

Responding To The Hemisphere's Political Challenges

Report of The Inter-American Dialogue Task Force on the **ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES**

Fernando Cepeda, Chair
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JUNE 2006





Inter-American Dialogue

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Foreword

More than ever before the nations of the Western Hemisphere need an active and effective regional organization to address a range of problems in the Americas, including those affecting domestic governance and security as well as those with international dimensions. Yet few governments assign priority to making the Organization of American States (OAS) such an organization. This was a central conclusion of an Inter-American Dialogue Task Force convened in 2005 to review the work of the OAS and set forth recommendations for how the organization can and should be used to engage the varied challenges confronting the hemisphere.

The task force included some 20 prominent leaders—former government officials, political figures, business leaders, academics and NGO representatives—drawn from the United States, Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean. This report reflects the views of its members. Not every participant agrees fully with every point in the text, but each of them has endorsed the report’s overall content and tone, and supports its principal recommendations. In reaching its conclusions, the group followed three broad guidelines.

- First, we decided that the report and recommendations would give most attention to what the OAS should be doing to address the hemisphere’s problems, rather than focusing our effort on issues of institutional reform, although these would not be entirely neglected. Most task force members agreed, moreover, that it was not mainly the organization of the OAS or its mandates that hampered its effectiveness. It was instead the lack

of consensus among member states on the key issues and what needs to be done about them.

- Second, we decided the report should mainly address the hemisphere's political agenda—safeguarding and advancing democratic governance, defending human rights, strengthening security, resolving conflicts, and managing the Summit of the Americas process. We do not underestimate the importance of other areas of OAS work, but we judge that the OAS is most importantly a political organization. It is the only hemispheric organization with authority to deal with political issues and arrangements, and we consider that to be its most vital role.
- Third, our objective has been to make this exercise and the resulting report as useful as possible to the leadership of the OAS—the secretary general, other senior officials, and members of the Permanent Council—as well as to the region's governments.

All of us owe a debt of gratitude to Fernando Cepeda for his skill in chairing the task force and for his many contributions to this report. Jaclyn Shull, a program assistant at the Dialogue, deserves our appreciation for her assistance in bringing the task force together and preparing the report. We are especially grateful to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Whitehead Foundation for their generous financial support of this initiative.

Peter Hakim
President
June 2006

Introduction

The Western Hemisphere today is confronting a period of exceptional challenges. Political and social tensions are severe and worsening in many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Relations between the United States and many nations of the region have become fractious, and a growing divisiveness has developed among Latin American governments—often about the kind of links that the region should have with the United States. The Mar del Plata Summit revealed that common ground can be hard to find.

U.S. relations with Latin America have never been easy. The enormous difference between the wealth and power of the United States and the countries of Latin America has fundamentally shaped hemispheric attitudes and institutions. Latin American nations have long been distrustful of the United States, and cautious about their relationships with Washington. Most of them recognize the vital importance of their political and commercial ties to the United States. At the same time, they have consistently sought to curb U.S. influence in their own countries and the region as a whole. For its part, Washington has often been disappointed by the lack of support from Latin America and the region's rejection of U.S. leadership on many issues.

The structure and operations of the Organization of American States (OAS) reflect these fundamental tensions in inter-American relations. The establishment of the OAS and its varied roles in hemispheric affairs are strong evidence of the interdependence of the United States and Latin American and Caribbean states and the fact that they share important common interests that can be advanced by cooperation. At the same time, as the OAS Charter and other key documents make plain, national sovereignty

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Recent developments in the Americas have given the OAS an expansive agenda.

and non-intervention are basic guiding principles of all OAS actions, leaving no doubt that Latin American and Caribbean governments want clear restraints on the organization and its most powerful member. The U.S. government views the OAS as a mechanism for building alliances with Latin American nations, gaining their support on critical issues, and exerting leadership in hemispheric affairs. Latin Americans see the organization, in part, as a means to moderate and contain Washington's power and influence in the region.

While recent developments in the Americas have given the OAS an expansive agenda of critical issues to address, the disagreements and strained relations among the hemisphere's governments make it more difficult for the organization, which generally reaches decisions by consensus, to agree on appropriate courses of action and conduct its work.

The Unique Role of the OAS

Every member of the task force called for a more active and engaged OAS, and agreed that no significant governance issue should be excluded from the organization's agenda. On this question there was no difference of opinion or hesitation. We reached quick consensus that no other regional or international organization can substitute for the OAS—although cooperation can and should be strengthened between the OAS and many other institutions. The UN has a significant role in hemispheric affairs, particularly where peacekeeping is needed, and the multilateral banks are important for the region's economic development and social progress. The OAS, however, is the core institution for addressing regional issues, especially those concerned with political matters. No other organization has the necessary credibility and mandate to bring together the collective influence of the hemisphere's countries to resolve disputes among member states, encourage compromise among governments on salient regional issues, credibly monitor national government performance on sensitive concerns, and press countries to change course when they violate hemispheric norms. In some instances, a smaller group or coalition of countries can

join together to usefully address a regional issue or help a troubled neighbor confront domestic governance and security challenges. Such coalitions can make a significant contribution when OAS action is blocked by the opposition of some member governments, and their efforts can sometimes prompt subsequent OAS initiative. No group or coalition, however, can act with the unique legitimacy and broad mandate of the OAS.

Leadership at the OAS

Another fundamental point of agreement among task force members was that the effectiveness of the OAS critically depends on the consistent, vigorous, and sometimes risk-taking leadership of the secretary general. The OAS Charter conveys only limited executive power to the secretary general. Most formal authority resides in the Permanent Council where each of the 35 member states is represented by an ambassador with a single vote. At best, this arrangement results in extremely slow decision making; at times, when there are major differences among the states, it can lead to virtual paralysis. It is the secretary general—like the CEOs of most international institutions—who must drive the OAS.

The secretary general clearly needs to have strong and constructive relations with the members of the Permanent Council. But he has to exercise leadership in the organization as well. The secretary general should make clear his priorities for OAS initiatives, offer a broad strategy for pursuing those priorities, propose courses of action in specific circumstances, and use his political skills and powers of persuasion to mobilize the backing of national governments for his agenda.

When the Permanent Council cannot reach a decision on how to proceed, the secretary general still retains some capacity to act. If, for example, the council cannot agree to a fact-finding or mediating mission in a politically troubled country, the secretary general might himself assemble a team to gather needed information and assess the situation. Like most institutions, the OAS has a degree of bureaucratic flexibility that allows it to operate in the face of disagreements.

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The OAS needs continuing support from the countries of the hemisphere to carry out its mandate.

Anticipating Crises

That the OAS should play an anticipatory or preventive role in circumstances of prospective danger or crisis was an idea strongly endorsed by every member of the task force. Rather than merely responding to events and working to catch up, the OAS, it was agreed, should take the initiative to carefully assess, offer advice and assistance, and where possible, work to prevent serious violations of democratic norms, breakdowns in governance, internal violence, and disputes between nations. The secretary general and the OAS secretariat will have to take the initiative both to identify situations that demand attention and develop strategies for addressing them. They will also need to gain the support of OAS member states, including that of the government (or governments) concerned. To make anticipatory or preventive diplomacy work, the OAS will require specialized and expanded staff capacity and additional resources.

The OAS Budget Squeeze

Regardless of the quality of leadership provided by the secretary general, the OAS needs continuing support from the countries of the hemisphere to carry out its mandate—including political support, resources and staffing. Even the most talented leader cannot succeed without that support. Although recent progress to address the OAS's financial problems is encouraging, the organization's recurring budgetary crisis is shameful. It is a source of demoralizing institutional weakness. It constrains the OAS's ability to establish priorities and plan ahead, to recruit and retain top level staff, conduct high quality programs, and initiate urgently needed activities. Most OAS programs now rely on grant funding for specific initiatives from governments and other institutions. The setting of priorities now often depends on the preferences of these donors rather than on decisions by the secretary general and Permanent Council. Without a substantial rise in revenues from member governments, the OAS could become increasingly hobbled and unable to carry out even its most central mandates.

The OAS's financial shortfalls are, in significant part, a reflection of the limited support for the institution and its work among many countries of the hemisphere. For the past dozen years, the OAS budget has been squeezed by the resistance of many governments to increase their annual payments—even to compensate for rising costs, let alone for expanded activity. Member states agreed to a modest increase in February, but far more is required to put the OAS on a solid financial footing. Unless governments are prepared to pay more to strengthen the financial base of the OAS, the only realistic course will be to substantially downsize the organization and curtail its mandate and authority. Members of the task force believe it would be a serious mistake to pursue that alternative.

We call on the nations of the hemisphere to bolster the OAS's finances and provide it with the resources it needs to conduct its work. It is long past time that the member states agreed to permanently raise their annual payments to the OAS; these have been frozen for more than a decade, even as staffing and operational costs have soared. The organization's budget is now the equivalent of one-half of what it was in 1994. Staff has been pared by nearly one-third, while there remains almost no funding for non-staff costs. Even worse, many countries are in substantial arrears in their quota payments, some because of disagreements with the policies of the organization. Task force members did not have a solution to the problem, but almost all of us felt that member governments should consider imposing penalties on non-paying countries.

Additional financing, however, is not enough. The hemisphere's governments need to demonstrate continuing support and respect for the organization by appointing the best qualified people they can to serve as permanent representatives to the OAS—and encourage the selection of top quality individuals from their countries for staff positions. That is not always the case today.

The Inter-American System

Task force members agreed that there is much to be gained from closer and broader collaboration among the multiple

The member states need to permanently raise their annual payments to the OAS.

A challenge to democracy in any country of the Americas is the concern of every country.

institutions that make up the Inter-American System. The Inter-American Development Bank and the Summit of the Americas process are the two most important of these institutions, but they also include the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and other UN organizations, the Pan American Health Organization, and numerous subregional organizations such as the Andean Development Corporation (CAF), the Caribbean and Central American Development Banks, and many others. Historically, each of these organizations has, for the most part, operated independently of the others although they have worked closely together on some specific issues (trade and poverty reduction, for instance) and in a few countries (Haiti is an example). The task force did not advance specific proposals for achieving greater cooperation, but urged the institutions to be more aggressive and imaginative in seeking ways to more effectively join their varied skills, objectives, and resources to meet common goals. If it can rebound from the disappointing 2005 meeting in Mar del Plata, the Summit of the Americas might be the right forum for exploring such cooperation and identifying how it could be accomplished.

Democratic Governance

Defending and advancing democracy has been the OAS's highest priority, at least since the approval of the Santiago Resolution in 1991, which called on the OAS to respond to interruptions of democratic rule in any of its member countries. Safeguarding democracy imposes three tasks on the OAS—to help strengthen democratic institutions and processes within countries; to monitor elections, particularly where there are threats of fraud or considerable distrust among political factions; and most important, and most controversial, to respond to threats to democratic or constitutional processes, including when the threat is entirely internal to a country.

Taken together, these mandates, particularly the last one, add up to a hemisphere-wide acceptance of the idea that a challenge to democracy in any country of the Americas is the concern of every country. The adoption on September 11, 2001 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter makes clear the expectation—

indeed, obligation—that all member states will respond collectively to that challenge through the mechanism of the OAS.

Bolstering Democratic Institutions

Many institutions other than the OAS assist in the building and strengthening of democratic institutions. Multilateral banks and bilateral development agencies are investing in efforts to strengthen judicial systems, legislatures, and anti-corruption projects, and in many other democracy bolstering initiatives. Most of these agencies have one important advantage over the financially strapped OAS; they bring considerably more resources to the task, and are not as pressed to distribute their funds over many countries. The main asset of the OAS is that it embodies the collective political authority of the region's governments to bear on the issues it addresses.

The task force has not sought to evaluate OAS democracy-building projects, but indications are that their quality and importance are very uneven, in some measure because multiple claimants and few resources mean the projects are small and scattered. An independent evaluation of these efforts is needed to determine whether this should remain a top priority of the OAS, how it could be done better, and whether structured cooperation with other institutions (with larger resources) would enhance the OAS's democracy-building efforts. Surely, poor quality initiatives in this area are not helpful to the OAS in its broader work to advance democratic governance. Some members of the task force felt that democracy-building activities could be dropped without doing harm given the large number of other agencies that are involved in this work. Others strongly disagreed, arguing this was central to the OAS's mandate. The question that the OAS staff and Permanent Council should address is whether other items on the OAS democracy agenda—electoral monitoring and preventing constitutional violations, for example—represent a higher priority use of the organization's limited funds and staff expertise.

Monitoring Elections

Election monitoring is one of the OAS's highest priority activities, and it enjoys wide support. It is also pursued by many

OAS electoral monitoring is highly regarded.

HAITI. Despite the hopes generated by the recent electoral outcome, no one questions the need for a considerable measure of outside intervention in Haiti. On its own, Haiti cannot sustain a credible or minimally effective government. Public institutions are embryonic at best. It is the country where it has been easiest to justify a major continuing role for the international community, but it is probably the most difficult setting in which to find a lasting solution. The OAS is only one of the many international agencies involved.

In the past two years, the OAS has had principal responsibility for preparing for elections, while crucial security assistance and economic aid are managed by others. Overall coordinating responsibility rests with the UN, along with the supervision of a Haiti peacekeeping mission. It is ironic that the mission is led by Brazil and mostly composed of Latin American troops—while Latin American nations are unwilling to consider involving the OAS in peacekeeping operations. The lack of a security or peacekeeping capacity may relegate the OAS to a secondary role in Haiti. But there is no question that the organization has a vital part to play in building and sustaining a democratic government in the country. The recent elections are only the first step toward that objective. Given the nation's conflictive politics and the distrust among various political forces, the secretary general should be well prepared to take on a mediating role or engage in constructive problem solving when needed—as he did in resolving the electoral dispute over whether a second round of voting was required. Task force members agree that Haiti must be a first order priority for the OAS, and that an intense involvement there will need to persist for many years.

NICARAGUA. OAS intervention in Nicaragua last year helped prevent the country's legislature and judiciary, dominated by two corrupted parties, from ousting the president or making it virtually impossible for him to govern. The challenge for the OAS and others now is to do what is possible to ensure a free and fair presidential election next November, which is critical for Nicaragua to regain any real measure of democratic stability. This will require a sustained OAS engagement, given the almost certain efforts of the two major parties to rig the electoral rules and procedures using their control over key institutions in the country.

BOLIVIA AND ECUADOR. Weak political institutions combined with deep ethnic and social divisions have made it extremely hard to govern either Bolivia or Ecuador. In both countries, elected presidents have been forced out of office by popular demonstrations and street protests—and the politics of both have become disorderly and confrontational. Hostility and distrust between different regions and ethnic groups threaten the unity of the two countries.

No one disputed the fairness of Bolivia's December 2005 presidential election (monitored by the OAS), which led to an overwhelming victory by indigenous leader Evo Morales, who now has unquestioned legitimacy to govern, more so than any Bolivian president in the past half century. Although Bolivia's basic social and political tensions remain to be resolved, there is now some opportunity to repair the nation's political divisions and establish the basis for democratic progress. The OAS and others should be encouraging the new president to reach out to his political opponents and find ways to work constructively with them. Neighboring countries, particularly Brazil and Argentina, which have major financial interests in Bolivia, can play an important role. It is also important for OAS officials—both directly and through Latin American and European governments—to do what is necessary to avoid any early clashes between Washington and the new government of Bolivia over anti-drug programs. A constructive relationship between Bolivia and the United States, which provides significant aid to the country, would contribute to the success of the Morales presidency.

Ecuador holds its next presidential election later this year, 2006. The most important task for the OAS is to help assure that the vote is conducted fairly—but credible elections are only part of the challenge facing Ecuador. The last three elected presidents have all been forced out of power in ways that were constitutionally questionable. This is a country in which anticipatory action, if it had been initiated by the OAS when the government disbanded the Supreme Court last year, might have made a difference; such action could be important in the coming period. The OAS cannot be content merely with a fair election in Ecuador. It also should be seeking ways to avert the kind of vicious battles that have come to characterize Ecuadorian politics and often end in constitutional crises. The outcome of the elections in the coming months could help to mitigate political antagonisms. It is important that an electoral mission be sent to the country soon to help prepare for next year's election.

VENEZUELA. Venezuela today represents a particularly difficult challenge for the Inter-American Democratic Charter and its fundamental principle that the nations of the hemisphere are obligated to respond collectively to threats to democratic governance. The six-year-old government of Hugo Chávez dominates every one of the country's public institutions. His governing power is virtually unconstrained. He controls every seat in the legislature (because the opposition declined to compete in the last election), the courts and electoral commission are packed with his supporters, and legal restrictions now put sharp limits on the activities of opposition groups, civil society, and the press. Some argue he is pushing an authoritarian agenda across Latin America with revenues from high-priced oil. Venezuela is playing an adversarial role within the OAS itself, making it harder for the organization to reach consensus and to operate in some areas.

The OAS monitored recent elections in Venezuela; the intense criticism it received from both the government and the opposition illustrates how difficult it is for the organization to act in highly polarized situations where there is virtually no middle ground and little willingness to compromise. The OAS has plainly not been able to respond forcefully to the multiple restrictions that have been imposed on democratic politics in the country. OAS initiative has been restrained by an array of factors—the extent of President Chávez's popular support, his long series of electoral victories, and the weakness of opposition groups within the country. Most OAS governments are reluctant to openly oppose Chávez, in some measure because their commercial relations with Venezuela are significant and Chávez is a popular figure in many countries. In addition, however, Latin American governments are uncomfortable with U.S. proposals to confront and isolate the Chávez government.

There are no very good options for the OAS. To do nothing, to simply treat Venezuela as another democratic country, would underscore the shortcomings of the OAS and the limitations of its capacity to protect democracy. At the same time, OAS member states are unwilling to directly challenge the Venezuelan government. Even the secretary general is largely hamstrung by this situation. Although it is unlikely to have any immediate impact, what the secretary general can and should do is to make clear to President Chávez and other Venezuelan officials that their country is violating basic norms of democratic governance and to consistently urge a change in course. He should similarly criticize any undemocratic actions by opponents of the Chavez government. The secretary general should also be consulting regularly with the hemisphere's presidents and other leaders about how to deal with Venezuela—and encouraging them, when appropriate, to express their concerns about democracy in that country. There is no easy formula for managing the situation of Venezuela. The political judgment of the secretary general will be critical in determining what kind of initiatives can be useful

Governments should not have the right to veto an OAS electoral mission.

other agencies—the United Nations, the European Union, the U.S. and other governments, and many private organizations such as the Carter Center. Unlike democracy building, however, election monitoring is an area in which the OAS has developed exceptional expertise and enormous experience. Its electoral work is highly regarded.

As it now stands, the OAS has the authority to monitor an election only when it is requested by the government of the country where the vote will take place. To be sure, political pressure from the OAS itself and from member countries directly is often enough to persuade a reluctant government to extend the necessary invitation to the OAS. Still, the great majority of task force members felt that, given the OAS's mandate to protect democracy, governments should not have the right either to veto or delay the start of an OAS electoral mission. The OAS, in short, should be granted authority to monitor any and all Western Hemisphere elections that it determines need such monitoring. Some task force participants thought that this change would make it difficult for the OAS to decide not to monitor an election and could end up stretching the organization's budget and staff. Most members argued, however, that OAS officials had responsibility for such decisions and could not avoid them.

There are also strong arguments for the OAS to establish (and regularly replenish) a permanent fund for electoral monitoring—rather than depend on securing special funding for each mission. This would accomplish several important objectives. It would underline the importance assigned to electoral observation—and allow for a careful setting of OAS priorities regarding which elections to monitor and how intensely, and permit the advanced planning of each mission. It would also allow for election monitors to start their work well ahead of the election date (which is often vital to deter or uncover fraud and manipulation during the campaign). This now requires both the agreement of the monitored country's government as well as the availability of resources.

The task force also thought it important that the OAS, as a multilateral institution experienced in election monitoring, should have the lead role when other observer groups are

sponsored by national governments or non-governmental organizations. In those instances when the UN is involved, the OAS should share oversight responsibility. One crucial lesson from past OAS electoral missions is the critical importance of a strong and capable head of mission. That was vital to the successful outcomes of OAS monitoring in two of the most highly contested elections in recent memory, in Peru in 2000 and the Dominican Republic in 1994.

Democracy in Danger

The most challenging and controversial task of the OAS today is responding to threats to democratic governance and breakdowns of constitutional order—as required by the Inter-American Democratic Charter. There have been few circumstances when an OAS intervention to protect democracy has been easy or straightforward. The difficulties reflect the continuing disagreements among governments regarding, on one hand, the fundamental principles governing OAS action in such cases and, on the other, judgments about the significance of events within the country affected and what, in fact, can and should be done to restore the democratic process.

There was broad agreement among the members of the task force that it is best to anticipate a crisis situation (or engage it as early as possible), and work to prevent a potential violation of the constitutional order, rather than having to react once a violation or breakdown occurs. Establishing a high quality monitoring facility within the OAS that would analyze and report on the condition of democratic governance in member states on a regular basis, particularly in those states where difficulties are apparent, would facilitate such anticipatory action.

Even under the best of circumstances, however, it will be difficult to secure support from OAS member states for a major pre-crisis intervention—but it should be possible to gain consensus for more modest efforts, for example mediation between a government and opposition groups, as was accomplished in Peru in 2000. When there is little chance of

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approval by the hemisphere's governments for anticipatory or early action, the secretary general still has some room for initiative. Nicaragua and Ecuador are recent examples of situations in which the initiative of the secretary general and his staff helped to reduce tensions and possibly avert political confrontations. More generally, the leadership of the secretary general is central to the success of any OAS effort to prevent or reverse an interruption of democracy.

To varying degrees and for different reasons, democratic institutions are troubled in many countries of Latin America. Challenges to democratic rule could emerge in nearly any nation of Latin America today. There are five countries, however, where democracy has been particularly unsettled and threatened during the past several years. In four of them—Haiti, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Ecuador—weak governments generally have been unable to uphold the rule of law and even minimally address the problems confronting the nation. Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez has centralized power to the degree that there are no longer any checks on his authority. As discussed on pages 12 and 13, all of these countries require sustained attention by the OAS and the broader international community.

Human Rights

Members of the task force strongly praised the work of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and Court, which have long been considered the most effective and productive parts of the OAS. They were unanimous in endorsing the independence of the commission and court, making clear that the autonomy of these institutions was essential to their mission. Being part of the OAS enhances the legitimacy of the commission and court to make judgments about the behavior of national governments, but they would not be able to render authoritative and independent decisions if they were supervised by the OAS or its participating states. The task force also strongly urged hemispheric governments, when they nominate or elect members of the commission and court, to base their decision on

the quality and experience of the candidates, not their nationality or political perspectives.

Task force members were divided on the issue of whether the commission and court, given the strong reputations they have gained over time, could effectively assume a greater political and policy role—and also maintain their standing as an independent, professional human rights institution.

Many members supported the idea that the OAS Permanent Council and the secretary general do more to highlight the decisions of the human rights bodies and support their enforcement in the member states. Others, however, were concerned that the council and the secretary general would inevitably be selective, emphasizing some decisions and ignoring others—and accordingly, imposing something of a political filter on the findings of the commission and court.

Another difficult issue for the task force was whether the commission should consider making its expertise available to other OAS programs. The advice of the commission could certainly be valuable to an OAS mission charged with assessing democratic practice in Haiti or Ecuador, for instance. The commission could also, for example, be helpful to the OAS program assisting Colombia's efforts to demobilize the country's paramilitary forces. Clearly, the commission could usefully advise the Colombian government and the OAS on what could be done to adjust the demobilization process to conform better to human rights norms while pursuing the goal of disarmament. The majority of task force members argued, however, that the commission should rarely, if ever, assume operational roles in OAS missions that are not plainly part of its human rights mandate. The human rights body should be especially careful to avoid politically controversial initiatives (such as assisting the demobilization process), which could end up compromising its independence and diminish its professional credibility.

Security Matters

Most task force members felt that, given the increased salience of security issues worldwide, the hemisphere's governments

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should encourage the OAS to take on a more active and significant role in this area. Several participants suggested that, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, security would be an attractive area for U.S. cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean (as it has already been in the case of Canada and Mexico). There are obstacles to be overcome, however.

The hemisphere's security instruments—the Rio Treaty and the Inter-American Defense Board—are outmoded. They need either to be thoroughly refashioned or eliminated. (Indeed, whether or not the OAS assigns new priority to security, these instruments should be overhauled.)

Moreover, the U.S. security agenda is very different from that of Latin America and the Caribbean. For the United States, the central issue is international terrorism. Aside from Mexico and Canada, most countries of the hemisphere have little to contribute to the U.S. battle against terrorism. Moreover, the great majority of Latin American countries (including Mexico) are deeply critical of the U.S. international security strategy and how Washington is pursuing it. Finding the common ground needed for cooperation will not be easy.

For Latin America and the Caribbean, the central security issue is crime and violence. Aside from economic failure and joblessness, this is the issue of greatest concern to the region's citizens and governments. The OAS could, in principle, help foster intergovernmental cooperation to combat the international aspects of the region's violent crime wave—including illicit drug and human trafficking, illegal weapons sales, and money laundering. The OAS has been successful in developing programs to monitor the anti-drug performance of the hemisphere's countries (for the most part, replacing the widely unpopular U.S. certification process). It has not, however, been involved in direct efforts to battle the drug trade, nor is there an obvious role for it to play in that battle, given its reluctance to engage in military or police action. At best, it could serve as a forum in which the nations can discuss and seek to reconcile their different approaches.

The OAS has taken on major responsibility for assisting and monitoring the Colombian government's efforts to demobilize the paramilitary forces—but this is an ad hoc initiative that will be difficult to translate into a broader “security strategy”. Task force members strongly endorse the OAS program in Colombia, and believe that it is what the OAS should be doing—taking on specific initiatives where it can play a useful part, rather than seeking to define a broad agenda in a complex and controversial area. The ability of the OAS to identify and define other appropriate security initiatives will depend on the secretary general's leadership in pursuing this role and mobilizing the support of member governments.

Dispute resolution is an area closely related to security. Most members of the task force felt that the OAS should take on a more significant role than it has to date in seeking to mediate and resolve at least some of the outstanding border and territorial disputes between its member countries. As in the case of other security issues, the task force agreed that the best way for the OAS to proceed is to focus on a small number of specific disputes, rather than trying to develop a comprehensive agenda. As suggested in the discussion on “anticipating crises”, it should largely be up to the secretary general to exercise initiative to identify which disputes to engage and to propose how to tackle them.

Management of the Summit of the Americas Process

Over the years, the OAS has taken on increasing responsibility for the now regularly scheduled Summits of the Americas. In many respects, it has served as the secretariat to the last two summit meetings. The OAS, including Permanent Council members and the secretary general and other staff, is involved in preparing for each summit, organizing wide consultations on the agenda and program of action; keeping track of summit initiatives and mandates; and monitoring post-summit activities undertaken by the governments.

This role, however, is not a completely satisfactory one for the OAS. For one, the summit process has not lived up to its early

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expectations and its role in hemispheric affairs has been limited. Indeed, there is some question whether the meetings should even be continued after the singularly unproductive summit recently held in Mar del Plata, Argentina. But even previous summits never succeeded in establishing a regional agenda. Summit declarations have not carried much influence.

Moreover, the OAS has never been assigned real authority to guide the preparations—nor has it been provided the staff capacity or resources to do much to carry out the summit results. Some members of the task force felt that the summit may have become a diversion from the OAS's higher priority tasks in democratic governance and other areas. Others thought that the OAS should have a stronger, more continuing participation in the summit, one that involved the secretary general and the Permanent Council in setting the agenda for each meeting and coordinating implementation of the summit decisions. This would, they argued, strengthen the summit process and give the OAS the central role in hemispheric affairs it should have. We all agreed that the current OAS involvement is unsatisfactory, but that it is premature to define a new role until there is a greater consensus on whether the summits should continue and, if so, what their mission should be.

Conclusions

The task force was unanimous in urging support for a more active and robust OAS to engage the hemisphere's political and governance challenges. The OAS could and should be playing a far more influential role in hemispheric affairs—but, in order to do so, it will need greater unity and cooperation among its member states. To be sure, there are organizational changes that would strengthen the OAS and it certainly needs a larger budget and more reliable financial support. But what most constrains the OAS are the divisions and antagonisms in inter-American relations and the resulting disagreements among member states on the key issues and what needs to be done about them.

The multiple challenges affecting the nations of the hemisphere provide the OAS an ample agenda of work. At the same time, however, the strained relations among the hemisphere's governments make it more difficult for the organization to act. The secretary general has considerable room for initiative on his own, and he should certainly take that initiative when the member states are unable to reach decision, and then do his best to get their support. Indeed, at all times, the effectiveness of the OAS critically depends on the imaginative and energetic leadership of the secretary general, and his ability to mobilize governments to take action. It is the secretary general who must drive the OAS. But, the OAS cannot be a strong and effective regional organization if its member states are unwilling to put aside their differences and use the organization to advance their common interests and values.

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Members of the Task Force

Fernando Cepeda (Chair) is professor of political science at the University of the Andes. He was minister of government in Colombia.

George Alleyne served as director of the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO). He is chancellor of the University of the West Indies and special envoy of the UN secretary-general for HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean Region.

Harriet C. Babbitt was deputy administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and served as U.S. permanent representative to the OAS. She is currently senior vice president of Hunt Alternatives Fund.

Eduardo del Buey is executive director of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL). He served as director of external relations and public information at the OAS and advisor to secretary general César Gaviria on strategic communications.

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Richard Fletcher was a senator for the People's National Party in Jamaica, and a senior official of the Inter-American Development Bank.

Diego García-Sayán is a judge on the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the executive director of the Andean Commission of Jurists. He served as minister of justice of Peru from 2000 to 2001 and as foreign minister from 2001 to 2002.

Rosario Green was foreign minister of Mexico and is now general secretary for Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

Peter Hakim (Director) is president of the Inter-American Dialogue.

Donna J. Hrinak was the U.S. ambassador to Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic. She is currently director for corporate and government affairs for Kraft Foods Latin America.

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Inter-American Dialogue

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