-Palestine two-state solution seemed to be stalled as well. Questions were increasingly raised about the viability and durability of the Obama administration's initial foreign policy approaches.<sup>27</sup>

## **Assessing the Obama Policies in the Americas**

One new U.S. administration after another in recent decades has announced a new policy for the Americas, usually with considerable fanfare. Often, however, these initiatives have come to naught, or little more.<sup>28</sup>

There is a recognizable cycle: Incoming policymakers closely associated with a newly elected president push for fresh starts. Political pressures often lead to overdramatizing these new approaches. Resistance to the initiatives emerges from the career bureaucracy of the U.S. government, from interest and pressure groups, or from both. Other domestic and international issues soon take up the time of senior officials. Uncertain, contradictory, and ineffective implementation of the new policies leads to their tacit or even explicit abandonment.

It is much too early to be sure how the Obama administration's policies toward Latin America will develop, or how U.S. relations with the diverse countries and subregions of Latin America and the Caribbean will ultimately evolve. This uncertainty arises in part because U.S. policies in the Americas are generally shaped less by international power relationships and strategic considerations than by the interacting influence of various domestic pressure groups on political and bureaucratic processes. Multiple actors enjoy access to policymaking in the extraordinarily permeable U.S. policy process. On issues short of imminent threats to national security, it is much easier to influence policy affecting Latin America than it is to coordinate or control it.

These tendencies are reinforced by the proliferation of U.S. government agencies involved in inter-American affairs. The Departments of State and Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency no longer necessarily dominate U.S.–Latin America relations, as they did practically without challenge from the 1940s through the 1980s. In many countries in Latin America today, the Treasury Department, the Commerce Department, the Federal Reserve, the U.S. Trade Representative, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, and the Drug Enforcement Agency all have considerable influence. A bewildering number of departments and agencies have a hand in shaping U.S. relations with Mexico, for example, which makes coordination a major challenge.<sup>29</sup> When it comes to many specific issues in U.S.–Latin America relations, such as trade and immigration, the U.S. Congress, with its various committees and caucuses, is more relevant than the executive branch, and is much more responsive to diverse societal influences. The

judiciary, and even state and local governmental authorities, also have a say. In the end, bureaucratic and interest-group politics, shaped by domestic political calculations and heightened by ideological polarization, generally have more impact on U.S. policies toward Latin America than do grand foreign policy designs. Inconsistencies and contradictions are inevitable; what is uncertain in advance is how important these various groups' influence will be, and whether such pressures will overwhelm any attempt to initiate a new approach.

All these points were abundantly illustrated during the Obama administration's first year. The administration's approach to Cuba was constrained both by the ongoing political influence of Cuban Americans and also by the procedures of the U.S. Senate, where one member's intensely held position can be decisive. The trucking dispute with Mexico and the stalled Colombia and Panama Free Trade agreements were attributable to labor union lobbying, compounded in the case of Colombia by that of human rights organizations. The administration's failure to press forward with comprehensive immigration reform results from its making this goal a lower priority than the need to get legislation passed to reform the American health-care system, which finally occurred in March 2010. It made a political calculation that an aggressive pursuit of immigration reform would seriously harm the chances of achieving a viable coalition to pass the health plan, a jobs bill, and other top-priority legislation. The chances for significant immigration reform were further complicated by Arizona's adoption of a law permitting police officers to require that persons whom they reasonably suspect of being undocumented residents produce their immigration papers.

Lobbying from Midwest agricultural interests accounts for the continuing subsidies for corn-based ethanol producers and tariffs on ethanol imported from Brazil. The clumsy handling of the Colombia bases agreement reflected, at least in part, a temporary imbalance in the Washington policymaking process between the continuity in Pentagon personnel and the lack of continuity within the State Department, which was deprived of leadership for its Western Hemisphere division for many months because of blocks in the Senate of the nominations of Arturo Valenzuela and Ambassador Shannon for top posts. The ambivalent Honduran policy was influenced by the anti-Zelaya lobby, which sought to use this issue both to weaken Chávez and to challenge Obama.

These examples underline the difficulty the Obama administration has faced in implementing its stated policies for the Americas—but the constraints need not be permanent or irreversible if the administration can set



forth and pursue a strategic approach to the region. In fact, the policy community's tendency to see individual decisions as straws in the wind could have led it to miss trends of potentially greater lasting significance. The Obama administration's apparent tacit abandonment of regime change as the prime goal of U.S. policy toward Cuba may ultimately turn out to be much more important than its caution in moving toward full normalization of relations with a Cuban government that at present is, in any case, unwilling or unable to reciprocate. The administration's high-profile commitment to working out a path toward citizenship for unauthorized migrants who have worked in the United States for an extended period without incurring criminal violations could turn out to be of historic import. Washington's increasingly close day-to-day cooperation with Mexico on a variety of border, economic, social, and law enforcement issues may help positively transform a crucial bilateral relationship.

Differences of perspective between Brazil and the United States have been evident vis-à-vis Honduras, the Colombian bases, trade issues, and the preferred approach to Iran. Yet some such differences should be expected between large and complex countries with diverse interests and contradictory domestic political exigencies. Brazil and the United States during the Obama presidency could well still become much more significant partners on a variety of important international questions, including trade, climate change, environmental protection, intellectual property, and global governance reform.<sup>30</sup>

## **Looking Forward**

How the Obama administration's policies toward Latin America and the Caribbean actually unfold and how U.S.-Latin American relations develop in the coming years will largely depend on factors that are still difficult to gauge. Much of the impact of the United States in the Americas is ancillary—a consequence of decisions made for other reasons. What the Obama administration does about homeland security and deficits, what the Federal Reserve Bank does about interest rates, how Washington handles trade and currency disputes with China, and the nuclear issue with Iran all will likely affect Latin America and U.S.-Latin America relations more than decisions taken directly to influence them.

On a number of issues, President Obama's ability to deliver will depend on the administration's success in cultivating domestic public support, through a combination of performance, political strategy, and

communication skills. A great deal will depend on whether the U.S. economy recovers. A renewed or prolonged economic downturn and the consequent loss of public confidence in the administration would undermine its approach to trade and immigration, and would deprive it of latitude to resist interest-group pressures on many issues, from trade to border security, from energy to counternarcotics. Whether or not President Obama and his party can build on the passage of health insurance reform legislation to reverse the erosion in public and congressional support that was evident early in 2010 will determine how much persuasive authority Mr. Obama can bring to bear on a host of issues.

It is certainly possible that the initial hope for a new era of inter-American cooperation will continue to be overwhelmed by the many pressures to which the Obama administration is subject, especially if the economic downturn deepens or the administration's political capital is further depleted. A contrary case can still be made, however. The Obama administration could yet persist in carrying out the implicitly coherent but never fully articulated approach suggested in its first months: cooperating on shared transnational challenges and opportunities; concentrating most on strengthening relations with America's closest neighbors in Mexico and the Caribbean Basin and on forging a strategic relationship with Brazil on issues both within and beyond the hemisphere; responding in a carefully differentiated way to diverse populist and nationalist movements; moving cautiously toward a pragmatic working relationship with Cuba on matters of mutual interest without diluting U.S. concerns about fundamental human rights, supporting Latin America-led multilateral efforts to strengthen effective democratic governance in the region; and working with specific countries to confront other specific shared challenges, including climate change and the development of alternate energy sources.

If the administration manages to recover its political footing and if the U.S. economy stabilizes, implementation of the Obama administration's positive vision might still occur. Its approach to Latin America and the Caribbean is supported by the president's own foreign policy team, by the career government bureaucracy specializing in Western Hemisphere affairs, by most Latin American specialists outside the U.S. government, and by many major external groups. Unlike what happened in the Kennedy, Carter, and Reagan administrations, therefore, the Obama administration's Latin American policy is unlikely to be torpedoed by systematic conflict between the career bureaucracy and political appointees. Although interest groups

will continue to press their views, many of the most important groups—large corporations as well as NGOs such as religious organizations, environmentalists, and human rights advocates—generally share the vision the Obama administration has projected.

The Obama administration's tenets of Latin America policy fit well with its overall internationalist approach, and with its domestic priorities and political coalitions. It is not based on special considerations or exceptions for the Americas, but is grounded in the president's own fundamental worldview.

The 2008 elections weakened some of the forces that shaped previous U.S. policies. The hard-line sector of Florida's Cuban American community has lost ground. Cuban Americans born and raised in the United States as well as the rapidly increasing number of Hispanic and Latino voters of other backgrounds have been gaining influence, and they generally support the Obama administration's proposed changes in immigration policy and in relations with their countries of origin.<sup>31</sup> The farm subsidies lobby has lost some clout, particularly in a period of fiscal concern. Trade union clamor for protectionism is weakened by the urgent need to expand exports in order to revive the U.S. economy.

Thus, the Obama administration may have somewhat greater room to maneuver than did recent U.S. administrations. This is suggested by the moves early in 2010 toward resolving the trucking dispute with Mexico; President Obama's emphasis on doubling U.S. exports and his specific mention in his January 2010 State of the Union Address of Colombia and Panama as important trading partners of the United States; growing efforts on Capitol Hill to repeal the U.S. tariff on Brazilian ethanol; and the intensified efforts to adopt a bipartisan approach to immigration reform.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, several Latin American governments, including some that differed sharply with the Obama administration over Honduras and the Colombia bases, might reach out for improved cooperation with the U.S. government. Important actors in foreign and finance ministries and in the private sector understand that the Obama administration offers greater chances of positive-sum relations with the United States than has been the case in many years, and that signals of reciprocal interest in closer cooperation might therefore be timely. Such signals may also be easier to provide in the context of Chávez's mounting internal difficulties, which could reduce pressures in several countries to keep their distance from Washington. Significant Latin American moves to work more closely with the United States, especially by Brazil, would help consolidate the Obama approach.<sup>33</sup>

## The Obama Opportunity

The catastrophic earthquakes that struck Haiti in January 2010 and Chile in February were dramatic reminders that agendas and policies often must respond to the unexpected. They also underlined the special ties of history, geography, trade, and demography that link the United States closely to its southern neighbors, and especially to Haiti and other countries in the Caribbean Basin region. The Obama administration quickly demonstrated its solidarity, emphasizing multilateral cooperation in its response to these catastrophes rather than intervention or imposition. In Haiti, the Obama administration cooperated with Cuba and Venezuela as well as Brazil, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Canada, and other nations to provide rapid, substantial, and effective aid, while letting the United Nations take the lead.<sup>34</sup>

Early in its second year the Obama administration refocused on Latin America. Secretary of State Clinton made trips to Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Guatemala, and Costa Rica in late February and early March 2010 and to Mexico later that month; on the Mexico trip she was accompanied by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mullen, and Homeland Security Secretary Napolitano. President Obama had meetings with President Mauricio Funes of El Salvador and President René Préal of Haiti in March, and hosted Mexico's Felipe Calderón for a state visit in Washington in May.<sup>35</sup> Considering how many other problems, domestic and international, the administration was then facing, this spurt of high-level attention suggests that the Obama administration still seeks the opportunity to improve U.S.-Latin America relations.

To effectively grasp that opportunity, the Obama administration should consider following ten recommendations that emerge from the analysis this book presents:

First, the administration should accept as a basis for policy that Latin America and the Caribbean cannot receive much sustained high-level attention in and from the U.S. government, even one disposed to do so; there are just too many other competing and compelling issues. Even sincere promises will not change this reality. The aim, therefore, should be to devote higher-quality attention, based on better concepts, more appropriate mind-sets, and improved processes.

Second, the Obama administration should clearly articulate a positive vision and broad framework for U.S. policies and relationships in the Americas. The administration's wise decision to eschew an overly ambitious overarching program such as the Alliance for Progress and to approach the

Summit of the Americas primarily in a listening mode should not now preclude it from setting forth its strategic approach to Western Hemisphere relations. It should articulate clearly why Latin America matters to the United States, what ideals and interests the countries of the Americas share, and how the United States and its neighbors can work together to pursue common goals. The elements of such a vision have been implicit from the start, but they have not yet been articulated in a comprehensive and authoritative way. A clear policy statement, delivered with the eloquence for which President Obama is recognized, would go a long way toward building the *confianza* on which cooperation depends.

Third, the Obama administration should acknowledge that a broad pan-American partnership from Alaska to Patagonia is less relevant in today's world than a series of smaller partnerships anchored in specific issues, involving particular countries or clusters of countries willing to work together on mutual concerns. It is vital at the same time to reinvest in those broad-hemispheric institutions—especially the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Development Bank—that can take on selected challenges on which there is broad consensus in the Americas.<sup>36</sup>

Fourth, the administration should explicitly recognize that U.S. relations with Mexico are unique. The special issues that stem from the exceptional and accelerating functional integration between the two societies and economies require new concepts, policies, modes of interaction and governance, norms, and institutions, in the border region and more broadly.<sup>37</sup> Crafting them should be an explicit strategic priority for both countries for many years to come.

Fifth, President Obama should invite Mexico and Canada to join the United States in long-term positive engagement with the countries of Central America and the Caribbean, where all three North American nations have strong demographic and economic ties, as well as overlapping security, public health, environmental, and humanitarian concerns. In that context, it is important that the United States government consistently express the aim to move beyond the cold war confrontation with Cuba, and for Washington to take concrete steps in that direction—such as cooperating on shared concerns, including responding to humanitarian crises and protecting the environment and promoting student and academic exchanges, while maintaining a concern for human rights that is consistent with U.S. values and policies toward the Americas.

Sixth, the United States should work to build synergy with Brazil in order to respond effectively to climate change, prevent and contain global

pandemics, curb nuclear proliferation and strengthen international governance arrangements, and strengthen global regimes of trade, finance, and investment. Cultivating mutually supportive relations with Brazil will require sustained effort in both nations.

Seventh, the Obama administration should invite all the countries of the Americas, whatever their political orientation, to join in dealing with three challenges that affect them all, and on which the United States has as much to learn as to teach:

—Narcotics: Improve research, open debate, and undertake concerted efforts to curb the violence and corruption the drug trade produces; reduce consumption by investing more in treatment, rehabilitation, and effective education programs; reduce and mitigate the harm done by the drug trade and the use of narcotics.

—Citizens' security: Improve citizens' security by focusing on what can be learned from experiences throughout the Americas and beyond on the relationships between citizen security and economic prosperity, social equity, political participation, community-based policing, and judicial and penal reform.

—Climate change: Explore and implement all feasible ways to understand and respond effectively to climate change and its consequences, by developing alternative energy sources, developing responses to hurricanes and other severe weather consequences, and protecting countries threatened by rising sea levels.

Eighth, the administration should take measures within its capacity and available resources to help strengthen Latin American economies, including passing the Free Trade Agreements with Colombia and Panama, and expanding multilateral, bilateral, and private-sector flows of investment to strengthen Latin America's infrastructure.

Ninth, the administration should keep an appropriate focus on how, working through multilateral approaches as much as possible, it can help strengthen effective democratic governance, the protection of fundamental human rights, and the consistent application of the rule of law while appreciating that the challenges of bolstering democratic governance are especially complex in countries that must incorporate large numbers of historically excluded indigenous participants with special issues of identity, ethnicity, culture, and long-standing marginalization and consequent resentment.

Tenth, the U.S. government should work with interested Latin American countries to strengthen the quality of and enhance access to education

at all levels, as a basic human right, in part to facilitate the region's greater participation in the global knowledge economy.

Barack Obama came to the presidency of the United States at a critical moment for his country, the Americas, and the world. He and his administration face multiple difficult challenges, some of unprecedented magnitude and complexity. In the Americas, however, the Obama administration encounters exceptional opportunity, not grave threats. The Western Hemisphere provides the chance to make progress on many issues with feasible effort, provided that the United States develops, articulates, and pursues a proactive and integrated strategy, rather than mainly ignoring a region that is increasingly important for the future of the United States or merely reacting to issues one at a time as they emerge. That is the essence of the Obama opportunity in the Americas. It is not too late to seize it.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Ken Ellingwood, "Hillary Clinton Wraps Up Mexico Visit, Calls Drug Violence 'Intolerable,'" *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 2009; Mayolo López and Claudia Guerrero, "Ponen lupa a frontera y armas" [A closer look at the border and weapons], *Reforma.com*, April 17, 2009; and Peter Nicholas and Tracy Wilkinson, "Obama and Calderon, in Mexico, Stress Partnership," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 2009.

2. Various former U.S. officials began talking, albeit loosely, about the possibility that Mexico could become a "failed state," which would have dire consequences for the United States. A report by the U.S. Joint Forces Command suggested that worst-case scenarios in the medium term were most likely in Pakistan and Mexico. See United States Joint Forces Command, *Joint Operating Environment 2008* (Suffolk, Va.: November 25, 2008; see especially p. 36). Media coverage of Mexico's troubles rose abruptly in 2008 as the violence escalated.

3. See Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Benjamin Bahney, and W. Jack Riley, *Security in Mexico: Implications for U.S. Policy Options* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2009).

4. See Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, *U.S. Population Projections: 2005–2050*, Pew Hispanic Center Report (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, February 11, 2008) (<http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/85.pdf>; accessed July 18, 2010).

5. The term "intermestic" was coined by Bayless Manning in "The Congress, the Executive and Intermestic Affairs: Three Proposals," *Foreign Affairs* 55 (2; January 1977): 306–24. Various writers who use the term frequently—including me—have been erroneously credited with coining it.

6. See "Developing Sustainable Energy Resources and Combating Climate Change," in *Rethinking U.S.—Latin American Relations: A Hemispheric Partnership for a*

*Turbulent World*, Report of the Partnership for the Americas Commission (Brookings Institution Press, 2008), pp. 13–16 ([www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2008/1124\\_latina\\_america\\_partnership/1124\\_latina\\_america\\_partnership.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2008/1124_latina_america_partnership/1124_latina_america_partnership.pdf)).

7. See Laurence Whitehead, “A Project for the Americas,” in Abraham F. Lowenthal, Theodore Piccone and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *The Obama Administration and the Americas: Agenda for Change* (Brookings Institution Press, 2009), 203–24.

8. ALBA members besides Venezuela are Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Honduras officially withdrew from the alliance in January 2010.

9. See, for example, Riordan Roett and Guadalupe Paz, eds., *China’s Expansion into the Western Hemisphere: Implications for Latin America and the United States* (Brookings Institution Press, 2008); Robert Evan Ellis, *China in Latin America: The Whats and Wherefores* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009); Javier Santiso, ed., *The Visible Hand of China in Latin America*, OECD Development Centre Report (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007); Nicola Phillips, “Coping with China,” in Andrew F. Cooper and Jorge Heine, eds., *Which Way Latin America? Hemispheric Politics Meet Globalization* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), 100–139; Jorge Heine, “Playing the India Card,” in Cooper and Heine, *Which Way Latin America?*

10. See, for example, Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy, “Drugs and Democracy: Toward a Paradigm Shift,” declaration released February 9, 2009 ([www.plataformademocratica.org/Publicacoes/declaracao\\_ingles\\_site.pdf](http://www.plataformademocratica.org/Publicacoes/declaracao_ingles_site.pdf)). Among the commission’s members are three former presidents: Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil, Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico, and Cesar Gaviria of Colombia.

11. See Mark Landler, “Clinton Says U.S. Feeds Mexico Drug Trade,” *New York Times*, March 25, 2009; Ariadna García, Mayolo López, and José Díaz Briseño, “Necesitan aliarse EU y México—Hillary” [Hillary: Mexico and the United States must work together], *Reforma.com*, March 26, 2009.

12. For an excellent statement of the prevailing Latin American view, see Alejandro Foxley, *Market versus State: Postcrisis Economics in Latin America*, report (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 2009) ([http://carnegieendowment.org/files/market\\_versus\\_state.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/market_versus_state.pdf)).

13. The Obama administration’s quick, positive start put Hugo Chávez on the defensive, at least temporarily, as was evident at the Americas summit in Port of Spain, where the Venezuelan leader felt the need to show that he, too, could be friends with Obama. See Alexei Barrionuevo, “At Americas Summit, Leaders to Press U.S.,” *New York Times*, April 16, 2009; Dan Froomkin, “More Humility from Obama,” *Washington Post*, April 16, 2009.

14. These reports were in a tradition of reports by independent entities that have been influential in framing policy toward Latin America. Latin Americanists are especially aware of this periodic opportunity for affecting the policy approaches of incoming administrations. Thus, the Linowitz Reports (prepared by the Commission on



U.S.–Latin American Relations, chaired by Sol Linowitz in 1974 and 1976), strongly influenced the Carter government; “A New Inter-American Policy for the Eighties” (often called the Santa Fe Document) by the Committee of Santa Fe (affiliated with the Council on Inter-American Security) and released in 1980 had an impact on Reagan’s policies; and the Inter-American Dialogue reports “Consensus for Action: The Americas in 1989” and “Toward an Era of Hemispheric Cooperation” (1993) influenced the administrations of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, respectively (see [www.thedialogue.org/page.cfm?pageID=42](http://www.thedialogue.org/page.cfm?pageID=42) for links to both reports). I was a contributor to the Linowitz report and to the Inter-American Dialogue reports.

15. A number of influential reports have been published since 2007: Washington Office on Latin America, *Forging New Ties: A Fresh Approach to U.S. Policy in Latin America* (November 25, 2008) (link at [www.wola.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=viewp&id=580](http://www.wola.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=viewp&id=580)); Abraham F. Lowenthal, “Toward Improved U.S. Policies for Latin America and the Caribbean,” prepared for Task Force on New U.S. Policies for a Changing Latin America, Center for Hemispheric Policy, University of Miami (September–December 2007) (<https://www6.miami.edu/hemispheric-policy/FinalDraftLowenthal-11-21-07.pdf>); Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S.–Latin American Relations: A New Direction for a New Reality* (May 2008) ([www.der.oas.org/Institutional\\_relations/CFR\\_report.pdf](http://www.der.oas.org/Institutional_relations/CFR_report.pdf)); Partnership for the Americas Commission, Brookings Institution, *Rethinking U.S.-Latin American Relations: A Hemispheric Partnership for a Turbulent World* (November 2008) ([www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/1124\\_latina\\_merica\\_partnership.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/1124_latina_merica_partnership.aspx)); James M. Roberts and Ray Walser, “10 Points for President Elect Obama’s Latin America Strategy,” Heritage Foundation Web Memo (January 2009) ([www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/01/10-Points-for-President-Elect-Obamas-Latin-America-Strategy](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/01/10-Points-for-President-Elect-Obamas-Latin-America-Strategy)); Americas Society and Council of the Americas, Trade Advisory Group, *Building the Hemispheric Growth Agenda: A New Framework for Policy* (January 13, 2009) ([www.as-coa.org/files/BUILDING THE HEMISPHERIC GROWTH AGENDA - FINAL.pdf](http://www.as-coa.org/files/BUILDING%20THE%20HEMISPHERIC%20GROWTH%20AGENDA%20-%20FINAL.pdf)); and Inter-American Dialogue, *A Second Chance: U.S. Policy in the Americas* (March 2009) ([www.thedialogue.org/uploads/2008\\_Sol\\_M\\_\\_Linowitz\\_Forum/A\\_Second\\_Chance,\\_FINAL\\_to\\_post.pdf](http://www.thedialogue.org/uploads/2008_Sol_M__Linowitz_Forum/A_Second_Chance,_FINAL_to_post.pdf)).

16. Some examples of these think tank reports on other foreign policy issues are Mark Agrast, “Restoring America’s Moral Authority,” *Center for American Progress Action Fund* (online magazine) February 28, 2007 ([www.americanprogressaction.org/issues/2007/moral\\_authority.html](http://www.americanprogressaction.org/issues/2007/moral_authority.html)); Audrey Singer, *Reforming U.S. Immigration Policy: Open New Pathways to Integration*, Opportunity 08 position paper (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, February 2007) (link at [www.brookings.edu/papers/2007/0228demographics\\_singer\\_Opp08.aspx#](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2007/0228demographics_singer_Opp08.aspx#)); Council on Foreign Relations, *Confronting Climate Change: A Strategy for U.S. Foreign Policy*, Task Force Report (New York: June 2008) (link to full text at [www.cfr.org/publication/16362/confronting\\_climate\\_change.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/16362/confronting_climate_change.html)); Nina Hachigian, Michael Schiffer, and Winny Chen, *A Global Imperative: A Progressive Approach to U.S.-China Relations in the 21st*

*Century*, report (Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, August 13, 2008) ([www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/08/china\\_report.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/08/china_report.html)); Karim Sadjadpour, *Iran: Is Productive Engagement Possible?* policy brief (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2008) ([www.carnegieendowment.org/files/us\\_iran\\_policy.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/us_iran_policy.pdf)); Richard N. Haass and Martin S. Indyk, *Restoring the Balance: A Middle East Strategy for the Next President* (Brookings Institution Press, 2008).

17. For a representative statement, see Felipe de la Balze, “Con Obama regresó el realismo en la política” [With Obama, a return to realism in politics], *Clarín*, February 28, 2010.

18. The official transcript of President Obama’s press conference on April 19, 2009, is available online ([www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Press-Conference-By-The-President-In-Trinidad-And-Tobago-4/19/2009](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Press-Conference-By-The-President-In-Trinidad-And-Tobago-4/19/2009)).

19. See Pew Global Attitudes Project, “Confidence in Obama Lifts U.S. Image Around the World—Most Muslim Publics Not So Easily Moved” (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center Publications, July 23, 2009) (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1289/global-attitudes-survey-2009-obama-lifts-america-image>); Ian T. Brown, “U.S. Leadership, Obama Winning Favor in Latin America,” Gallup website, December 1, 2009 ([www.gallup.com/poll/124514/leadership-obama-winning-favor-latin-america.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/124514/leadership-obama-winning-favor-latin-america.aspx)); and Informe Latinobarómetro 2009 ([www.latinobarometro.org/documentos/LATBD\\_LATINOBAROMETRO\\_INFORME\\_2009.pdf](http://www.latinobarometro.org/documentos/LATBD_LATINOBAROMETRO_INFORME_2009.pdf)).

20. See President Lula da Silva’s interview with Lionel Barber and Jonathan Wheatley of the *Financial Times*, November 6, 2009; President Cristina Kirchner’s interview with *CNN Español*, February 25, 2010; Jorge G. Castañeda, “Adios, Monroe Doctrine: When the Yanquis Go Home,” *New Republic*, December 28, 2009; Rubens Ricupero, “Horror ao Vácuo” [Horror of a vacuum], *Folha de São Paulo*, October 25, 2009.

21. See Guy Hursthouse and Tomás Ayuso, “¿Cambio? The Obama Administration in Latin America: A Disappointing Year in Retrospective,” Council on Hemispheric Affairs, January 26, 2010 ([www.coha.org/cambio-the-obama-administration](http://www.coha.org/cambio-the-obama-administration)); Laura Carlsen, “CIP Analysts Look at Obama’s First Year,” Americas Program, Center for International Policy, January 27, 2010 ([www.cipamericas.org/archives/2761](http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/2761)).

22. See Peter Hakim, “Obama y Latinoamérica: Un Decepcionante Primer Año” [Obama and Latin America: A disappointing first year], *Foreign Affairs Latinoamérica* 10, no. 1, 2010 ([www.thedialogue.org/page.cfm?pageID=32&pubID=2234](http://www.thedialogue.org/page.cfm?pageID=32&pubID=2234)); Michael Shifter, “Obama and Latin America: New Beginnings, Old Frictions,” *Current History* 109, no. 724 (February (2010): 67–76; “Obama’s Disappointing Year in Latin America,” Julia Sweig, interviewed by Robert McMahon, Council on Foreign Relations website, January 12, 2010 ([www.cfr.org/publication/21177/obamas\\_disappointing\\_year\\_in\\_latin\\_america.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/21177/obamas_disappointing_year_in_latin_america.html)).

23. Friction between the new administration and the Latin American countries was eventually smoothed over by a compromise formula that reversed the 1962

OAS exclusion of Cuba but left Havana's reentry for future consideration, subject to further conditions.

24. Hillary Rodham Clinton, "U.S.–Latin America Relations," speech delivered at the State Department, December 11, 2009; see also "Hillary Clinton Warns Latin America Off Close Iran Ties," *BBC News*, December 11, 2009 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8409081.stm>).

25. Latin American perspectives on the Honduran imbroglio were far from uniform. A particularly lively debate took place in Brazil, with indications that domestic political calculations shaped both the Lula government's policies and the critique of them by opposition analysts. See, for example, Marco Aurelio Garcia, "O que está em jogo em Honduras" [What is at stake in Honduras], *Política Externa* 18, no. 3 (December–February 2009–2010): 123–29; Luiz Felipe Lampreia, "Brasil comete erro de avaliação em Honduras" [Brazil commits an error of judgment in Honduras], *Política Externa* 18, no. 3 (December–February 2009–2010): 117–22; Marcel Fortuna Biato, "Winds of Change: From Trinidad and Tobago to Honduras," Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre, October 5, 2009; Ricupero, "Horror ao Vácuo." See also João Augusto de Castro Neves and Matias Spektor, "Obama and Brazil" (this volume, chapter 3).

26. See Kevin Casas-Zamora, "The Honduran Crisis and the Obama Administration" (this volume, chapter 8), and Christopher Sabatini and Jason Marczak, "Obama's Tango: Restoring U.S. Leadership in Latin America," *Foreign Affairs*, January 13, 2010 ([www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65923/christopher-sabatini-and-jason-marczak/obamas-tango](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65923/christopher-sabatini-and-jason-marczak/obamas-tango)).

27. An interesting collection of comments from U.S. observers was published in *The American Interest* 5, no. 3 (January–February 2010): 4–31. On Latin American opinion, see, for example, "America Latina, decepcionada ante el primer año de Obama" [Disappointment about Obama's first year], *Infolatam/EFE*, December 22, 2009.

28. For an early discussion of this pattern, see Abraham F. Lowenthal, *Partners in Conflict: The United States and Latin America in the 1990s* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

29. See Jorge I. Dominguez and Rafael Fernandez de Castro, *Between Partnership and Conflict: The United States and Mexico*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2009), especially 80–90, 130–34.

30. Abraham F. Lowenthal, "US–Brazil Relations Are Critical," *San Diego Union Tribune*, March 5, 2010. See also Matias Spektor, "How to Read Brazil's Stance on Iran," Council on Foreign Relations website, March 4, 2010. See also João Augusto de Castro Neves and Matias Spektor, "Obama and Brazil" (this volume, chapter 3).

31. See Bendixen & Amandi (polling firm), "National Poll of Cubans and Cuban Americans on Changes to Cuba Policy," poll, April 20, 2009 ([www.bendixenandassociates.com/Cuba\\_Flash\\_Poll\\_Executive\\_Summary.html](http://www.bendixenandassociates.com/Cuba_Flash_Poll_Executive_Summary.html)); Gary Segura, "The

Latino Electorate at 100 Days: Obama Popular, But Want to See Action on Immigration,” *Latino Decisions* (blog), May 4, 2009 (<http://latinodecisions.wordpress.com/2009/05/04/the-latino-electorate-at-100-days-obama-popular-but-want-to-see-action-on-immigration>).

32. The fact that Colombia’s Constitutional Court in March 2010 finally nixed the reelection of President Uribe for a third term may make it considerably easier for the administration to obtain approval for the Colombia Free Trade Act. See Michael Shifter, “The United States and Colombia: Recalibrating the Relationship” (this volume, chapter 4).

33. The recent formation by thirty-two Latin American and Caribbean nations of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, to include all countries of the Americas except the United States and Canada, could allow those countries disposed to try greater cooperation with the United States to hedge their bets, and to undertake pragmatic cooperation with little political risk.

34. See Daniel P. Erikson, “Obama and the Haitian Earthquake,” *FocalPoint: Canada’s Spotlight on the Americas* 9, no. 2 (“Focus on Haiti,” March 2010): 1 ([www.focal.ca/pdf/focalpoint\\_march2010.pdf](http://www.focal.ca/pdf/focalpoint_march2010.pdf)), and Juan Gabriel Valdés, “Haiti: Life beyond Survival” (this volume, chapter 9).

35. In Brazil, too, Ambassador Shannon welcomed six U.S. cabinet members to the country between February and April.

36. The pledge made by the United States and other countries at the annual meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank in Cancún in March 2010 to a substantial expansion of capital commitments to the Bank is a step in the right direction, especially as the international financial crisis has greatly tightened private credit and has made the bank much more important again.

37. The May 19, 2010, declaration by the governments of Mexico and the United States outlining a new vision and procedures for border management was an important step in this direction. See “Declaration by the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the United Mexican States Concerning Twenty-First-Century Border Management” ([www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2010/May/20100524151635SBlebahC0.1740032.html](http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2010/May/20100524151635SBlebahC0.1740032.html)).