

US Diplomacy in the Americas: Multilateralism, the Organization of American States and Summitry

John F. Maisto

United States Permanent Representative to the
Organization of American States

On December 1, 2004, in his first foreign policy address shortly following his reelection to a second term of office, President Bush stated in Halifax, Nova Scotia, that: “The success of multilateralism is measured not merely by following a process, but by achieving results,” and pledged “to work as far as possible within the framework of international organizations...to make those institutions more relevant and more effective in meeting the unique threats of our time.”

President Bush’s commitment to effective multilateralism goes back to the very beginning of his first term. Less than three months after taking office in 2001—and just before attending the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec—President Bush addressed the Organization of American States (OAS) Permanent Council in Washington, where he laid out the guideposts for what he called “our shared future and the important role the OAS will play in helping to shape it.”

It is important to underscore that this early commitment to working with and through the inter-American system has advanced United States (US) foreign policy goals that are shared in the region, and has served as a springboard for the solid accomplishments that the OAS has achieved in recent years in addressing the critical issues facing the people of the Western Hemisphere.

Multilateralism that Works

Multilateral diplomacy is an essential, indeed a vital, element of Bush Administration policy in the Western Hemisphere to pursue goals in key strategic areas, including democracy, regional stability, economic prosperity and security, counter-terrorism, and international crime and drugs.*

Multilateralism works in the hemisphere because of OAS adherence to its founding principles: representative democracy, respect for human rights, and the recognition that all states are equal partners. The nations of the Western Hemisphere, including the United States, understand that we are united by common interests and values. These common interests and values converge on democracy, economic growth through free trade, and good governance. With the exception of Cuba’s lone tyrant, the hemisphere has embraced

* *Editor’s Note: According to the October 13, 2005, edition of The New York Times, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld joined defense and security ministers from seven Central American nations on October 12 in “promising closer cooperation on a range of common threats, including drug trafficking, arms smuggling and organized crime. Central American officials are considering creating a new battalion-size unit of roughly 700 members trained and equipped for national disasters, regional security and peacekeeping.”*

democracy—a right of all peoples and which governments all must promote and defend—as the *sine qua non* of social, political and economic development. There is, in fact, no other region of the world, with the exception of Europe, that has such an explicit commitment to democracy.

A Commitment to Democracy

With the advent of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IADC) in September 2001, no OAS member state can be a disinterested spectator to what occurs in our hemisphere. Any actions that undermine democratic order or that threaten the security and well being of the region are of legitimate concern to all.

Today, the notion that winning elections alone is sufficient to be permanently considered a democracy has been challenged in the Americas. Elected leaders must now govern justly and democratically to maintain their legitimacy. Those who flout democratic institutions and principles or fail to meet the rising expectations of electorates can unleash forces that threaten regional stability, thwart democratic development, and stand in the way of economic growth.

Through the work of the US Mission, the OAS is playing an increasingly important role in advancing US interests in the hemisphere through policies and programs that complement and help achieve, in measurable ways, US bilateral policy objectives.

This is manifested at the OAS in various ways:

- ◆ Through our support for the Office for the Promotion of Democracy (OPD) and its programs to strengthen democratic institutions, most importantly through Electoral Observation Missions;
- ◆ Through our support for OAS special missions, acting under the Inter-American Democratic Charter, to address internal political conflicts, in such countries as Haiti, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and Colombia;
- ◆ Through our role as the largest financial supporter of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), considered the “crown jewel” of the inter-American system for its role as a defender of fundamental rights and freedoms and through its thorough country reports on the human rights situations in nations throughout the region, including Cuba, Venezuela, Haiti, Guatemala and Colombia;
- ◆ By addressing the war on terrorism and transnational organized crime multilaterally through the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE);
- ◆ Advancing our ongoing efforts to combat drug trafficking and drug abuse in the Americas through the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD)—the principal venue for counter-narcotics cooperation—and its

Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM), where experts evaluate individual country submissions documenting efforts to combat drug abuse and trafficking;

- ◆ And through our, albeit modest, development assistance through the OAS to leverage larger external contributions from member states, observers and the private sector.

OAS General Assembly

On June 5-7, 2005, the United States hosted the 35th annual OAS General Assembly (OASGA), for the first time since 1974, with the participation of both President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, signaling the Bush Administration's continued multilateral commitment to bolster democracy in the Americas.

Presiding over the inaugural ceremonies, Secretary Rice framed the discussion, stating: "Delivering the benefits of democracy is a dramatic challenge indeed. And the OAS has an essential role to play—a role that is defined by the Inter-American Democratic Charter...The Democratic Charter must become the core of a principled, effective multilateralism for the Americas."

Under the theme "Delivering the Benefits of Democracy," the assembly spoke to the challenges facing the hemisphere. The citizens of the Americas have embraced democracy as the best form of government, and have reasonable expectations that it will deliver a better quality of life.

To that end, the OASGA succeeded in reaching some very important objectives to help strengthen democracy, promote prosperity, enhance security and protect human rights.

The 2005 Declaration of Florida is a multilateral commitment to advance the hemisphere's democratic agenda and give "teeth" to the Inter-American Democratic Charter in order to strengthen its application. Building on previous achievements of the inter-American community in defense of democracy—the 1991 Resolution 1080, the Protocol of Washington, the 2001 Quebec Summit, and the Democratic Charter—the Declaration of Florida, and the accompanying resolution that enforces it, empower and give the Secretary General a new mandate to move the hemispheric commitment to the Charter and its principles beyond rhetoric towards concrete, measurable outcomes that give the document practical relevance in order to help fulfill its promise.

Among the important achievements set forth in the Declaration, it:

- ◆ Tasked Secretary General José Miguel Insulza to propose initiatives—some may refer to this as a Plan of Action—for the timely application of the provisions of the IADC to address threats to democracy;

- ◆ Reaffirmed the Secretary General's authority, charging him with bringing to member states' attention situations that may require action under the IADC;
- ◆ Charged the Permanent Council with considering the Secretary General's recommendations and working with him in applying the IADC;
- ◆ Created openings for civil society input into the efforts of the Secretary General and Permanent Council for action under the IADC;
- ◆ And it also set a new and important marker, establishing that adherence to the IADC is the standard for member states' full participation in the Inter-American system. In other words, the IADC is the way into the OAS, and the way out.

To promote prosperity, the General Assembly also approved a US-sponsored Resolution convening a special meeting to channel the efforts of all inter-American agencies into a coordinated, strategic plan for economic growth and development that will provide for improvements in education, gender equity and public/private partnerships.

To improve security, the General Assembly mandated tighter controls on Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS); greater transparency in small arms and light weapons transfers between countries will help safeguard them from use by terrorists. They also instructed further cooperation to combat gangs, drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, and other manifestations of transnational crime.

On human rights, three distinguished candidates were elected to serve on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, including Paolo Carozza of the United States, a law professor at Notre Dame University, and an expert on international human rights law and Latin American legal systems. The General Assembly also adopted an inter-American plan for the protection of the human rights of migrants and immigrants, which includes large numbers of retired Americans living in the hemisphere.

As evidenced by our leadership at the OASGA in Fort Lauderdale and our active participation, the US values multilateralism. We look forward to the new dynamic Secretary General to take this mandate and run with it. We are also proud of the next steps taken at the Fourth Summit of the Americas held in Mar del Plata, November 4-5.

Summits of the Americas

The Summits of the Americas are the pinnacle of US multilateral engagement in the region. Held every two to three years, the Summits are the only meetings of all democratically-elected Heads of State in the Western Hemisphere. They enable the President to strengthen ties with hemispheric leaders. Furthermore, the Summits underscore our government's commitment to democracy, growth, and proactive multilateralism in the region.

Summits generate concrete, measurable commitments by the region's governments. Some particular areas of Summit success in this regard include advancing free trade, lowering the cost of remittances, reducing the time and cost to start a business, fighting corruption and improving the quality of education. The Inter-American Democratic Charter and the commitment to the FTAA are both fruits of the Summit process.

The active defense of representative democracy has been in the forefront of the Summit process since the Quebec Summit in April 2001. As a result of the Summit, Secretary Powell was in Lima, Peru on the momentous day of September 11, 2001, to sign the Inter-American Democratic Charter. On that day, while terrorists tried to send a message of hate, we were working with our partners in the Americas to send a message of hope and freedom.

President Bush took the initiative to fight corruption in the hemisphere by issuing Proclamation 7750 immediately before the Special Summit in Monterrey in 2004, where leaders committed themselves to "deny safe haven to corrupt officials, those who corrupt them and their assets."

Building on initiatives to strengthen the quality of education in our own country, President Bush pledged to support Centers of Excellence for Teacher Training in the Caribbean, Central America and South America. These Centers have trained 12,500 teachers in literacy education so far, benefiting about 415,000 children.

The US government has been instrumental in helping the region meet and surpass a key commitment from the 2004 Summit: placing at least 600,000 people in the hemisphere on anti-retroviral medications by the end of 2005. About 640,000 individuals living with HIV/AIDS in the region now receive this therapy. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief has played a vital part in this success, through its bilateral, regional and multilateral initiatives, including assistance provided through the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The US has devoted a total of \$236.6 million over the last two years to the fight against HIV/AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Some other excellent examples of concrete, achievable, short-term initiatives from our 2004 Summit in Monterrey include:

- ◆ Creating the conditions to cut the cost of sending remittances back to the region in half—from 12 percent to six percent—by 2008;
- ◆ Tripling private sector lending through the Inter-American Development Bank to micro and small- and medium-sized enterprises;
- ◆ Strengthening property rights and expanding the use of property as collateral; and,
- ◆ Significantly reducing the time and cost to start a business in the region of longest time and highest cost in the world.

The Fourth Summit in Argentina addresses the theme of “Creating Jobs to Fight Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance.” The challenge of this Summit has been, and remains, finding the best ways to inspire the hemisphere’s pro-trade, pro-growth, and pro-democracy consensus, forged in previous Summits, to remain firm and to commit to specific efforts to reach new heights. This has been the challenge in the negotiations leading up to this Summit and remains a key objective in terms of how we implement the mandates emerging from Mar del Plata.

Surrounding the Fourth Summit, there has been extensive debate on the role of international financial institutions. The status of our trade agenda has had a strong impact on the overall atmosphere. Fortunately, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) has strengthened our ability to credibly promote free trade in the region. We also need to help countries which invest in their own people, by providing broad, high-quality access to education, training and business opportunities. We also must continue to press forward to strengthen democratic institutions and practices which, overall, remain fragile in the region.

This year’s Summit in Argentina stands as a valuable testament to how we continue to work constructively with our neighbors to secure freedom—and with it, democracy—and create more and better opportunities for all citizens of the hemisphere.

The Challenges Ahead

Over the last decade, the hemisphere, and indeed the OAS, have made enormous progress. However, we have not managed to fully erase the legacy of decades of poverty, corruption, and, even, wrong-headed policies.

The hemisphere today faces very serious challenges. Although last year they registered the highest growth in the region in the last 25 years, economies in the region are not growing fast enough to generate sufficient jobs for growing populations, let alone deal with extreme poverty. Corruption and inefficiency have stunted development and spawned popular discontent. All of this has combined to give rise to questions concerning the value of democracy in the Americas.

Surmounting these challenges will require leadership on the part of individual hemispheric presidents and prime ministers, their governments, their societies and, particularly, the political elites of each country. Today, the OAS is poised to tackle the substantive challenges facing the nations of the Western Hemisphere, but it will require political will by the member countries if it is to succeed.

It is critical that the OAS remain engaged and proactive. And from the US standpoint, this means continuing to ensure that multilateralism in the Americas is not pursuing the lowest common denominator but, rather, pressing the OAS to pursue practical, achievable objectives that produce tangible, measurable results.

To that end, the United States is firmly committed to working with and strengthening the OAS and remains its largest contributor. We pay almost 60 percent of the OAS operating budget each year (\$44,395,000) and contribute between \$10-\$15 million annually to specific OAS activities, such as development projects, promoting transparency, fighting drugs, terrorism and trafficking in persons, and electoral observation missions, to name but a few.

The OAS provides significant value-added and plays an important catalytic role in development and democracy-building efforts. Some of the primary challenges ahead for the Organization include:

- ◆ Acting on the Declaration of Florida’s mandates, and effectively applying the Inter-American Democratic Charter to all the countries of the hemisphere, leaving no country out;
- ◆ Expanding the participation of civil society organizations in the work of the OAS, pursuant to existing OASGA resolutions and the Declaration of Florida;
- ◆ Producing a “Social Charter of the Americas” that supports the notion of development in the context of democracy and underlines the commitments made in the Inter-American Democratic Charter;
- ◆ Looking for ways to bolster the effectiveness of OAS Electoral Observation Missions. The OAS faces the challenge—and opportunity—of forming electoral observation missions for many of the 27 presidential, legislative, regional and local elections throughout the hemisphere in the next year. An OAS presence during many of these elections will be vital to reinforce the democratic gains of the past two decades and to counter the ongoing threats to democracy in several countries. However, current financial constraints could hinder the OAS’s ability to get the job done;
- ◆ Providing institutional capacity building initiatives in each country to complement efforts toward the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which is the key to generating jobs, fostering growth and fighting poverty effectively;
- ◆ Finding additional ways to address the post-9/11 security threats from internal and home-grown terrorists, and international crime;
- ◆ Helping countries deal effectively with burgeoning domestic crime rates at a time of high citizen insecurity;
- ◆ Implementing the mandates emerging from this year’s Summit;
- ◆ And, “giving teeth” to the Inter-American Convention against Corruption.

The US stands ready to work side by side with our partners in the region, and with and through the OAS, to meet these challenges.

As President Bush said at the OAS General Assembly in Fort Lauderdale: “To give our children a better tomorrow, our citizens must see that democracy delivers more than promises. They need to see in their daily lives that their hard work and enterprise are rewarded...And when the people of the Americas see that opportunity and social mobility are real, they will know that in a free and democratic society, the only limit of how far they can go is the size of their dreams.”