

SPECIAL REPORT

WHAT SHOULD THE PRIORITIES BE FOR PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA AND THE HEMISPHERIC LEADERS AT THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS?

Ambassador Everett Briggs:

1. The top priority of all our governments should be to adopt policies to promote individual economic and political freedom, at home and abroad; and to cease their reliance on foreign aid while blaming others for their particular shortcomings. And for leaders of government, industry and society in all of our countries to acknowledge models that have brought prosperity to the citizens, in North America, in Chile, increasingly in Brazil, in Colombia despite the ravages of narco-terrorism, as well as in the developed areas of Europe and Asia. There is no reason for Latin America and the Caribbean to lag behind the rest of the developed world, except a lack of will to reform.
2. As a follow-up to the first point, the US should make a new commitment to free trade, and announce our intention to begin phasing out economic development assistance programs as an incentive to other countries to adopt long-overdue free market reforms. The US should pledge to work with the Hemisphere in removing existing trade barriers and resist pressures for new protectionist measures. President Obama should declare his intention to push for Congressional ratification of the Colombian and Panamanian FTAs.
3. The President should acknowledge (as he and Secretary Clinton already have, with respect to Mexico) that what fuels the wave of drug-related crime in key Latin American states is the unchecked demand for drugs in the US; and announce a major shift in emphasis in this country to implementing a comprehensive, nationwide campaign at home. At the same time, the US should state its willingness to continue cooperating with those countries that request US assistance in addressing runaway drug-related crime that undermines their democratic institutions.
4. Cuba has been an outcast for 50 years. Some voices are now loudly calling on the U.S. to accept as "normal" and worthy of recognition the cruel dictatorship that has systematically denied the Cuban people their civic and human rights, and to change our policy toward the regime. Our reply should be that it is past time for change with respect to Cuba: *all* of the Americas should as a matter of policy and conscience now join together in support of the Cuban people's right to democracy and economic freedom and against the geriatric military dictatorship. The onus should be on those OAS members that would ignore their commitment to democracy in our Hemisphere, and not on the US for refusing to betray the principles all American states have formally subscribed to.
5. Most of all, President Obama should abjure apologizing for past mistakes. It is time to look ahead, not backwards. "A hair shirt ill becomes the Eagle."

Ambassador James Cason:

Latin Americans are fed up with corruption. Rampant government corruption has given

democracy a bad name in many countries. Latins want honest leaders that will spend their tax money wisely, and on behalf of all citizens, poor and rich. The President should offer to cooperate on a hemispheric-wide anti-corruption initiative in which all states agree to return foreign corrupt officials in their jurisdiction to face trial in their homeland. The U.S. should pledge to continue to deny visas to corrupt foreign leaders. He should urge all states in the OAS to cooperate on anti-bribery initiatives as well.

While in Trinidad, the President should make a special effort to listen to representatives of the country's poor to learn what their concerns are and what ideas they may have for U.S. programs and policies to address their needs. Too often our Presidents are only photographed with other officials and at diplomatic events with elites. The poor are the majority. U.S. programs should be aimed at helping them escape from poverty. More programs to teach English to bright children whose families are poor is one way to help them find 21st century jobs.

Dr. Sergio Diaz-Briquets:

Undocumented migration continues to be a major concern in the Americas. Cooperative endeavors should address enhanced human rights protection, including procedures to prevent human trafficking. Further mechanisms to mobilize migrant remittances for productive purposes should be explored as they potentially constitute a major source of investment capital. Corruption of all sorts continues to undermine the legitimacy of governments in the region, particularly in countries confronting the narcotics traffic scourge. As producing and transit nations must intensify efforts to combat illicit production and shipment of cocaine and other substances, consuming nations must do more - and in more creative ways - to reduce demand for illicit substances. A social calamity is on the making as narcotics use is on the rise in poor countries formerly facing only limited consumption.

Dr. Mark Falcoff

During the past eight years, Latin American leaders have complained publicly and privately about a lack of interest and attention on the part of Washington. This is only partly true. They need to be reminded of free trade agreements negotiated with Peru and Colombia, as well as the Central American republics. What is true is that Latin America has entered a new era of globalization in which relations with the US are only part of a larger foreign policy agenda for Washington. Meanwhile, Latins have lost competitiveness in the world economy thanks to their continued inattention to education and infrastructure. There is nothing the United States can do about this.

On the political side, the region has split into what might be called democratic and post-democratic spheres. It is not a matter of left versus right but serious versus non-serious countries. Serious countries make a clear calculation of their national interest and proceed accordingly; nonserious countries indulge in childish posturing and needless drama, often neglecting or even pursuing policies counterproductive to their real interests. I consider at present Uruguay, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Brasil, and Colombia to be serious. I do not think the current governments of Argentina, Paraguay, Ecuador, Venezuela or Nicaragua to be serious in any way. The U.S. can deal productively with the first; there is really little point in more than ho usekeeping relations with the second.

I have not decided in which category Mexico belongs, though I desperately want it to be in the first. Latin leaders will soon discover that a change of administrations in Washington makes less difference than they hoped. As the region continues to lose geopolitical ground, it will have to deal with an increasingly difficult international environment.

Professor Roberto Gonzalez-Echevarria:

As President Barack Obama fulfills his campaign promises to ease restrictions on travel to Cuba, a unilateral move that seems to presage a further relaxation of tensions between the United States and Cuba, he should ask for reciprocal actions by the Castro regime. The first should be that the Cuban government lift its restrictions on Cubans traveling to other countries. Cubans are not free to leave Cuba. If they do so without approval they can be, and many have been, charged with "salida ilegal," or "illegal exit." There are at present hundreds of Cubans with visas to other countries who have not been issued the "white card" by the authorities allowing them to travel. Latin American countries should make the same demand. There are many Cubans with valid visas to travel to them -- most notably Hilda Molina, the Cuban doctor who has for years been asking to go to Argentina to visit her family -- who have not been allowed to do so.

Another move should be to resume normal postal service, so that the goods sent by Cuban Americans to their families do not have to go via specific companies licensed by Havana, at outrageous cost. This gouging creates the possibility of corruption on both sides of the Florida Straits at the expense of ordinary Cuban Americans.

Dr. Irving Louis Horowitz:

The request for special advice and report by free wheeling intellectual spirits is one of the burdens a President faces upon taking office. I have never felt that such polite arm-twisting on policy matters is especially fruitful, and even less appreciated by the Executive officer and commander in chief of the United States. That said, there are issues that are unique to each nation. "Latin American specialists" should be especially wary of large scale global policy statements. So let me restrict my remarks to a very few: First and foremost, a rededication to the principles of democracy and the liberties for individuals that big word includes. The balance wheel of justice entails the obligations of those who rule and the rights of those who are ruled. Seen in this way, the issue of Cuban Communism looms large. For in that dictatorship, the roles are reversed: rulers have all the rights and the ruled have all of the obligations. As part of any ongoing discourse between each leader in all countries of the Western hemisphere, the key bargaining chip should be a redressing of this ongoing shameful and sad regime condition. Once the give and take of real diplomacy in an open climate is made, issues of travel restraints, embargoes, and trade exchanges will fall into place. If this does not take place, if the meeting becomes a time and place for recognizing a tyrannical regime without gaining any identifiable concessions to benefit the people of Cuba, the meeting will only encourage cynicism, sorrow and bitterness. One hopes that the President and his principal advisors realize the stages and the game as it is played.

Ambassador Otto J. Reich:

At Trinidad, President Obama should emphasize the American values he embodies: democracy, human rights and individual opportunity. While this may appear on the surface to be too political, Obama will be meeting with the political leadership of the region and it is essential for the American president to re-state what we stand for. When the leaders ask, as they will, what will the US do for their countries, Obama should answer that there is nothing the US could do

which could have as much impact as opening up their societies to opportunities to all, to guaranteeing economic and political rights, and to ensuring transparency and eliminating corruption.

The nations of Latin America are not poor. The abundance of natural resources make these some of the wealthiest nations on Earth. They are populated by poor people because for too long their governments have been led by autocratic, obstinate or corrupt leaders who have used their power to enrich themselves and their friends, promote failed economic policies and preside over continuing injustice and inequality. If the leaders clamor for the re-inclusion of Cuba in the Inter American system, as has been reported they intend to do, Obama should remind them that the Cuban people have been denied for half a century the right to choose their leaders, as they themselves have been chosen by their people.

If dialogue with the Castro brothers will lead to opening up Cuba, as the leaders claim, ask the leaders why their decades of dialogue with Cuba's rulers has resulted in not one single political concession on the part of the Castro brothers. Finally, Obama should embrace those US allies that are following the correct policies and fighting narcotics, terrorism, and corruption and doing it within a framework of respect for the law: Mexico and Colombia. They deserve our support.

Conversely, Obama should be wary of the half-dozen countries that have joined Hugo Chavez's Venezuela in the ALBA project, a collective of self-described left-wing populist governments who offer no new solutions, only tired anti-American rhetoric. These are, in addition to Venezuela: Honduras, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Dominica. Obama should not be too hard on some of these, however, since they are the poorest nations of the hemisphere, whose leaders have been persuaded to join by Chavez's oil money.

Ambassador Jose Sorzano:

First and foremost, the United States needs to have a Latin America policy. We have not had one for some time. Secondly, a number of Latin American leaders will no doubt raise the issue in Port of Spain of getting Cuba back into the Organization of American States. To do so, without significant changes in Havana will make a mockery of the OAS and the democratic principles of the OAS Charter of the Americas. Thirdly, at a time of economic downturn, the United States should enact the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia. Ironically, the agreement will benefit the United States more than Colombia because under the present system Colombia exports to the US, while American exports to Colombia will benefit by the enactment of the agreement.

Dr. Jaime Suchlicki:

President Obama should reaffirm in Trinidad U.S. commitment to Democracy, Human Rights and Constitutional government. This has been the U.S. policy for more than 30 years in Latin America. It excludes normalizing relations with the military regime in Cuba, until the Castro brothers end their embargo on the Cuban people. The President should also go further and call for policies that enhance the dignity of the individual, housing, education, health, economic opportunities. Freedom must go hand in hand with respect for the well being and welfare of the individual.

Dr. Laura Y. Tartakoff:

I am happy to associate myself with Dr. Irving Horowitz's statement.

Ian Vasquez:

As President Obama meets with other hemispheric leaders at the Summit of the Americas this week, he should keep in mind that the most effective way for the United States to help Latin America is to strengthen its own economy based on sound policies that encourage wealth creation. U.S. economic growth, rather than foreign aid or other forms of U.S. largesse, should be welcomed by regional leaders.

In practice, Obama should announce a commitment to supporting the Colombia and Panama free trade agreements and move away from the protectionist measures that ban Mexican truckers from driving in the United States, a policy that violates the North American Free Trade Agreement. Such an announcement would be a powerful signal to the region of the United States' continued interest in economic integration. Greater integration should include Cuba as well, but all regional leaders should forcefully denounce the Castro dictatorship and human rights abuses in Cuba that are typically ignored by Latin America's democratic governments.

Other areas for positive U.S. policy change toward the region include a liberalization of immigration policy that is currently at odds with economic reality; and an end to the failed U.S.-led war on drugs that is undermining the institutions of civil society south of the Rio Grande. Such moves by Washington would be major steps forward for inter-American relations. At the same time, they would require Latin American leaders to recognize that the United States can help, but not solve, the region's problems. The hard work of development has to be done by Latin Americans themselves.

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