



# Washington's Asia-Pacific Response to a Changing Hemispheric Order

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## I. Introduction

U.S. relations with Latin America historically have been characterized by stark degrees of asymmetry. Since the time of the Monroe Doctrine the United States has tended to treat Latin America as its “backyard,” even when U.S. leaders proclaimed the countries as “good neighbors.” Worse, as historian Greg Grandin argues, since 1945 Washington may at times have viewed Latin America as a laboratory in which to experiment with tactics later used to subordinate other regions of the world.<sup>1</sup> Throughout much of the second half of the twentieth century —Jimmy Carter’s presidency was a partial exception— economic, ideological and security objectives of the U.S. reinforced one another in such a way as to generate a landscape emblematic of dramatic North-South power differentials. When Latin American

governments resisted this state of affairs—as did Cuba from 1959 onward, Chile and Jamaica during the 1970s, and Nicaragua and Grenada during the 1980s—the backlash from Washington was sharp and unequivocal. Challengers to U.S. hegemony were expected, to paraphrase the rap musician Gil Scott Heron's characterization of the Reagan administration's stance, to "get off this planet by sundown." It was in this spirit that Secretary of State Christian A. Herter made clear in a November 1959 memo that Cuba's primary crime was its challenge to U.S. hegemony. He argued that the United States did not need to overthrow Cuba's revolutionary regime because it was communist (which it was not at the time) or because of its ties to the Soviet Union (it did not yet have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union). Rather, confrontation was justified because Cuba "has veered towards a 'neutralist' anti-American foreign policy... which, if emulated by other Latin American countries, would have serious adverse effects on Free World support of our leadership..."<sup>2</sup> Similar perspectives guided U.S. policymakers for the remainder of the Cold War, as was evident in Washington's support for friendly military regimes in South America from the 1950s to 1980s and U.S. interventions in the Central American conflicts of the 1980s.

The world has changed in countless ways since that not so long ago period. Few Latin Americans, including Cubans, harbor aspirations any longer for far-reaching socialist transformation, and there is near unanimity as to the desirability of market-oriented development and some form of electoral democracy. Meanwhile, multi-polarity has replaced the unipolar landscape that prevailed in the Americas throughout the Cold War and 1990s. Having emerged from three decades of stagnation, Brazil has become a major regional power, the world's sixth largest economy and a visible player in world affairs that even under a succession of left-leaning governments seeks by all accounts to consolidate a relationship of cooperation with the United States that is consistent with the transformed landscape of the twenty-first century. Even in Havana, Caracas, Quito, La Paz, and Managua—the capital cities of the ALBA alliance in which a reflexive anti-Americanism remains vibrant—rhetoric has not vitiated pragmatic efforts to maintain or develop trade with the United States and engage the colossus while continuing to diversify trade, investment and diplomatic ties to other parts of the world. At the

same time, in Washington, in an environment shaped by exhaustion from taxing wars in the Middle East and South Asia, the Obama administration has proclaimed since its inception a commitment to evolving partnerships among equals in the Americas. Not since the early Alliance for Progress has the message articulated by the White House so avowedly emphasized mutual respect and reciprocity. The foundation was thus in place for what by now should have been a set of Hemispheric affairs distinctly different from the overarching logic of the prior sixty-five years.

Yet important continuities have endured amid the many changes, and some of these resist simple explanations. This article analyzes one of those continuities: the tendency of the United States to regard the countries located to its South as subordinates, a pattern that has endured despite President Obama's proclaimed intentions to the contrary. The tendency is most evident in the U.S. expectation that a country should follow the U.S. lead without dissent, even when its interests are neglected, and should be treated as a pariah and even an enemy if it refuses to follow. The article grapples with this apparent paradox by focusing on the domestic forces that drive U.S. attitudes and policies with regard to Latin America.<sup>3</sup> We argue that despite genuine desires in some quarters to hit the "re-set" button on policy positions rooted in an era of Hemispheric asymmetry, important forces in American politics and society have shaped the policy-making processes in ways that foster inertia with regard to U.S. relations with Latin America. The resulting approach to regional affairs, which we anticipate will extend through the remainder of the second Obama administration, has led to Latin American disappointment and anger made all the more acute because of the guarded optimism initially expressed by many of the region's leaders initially about prospects for respectful and productive U.S.-Latin American engagement under Obama.

As tensions have surfaced openly, and as the countries in the Hemisphere have attempted to develop new institutions for cooperation apart from the United States, a frustrated Washington seems to be opting for a new regional vision, as we analyze in the ultimate section of this paper. Driven by a security agenda oriented toward Asia and the Pacific, the United States seems intent on reviving

the late twentieth century neo-liberal project, which was stymied by South American resistance, by building on existing, trade-driven bilateral arrangements with Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Chile to concentrate its hemispheric agenda on only a handful of countries.<sup>4</sup> As we argue in the conclusion, such a policy is likely to perpetuate a U.S. policy out of sync with the reality it purports to address.

## II. Realism in Action

President Obama's initial signals regarding U.S.- Latin American relations were in effect reprises of a cooperative vision that had emerged in the mid-1970s but was discarded amidst the upheavals in Nicaragua and El Salvador at the end of the decade. The Clinton administration's Latin American policies, developed during the moment of greatest U.S. regional influence since World War II —with the left in disarray and the Washington Consensus framing economic decisions —did not depart from a realist paradigm. Nor did the George W. Bush administration's policies, which portrayed the rise of the Chavez-led ALBA bloc as an unacceptable challenge to U.S. interests in the region and potentially a threat to national security. Obama's electoral triumph in 2008, however, created great expectations for change.

Reinforcing the climate of optimism, Obama's campaign message of "Change you can believe in" was echoed in his first presentation at the Summit of the Americas, setting the stage for what seemed might be a new era in U.S.-Latin American relations:

"I know that promises of partnership have gone unfulfilled in the past and that trust has to be earned over time. While the United States has done much to promote peace and prosperity in the hemisphere, we have at times been disengaged, and at times we sought to dictate our terms. But I pledge to you that we seek an equal partnership. (Applause.).... So I'm here to launch a new chapter of engagement that will be sustained throughout my administration (Applause)".<sup>5</sup>

As the applause reported in the transcript from that session suggests, the new discourse was greeted warmly by Latin American and

Caribbean leaders, both for its acknowledgement of past injustices and its vow to jointly forge a cooperative agenda for the hemisphere. In many Latin American countries, as elsewhere in the world, Obama's own persona as the first non-white President suggested unprecedented possibilities rooted in a new capacity for the United States to empathize with smaller powers.

Yet the atmosphere was quite different three years later, at the Cartagena, Colombia, Summit of the Americas, when Latin American frustration with the Obama administration erupted openly. Leaders of even the most friendly countries were critical of Washington's failure to address regional concerns about its anti-narcotics policies and the ongoing U.S. hostility towards Cuba. While the U.S. President would lament the degree to which some of his counterparts in the region appeared to be caught up in a Cold War mindset, it was the policies and discourses of the United States itself that had failed to evolve to reflect conditions of the twenty-first century. Washington still operated from a "hegemonic presumption" which political scientist Abraham Lowenthal described and decried in 1976.<sup>6</sup>

Consider that in 2009 the United States felt free to ignore the requirements of the Inter-American Democracy Charter when the coup occurred in Honduras, yet it stipulates that all countries must follow the Charter. It has demanded that before a country can receive economic or military assistance it agree to waive its right to submit a U.S. military or civilian employee accused of a crime to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (Article 98 Agreements).<sup>7</sup> In mid-2013, the cascade of revelations about the National Security Agency's spying operations throughout Latin America provided further evidence of a continued hegemonic mindset. Washington then belittled the widespread uproar in Latin America over the grounding of Bolivian President Evo Morales' airplane in Europe, because of U.S. suspicions that former security contractor Edward Snowden might be aboard.

With the Obama administration now well into its second term, a "new normal" seems to have been established with regard to U.S.-Latin American relations. In most respects Washington's stance toward the region appears little changed from what prevailed over the past half century. It is an approach that still attempts to create

and enforce U.S. hegemonic control in three essential ways: (1) The U.S. economic agenda is focused largely on key components of the Washington Consensus; (2) the U.S. security agenda emphasizes the integration of Latin American militaries with those of the United States, and promotes militarized responses to organized crime and drug trafficking based on prohibitionist, anti-narcotics dogma; (3) the political agenda claims to be aimed at the promotion of democracy in accord with the Inter-American Democratic Charter, but the U.S. pattern of faulting only some countries for their authoritarianism while tolerating coups against democratically elected leaders in others suggests that the real U.S. political agenda is support for governments that accept U.S. hemispheric “leadership” without challenge.

To be sure, the implementation of a hegemonic policy with respect to particular countries has its subtleties. For example, the Obama administration has been less brazen with Brazil than in the past acknowledging its obvious economic power. In 2014 Washington reportedly remained neutral in the Salvadoran presidential election, and accepted the legitimacy of the close results which gave the presidency to Salvador Sánchez Cerén, a former guerrilla fighter with the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN). Despite such anomalies, the practice of the Obama administration toward Latin America is better characterized by continuity than change. The next section examines four factors that together would seem to explain this behavior.

### III. Explanation of Policy Continuity under Obama

Foreign policy tends to be more difficult to change than other kinds of policy, because historically the issues are less salient for the public. Political theorists Dan Wood and Jeffrey Peake observe that presidents often find that issues commanding greater public attention crowd out foreign policy topics. Despite perceptions of wide executive authority to manage foreign policy, they found that “presidential attention... is governed by the realities of scarce resources and rational efforts by the president to garner favorable public approval and historical treatment.”<sup>8</sup> As compared to domestic issues, foreign policy issues are rarely connected to vocal constituencies and powerful interest

groups who are directly impacted by policy. Partly as a result, “policy paradigms” in the foreign affairs arena are particularly resistant to change, even amidst evidence of policy failure.<sup>9</sup> In addition, as political theorist Charles Hermann notes, “foreign policy change must overcome normal resistance in political, administrative, and personality structures and processes.”<sup>10</sup> Organizational bureaucracies that handle foreign policy have often been cited as barriers to change, requiring the significant mobilization of political will and resources “to overcome or circumvent the organizational structures and processes committed to the maintenance of existing policy.”<sup>11</sup>

Hermann identifies four different sources that lead to significant policy shifts: (1) the “leader,” namely the president, who “imposes his [or her] own vision of the basic redirection necessary in foreign policy”; (2) “bureaucratic advocacy,”<sup>12</sup> whereby bureaucrats in key positions recognize that a current policy is not working and create change; (3) “domestic restructuring,” which occurs when “elites with power to legitimate the government either change their views or themselves alter in composition;” (4) “external shocks” that result from dramatic events and significantly reshape the context in which policy is formulated.<sup>13</sup> As we review each of these factors in the case of Latin America policy under Obama, it becomes clear why no shift in the policy paradigm has occurred.

1) The President and White House: The White House insisted on taking the lead to shape policy towards Latin America, but the principal Latin American adviser until mid-2012 (Dan Restrepo) lacked experience. Few stakeholders who mattered respected his judgments. Indeed, the President turned to an old Latin America hand, Ambassador Jeffrey Davidow, to organize U.S. participation in the 2009 Summit of the Americas, a role that previously would have been the responsibility of the National Security Adviser for Latin America. Moreover, the President’s political advisers focused on domestic electoral calculations and these dominated decision-making toward a region in which Obama had no prior experience and exhibited little personal interest. Absent a strategic vision for engaging with Latin America or even an inclination to prioritize neighbors to the South, and distracted by urgent concerns elsewhere at home and around the globe, the default option was to approach

the region in such a way as to minimize potential friction with the handful of influential domestic constituencies that had some degree of interest in Latin America policy.

The political climate surrounding Obama's presidency epitomizes the ways in which pressing issues can crowd out any particular foreign policy topic, eliminating the possibility of "leader driven" change in the case of U.S.–Latin American engagement. Obama took office in the midst of two Asian wars, a financial meltdown, and a social welfare network frayed to the point of dysfunction. In the face of such pressing issues, reforming U.S. Latin America policy did not command the attention of the public or of the President and his core foreign policy team. Given the "realities of scarce resources" that tend to determine priorities on the presidential agenda, much of the policy inherited from Bush was merely sustained.

Policy continuity under Obama resulted not only from a lack of attention paid by a president overwhelmed by more urgent matters, but also from pressures generated by actors who pay considerable attention to the ways in which the United States engages with the region. A substantial policy shift by Obama would have required not only overcoming inertia—divesting attention away from more pressing policy matters to reconsider and reorient the U.S. stance—but also overcoming these powerful influences. Obama already had used much of his political capital to promote a significant overhaul of the health care system, enact one of the biggest (albeit inadequate) economic stimulus packages in U.S. history, pressure for increased regulation of the financial sector, and to set timelines for withdrawal from both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. In explaining the "issue inertia" that often defines presidential treatment of foreign policy issues, Wood and Peake note that, "(A)s political creatures, presidents are ever aware of the risks associated with ignoring or attending to new policy problems."<sup>14</sup>

2) Bureaucracy: Obama had little help from the executive branch in formulating a coherent policy. The State Department's Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) bureau was hampered by the machinations of a few senators, especially Jim Demint (Rep.-South Carolina) and Robert Menendez (Dem.-New Jersey), who used their senatorial prerogatives to place "holds" on the appointments

of Arturo Valenzuela as Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs and Thomas Shannon as U.S. ambassador to Brazil. As a result, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was forced to rely *ad hoc* on officials outside of WHA, and in effect the policy itself became *ad hoc*.

A number of actors resistant to a potential policy shift could also be found within the executive branch itself, as many of the main players dealing with Latin America policy in the Obama administration had been engaged in shaping this policy for the last decade or more, while the newcomers were neither bureaucratically nor intellectually forceful presences in Washington. In this context, “bureaucratic advocacy” was an unlikely source of policy change under Obama. To the contrary, administration bureaucrats served to promote and advance the dominant policy paradigm.

One example was the continuity in both the logic and the content of Plan Merida, the counter-narcotics and security policy package put forth under the Bush administration in response to the spread of organized crime and impunity in Mexico and Central America. Despite ample evidence suggesting that the policies were exacerbating insecurity and undermining democratic governance, advocates in the counter-narcotics, intelligence and military agencies (in both Washington and in U.S. embassies across the region) maintained vigorous advocacy for the militarized policy. Another example was the tendency of U.S. officials to react to rather than ignore inflammatory rhetoric from leaders of the ALBA alliance.

Yet another example of continuity emerged in the Central American isthmus, where time and again echoes of the past reverberated in bilateral relationships. The administration’s tepid response to the Honduran coup had signaled the likelihood that congressional rightwingers rather than potential reformists in the executive branch were to carry the day in instances where Central American elites challenged longstanding balances of power in their countries. Despite respectful White House acknowledgement of Mauricio Funes Cartagena’s election as president of El Salvador in 2009, State Department staff and the U.S. embassy in San Salvador tended to be hostile to the government because of President Funes’ political base in the FMLN. When the rightwing opposition party —encouraged

by U.S. responses to the 2009 military coup in Honduras and the June 2012 ouster of Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo Méndez—tried to take advantage of a confrontation between the Salvadoran Congress and the judiciary, by suggesting that the Funes government was threatening the survival of democracy and thus implicitly inviting a coup d'état, the U.S. embassy and State Department issued statements that appeared to back the *golpistas*. They were responding in part to congressional pressures from Senators Menendez and Marco Rubio (Rep.-Florida), who have been heavily backed by the hard line Cuba lobby. Moreover, resistance to change went beyond governments of the left as was evident in the State Department's aggressive rejection of Guatemala President Otto Perez Molina's mere suggestion, echoed by numerous governments in the region, that the drug prohibition paradigm needed to be reconsidered in its entirety.

Policy toward Colombia offers another example of the power of inertia. Assistant Secretary Valenzuela had served as principal National Security Adviser for Western Hemisphere Affairs in Clinton's White House, at a time when the multi-year Plan Colombia was conceived and first implemented as a major component of U.S. policy in South America, eventually channeling nearly \$7 billion into a comprehensive package of counter-insurgency and anti-narcotics trafficking programs. As a Senator (Dem.-Delaware), Vice President Joseph Biden had also played a major role in the original shaping of Plan Colombia, which emphasized militarization to a greater extent than Colombian President Andrés Pastrana Arango had proposed.<sup>15</sup> In the 2000 congressional debate over funding the plan, Biden was a key Democratic proponent of the Clinton position, arguing vehemently against the amendment proposed by Senator Paul Wellstone (Dem.-Minnesota) to decrease the military aid portion of Plan Colombia and commit additional resources to reducing the U.S. demand for drugs. Sen. Biden remarked that he based his position on a trip to Colombia during which he spent "2 days, 24 hours a day" with President Pastrana. "For the first time, the Senator said,

we have a President who understands that his democracy is at stake. He is willing to risk his life-not figuratively, literally... Folks, if they lose, mark my words, we are going to reap the whirlwind

in this hemisphere on matters that go far beyond drugs. It will include terrorism, it will include whole cadres of issues we have not thought about.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, even before the 9-11 attacks, Biden articulated, and advocated, a framework for a U.S.-Colombian partnership focused on counter-terrorism, as opposed to counternarcotics.

3) Domestic Politics: In the absence of executive branch initiatives, the U.S. Congress seized the opportunity to shape policy toward the region. President Obama did use executive orders to relax restrictions on travel and the transfer of remittances by Cuban-Americans to their homeland. But he stopped far short of what OAS members demanded—restoring Cuba’s membership in the organization and ending a policy of hostility— or what the major changes occurring in Cuba might have engendered in response. Cuba policy was dominated in the House by Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Florida Republican who was chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee from 2011 to 2013 (and was ranking minority member of the committee in 2009 and 2010), and in the Senate by Sen. Menendez, who had long been associated with virulent opposition to the Cuban government. Similarly in the case of Honduras, ultra-conservative members of the Senate—led by Sen. Demint as described above—diminished the credibility of President Obama’s proclaimed commitment to democracy. They held hostage the nominations of Valenzuela and Shannon, demanding that the President support the Honduran regime that came to power in 2009 by ousting Manuel Zelaya, the democratically elected president, and ignore the murderous crackdown on dissent that followed the coup. With a reprise of Cold War rhetoric, conservatives endeavored to situate U.S.-Latin American relations within a larger policy paradigm that painted the encroaching power of “the left” in Latin America as a fundamental threat to American interests. The Colombia case once again is an illustrative example. The government of President Alvaro Uribe Vélez was cast as a key U.S. ally surrounded by hostile socialist leaders in Venezuela, Bolivia, and to some extent Ecuador, that the United States had to help defend against leftist revolutionary forces within its own borders. Ros-Lehtinen demanded the United States strengthen ties with Colombia through increased military cooperation because “U.S. interests throughout the hemisphere are under attack.”<sup>17</sup>

Despite efforts by a number of concerned Democrats in Congress and nongovernmental organizations to call attention to the grave problems inherent in President Obama's positions, and to generate political pressure for change, there was no U.S. voting bloc or powerful interest group that created real political consequences for failure to modify policy. On the other side, however, powerful political actors opposing any policy paradigm shift sought to link this region of the world to key national constituencies.

Playing to a conservative Florida voting bloc, Reps. Ros-Lehtinen and Connie Mack, also a Florida Republican and a senior member of the House Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, made outspoken criticism of President Hugo Chávez and other so-called Latin American "thugocrats" central to their political agendas. Following Obama's election Mack sponsored or co-sponsored three bills related to Colombia. Given Florida's status as a swing state whose substantial number of electoral votes has played a historic role in making or breaking presidential bids, these two Republicans were viewed as having the potential to create high political costs for any major U.S. Colombia policy reform.

By connecting the Colombian Free Trade Agreement (CFTA) to the reduction of unemployment, Republican members of Congress also endeavored to link U.S. Colombia policy to an issue that is fundamentally important to virtually all domestic constituencies, though the primary domestic advocates for the agreement were the multinational corporations that stood to gain from its passage. Playing to popular opinion in the midst of an acute economic crisis, Republican senators and representatives used floor speeches, resolutions, and letters to paint the CFTA as a quick and costless way to create jobs in the United States and to head off potential executive resistance to its passage. As California Republican Representative Dreier stated:

"We have got an unemployment rate in excess of 10 percent... and we think—Democrat and Republican alike—that it's a very good idea for the President to be focusing on job creation and economic growth... He has a wonderful opportunity to take what I believe would be the strongest, boldest, most dynamic step towards economic growth, and that is to send to Capitol Hill

three pending trade agreements: Panama, Colombia and South Korea.”<sup>18</sup>

One might have expected the growing Latino population in the United States to create societal pressure for recalibrating relations with Latin America, but the Latino community is not united. Cuban-Americans focus on Cuba itself or on countries they perceive are allies of Cuba, and they are divided internally about U.S. policy toward Cuba.<sup>19</sup> Mexican-Americans, the largest segment of ethnic Latinos, tend not to focus on foreign policy, and concern themselves with domestic issues such as the economy, jobs, and access to health care and education, and with immigration. Even when non-Cuban Latinos take up foreign policy issues, the Obama Administration has tended to ignore them, assuming that they will not vote for Republicans.

4) External Shocks: With respect to Colombia several “shocks” might have derailed the policy, including the Colombian government’s systematic record of committing grave human rights violations, the reemergence of paramilitary groups and extensive evidence of continued governmental connections with paramilitaries, the record levels of Andean coca production at a point when U.S. counternarcotics support was also near its peak, obvious signs of the diversion of trafficking to Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, and the 2009 scandal involving Colombia’s domestic intelligence service, the Administrative Security Department (DAS in the Spanish acronym).<sup>20</sup>

Yet none of these exogenous factors constituted enough of a “shock” to propel major policy change, exemplifying the extent to which foreign policy paradigms can withstand the “reality checks” of data that demonstrates policy failure. Hall suggests that while “a policy paradigm can be threatened by the appearance of anomalies, namely by developments that are not fully comprehensible...within the terms of the paradigm,” paradigms are often “stretched” to incorporate such anomalies. By insisting on the effectiveness of U.S. Colombia policy in reaching a number of stated goals, and generally excusing the Colombian government’s human rights record, President Obama effectively deflected attention from developments that might have catalyzed a policy change away from the one established by the two previous administrations. With regard to the drug reduction goals

and strategies of the policy, expert reports on the “manipulation of data and diagnosis...in order to consolidate the ‘success of the strategy’” suggest that U.S. officials have endeavored to shape reality to fit within the policy paradigm, as opposed to vice versa.<sup>21</sup>

Policy under Obama becomes easier to understand if one conceives of U.S. foreign policy paradigms as resistant to change, shaped by entrenched “behind the scenes” actors and groups and only altered in the case that potential “drivers” of change, stemming from executive leadership, the foreign policy bureaucracy, domestic constituencies, or external shocks, intervene to overcome a general policy inertia. Given the “economy of attention” and limited political capital of the President, and the lack of cogency in foreign policy toward Latin America for much of the U.S. population, it is not surprising that Obama did not use his limited influence to push a change in U.S. policy toward Latin America, a region about which U.S. voters tend to pay little attention and where he would have certainly confronted significant resistance. Nor is it likely that the impetus for policy change would have come from a foreign policy bureaucracy comprised primarily of actors who, in previous administrations, played key roles in shaping and promoting the framework that has defined U.S.-Latin American relations for the past decade. Finally, the crucial relationship with Colombia, like that with Mexico engulfed in crime-related violence, exemplifies the extent to which U.S. foreign policy paradigms are resistant to the kinds of empirical “anomalies” that should challenge their validity. Rather than reevaluating the policy paradigm to take into account this reality, policymakers under Obama insisted on the success of the framework, to the point of negotiating the facts to fit the theory. Inertia prevailed over the change one could believe in.

#### **IV. An Emerging Asia-Pacific Policy for the Hemisphere**

Inertia in Washington does not imply an absence of change in U.S.-Latin American relations, because patterns of Latin American interaction with the United States are contingent on a number of factors, encompassing changes in U.S. bilateral relations with particular countries and the impact on the United States of the shifting landscape of regionalism. For example, presidential elections

outcomes in Brazil, Colombia, and Uruguay are likely to be the most significant for the region and U.S. economic and security relations. U.S.-Mexican security cooperation under the Peña Nieto government is likely to change because of popular antagonism to Plan Merida.<sup>22</sup>

With regard to regional configurations, uncertainties abound. One concerns the fate of the Venezuela-led ALBA alliance in the aftermath of President Chávez's death in March, 2013. Another has to do with the way relatively new regional blocs and organizations that exclude the United States and Canada —such as UNASUR (Union of South American Nations), CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), and SICA (Central American Integration System) —relate to each other and to the OAS.

Traditionally, the OAS had been Washington's preferred instrument for hemispheric cooperation, a claim that persists in the imagination of ALBA countries that have chafed at OAS pressures on human rights-related issues. In reality, recent U.S. administrations have done little to buttress the OAS's relevance and have repeatedly undermined the leadership of Secretary General José Miguel Insulza. The 2012 Summit of the Americas in Cartagena at which President Obama was caught entirely off-guard by unified Latin American criticism over drug policy, Cuba and other issues, underscored the degree to which the OAS has simultaneously been weakened and ceased to serve as a tool for American hegemony. The Obama administration's willingness to make policy concessions demanded by Latin American governments, particularly regarding the participation of Cuba, will determine whether there is another OAS Summit in 2015 or whether instead there will no longer exist an institutional venue bringing together the leaders of all countries in the hemisphere. Officially, the executive branch remains committed to the OAS, labeled in 2013 by a State Department spokesman as "the pre-eminent multilateral organization, speaking for the hemisphere."<sup>23</sup> But resistance is to be expected from the Congress and bureaucracy. Notably when he was Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2012, Secretary of State John Kerry joined a bipartisan group of senators who signed an open letter to the State Department charging that the OAS "is sliding into an administrative and financial paralysis," that could lead to its "irrelevance."<sup>24</sup>

If the United States is ambivalent toward the OAS, the organization's standing is even more tenuous for the ALBA countries, Cuba and increasingly Brazil. It is in that context that some Latin American advocates of strengthening UNASUR and CELAC see these entities as mechanisms to further Latin America's autonomy from the United States. As Uruguay's foreign minister, Luís Almagro Lemes, remarked in February 2014, "the importance of CELAC is political, in the sense that it enables Latin America to have a strategic dialogue with the EU and China apart from the relationship China or the EU has with the United States."<sup>25</sup>

Washington has been circumspect in not openly challenging these Latin American initiatives. But privately some officials have expressed reactions ranging from disappointment to contempt at being excluded from regional discussions. At a minimum they have been frustrated by the increasing lack of U.S. influence in regional affairs. This was evident in March 2014, for example, when regional leaders rebuffed Vice President Joe Biden's attempt to organize a special OAS meeting to consider sanctions against Venezuela.<sup>26</sup>

One possible U.S. reaction to its diminishing status might have been to recognize at long last that the time had come to end Washington's hegemonic presumption. In fact, it appeared that was what Secretary Kerry tried to do in November 2013, in announcing at the OAS that "The era of the Monroe Doctrine is over." He continued by saying,

The relationship that we seek and that we have worked hard to foster is not about a United States declaration about how and when it will intervene in the affairs of other American states. It's about all of our countries viewing one another as equals, sharing responsibilities, cooperating on security issues, and adhering not to doctrine, but to the decisions that we make as partners to advance the values and the interests that we share.<sup>27</sup>

Remarkably, though, no major U.S. newspaper reported on the Secretary's speech, and it seemed to have had no impact even in WHA, the State Department's Latin American bureau.

WHA officials did not repeat the announcement in any public statements, and the WHA website did not change after Kerry's speech.

It still trumpeted four goals of US policy, without acknowledgement that these have mostly been honored in the breach: Promoting Social and Economic Opportunity, Clean Energy and Mitigated Effects of Climate Change, Safety of the Hemisphere's Citizens, Strengthening Effective Institutions of Democratic Governance.<sup>28</sup> For example, while most of the hemisphere has rejected the Washington Consensus straightjacket, because it generated unemployment and undermined governments' abilities to reduce income inequality, WHA still viewed the promotion of Washington-style "free trade" as a way to achieve social and economic opportunity. While WHA proclaimed it advances citizen security by supporting Plan Merida, it failed to acknowledge that 98 percent of the crimes committed in Mexico go unpunished. Moreover, as we have noted, the United States did enormous damage to the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2009 by undermining OAS efforts to re-establish democracy in Honduras, rather than serving as strong advocate of democratic governance.

In short, the United States has not responded to the loss of influence by discarding its hegemonic presumption, despite Kerry's audacious pronouncement. Instead, it seems intent on admonishing Latin America that the region needs the United States more than the United States needs its neighbors, much as George Kennan advised in 1950. In a report to the Secretary of State the revered diplomat wrote:

It is important for us to keep before ourselves and the Latin American peoples at all times the reality of the thesis that we are a great power; that we are by and large much less in need of them than they are in need of us; that we are entirely prepared to leave to themselves those who evince no particular desire for the forms of collaboration that we have to offer; that the danger of a failure to exhaust the possibilities of our mutual relationship is always greater to them than to us; that we can afford to wait, patiently and good naturedly; and that we are more concerned to be respected than to be liked or understood.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, Kennan's prescription seems to be precisely the course the Obama Administration is following, as it fashions a policy to ignore much of the hemisphere and work closely with a few countries willing to sign on to its Asian-Pacific alliance. The apparent shift toward situating Latin American relations in a broader Asia-Pacific context

has largely been presented in domestic economic rather than political terms, although it represents as well a response to the twenty-fold increase in China's trade with the region over the past fifteen years.<sup>30</sup> It also sends an unequivocal signal that liberalizing trade remains the core principle guiding U.S. thinking about economic relations in the hemisphere, in effect continuing a paradigm that has reigned for decades. The lynchpin of this shift is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), also known as the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership, a multilateral free trade agreement aimed at reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers to boost trade and investment. Originally formed by Chile, Brunei, New Zealand and Singapore in 2006, today five more countries are negotiating membership in the group: Australia, Malaysia, Peru, the United States and Vietnam, and other countries, including Mexico, Colombia, Canada and Japan are considering doing so. Speaking at a 2013 conference at the Inter-American Development Bank, U.S. Commerce Under Secretary for International Trade Francisco Sánchez referred to "the framework for the TPP agreement as 'a landmark accomplishment' because it contains all the elements considered desirable for modern trade agreements: It removes all tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade; takes a regional approach to promote development of production and supply chains; and eases regulatory red tape limiting cross border flows."<sup>31</sup>

The degree to which the TPP has become central to policy-makers' vision for U.S. ties with the region is evident in increasingly frequent official statements. Briefing reporters after President Obama's May 2013 visit to Mexico and Costa Rica, National Security Adviser for Latin America Ricardo Zuniga noted "the strategic relationship between the United States and Mexico, and that stems in part from the \$1.5 billion in commerce between the United States and Mexico every day, and the half-a-trillion-dollar economy that exists with us ... as well as our work together in global institutions and global mechanisms such as the G-20 and our ... joint participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership."<sup>32</sup> But despite continued administration pressure, Senate Democrats effectively denied "fast track" trade authority to President Obama in February 2014, denying him the opportunity to make the TPP a component of his Asian pivot.<sup>33</sup>

The tilt toward Asia-Pacific as a magnet for U.S.-Latin American ties was not limited to the trade-focused TPP. The growing emphasis placed on strengthening U.S. ties to the Pacific Alliance—comprised of Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru—suggested that Washington aims to advance a broader, alternative regional agenda. This was evident in the *Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)*, the major strategic planning document for the U.S. military. Released on March 4, 2014, it emphasized that the primary U.S. security interest is “inextricably linked to the peace and security of the Asia-Pacific region.” The role, it asserted, for those Western Hemispheric militaries “that want to partner with the United States and demonstrate a commitment to investing the time and resources required to develop and sustain an effective, civilian-led enterprise” is essentially to increase “interoperability with the United States and other likeminded partners,” that is to play a subordinate role in supporting the U.S.-led Asian-Pacific alliance.<sup>34</sup>

On the basis of this analysis of trends in the region and constraints on policy innovation in the United States, we anticipate that the Hemisphere will gradually bifurcate in one of two ways: (1) between a Northern tier of Latin American countries subordinate to and frequently resentful of the United States, and a Southern tier that essentially opts to ignore Washington; or (2) between four key countries that border the Pacific Ocean (Chile, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico) striving to participate in the new Pacific Alliance jointly with the United States, and the other major countries in the region that seek common cause through institutions such as UNASUR or CELAC.

There arguably is, then, a new regional agenda in Washington. Developed alongside an enduring preoccupation with security from the Andean countries northward through Central America and Mexico, this vision revives the trade-focused approach that shaped U.S. preferences toward Latin America in the late Cold War and early post-Cold War eras, and that had fallen by the wayside over the past decade following its rejection by a heterogeneous majority of South American countries. The difference is that now, rather than try to convince its Southern neighbors of the desirability of a U.S.-led hemisphere-wide bloc, Washington has chosen to incorporate

like-minded Latin American countries into its trade-focused agenda centered on Asia and the Pacific.

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#### ABSTRACT

### Washington’s Asia-Pacific Response to a Changing Hemispheric Order

This article analyzes the principal factors that are shaping U.S. policies toward Hemispheric affairs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, situating these historically in the context of U.S.-Latin American relations. It draws on approaches to the study of foreign policy making processes to examine explanations for why the United States has been unable to respond to significant changes in the region as the kind of “partner” promised

by President Barack Obama in 2009. It then highlights how the U.S. response has been an attempt to siphon away some countries into a new Asia-Pacific alliance consistent with the U.S. "pivot" to Asia.

#### RESUMEN

### **El vuelco hacia Asia-Pacífico de Washington en respuesta a un Orden Hemisférico cambiante**

Este artículo analiza los principales factores que están moldeando las políticas de Estados Unidos hacia los asuntos hemisféricos en el siglo XXI, ubicándolas históricamente en el contexto de las relaciones entre Estados Unidos y América Latina. Plantea abordajes al estudio de los procesos de formulación de políticas exteriores para analizar por qué Estados Unidos no ha podido responder ante cambios significativos en la región como el "socio" que el Presidente Barack Obama había prometido en 2009. Luego el artículo destaca cómo la respuesta de Estados Unidos ha representado un intento por arrastrar algunos países hacia una nueva alianza Asia-Pacífico, hecho que guarda coherencia con el viraje de Estados Unidos hacia Asia.

#### SUMMARY

### **A guinada de Washington para a Ásia-Pacífico em resposta a uma ordem hemisférica em transformação**

Este artigo analisa os principais fatores que estão moldando as políticas dos Estados Unidos voltadas aos assuntos hemisféricos no século 21, situando-as historicamente no contexto das relações entre os Estados Unidos e a América Latina. Lança abordagens ao estudo dos processos de formulação de políticas exteriores para analisar por que os Estados Unidos não puderam responder às mudanças significativas na região como o "sócio" que o Presidente Barack Obama havia prometido em 2009. Em seguida, o artigo destaca como a resposta dos Estados Unidos representou uma tentativa de arrastar alguns países para uma nova aliança Ásia-Pacífico, fato que guarda coerência com a guinada dos Estados Unidos para a Ásia.