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Latinos, Foreign Policy and Contemporary International Relations Meeting Report

Overview

On May 29, 2002, in Washington, DC, the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) and the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD) convened a select group of Latino leaders from Boston to Miami to discuss major foreign policy issues; primarily the two issues of US national security and Latin America. The twin goals of this discussion were to begin to intentionally engage the US foreign policy process with an informed Latino perspective and to share information and understanding on dynamic international issues.

Previous collaborative meetings and research by TRPI and IAD have revealed that in a global era Latinos have indeed become more internationally focused, but have yet to more formally engage the US foreign policy process. The purpose of this meeting was to talk about how to move Latinos more actively into the US foreign policy agenda and to bring more information to a collective discussion in order to build a Latino base on foreign policy. For example, given the new post-terrorism environment, how does that affect Latino attitudes and perspectives? How should US policy toward Latin America be shaped, especially considering recent administration efforts to extend the war on terrorism into the region? What happens to issues like the Fox/Bush immigration agenda that appears to have been shelved after the events of 9/11?

National Security: US and Latin American Perspectives

Consistent with the goals of this discussion, one participant provided the group with an overview of past and present US national security policy and interests, as well as a comparison of US security policy vis-à-vis Latin America. The United States and Latin America have distinctly different perceptions of national security. While the United States looms large in Latin America the reverse is almost the opposite. Latin American issues rarely demand the attention of the United States, although there is a difference in how the United States relates to Central America and South America on security issues.

The national security policy of a country concerns maintaining the safety of that country from an external attack. The simplicity of this definition has been clouded over the years by debates on the scope of what national security means. In the US in the 1970s many argued to expand the definition to include economic, environmental, and humanitarian issues. In the 1980s a more traditional definition came back for a period. The 1990s again saw the rise of a debate over US intervention to protect economic interests and to stabilize troublesome and often horrific circumstances. The events of September 11, 2001 brought the traditional definition of the safety of the state and its allies from external threats clearly to the forefront. This participant noted that the first priority of foreign policy is national security. War remains common in international affairs and a realist view of the world should keep national security firmly entrenched at the top of US interests. This participant also noted that there are some in the foreign policy and political community that do not subscribe to the *realpolitik* view, international power politics, and feel the world is not such a dangerous place. In either view national security is an outward looking enterprise.

By contrast to the US, in Latin America, this participant observed, regime stability is often the goal of national security as threats come from internal vs. external sources. Regime preservation requires an inward focus on threats within the country and rarely wars with their neighbors.

The divergent perspectives of the US and Latin America on national security is also reflected in the Western Hemisphere experience vs. that of the rest of the world. In Europe, Asia, and the Middle East nations endeavored to keep each other in check in a dynamic balance of power context that resulted in many small wars and two catastrophic world wars. In Latin America the balance of power has not applied. The United States has long been the only great power in the Americas. US military hegemony makes Western Hemisphere a different place than the rest of the world.

The US has been a global player in balance of power politics due in large part to its emergence as a superpower, particularly after World War II. In many ways World War II passed by Latin America while the US emerged as one of two superpowers in the world. In the Cold War struggle between the ideologies of communism and capitalism the military and political struggles defined national security concerns. Several "proxy wars" were fought, i.e. Viet Nam, Afghanistan, but aside from a near miss in Cuba in 1962 the devastation of a hot war was avoided. Competition between the US and USSR took place in the developing world as each worked to add nations to its column. US security policy toward Latin America was a byproduct of the larger containment policy of the United States to maintain the balance of power with the USSR.

How does Latin America figure into US security policy in the 21st century? The presenting participant noted that the primary security preoccupations of the US were largely focused on North Korea, and in the Middle East, all within the context of the recent war on terror. Latin American policy will remain more about trade, democracy, and immigration. There are some civil conflicts, but it is unlikely to change US attitudes on security priorities. However, this participant did note that recent comments by the administration have moved the drug war and the anti-terror campaign into the same cluster of concerns that could result in US intervention. It was also observed that the promotion of democracy could foster US intervention, but that this was more likely in Central America and the Caribbean, closer to the US, than in South America. Historically, the US has not intervened as often in South America as in the Central America/Caribbean region.

From a national security perspective, the United States may pay more attention to Latin America, but this participant predicted it would not be a whole lot more. Terrorism is replacing the Cold War in US national security policy, although they are not comparable threats, and Latin America remains a derivative security issue for the US.

Several participants queried as to the possibility of a greater Latin American influence on US national security in light of the dramatic attack of 9/11. Could smuggling weapons of mass destruction across the US border from the Caribbean or Mexico cause a change in focus in US policy? Given the mass immigration from Latin America to the United States amounting to some 20-30 million Latinos in the United States, will the government be more attuned to security events in Latin America? Given the recent intelligence lapses relating to 9/11 intelligence becomes a central focus for prevention of such attacks in the future. Will there need to be more collaboration with Latin America on sharing and developing intelligence and will that change the importance of Latin America to US security?

In each of these cases the defense experts at the meeting conceded that all of these issues might have some influence and require some modification. This might be especially true in intelligence cooperation and coordination with US security policy, but that it was unlikely that US priorities in Latin America would become security oriented, focused instead on trade and economic issues. Another participant countered that economics and trade had long been the focus of US/Latin American relations, even during the Cold War. Given the US ambivalence toward recent events in Argentina, and the likely eventual subsiding of terror concerns, economic issues might become important security issues exacerbated by inequality and deprivation.

Noting the lumping of the wars on terrorism and drugs in Colombia, a question was raised regarding the danger of abandoning the drugs only policy of the US and becoming involved in the civil struggles of Colombia. It was acknowledged that this is a potential danger, but that due diligence would prevent the US from falling into a military/political quagmire and that as long as the costs were low the US public would accept an increase in military activism.

The group agreed with the general assessment of US security concerns and focus regarding Latin America with one important caveat. If something major, i.e. a major disruption in Mexico sending millions fleeing to the US border, then everything regarding Latin American importance in US security policy would change.

Political/Domestic Situation in Latin America

As in the discussion of national security, one participant agreed to provide a comprehensive overview to both inform and stimulate discussion on the political/domestic issues in Latin America.

Overall, this is not a good time in Latin America. The public throughout Latin America is dissatisfied and polls, the Latino barometer for Latin America confirm that it is indeed a bad time. Views of politicians in Latin America are traditionally low, but whether it is Congress, political leadership, or administrations all are polling in the teens in terms of approval. Normally, this would be a reflection of good or bad governance, but as this participant noted Chile is well governed yet its public does not like their government. On a positive note it was observed that in the past under similar circumstances coups would be expected, but that the military and the public for the most part are sticking with the democratic process.

Economically the entire Latin American region has slowed significantly as a consequence of the 1997 Asian economic crisis. Foreign investors, a major source of capital, are afraid of countries that they do not know well, especially if they were burned in Asia. As a consequence the cost of capital went up and the Latin American recession began. The first hard hit country was Brazil in January 1999 followed by the rest of South America. Central America and the Caribbean, with closer economic ties to the US continued to grow until the US recession began in 2000, just as they were intentionally integrating their economies more into the global system. 2001 was a miserable year for South America as 14 of 18 nations had negative growth rates. One interesting difference between South America and the Caribbean/Central America region is that Brazil sets the economic rhythm for South America, while the US, particularly with the passage of the Caribbean Basin Initiative in the US Congress, sets the tone in Central America and the Caribbean.

Several in the group wondered about the possibility of achieving the signing of the Free Trade Act of the Americas (FTAA) by the 2005 deadline agreed upon in earlier negotiations. Most thought it would be difficult to get the FTAA signed by 2005, but that the deadline is a good pressure tactic to keep the agreement on the agenda of the US. One participant observed that the key to the success of the FTAA is what Brazil and the United States can agree on, given their importance in the hemisphere. A few participants speculated on whether the Latino community would become more involved in the negotiation and finalization of the agreement, but reached no consensus.

What happens to the people in Latin America, and their attitudes, is often difficult to determine due to faulty data on unemployment and other economic indicators. However, as this participant noted, double-digit employment is common among Latin American countries, even those that are well governed like the Dominican Republic. However, it was observed that economic data and measurements could be misleading.

Perhaps the best way to measure good or bad performance in Latin America is relative to the individual history of each country. Generally speaking, good performers in Latin America, that is governments, are those that sustain democracy and do well economically compared to their own political/economic past taking into account the global economic context. Among good performers identified by this participant are Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Bolivia, El Salvador, and Uruguay. For example, Bolivia, while still facing problems, is better off than it was twenty years ago. Mexico is doing well since the mid-1990s even though it is in recession. In a wry observation, the fact that many countries are in the midst of a "normal" recession as a consequence of the US recession is a positive sign.

Among the bad performers Ecuador, Paraguay, Haiti, Colombia, and Jamaica were identified. Democracy endures in these countries, but is constantly threatened by unacceptably high level of violence. As a consequence their economic performance has stagnated.

Some in the group expressed concern that the democratic process in Latin America had slowed and while enjoying near term success was now being undermined by deep-rooted problems. Others responded that democracy is a slow process, i.e. the United States, but that there is utility in the process and one should not be alarmed by the lack of immediate progress on difficult issues. But there are examples of progress as well, Brazil's economic rebound was made possible because of new legislation passed to aid the political economy. Negotiations are often tough and slow, but they also often work productively.

A question was raised regarding the interaction with the large Latino population in the US and the potential benefit for the democratic process in Latin America. Most agreed that it likely has some positive influence and that there was indeed lots of fundraising for political campaigns. However, there was a general view that these activities reinforced rather than openly benefited the political process.

Another indicator of the situation in Latin America, especially as it impacts the public, is crime. Crime is pandemic in Latin America. By almost any measure crime is up. Crime has become more transnational and even by comparison to their own histories, countries show an increase in crime. The international networks of crime: drugs, money, cars, gangs are all more of a serious problem than in the past.

This overall dissatisfaction with governance, poor economic performance in some countries, high levels of crime, and civil violence in some countries, have all served to make all countries in Latin America sources of immigration to the United States. In addition, the public has been transnationalized as they remain in contact with relatives at home and abroad through e-mail, air travel, telephones, and mass media which also portends higher levels of migration. The possibility of higher levels of migration northward also links to national security policy in the US policy. Utilizing new technology experiments with “smart borders,” where the overwhelming flow of traffic across the borders of the United States is categorized by risk rather than random checks or only in cases of suspected smuggling or illegal entry, have already begun and are developing a growing political constituency of support.

In the past, US response to Latin America, especially during the Cold War, has been largely reactionary. However, it was noted that the US does typically respond to domestic initiatives arising from Latin America including NAFTA. Most felt it was a positive trend in US response to Latin America, but some expressed puzzlement that Latin American policy by the US has not changed much with the new administration.

Overall, Latin America has shown steady progress in democratization, had fewer coups, has shown relative economic growth, only recently declining during the recession, based on a change in economic policies better suited to a globalized economy, and has effected some positive changes in relations with the United States. On the negative side inequality is unchanged as poverty rates remain high, political parties are established, but do not always work as well as they need to, and crime, violence, and corruption levels are still very high adding to the frustration and dissatisfaction of the Latin American public.

Adding Perspective: Mexico, Colombia, Central America

To provide further depth and specificity to the meeting three participants gave presentations on the particular situations in Mexico, Colombia, and Central America. Each case is unique and uniquely positioned globally and in relation to the United States.

Mexico

The presentation on Mexico focused primarily on the evolving political situation in Mexico and the changing relationship with the United States. The defeat of the Institutional Revolution Party (PRI) party with the election of Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN) had the anticipated major impact on the Mexican political system. Yet, it did not resolve and perhaps worsened the competition for governance authority. The presidency is politically weaker than in the past as the Mexican congress presents a politically tough composition for President Fox to work with often resulting in a political “tug-of-war.”

The PRI is still divided after its presidential defeat and lacks identity and cohesiveness. In this presenter’s view, PRI has not evolved as a party and now cannot define itself. PRI leadership has failed to unite the party and appears illegitimate even by PRI standards. For example, in a bid for power a PRI faction in the Senate was able to cancel President Fox’s planned trip to the United States thereby undermining the current PRI leadership and at the same time devaluing that

leadership in the eyes of the Fox administration. PRI unification is important as it unifies the opposition and allows political negotiation with only one PRI and not multiple factions of PRI.

Other Mexican political parties are also divided. The Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) is divided on the left and plagued by obstructionist attitudes that have cost the party seats in the legislature. PAN, despite its presidential victory, is experiencing some growing pains and is trying hard not to become the old PRI. Despite the successful election of Fox they are keeping the President at arms length and Fox cannot always count on his own party for support.

Overall the political dynamic in Mexico is very fluid and complicated by the upcoming 2003 midterm elections which will change the composition of the lower house. This election could make things better or worse for President Fox. Much is at stake for the PRI party as well as they must do well to consolidate the party leadership.

For a brief period US-Mexico relations looked very good, Bush and Fox seemed to have a personal affinity and demonstrated familiarity, but now things do not look as good. US-Mexico policy witnessed an historic moment as Mexico moves toward a more democratic process, yet it has not been realized in US-Mexico relations. Part of the problem falls on the Fox administration plans to put a great deal of emphasis on immigration/migration issues. This turned out to be a tactical mistake as the Bush Administration felt the timing and agenda were off and that it was not viable at this time. The Fox administration pushed immigration so hard that they are now dependent on an immigration deal with the United States.

Mexico, according to this participant, is still trying to find its place in the world. They are in the midst of an evolving political process and how they see themselves and their integration globally. National security issues in Mexico are also in a period of change. Border security is now more important as Mexico wants to overcome the border stigma. They feel they cannot afford an incident on the US-Mexican border at this time. On a positive note, the US and Mexico demonstrated unprecedented collaboration on the 22 point "smart border" agreement due to be finished by the end of June.

On immigration, questions were discussed regarding temporary worker programs. Several felt there was receptiveness to regularization of temporary worker programs, but also that it had political implications in terms of increasing party votes in the upcoming elections.

Several participants raised questions regarding the role and relationship of Latinos in Mexico's ongoing evolutionary process. Mexicans in the United States are starting to have an impact on policy in the United States and Mexico. A key issue might be allowing Mexicans abroad to vote. There is consensus on this issue in Mexico and it could happen in 2006 according to one participant. However, key questions remain. How do you administer elections that allow diaspora to vote yet maintain the integrity of the system. The state electoral institute in Mexico is already undergoing major changes and turnover.

Mexico is going through pivotal changes in what one participant called the "Birth of a Nation." The impact of Latinos on top of all that could be overwhelming prompting one participant to raise a specific question about the US developing a "special relationship" with Mexico on trade, migration, and the border. Would a Mexico-only deal have huge implications in the Latino community for non-

Mexicans? Is that a viable policy and what would it provoke? Another participant responded that the deepening ties between the US and Mexico was revolutionary and that the Mexican-American community has had a lot to do with that. However, this participant felt that there was no real support for a “special relationship.”

Colombia

The situation in Colombia remains complex and fluid according to the participant who provided the background briefing on Colombia. Colombia is a nation of conflict. The leftist insurgent Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) boast over 18,000 fighters and control over one third of the country. The right wing United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) are paramilitaries formed to battle the FARC in the absence of the Colombian military's ability to control the rebels. They number somewhere between 8,000 and 15,000 fighters. Both of these groups are well armed and well funded through the drug trade, kidnapping, and extortion. An estimated 80% of US cocaine comes from Colombia, A smaller leftist rebel group, the National Liberation Army, numbers about 3,500 and makes its money primarily through kidnapping and extortion. 70% of global kidnappings take place in Colombia with an estimated 3,500 last year. While the military is finally getting stronger the government has remained politically weak. In fact, this participant noted that the core problem in Colombia is a weak state.

The recent, unprecedented election of Álvaro Uribe Vélez as the next president of Colombia, he will take office on August 7, 2002, is an indication of public dissatisfaction with the ongoing violence in Colombia. Colombians were very disappointed with current President Pastrana's peace overtures to the rebels and made their frustration known by voting for Uribe. Uribe, without a party affiliation, won the election handily without even the usual run-off by promising to build-up of the police and military forces of Colombia to take a “hard hand” against the insurgent Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

What will happen next is largely anybody's guess, but while Uribe rejected negotiations during the campaign he has made, according to the presenter, some significant overtures at a critical juncture for the future of Colombia. First, Uribe has sought UN mediation for the conflict and made a conciliatory post-election speech that was generous to the other candidates. Second, he said that he would pursue talks with the FARC and the AUC. Several were at least a little skeptical, however they are positive statements and are backed up by a strong hand as the election has given him the mandate to pursue a much harder line and not cede a safe zone for the FARC. Many observers are wondering if Uribe will be as hard on the AUC, which has reportedly had close ties with the military and with elites in Colombia, as he will be on the FARC. Uribe has stated he will go after both, but several at the meeting remained unconvinced.

US policy in Colombia is also in a state of change. Colombia is the third highest recipient of US foreign aid. The recent US policy shift from a focus solely on fighting drugs under Plan Colombia to a broadened effort to combat terrorism, the FARC and ELN are listed as a terrorist organizations by the State Department, is a significant change and places the US in direct opposition to the rebel forces in Colombia's civil war. The change was brought about in part by evidence of outside terrorist organizations collaborating with the FARC in Colombia and the growing levels of violence, attacks on energy and water resources, and the stepped up efforts of the US after 9/11 to fight terror globally.

There is clear support for the state in the US Congress but some members have expressed major concerns about increased US involvement in the politics and civil war in Colombia. First, there is concern that the United States is getting sucked into an irresolvable, violent quagmire with no exit policy. Second, there are strong concerns about human rights violations based on the paramilitaries brutal activities and their links to the military. They noted that in the past the US has put very little pressure on Colombia to go after the paramilitary groups in a forceful way.

Several participants expressed concerns about the labeling the FARC as terrorists. Differentiating terrorists from rebels is a very complex political issue and subject to who is doing the defining. If you label them as terrorists how do you position yourself in the future regarding insurgent movements in Colombia and elsewhere. If they are terrorists there is no basis for negotiations. It was acknowledged that this is indeed a big problem. Terrorism is a hook for US interest and support yet there is also a risk. How will the US avoid long-term entanglements? A few felt the US had no role in engaging the FARC. One participant, acknowledging the risks, noted that the US Congress was monitoring the situation in Colombia closely and would continue to do so.

The Colombian community is the fastest growing in the United States. One participant estimated that 1.2 million Colombians now reside in the US and that given the civil strife in Colombia, president-elect Uribe would likely request temporary protected status for Colombians. Some in the group wondered whether an organized Colombian community with protected status might impact US policy. Others responded that so far Colombians have shown little interest in getting involved in US policy toward Colombia and remain apolitical. Of course, as one participant noted, the Colombian community could also represent a political resource in US elections as they become citizens.

In the closing analysis of Colombia, most expressed concern that in the near-term more bloodshed is highly likely. The conflict has deep roots and the current conditions, regardless of the election of Uribe, are not favorable to settlement and that a military solution is not viable.

Central America

During the Cold War, Central America was often a primary interest of US foreign policy. Since the end of the Cold War and the signing of peace agreements ending decades of war Central America has been moving steadily toward democratization and stability, but, as the participant briefing the group observed, it has also moved off of the US foreign policy radar screen. Where is Central America now? As the presentation on Central America illustrates, the region continues to suffer from a range of very difficult challenges.

Political fragmentation, weakness of the states, and government corruption all continue to plague Central America. Throughout Central America most political parties have failed to generate enduring support or to field candidates who are capable of effective governance. Even Costa Rica, long the standard for democracy and political stability has seen support for the major parties erode and the likely emergence of a fragmented multi-party system. Only the ARENA party in El Salvador has shown strength, but its inability to control crime and promote economic growth has seriously undermined its strength and it maintains power largely due to the divisions within the opposition FMLN.

A major reason for state weakness is widespread government corruption. As the presenter noted, two former presidents and one sitting president are facing charges of corruption. While there are nascent efforts to reform governments and attack corruption, Honduras and Nicaragua were mentioned as examples, system-wide corruption continues to undermine government legitimacy throughout most of Central America.

Overall, the weakness of the states in Central America remains a most serious problem. States cannot serve the needs of their citizenry. Poverty and crime are endemic to the region and people are becoming increasingly dissatisfied as their basic needs go unmet.

The economic/development picture in Central America is equally troublesome. The region is suffering from the effects of the global recession, especially the economic downturn of the US, a drought that is threatening famine in the region, and the loss of commodity income due to the decline in coffee prices.

Prospects for improving the economies of Central America remain relatively bleak. Poverty rates, global recession, economic inequalities, and natural disasters seriously impede growth and recovery.

Central America has attempted to improve its economy through US initiatives resulting from the Caribbean Basin Initiative that promoted a shift from agricultural export to light industry. 70% of textiles from Central America are exported to the United States.

Perhaps the most promising developments have resulted from the migration flow to the United States in the 70s and 80s. The enduring connections between immigrants to the US and their home countries have resulted in four major sources of income for the region, or as the presenter labeled them, the “four Ts, transfers, tourism, transportation, and telecommunications.” Transfers of remittances from immigrants in the US are a major source of income for Central America, e.g. nearly two billion dollars to El Salvador last year, and have a powerful leveraging effect in generating additional profits and wealth in Central America. Tourism has increased as diaspora return home for extended visits, spend money and bring goods and merchandise to relatives. This home country tourism has generated local and international businesses to serve these groups and their needs. Air transportation has increased the number of flights to Central America as Central Americans return for visits which increases the number of visitors and the possibilities for economic gain. The boom in technology and the falling costs of telecommunications have boosted the interconnectedness of Central America with their diaspora communities. This opens more opportunities for business expansion and investment in cellular phones and the Internet, spawning more investment from major telecommunications companies.

In the view of the participant briefing the group on Central America, the range of business opportunities from telecommunications, transfers, tourism, and transportation will generate a “fifth T,” trade. It is up to governments to enhance the opportunities for investment by maintaining an environment that is stable and conducive to greater investment. Greater regional integration between Central American states could help create a stronger economic structure, but unfortunately monopolies and oligarchies that close off the opportunities for greater economic integration impede governments.

US relations with Central America are generally good according to this analysis. There is resonance regarding migration policies. The US and Central American countries have collaborated to curtail narcotics trafficking through the region and have been effective in interdicting drug flows, particularly in the coastal areas. President Bush has requested an acceleration in free trade negotiations. More than 60 percent of the region's exports go to the US and Central America imports more from the US than Russia, Indonesia and India combined.

The recent security threats posed by 9/11 have had little impact in Central America or on Central America/US relations. However, the presenter warned that dissatisfied political elites in Central America might seize on the rhetoric of terrorism as a mechanism to mobilize the military.

The Central American communities in the US are significant protagonists regarding what is happening in their home countries. Many are pushing for the ability to vote in the US for candidates in their home countries.

Diaspora Voting

Latino diaspora voting in the US is a complex and controversial issue. It is also an issue that impacts most of the Latino community, US/Latin America relations, hemispheric integration, and perhaps the course of democracy in Latin America. The difficulty is that the issue is as complicated as it is important. Some in the group felt that giving Latinos the opportunity to vote in home country relationships would strengthen the integration of those countries with politics and economy of the US. Others felt that it is difficult to grasp the impact and wondered if the needs of the diaspora community were the same as those living in the home country under whatever government is elected.

Regarding the impact on the Latino community, some participants raised concerns that given the major diaspora communities living in the US, it could have a negative impact on the status of Latinos, especially if major politicking took place in the US. They predicted a domestic backlash against immigrants in the form of a reduction in social services. As one participant observed, "the image of Mexicans campaigning in the US is one that the US is not ready for."

Several participants also questioned the fundamental logistics of having so many vote and wondered about the criteria and legal status of those who would cast votes. One participant noted that in the Mexican case the vote abroad had little to do with the rights of immigrants to vote and more to do with home country politics. Local leaders in Mexico are not supportive of giving the rights to vote without the obligations of citizenship.

It was observed that there are important democratic principles to be considered here. For example, are the interests of the diaspora the interests of the home country? Does the vote abroad increase or decrease the involvement of Latinos in the US political system? These critical questions could not be answered in this brief forum, but participants agreed that the magnitude of this issue needs further consideration and should remain high on the Latino agenda.

Concluding Observations

Participants were asked to provide general observations on the discussion. Regarding Latinos, it was noted that the Latino community is strong on defending the rights of immigrants in the United States, but has done little to fight for democracy in the home country, especially in Mexico. This was viewed as a myopic approach as dignity does not stop at the border. People want to stay in their own countries and the organization of the Latino community increases the opportunity to build a better plan for improving the quality of life in the home countries. Further, it was observed that while the US border may be moving north due to immigration it is also moving South as the US and Mexico begin to collaborate on customs and migration issues which suggests and even greater integration of Mexico in US interests.

Latinos are very thin regarding their involvement in US foreign policy and a plea was made that Latinos become more involved, indeed, that they cannot help but be more involved in the future. The Latino domestic agenda has long taken precedence in the political agenda of Latino communities, but as this meeting has shown there is increasing pressure through economic and security issues to get Latinos more involved in Latin America. But these issues are not limited to Latin America alone and work needs to be done to get Latinos, particularly the elites and leadership, more engaged in foreign policy issues and in the US foreign policy process.

Last, it was observed that unlike past meetings and discussions there was no discussion of obstacles to greater participation by Latinos in the foreign policy process. While there is certainly a need to find ways to engage Latino leadership, there was an acceptance in this group that it was a normal part of the democratic process. Given the growing economic and political power of Latinos it is both a right and an obligation to be more engaged in all areas of policy development, including foreign policy where Latinos and others have long been excluded. As one participant noted, "there was consensus on the empowerment of greater citizenship and therefore greater engagement."

Latinos, Foreign Policy and Contemporary International Relations Meeting Report

Overview

On June 25, 2002 a roundtable of about 20 scholars, journalists, business people and government officials met at the offices of La Opinión newspaper in downtown Los Angeles to discuss and analyze contemporary international and US – Latin American relations. The roundtable was the second in a series of forums organized by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute with support from the Ford Foundation designed to involve Latinos in the foreign policy process. By becoming more active in this area, Latinos can avoid having their foreign policy input defined by others whom may do so out of ignorance or discrimination.

With this overarching goal in mind, the June 25 roundtable sought to encourage participants' discussion and debate on two main issues. The first was to identify recent changes in the foreign policy agenda, especially in light of the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. The second was to assist in making Latino leaders aware of the importance and scope of foreign policy. Participants noted that although Latinos are very "international" simply by going through their daily routine – which includes ongoing contact with relatives and friends in their home country, commerce built around contacts in Latin America and remittances to their native communities -- they are not always aware of the importance of these actions and their connections to foreign policy and international relations.

The roundtable presentations and discussion was divided into five broad thematic sections important for contemporary international relations and particularly relevant for Latinos: 1) US National Security and Latin America 2) Immigration, Border Control and National Security 3) Country and Regional Analyses 4) Latinos in the US Foreign Policy Bureaucracy 5) Dual Nationality and Absentee Voting

US National Security and Latin America

Participants generally concurred that the most important development in recent North American history is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Roundtable members agreed that NAFTA produced a fundamental change in North American relations that assists the US in meeting its strategic interests by supporting stable regimes and a non-threatening nation to its south. Beyond this, members ranked the significance of US strategic interests in Latin America in the following order:

- 1) *Extremely important*: No massive, uncontrolled immigration across US borders. This issue is very closely tied to domestic interests and domestic public opinion and therefore is quite sensitive politically. This policy focuses on Mexico and Caribbean states such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic and, to some extent, Central America.
- 2) *Very important*: No failed or collapsed government on US borders. This goal is directed particularly at Mexico. After seeing how chronic social anarchy in Afghanistan was recently

used by hostile groups to create a safe haven from which to launch attacks against the US, policy makers' most important goal is to prevent another situation where a nation experiencing social and political chaos could be used as a staging ground for attacks against the US so close to US borders.

3) *Important:* Prevent narcotics traffickers from taking control of a major state. Toward this end, encouraging prosperous, democratic and stable regimes in Latin America is important.

Impact of the September 11 attacks on US Foreign Policy

Participants said that in one sense the attacks distracted attention from Latin America because the region is not viewed as part of the terrorism problem or a future battleground against terrorists. On the other hand, the US is paying more attention to failing states due to worry that they may become staging areas for attack on the US. Thus, for this reason, the US could become more involved in developing nations, including those in Latin America.

US Policy and International Relations in Specific Latin American Nations/Regions

Mexico

The roundtable group agreed that Mexico has been a key part of US strategic space for many decades and that Mexico is key to the US because of its proximity to US territory, its economic size and volume of trade with the US, and immigration issues, among other issues. Participants said the importance the US government places on Mexico is evident in the contrast between the \$20 billion bailout of Mexico during its 1994 financial crisis, which was automatic under the Clinton Administration, and the current Bush Administration's lack of assistance for Argentina and its even more severe financial crisis.

Colombia

Discussants said that although fighting the US drug consumption problem by attempting to cut down supply has been a failure for the US, the policy of destroying drug crops in Colombia probably helps the Colombian government because of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia's (Spanish acronym -- FARC) use of the drug trade to finance its operations. Thus, although aid to Colombia has not helped cut down drug consumption in the US, it has indirectly aided US policy by weakening the various rebel groups seeking the overthrow of the Colombian government. The intersection of guerillas and the drug trade makes Colombia a significant public policy issue for the US government.

Brazil

While, Brazil has not reached a consensus on its future trade course, there is significant opposition to opening up the country further to globalization and privatization. The legacy of a controlled economy is still a factor in Brazil where there has been difficulty getting rid of state owned enterprises. With this background in mind, participants debated the importance of Brazil to the US and in the international system.

Some participants felt that the US has neglected Brazil and underestimated its importance in the international system. This was considered a folly due to its large economic size, strength and diversity. Others discussants felt that the United States' "benign neglect" could be a blessing to Brazil because it has been able to develop with less US interference than other Latin American nations. Some roundtable members made the distinction that Brazil is important to the United States primarily in economic terms because of the aforementioned economic factors and was not nearly as relevant politically.

Caribbean

Roundtable participants agreed that the Caribbean region derives its strategic significance to the US through its proximity to US territory. Immigration and narcotics trafficking to the US often have a direct link from or through the Caribbean and are therefore of great concern to various US domestic interests. Many Caribbean regimes are unstable and therefore hard to predict. Participants pointed to the case of Haiti as an example of how influential US domestic interests are in determining policy in the region. One participant suggested that the Congressional Black Caucus was instrumental in supporting the current government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in spite of the fact that Haiti had become one of the primary transit points for drugs into the US. Although Aristide has cut down Haitian mass immigration to the US, it was suggested that a major part of his support in Washington was due to his backing by the Congressional Black Caucus, an example of a US minority banding together to influence foreign policy in Latin America. Participants cited this as an example of how foreign policy in the US "neighborhood" blends quickly into domestic policies and concerns. Participants contrasted the case of Aristide with the example of Latino groups that have been much slower to organize with the aim of influencing Washington's foreign policy.

Northern South America (Andean Region)

This region includes Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Bolivia. Participants said this area is not seen as a very strategic area for the US It is increasingly left out of US concerns in spite of the fact that Peru, Ecuador and particularly Colombia are confronting ever more chaotic political situations. The main reason Washington engages this region is if it caused problems for the US such as terrorism or narcotics production.

Cuba

Roundtable participants said the main question concerning Cuba is not a matter of whether the current regime will change, but rather when it will happen. When President Fidel Castro is no longer in power a variety of transitions are possible, none of which is certain. One scenario follows the West German/East German unification model where West Germany invested many billions of dollars into the East German economy after the fall of communism but also led the planning and strategy for how the East German economy would be integrated into the West. Cuban-Americans see themselves as the leaders of any potential change in Cuba when Castro falls and would likely not want to keep any remnants of Castro's regime. Another scenario is that Raul Castro, current minister of defense, would rise to power and there would be few political changes made to the status quo. Either way, one of the US government's most important Cuba concerns is how to manage the transition from Castro's Cuba, particularly in controlling the flow of immigrants seeking to enter the US and Americans seeking to enter Cuba to affect change.

US Policy and Intra – Latin American Relations

Participants noted that Latin American relations should not be looked at through the prism of what the US imposes on Latin America. There are competing economic, political and cultural interests among Latin American nations that are not directly tied to the US. The rivalries present between Brazil and Mexico and Brazil and Argentina are examples of these political and economic competitions that shape international relations in the Western Hemisphere. Participants suggested that with Argentina's fall into political and financial crisis, Brazil has assumed the clear leadership role in South America and will now find itself in competition with Mexico as the leading Latin American power.

Immigration Border Control and National Security

Participants concurred that in the United States, economic factors have the greatest impact on immigration policy. During the late 1990's the US experienced an unprecedented economic boom that, in turn, led to a rethinking of the relationship between immigration and economic growth in the US. The debate on this issue led to the idea of re-instituting a regularized migration program such as the Bracero Program. But the US recession cooled support for this idea and the September 11 attacks further discouraged support for this program.

As immigration discussions between President George W. Bush and Mexican President Vicente Fox dissipated, migration from Mexico to the US also slowed. In 2000, there were 1.6 million apprehensions by the Border Patrol at the US – Mexico frontier. In 2001, apprehensions went down 25% to 1.2 million. Projections for 2002 are that apprehensions will fall another 25%. Experts see border apprehensions as symbolic of the magnitude of overall immigration across the border.

This fall in migration is not primarily due to the September 11 attacks, but is more closely related to the current US recession that began before the attacks. There was some discussion among participants as to the manner in which immigrants crossing the border are counted. Some discussants said that the lower number of immigrants counted crossing the border could be due to less "multiple crossings" of immigrants rather than a true decrease in the number of people crossing the border.

Border Control Strategy

During times of economic retrenchment immigration is more apt to be viewed by the public as out of control. As immigration rose during the 1990's, the Border Patrol also grew. In 1993, the Border Patrol consisted of 3,500 to 4,000 persons. In 1999 it rose to between 7,500 and 8,000, and at the end of 2002 staffing levels are projected to be between 8,500 and 9,500. In spite of this increase, to effectively patrol the border and significantly reduce illegal immigration across the border, it is estimated that the Border Patrol must have 15,500 personnel. The Border Patrol's relatively small size is remarkable when compared with the police forces of several US cities. The New York City Police Department has 40,000 officers, Chicago has 38,000 and the Los Angeles Police Department has about 10,000.

The Border As A US Security Issue

There has been some speculation among policy makers that weapons, even components for a nuclear weapon, could be smuggled into the United States hidden in narcotics shipments. Nevertheless, respondents agreed that although overland shipment of weapons on the US – Mexico border is one possible threat, container vessels in US ports are an even larger threat. There was consensus among participants that the US also uses Mexico as a border sentry in terms of helping slow Central and South American immigration through Mexico en route to the United States. Some participants suggested that more effort should be spent on guarding Mexico's southern border while investing heavily in Mexico's economic advancement in order to curb immigration. This strategy would effectively "move the US border to the south" and share responsibility for border control with Mexico.

There was a vigorous debate among participants concerning whether immigration across the border was a significant public policy issue for Latinos. Some participants said it was very important while others said that border control was not a major issue for Latinos. There was consensus that once Latin Americans cross into the United States, then the treatment of immigrants is of concern to Latinos, but border control is less salient for Latinos in general.

Country and Regional Analyses: Mexico, Colombia and Central America

Colombia

Discussants said that 90 percent of the cocaine and 70 percent of the heroin in the United States comes from Colombia. In spite of this and its long-standing civil war, Colombia receives a small share of US supplemental monies against terrorism when compared with other regions. About \$28 million has been dedicated to Colombia out of a total fund of \$28 billion to be used to fight terror around the globe. Washington views Colombia as important for its drug production and trafficking more than for any threat it may pose through terrorism.

The lack of anti-terrorism resources directed to Colombia is a conscious decision by the Bush Administration to leave Latin America out of the war on terrorism. The logic is that there must be specific targets for terrorism in order to win public and congressional support for projects and Latin America is low on the list of targets. Therefore, the Bush Administration wants to get Colombia off the list of issues in order to concentrate on other areas, Iraq being the most obvious example. Human rights violations by paramilitary groups allied with the government also hold back American involvement in Colombia.

Central America

Countries in this region include Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Belize and Panama. Several participants noted the increase in Mexican investment in Central America that is growing and is not always welcome by Central Americans. There was agreement that Mexicans are sometimes seen as invaders in Central America. Along the Mexican – Guatemalan border Guatemalans serve as Mexico's coffee picking labor force while Mexicans cross into Guatemala to buy goods. Crime has overwhelmed many of Central America's small security forces. Gang membership in many nations is rising quickly with money laundering and kidnapping

especially on the rise. Many parts of Central America are centers for obtaining fake visas. Gang membership, fueled by returning immigrants from the US, has also plagued Central America.

The only nation in the region that has achieved a measure of stability and prosperity is Costa Rica, which has received investment in high-tech sectors of its economy. In spite of its many problems, Central America receives little attention from the United States. Washington's only significant interest in the region is with drug trafficking. As mentioned earlier, the war on terrorism will not be extended to Latin America barring drastic and unforeseen events.

Latinos in the Foreign Policy Making Bureaucracy

The appointment of Tony Garza as Ambassador to Mexico notwithstanding, participants predicted a decrease in the number of Latino ambassadors in the near future because the Bush Administration is not as motivated as the Clinton Administration to appoint Latinos. Clinton had an agenda to appoint Latinos for domestic political reasons and Bush is not as interested. Furthermore, Latino groups are not pushing for additional Latino appointments. Participants noted that there are currently only two Latino ambassadors to Latin American nations, an imbalance they felt should be rectified.

The importance of lobbying by Latino officials and groups to insert a voice into the foreign policy process cannot be overstated, according to participants. Latinos must be present in the debate on foreign policy. Some discussants argued that the problem around the lack of Latino input into foreign policy is exacerbated because Latin American issues have no natural domestic constituency in American foreign policy. In order to stress the importance of Latin American issues there must be several members of Congress and prominent Latino officials to carry the issue to the White House. Participants agreed that there must be more education of Latinos in general concerning the importance of foreign policy and its connection to domestic concerns. It was noted that there are only a couple of organizations in the entire country dedicated to examining the role of Latinos in the foreign policy making process.

Participants agreed that the recruitment of Latinos into the foreign policy bureaucracy is critical because the current generation of Latinos from the Vietnam Era is retiring out of the government bureaucracy. This generation is not being replaced. In spite of the need for new Latino foreign policy professionals, Hispanic congressmen and women, activists, academics and media figures have not joined forces to lobby the government for more equal representation of Latinos in the foreign policy process. Discussion revealed that one of the reasons that Latinos are not as influential in the foreign policy process as African-Americans is due to the fact that Latino issues in Latin America are ambiguous and not stark moral choices, as was US support for apartheid in South Africa, for example.

Even on immigration, Latinos are not united. Puerto Ricans and Cuban Americans generally do not consider immigration as important an issue as Mexican Americans, for example.

Latinos, Dual Nationality and Absentee Voting

The group noted that the implications of dual nationality for Latinos have not been fully considered regarding its impact in Latin America. The means by which voting from abroad will be organized

remains an open question. The notion of dual nationality is problematic because it creates rights without responsibilities. Latinos who would be able to vote in a Latin American nation's election would not have to live with the consequences of their vote. If Latinos were granted the right to vote in their home countries' elections, there would also be campaigning and competition in the United States for their vote. This would compete with the development of groups dedicated to Latino organizations in the United States and could affect Latinos incorporation into US civic and political life. Some participants noted that if Latinos were able to vote in the elections of Latin American nations than it might encourage anti-immigrant and nativist groups to question the loyalty of Latinos.