



Fifth Summit of the Americas, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, April 2009: Background, Agenda, and Expectations

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Summary

The fifth Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, which is scheduled to be held April 17-19, 2009, will be the first hemispheric forum for President Barack Obama to engage with leaders from across Latin America and the Caribbean. The Port of Spain Summit will also be the first meeting of all 34 democratic heads of government from Latin America, the Caribbean, Canada, and the United States since the contentious 2005 Summit in Mar del Plata, Argentina. Taking place less than four months after the U.S. presidential inauguration, the Summit could set the tone for hemispheric relations during the early stages of the Obama Administration.

There have been four Summits of the Americas, two Special Summits of the Americas, and a number of ministerial-level summits held since 1994. Past Summits have led to a number of successful initiatives in the region, including the creation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, reductions in the cost of remittance transfers, and increased provision of anti-retroviral therapy to victims of HIV/AIDS. Although some view the most recent Summit as a failure because of its divisiveness, it too produced a number of important initiatives, including support for Haiti's democracy, improved infrastructure, and reductions in child labor.

Despite these accomplishments, many observers have criticized the Summits of the Americas. Civil society representatives contend that the Summits lack transparency and believe their organizations should play larger roles in the Summit process. Some observers have questioned the Summits' effectiveness, drawing attention to the fact that the majority of Summit goals have never been met. Other analysts doubt the Summits' ability to advance U.S. interests and argue that the United States should pursue its own priorities outside of the Summit process.

The theme for the Port of Spain Summit is, "Securing our citizens' future by promoting human prosperity, energy security, and environmental sustainability." Summit organizers have stressed the need to refocus the hemisphere's priorities, set achievable goals, and create the institutions necessary to hold countries accountable for implementing the Summits' mandates. Some issues not on the official agenda, such as the global financial crisis and U.S. policy toward Cuba, are also likely to be discussed. Although there is a possibility of divisiveness, most analysts believe the Summit will be successful in setting a new tone for hemispheric relations.

On March 31, 2009, the Senate approved S.Res. 90 (Kerry) expressing support for the fifth Summit of the Americas and calling on the United States to reinvigorate and strengthen its engagement with the hemisphere, especially concerning the financial crisis, energy security, and public safety. The resolution also declared that the United States was prepared to work with the rest of the region to advance an agenda of human prosperity, implement a regional energy strategy, encourage the participation of non governmental organizations in the Summit process, and strengthen the Summit follow-up mechanisms.

This report will be updated following the Summit.

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Background on Previous Summits of the Americas: From Miami to Mar del Plata

By the early 1990s, after decades of civil war and military rule in parts of the hemisphere, 34 of the 35 governments in the region were elected civilian democracies. Likewise, most of the countries in the region discarded statist economic policies in favor of economic liberalization. In order to build on these values shared by the United States and Latin America as well as develop an agenda for the hemisphere's future, President Clinton organized the first modern Summit of the Americas. Held in Miami in 1994, the Summit was the first meeting of the region's leaders since 1967 and was attended by all 34 democratically elected heads of government in the region, excluding only Fidel Castro of Cuba. After much discussion, the region's leaders approved a comprehensive Plan of Action with 23 separate initiatives under four major themes: preserving and strengthening the community of democracies of the Americas, promoting prosperity through economic integration and free trade, eradicating poverty and discrimination in the hemisphere, and guaranteeing sustainable development and conserving the natural environment for future generations. One of the most important initiatives to emerge from the Miami Summit was the agreement to work towards the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which was to be completed by January 1, 2005.¹

Since the 1994 Miami Summit, there have been three Summits of the Americas and two Special Summits of the Americas, each introducing new initiatives and producing extensive Plans of Action. In 1996, a Special Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, focusing on environmental issues in the hemisphere. In 1998, Santiago, Chile hosted the second Summit of the Americas. The Santiago Summit focused on education, but also marked the initiation of negotiations for the FTAA. Quebec City, Canada hosted the third Summit of the Americas in 2001. The Quebec City Summit produced a commitment to democracy, led to the creation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, and generated a preliminary draft of the FTAA. Another Special Summit of the Americas was held in Monterrey, Mexico in 2004. The Monterrey Summit produced the Declaration of Nuevo León, which reaffirmed the region's commitment to implementing the Quebec City Plan of Action.² These Summits have been complemented by regular meetings of the ministers of defense, education, finance, justice, labor, and trade of the countries of the region. The Summit of the Americas process has been gradually institutionalized by the Organization of American States (OAS), with the third Summit designating the OAS as the Secretariat of the Summit Process.³

¹ For more information on the Free Trade Area of the Americas, see CRS Report RS20864, *A Free Trade Area of the Americas: Major Policy Issues and Status of Negotiations*, by J. F. Hornbeck.

² For more information on the Summits of 1998, 2001, and 2004, see CRS Report 98-330, *Summit of the Americas II, April 18-19, 1998: Background, Objectives, and Expectations*, by K. Larry Storrs; CRS Report RL30936, *Summit of the Americas III, Quebec City, Canada, April 20-22, 2001: Background, Objectives, and Results*, by K. Larry Storrs and M. Angeles Villarreal; and CRS Report RS21700, *Special Summit of the Americas - Monterrey, Mexico, January 2004: Background, Objectives, and Results*, by Clare Ribando Seelke.

³ Organization of American States, Summits of the Americas Secretariat, "The Summit of the Americas Process," 2008. For more information about the OAS, see CRS Report RS22095, *Organization of American States: A Primer*, by Clare Ribando Seelke.

The most recent Summit of the Americas was held in Mar del Plata, Argentina in November 2005. Although the theme of the Summit was “Creating jobs to fight poverty and strengthen democratic governance,” debate largely centered around the Bush Administration’s proposal to resume negotiations on the FTAA. President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela led the opposition to the proposal, speaking to protesters at the so-called ‘People’s Summit,’ who gathered to demonstrate—sometimes violently—against President Bush, U.S. military involvement in Iraq, and the FTAA. Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay—member countries of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur)—also opposed the resumption of talks on the FTAA.⁴ The Mercosur countries opposed the continuation of U.S. agricultural subsidies and argued that talks should not resume until after conclusion of the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Doha Development Round, when there may be a greater possibility of achieving what they would consider a balanced and equitable agreement. Despite consensus among 29 of the 34 democratic leaders that FTAA talks should resume, the economic weight of the dissenting countries led to the adoption of the first Summit declaration to acknowledge a lack of unanimous agreement among the countries in the region concerning the desirability of the FTAA.⁵

Achievements of the Summits of the Americas

Political

According to some observers, one of the greatest political accomplishments of the Summit process has been the Inter-American Democratic Charter. In the Declaration of Quebec City, the leaders of the Americas committed to a democracy clause, which led to the creation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in September 2001. The Charter affirms the peoples of the Americas’ universal right to democracy and asserts that the governments of the region have an obligation to promote and defend democracy. Though it has produced somewhat mixed results, the Inter-American Democratic Charter has been invoked on several occasions following challenges to democratic institutions in the region, such as the attempted coup against President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela in 2002 and the removal of President Lucio Gutiérrez from office by Ecuador’s Congress in 2005.⁶

The Plan of Action adopted at the most recent Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina in 2005, called on the countries of the region to act in solidarity with the Haitian people to improve democratic institutions. Since the Summit, the OAS Special Mission for Strengthening Democracy in Haiti has worked with the Provisional Electoral Council of Haiti to develop a stronger electoral system. The OAS and the Haitian government completed a mass registration and identity card distribution campaign, which integrated the citizen identity card issuing process, electoral process, and the Civil Status Registry in order to better organize and secure population information, establish stronger electoral institutions, and provide the government with better

⁴ For more information on Mercosur, see CRS Report RL33620, *Mercosur: Evolution and Implications for U.S. Trade Policy*, by J. F. Hornbeck.

⁵ “Americas Summit Ends in Polite Dissent Over Resumption of FTAA Talks,” *Latin News Weekly Report*, November 8, 2005; *Declaration of Mar Del Plata*, IV Summit of the Americas, November 5, 2005.

⁶ Barry S. Levitt, “A Desultory Defense of Democracy: OAS Resolution 1080 and the Inter-American Democratic Charter,” *Latin American Politics and Society*, Volume 48 (3), 2006; Craig Arceneaux & David Pion-Berlin, “Issues, Threats, and institutions: Explaining OAS Responses to Democratic Dilemmas in Latin America,” *Latin American Politics and Society*, Volume 49 (2), 2007.

information to improve the efficiency of its services. Approximately 3.56 million of the 4.4 million Haitians over the age of 18 were registered.⁷

Economic

The Summits have also led to several important economic initiatives in the hemisphere. In the Declaration of Nuevo León, the leaders of the hemisphere committed to reducing the average cost of remittance transfers by at least 50% by 2008. Between 2000 and 2006, transaction costs to send remittances were reduced from 15% to 5.6%, allowing \$5 billion more to reach recipient families.⁸ The United States has played a large role in reducing the transaction costs of remittances by encouraging competition, eliminating excess regulations, and promoting the use of new technology. The cost of sending remittances through some corridors between the United States and Mexico has fallen by 50% and the United States has begun to partner with other countries like Guatemala in hopes of achieving similar cost reductions.⁹

The Mar del Plata Plan of Action states that countries should promote investment in infrastructure. President Bush proposed the Infrastructure Facility of the Americas (IFA) at the Summit, which encourages private sector investment by reducing the cost of identifying worthy projects through the establishment of a fund for feasibility assessments. The U.S. Trade and Development Agency invested \$10.4 million in 2006 to support infrastructure development in 14 countries in the region. The funds supported a variety of projects, including road pavement in Paraguay, water re-use in Brazil, and a refinery expansion in Colombia.¹⁰

Social

In addition to political and economic initiatives, the Summits of the Americas have prompted some successful social programs. The Declaration of Nuevo León set the goal of providing anti-retroviral therapy to 600,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in the hemisphere by 2005. As a result of funding from a variety of multilateral, bilateral, and domestic initiatives, over 640,000 people in the region were receiving treatment by the time of the 2005 Mar del Plata Summit, exceeding the Nuevo León goal. These initiatives included the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria.¹¹ Additionally, the U.S. government has helped over 400,000 people in the region get tested for HIV and spent over \$552 million on HIV/AIDS programs in the hemisphere between 2001 and 2007. This represented a substantial increase in funding, rising from just \$22 million in 2001 to over \$153 million in 2007.¹²

⁷ Joint Summit Working Group, "Achievements of the Summits of the Americas: Progress since Mar del Plata," 2007.

⁸ Summits of the Americas Secretariat, "National Report of the United States of America on the Implementation of Commitments from the Fourth Summit of the Americas," 2007.

⁹ Summits of the Americas Secretariat, "Achievements of the Summits of the Americas: National Accomplishments," 2004.

¹⁰ Summits of the Americas Secretariat, "National Report of the United States of America on the Implementation of Commitments from the Fourth Summit of the Americas," 2007.

¹¹ Summits of the Americas Secretariat, "Achievements of the Summits of the Americas: National Accomplishments," 2004; For more information on the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, see CRS Report RL34192, *PEPFAR: Policy Issues from FY2004 through FY2008*, by Tiaji Salaam-Blyther.

¹² Summits of the Americas Secretariat, "National Report of the United States of America on the Implementation of (continued...)"

The Plan of Action of the Mar del Plata Summit called for the eradication of the worst forms of child labor by 2020. The U.S. Department of Labor took the lead in working toward achieving this goal by funding \$22 million in anti-child labor projects throughout the region in 2004 and providing an additional \$16 million in 2005. The projects reduced child labor in hazardous agricultural and industrial sectors and improved access to basic education for victims of child labor.¹³ These programs were responsible for withdrawing and preventing more than 40,000 children from the worst forms of child labor in countries throughout the region.¹⁴

Criticism of the Summits of the Americas

Transparency

The Summits of the Americas process has drawn criticism throughout its brief history. Civil society and anti-globalization organizations contend that the Summits lack openness and transparency. These groups argue that important discussions that affect the welfare of all people in the region should not be held behind closed doors and that the Summits should be open to civil society representatives. The exclusivity of the Summits and the large role that negotiations over the FTAA have played at each of the Summits have led some civil society groups to assert that the Summits promote the expansion of corporate power while ignoring social welfare, environmental protection, and citizens' rights.¹⁵ Although the countries of the region agreed in the Declaration of Quebec City that the Summits must be open, transparent, and include civil society, many civil society groups contend that little has been done to increase their participation.¹⁶

Effectiveness

A number of observers have also criticized the Summits of the Americas for producing overly-ambitious documents that repeatedly mandate new initiatives while largely ignoring the status of implementation of previous Summit commitments. Since the first Summit of the Americas, over 600 initiatives have been introduced.¹⁷ Many of these mandates provide no criteria for measuring their implementation. Likewise, there are few mechanisms to enforce implementation of those initiatives that are measurable. Furthermore, many countries lack the organizational capacity, political will, or financial resources to implement the Summits' mandates. As a result, most

(...continued)

Commitments from the Fourth Summit of the Americas," 2007.

¹³ Summits of the Americas Secretariat, "Achievements of the Summits of the Americas: National Accomplishments," 2004.

¹⁴ Summits of the Americas Secretariat, "National Report of the United States of America on the Implementation of Commitments from the Fourth Summit of the Americas," 2007.

¹⁵ "Trade Summit Spurs Peaceful Protest," *Washington Times*, April 21, 2001; "Counter-Summit to Summit of the Americas Showcases Opposition to U.S., Neoliberal Economics," *Latin America Data Base NotiSur*, December 2, 2005; "Caribbean Sub-Regional Civil Society Forum Underscores OAS Emphasis on Inclusion, Ahead of Summit of the Americas," *US Fed News*, November 3, 2008.

¹⁶ Peter Richards, "Politics: Civil Society Groups Demand Voice at Americas Summit," *Inter Press Service*, November 5, 2008.

¹⁷ Peter Richards, "Politics: Civil Society Groups Demand Voice at Americas Summit," *Inter Press Service*, November 5, 2008; Racquel Smith, "Summit Reform and Civil Society: Taking a Deeper Look," *FOCAL Point*, August 2008.

Summit commitments have never been met.¹⁸ The failure of many countries to implement the Summits' mandates has cast doubt upon the effectiveness of the Summit process and called into question the credibility of the Summits of the Americas as a mechanism for achieving tangible results in the hemisphere.

Ability to Further U.S. Interests

Some analysts, acknowledging the divergence of economic values among countries of the region, have begun to question whether the Summit of the Americas process is worth continuing. Whereas the Summit process was initiated in a spirit of cooperation by like-minded leaders in Miami in 1994, the hemisphere is now more divided than at any time since the Cold War. The dismissal of the Bush Administration's proposal to resume talks on the FTAA at the Mar del Plata Summit was a clear manifestation of the increasing number of leaders and countries in the region that reject neoliberal economic policies. Indeed, the most recent Latinobarómetro survey found that while 56% of Latin Americans agree that a market economy is the only path to development, only 32% are satisfied with services that have been privatized and majorities in every Latin American nation believe their countries should rely more on state solutions than market solutions to resolve societal problems.¹⁹ Given these economic divisions and the movement of the Summit agenda away from the FTAA and toward state-based development programs, some analysts believe the interests of the United States would be better served by focusing instead on finalizing bilateral and multilateral agreements with those countries that still share the U.S. commitment to free trade.²⁰

2009 Port of Spain Summit

The fifth Summit of the Americas is scheduled to be held April 17-19, 2009 in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. All 34 democratically elected leaders of the hemisphere are scheduled to attend the Summit, many of whom will be attending for the first time, including President Obama and Presidents Fernández de Kirchner of Argentina, Morales of Bolivia, Bachelet of Chile, Arias of Costa Rica, Correa of Ecuador, Colom of Guatemala, Zelaya of Honduras, Calderón of Mexico, Ortega of Nicaragua, Lugo of Paraguay, and García of Peru. Although Raúl Castro officially succeeded his brother Fidel as President of Cuba in February 2008, the country's communist government has once again ensured that it will be the only country in the region not invited to attend the Summit, which is limited to democratic nations.

Official Agenda

The theme of the Port of Spain Summit is, "Securing our citizens' future by promoting human prosperity, energy security, and environmental sustainability."²¹ In July 2008, The Summit

¹⁸ Richard E. Feinberg, *Summitry in the Americas: A Progress Report*, Institute for International Economics, April 1997; Juan Cruz Diaz, "The 2009 Summit of the Americas: A New Opportunity," *Council of the Americas*, July 22, 2008.

¹⁹ Corporación Latinobarómetro, *Informe 2008*, 2008.

²⁰ James M. Roberts, "Rethinking the Summit of the Americas and Advancing Free Trade in Latin America," *The Heritage Foundation*, August 8, 2008.

²¹ Summit Implementation Review Group, *Draft Declaration of Commitment*, July 21, 2008.

Implementation Review Group (SIRG, a planning and review committee with representation from all nations participating in the Summit) issued a “Draft Declaration of Commitment” for the Port of Spain Summit. The Draft Declaration of Commitment combines the traditional Summit Declaration and Plan of Action into a single document, and proposes 65 commitments under six themes: promoting human prosperity, promoting energy security, promoting environmental sustainability, strengthening public security, strengthening democratic governance, and strengthening the Summit of the Americas follow up and implementation effectiveness. Negotiations concerning the official Summit Declaration—a consensus document that has been discussed by the participating countries for several months—have been completed and the document is expected to be released prior to the Summit.²²

Promoting Human Prosperity

According to the Draft Declaration, countries will reaffirm their support for a number of past commitments regarding human prosperity, such as halving poverty by 2015 and eradicating child labor by 2020. Among the new national commitments of governments are goals to increase investment in research and development to a minimum of 1% of GDP by 2015, increase public spending on health to at least 5% of GDP by 2015, increase secondary education enrollment to 75% by 2010, and increase enrollment in tertiary education to at least 40% by 2020. Additionally, the countries of the region will call on multilateral organizations to address a number of issues. The Draft Declaration calls on the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and other regional banks to double lending to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises and triple the number of enterprises accessing credit by 2012. The Draft also directs the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to prepare a regional contingency plan that contains new international health regulations to address the spread of vector borne diseases by the end of 2009.

Promoting Energy Security

The energy security section of the Draft Declaration sets a number of specific goals for the countries of the Americas. These include generating a minimum of 50% of national primary energy demands with renewable and low-carbon energy sources by 2050, and ensuring universal access to accurate and reliable information on energy and environmental issues by 2012. The energy section also calls for hemispheric cooperation in creating cross-border renewable energy infrastructure, encouraging the development of next-generation biofuels, and developing a strategy for international cooperation on issues related to energy.

Promoting Environmental Sustainability

The environmental sustainability section of the Draft Declaration presents a wide variety of commitments, but offers very little in terms of immediate action on environmental issues. Countries will commit to ensure the eventual stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will not seriously affect Earth’s climate and weather systems and work toward a global agreement on Climate Change at the United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark in November and December of 2009. The Draft Declaration also directs Ministers responsible for sustainable development in

²² U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Amb. Davidow Holds State Department News Briefing on the Summit of the Americas,” *CQ Congressional Transcripts*, April 6, 2009.

their countries to work with the World Bank and IDB to undertake comprehensive studies of the potential impacts of climate change on each of the nations of the Americas and develop “plans of action” to mitigate those impacts by 2011.

Strengthening Public Security

In terms of public security, governments of the region will commit to cooperate with one another to combat terrorist and criminal organizations, prevent them from operating across borders, and deny them resources. Countries will also direct the OAS Secretariat for Multi-Dimensional Security to develop a regional strategy for dealing with criminal gangs that gives special attention to the region’s youth.

Strengthening Democratic Governance

The nations of the Americas reaffirm their commitments to a variety of regional democratic initiatives in the Draft Declaration. They commit to uphold and apply the values of the Inter-American Democratic Charter and the Inter-American Conventional Against Corruption as well as to strengthen the Inter-American System of Human Rights. Countries will also commit to conclude negotiations on the proposed Social Charter of the Americas and its Plan of Action—which were proposed by Venezuela and recognize a wide variety of social, community, economic, cultural, and indigenous rights—and adopt them before the end of 2009.

Strengthening the Summit Process and Implementation

In order to improve the effectiveness of the Summit of the Americas and ensure that the commitments made at the Summit are met, the Draft Declaration proposes a number of reforms to the Summit process. Countries will agree to hold the Summits of the Americas on a regular basis, at least every three years. They will also call on multilateral financial institutions to work with Ministers of Finance to ensure that countries have the technical and fiscal resources to implement the Summits’ mandates. Likewise, the Draft Declaration encourages countries to increase the participation of civil society and business groups in the Summit process and instructs the OAS and SIRG to report annually on the progress made toward achieving the goals of the Summits.

Other Likely Topics of Discussion

Global Financial Crisis

The upcoming Summit is taking place during a time in which many Latin American and Caribbean nations, much like countries around the world, are struggling to contend with the consequences of the global financial crisis and the U.S. recession. Although nearly every country in the region is better prepared to withstand the impact of these external shocks than in the past, the economic downturn will have serious consequences throughout the hemisphere. Economic growth for the region overall is expected to slow to just 0.3%, according to the World Bank, but several countries will face far more difficult economic situations.²³ The Mexican economy,

²³ "How Latin America fits into the 'New World Order' and the challenges ahead," *Latin American Weekly Report*, April 8, 2009.

closely linked to the U.S. economy, is expected to contract 2% in 2009. Likewise, most countries in the Caribbean and Central America have economies that are closely linked to the U.S. economy in terms of trade, investment, and remittances, and will face severe economic downturns as a result of the U.S. recession. A protracted period of economic hardship could threaten to erase the social gains of recent years and potentially produce dramatic political shifts.²⁴ Indeed, citizens of 17 of the 18 Latin American countries surveyed by Latinobarómetro in 2008 listed economic problems as the most important challenges facing their countries, with 53% of all Latin Americans saying they would be willing to live under an undemocratic government if it could solve their countries' economic problems.²⁵ While some Latin American leaders at the Summit may express resentment toward the United States for the economic crisis, a number of analysts maintain that the crisis will make Latin America's cooperation with the United States all the more important and contribute to the productivity of the Summit.²⁶ The countries of the hemisphere will likely try to build on the agreements reached at the April 2009 G-20 Summit, in which five countries from the hemisphere—Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, and the United States—took part.

U.S. Policy Toward Cuba

There is a strong likelihood that U.S. policy toward Cuba will be raised by Latin American leaders at the upcoming Summit. Countries in the region increasingly have sought to integrate Cuba into the hemisphere. Since December 2008, when Cuba was incorporated into the multilateral organization known as the Rio Group, 10 Latin American heads of state have traveled to the country. Likewise, Costa Rica's March 2009 announcement that it will restore ties with Cuba and the promise of El Salvador's president-elect to do the same, will leave the United States as the only country in the hemisphere without diplomatic relations with Cuba. A number of regional leaders have promised to raise the issue of Cuba at the Summit, hoping to convince the United States to end its economic sanctions and allow Cuba back into the OAS.²⁷ While observers expect President Obama to ease restrictions on family travel and remittances to Cuba before the Summit, the Obama Administration has indicated that it will maintain the embargo and maintains that Cuba should not be a principal focus of discussion.²⁸

Energy Partnership for the Americas

Some analysts believe the "Energy Partnership of the Americas" that President Obama proposed during his electoral campaign may play a large role in the Administration's engagement with the region.²⁹ The proposal—which could be introduced at the Summit—would increase research and development in green energy sources, coordinate regional energy transport, and move the

²⁴ "A Second Chance: U.S. Policy in the Americas," *Inter-American Dialogue*, March 2009.

²⁵ Corporación Latinobarómetro, *Informe 2008*, 2008.

²⁶ Peter Hakim, "No Surprise: the Spotline Will Be On Obama in Trinidad and Tobago," *Infolatam*, March 3, 2009.

²⁷ "Obama's first regional summit sees Cuba on the agenda," *Latin American Security & Strategic Review*, March 2009; Lesley Clark, "U.S.-Cuba policy watched as Americas summit nears; President Barack Obama is expected to address Cuba travel policy as pressure mounts leading up to the Summit of the Americas," *Miami Herald*, April 7, 2009.

²⁸ U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Amb. Davidow Holds State Department News Briefing on the Summit of the Americas," *CQ Congressional Transcripts*, April 6, 2009.

²⁹ Andres Oppenheimer, "Obama's Latin American priority: energy," *Miami Herald*, January 18, 2009.

hemisphere toward energy independence.³⁰ Although it was initially conceived as a regional arrangement, the Obama Administration has reframed the partnership as an open exchange of information, scientists, and best practices, in which individual countries would work with the United States on particular energy issues of interest to them.³¹ The energy partnership also coincides with a number commitments in the Port of Spain Summit's Draft Declaration and several of the proposals in S. 587 (Lugar), the Western Hemisphere Energy Compact, which was introduced in March 2009.³² Such a commitment to regional energy development would mark a significant shift in U.S. policy in the hemisphere, which has largely focused on free trade agreements and anti-drug efforts in recent years.

Expectations

The Port of Spain Summit comes at a difficult time in hemispheric relations. The 2005 Mar del Plata Summit was often confrontational and in 2007, Latin America and the Caribbean was the only region that was incapable of selecting a consensus candidate for a temporary seat on the U.N. Security Council.³³ The United States has become ever more isolated from the rest of the region as well. Favorable opinions of the United States in Latin America fell from 73%, following the attacks of September 11, 2001, to 58% in 2008.³⁴ Both Venezuela and Bolivia expelled U.S. Ambassadors from their countries in September 2008, and relations with both countries remain strained. Likewise, in two recent crises in the hemisphere—the Colombian airstrike of a Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) camp inside Ecuador and the ongoing social and political conflict in Bolivia—the United States and the regional body to which it belongs, the OAS, played minor roles while regional bodies that exclude the United States, the Rio Group and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), took the leads.³⁵ Additionally, the first Latin America and Caribbean Integration and Development Summit, held in Salvador de Bahia Brazil on December 16, 2008, hosted 31 heads of government from the Hemisphere, including Cuba but excluding the United States.³⁶

Given these divisions, some observers caution that President Obama needs to be careful not to let the Summit turn into a political circus led by those leaders, such as Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, with an anti-U.S. agenda.³⁷ President Chávez has scheduled a meeting of the countries involved in his Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas—a socially oriented trade block—for the days preceding the Summit in order to prepare a common front. He has also stated that he is attending the upcoming summit in order to “defend the integration of the Caribbean and Latin

³⁰ “Renewing U.S. Leadership in the Americas,” *Obama for America*, 2008.

³¹ Andres Oppenheimer, “Obama moving fast on Hispanics, slow on region,” *Miami Herald*, February 8, 2009; U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Amb. Davidow Holds State Department News Briefing on the Summit of the Americas,” *CQ Congressional Transcripts*, April 6, 2009.

³² Senator Lugar had introduced a similar measure in the 110th Congress, S. 1007, reported out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on September 23, 2008; Summit Implementation Review Group, *Draft Declaration of Commitment*, July 21, 2008; Andres Oppenheimer, “Obama’s Latin American priority: energy,” *Miami Herald*, January 18, 2009.

³³ Peter Hakim, “Why We Are Together,” *FOCAL Point*, August 2008.

³⁴ Corporación Latinobarómetro, *Informe 2008*, 2008.

³⁵ “Latin America Goes It Alone as Bolivian Conflict Explodes,” *Latin News Weekly Report*, September 18, 2008.

³⁶ Alexi Barrionuevo “At Meeting in Brazil, Washington is Scorned,” *New York Times*, December 17, 2008.

³⁷ House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, “U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in 2009 and Beyond,” *CQ Congressional Transcripts*, February 4, 2009.

America and demand that the empire Obama leads lift its blockade of Cuba, abide by UN resolutions, and condemn Israel.”³⁸ As noted above, the fourth Summit of the Americas held in Argentina in 2005, was marred by protestors demonstrating against U.S. policy in Iraq and U.S. support for the FTAA. A parallel “People’s Summit” will also be held in Trinidad and Tobago, and Port of Spain police are preparing for violence similar to what occurred at the April 2009 G-20 Summit.³⁹

Despite these challenges, a number of analysts are optimistic about the Summit. Some are encouraged by the scope and depth of the Port of Spain Draft Declaration of Commitment. Rather than focusing on the more divisive topics in the hemisphere, the Port of Spain agenda is built around issues where there is already broad consensus. The Draft Declaration also addresses past criticisms by identifying specific, measurable, and attainable targets for proposed initiatives as well as institutions to assist in their implementation. A number of analysts believe that structuring the official agenda around largely non-controversial issues should allow leaders to engage in greater cooperation and that the increased focus on implementation should make the Summit Process more effective.⁴⁰

Likewise, some observers believe that since President Obama is widely popular throughout Latin America, his attendance at the Summit alone will help reverse the negative views of the United States that have grown over the last several years. Indeed, several Latin American leaders have expressed hope for improved relations with the United States since President Obama’s election, and even President Chávez has said he would like to bring U.S.-Venezuelan relations back to a “rational level.”⁴¹ Given this openness to dialogue, some maintain that President Obama will have an opportunity to strike a new tone in U.S. relations with the region. While the Summit is unlikely to lead to any new initiatives or immediate policy changes, some analysts believe it may set the foundation for successful hemispheric interactions in the future.⁴²

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³⁸ “‘Couldn’t care less’ about meeting Obama: Chavez,” *Agence France Presse*, February 27, 2009.

³⁹ Aretha Welch, “Riot Cops Fly In,” *Trinidad & Tobago Express*, April 7, 2009.

⁴⁰ Richard Feinberg, “Making the Fifth Summit the Finest So Far,” *FOCAL Point*, July-August 2008.

⁴¹ Jack Chang, “Obama win brings high hopes to the hemisphere,” *Miami Herald*, November 6, 2008; Rachel Jones, “Chavez says he wants to ‘reset’ relations with US,” *Associated Press*, April 4, 2009; “Mensaje conciliador de Taiana en EE.UU.,” *La Nacion* (Argentina), April 7, 2009.

⁴² Michael Shifter, “The Promise of Port of Spain,” *El Tiempo*, April 8, 2009.