

**February 11, 2008 CSIS Remarks
Policy Challenges in the Americas for the New U.S. Administration in 2009—
And “Smart Power”**

John F. Maisto
CSIS – February 11, 2008

Thank you, CSIS and Peter DeShazo for a timely and needed initiative on what the new U.S. administration will face in early 2009 in our hemisphere, our neighborhood, what its policy objectives should be, and how the new leadership hopefully would employ the vast power of the United States to achieve them, and do it smartly.

Taking Stock

Before the end of 2008, as the new foreign affairs team prepares for the first months of the new administration, they will take stock. A prediction: they will find a pretty good “hechos concretos” list—one that has enjoyed effective bipartisan support as well—upon which to build a new U.S. policy. It will include:

- a firm bipartisan commitment to democracy and non-intervention, and belief in the 2001 Inter American Democratic Charter as a basic political construct for dealing with all hemispheric political issues (including Cuba...)
- the fact that governments elected democratically and governing democratically, and not whether they are “left” or “right”, is the basis for productive relations with the U.S.
- a commitment to multi-lateral engagement at the OAS (for political issues) and the IDB (for development). Examples: electoral observation missions; democracy practitioners; IA Human Rights Commission; CICAD, CICTE, multidimensional security approaches; myriads of IDB projects
- FTA’s in place with Chile, , Central America and DR (CAFTA), Peru, and hopefully Colombia and Panama
- Millenium Challenge Corporation compacts with Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, and pre compact arrangements with Guyana, Paraguay, and soon Peru
- Debt relief for the poorest countries in the region
- U.S.-Brazil Biofuels Partnership
- USNS Comfort Mission (health) to 12 countries
- Merida Initiative with Mexico and Central America

- Successful Colombia policies
- SOUTHCOM's successful below the radar engagement with military counterparts
- Cuba: new initiatives to reach out to the Cuban people

The Challenges: Prospects, Downside, and the Need to Simplify

All of these efforts are concrete, positive manifestations, with bipartisan support, of U.S. power. However, the public perception of the U.S. in the region, overall, is low. We know that and we know the reasons why—no need to analyze that here. In this negative atmosphere and amid prevailing cynical views about the U.S. from Latins and Caribbeans, the challenge for the new administration will be two-fold:

- what policies to undertake
- how to address public perceptions about them and about the U.S.

I would submit that the driving ideal behind what the U.S. does in the foreign affairs arena will continue to be, as my old mentor when we worked on the Philippines, Amb. Phil Habib, used to say, “to do the right thing.” This is the theme as well of a very wise former American military commander, General Tony Zinni, who notes in “The Battle for Peace” that “this does not mean that America has always acted well, only that the attempt to act well has consistently guided us.”

The policy initiatives outlined by Peter DeShazo's essay cover broad areas of needed focus by the U.S. to deal with many issues and problems, and “to do the right thing.” And each would require the sure, deft, and smart application of U.S. power.

The downside in dealing with all those many challenges (human development and human security and governance and economic growth and Cuba, plus the public diplomacy and messaging and marketing) is that we spread ourselves thin, and that, by addressing everything in some way, we are seen as not doing very much. And, of course, there are always the invidious comparisons with U.S. attention to other parts of the world.

The U.S. cannot and should not attempt to take on all these areas, creating expectations, and then, failing to deliver, be seen negatively due to perceived unfulfilled commitments. Besides, people in the hemisphere have heard promises over the years from their governments and supporting foreigners, and they have reason to be cynical.

Rather, the new Administration could promote, identify with, and focus our energies and resources primarily on one area, one that clearly and unambiguously puts the people of the region, and particularly young people, at the center of our policy attention in ways they want. And in ways with which the American people can readily

and enthusiastically identify, and see benefit for the U.S. That one area is EDUCATION.

An Education President

This approach should be at all levels: kinder and pre-kinder, primary, secondary, trade school, job retraining to deal with trade-related job loss, community colleges, university, graduate school, English as a second language, on-the-job and pre-employment education for government employees, and programs for the military and police.

This approach would not be cheap. Our inputs would not be “modest.” Education in the Americas clearly is the key to well-being, stability, peace and prosperity. Education translates into hope and opportunity. And education and hope and opportunity together translate into change. It is the change that democratic systems, with all their flaws and weaknesses, and open economies that include smart social policies, with all their contradictions, will foster. The next President of the United States can be, for all the Americas, the **Education President**.

How to do it? First, decide that Education will be the primary policy focus. Announce it—say at the April, 2009 Summit of the Americas at Port of Spain, Trinidad, at the same time that the new president does a lot of listening. Tell the Latins and Caribbeans how the U.S. will exercise its considerable power to enhance, expand, improve education at all levels. Engage the other leaders on how to do it best. And put U.S. resources on the table. Start with what we already have, and build, with:

- U.S. economic assistance (USAID)
- Millennium Challenge resources
- Peace Corps
- Supporting NGO’s already involved in education projects
- Working with IDB and World Bank
- Reshaping education efforts of regional development banks
- English teaching programs and binational centers
- Engaging U.S. universities already involved in teacher training, nurses training, etc.
- Supporting OAS efforts with more funding—multiplying successful OAS programs and/or creating new ones
- Supporting environmental awareness and problem-solving through education at all levels
- Increasing scholarships and fellowships significantly, such as Fulbright, and creating innovative new ones. (Does anyone remember CAPS in Central America in the 80s and 90s?)
- Increasing funding for English study to prepare young people to study in the U.S: i.e, expand the new \$75 million “Partnership for Latin American Youth”
- Supporting private entities and NGO’s that do exchanges

- Promoting Public-Private partnerships to increase study and training opportunities in the U.S. Offer incentives to the private sector. Get other governments to do the same.
- Expanding military education programs
- Creating student loan opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students to study in the U.S. similar to loan programs underwritten by the U.S. Government for U.S. citizens and green card holders.

Two additional areas of modest expenditure that can have achievable, measurable results to improve peoples' lives are in health and citizen security.

Investing in People: Health

In health, the starting point is existing programs, enhancing and expanding them, and being creative and bold about new directions.

The most exciting new U.S. initiative in health has been the US Navy Ship Comfort's twelve country visit to the region in 2007, and its treatment of 100,000 people. It represents a new military-private partnership approach. Institutionalize it! Expand it, to at least four such visits per year. The health needs are that great, indeed, greater. The good will generated is enormous. It works.

Investing in People through Citizen Security

U.S. concern with citizen security has already begun through existing programs, but there is need for much more U.S. expertise, experience, lessons learned, and the opportunity for U.S. entities to learn from our neighbors. The crime and gang issues are dramatic. For starters, we need to build aggressively on the Merida Initiative; on the new Strategy to Combat Gangs in Central America, with accompanying at-risk youth targeting through social programs and helping gang members re-integrate into their home countries; and on the U.S.-SICA (Central America) Security Dialogue. Expanded and new funding from international financial institutions is a must, as well as work with Europeans who are encountering similar problems.

Relevant Multi-Lateralism

Vigorous U.S. participation in multi-lateral organizations, with the objective of making them more relevant if they are to be more credible to people throughout the hemisphere will be a major challenge. Part of doing this would be through increased funding for the OAS, but funding is not the prime issue. Political will of the member states to take on political and other thorny issues more forthrightly is. Nevertheless, the U.S. must continue to champion relevant multi-lateralism in all possible ways. with particular emphasis on the Inter American Democratic Charter.

The challenge for U.S. presence at the IADB is more creativity and risk-taking for projects that will have direct impact on peoples' lives. Luis Alberto Moreno's initiatives have provided a workable new direction and merit U.S. support.

Public Diplomacy

With Education as the center piece, and health, citizen security, and relevant multilateralism in support, the simple basic message for U.S. public diplomacy would be:

- the U.S. cares about individual citizens, their families, and particularly young people
- How? By explaining and launching new policies, energizing and coordinating our institutions (public and private), marshalling our own resources with significantly increased funding, and leading efforts for IFI funding.
- Simultaneously, we must continue policies that work, beginning with support for Colombia. These include: strengthening human rights; promoting economic reform and reducing corruption; MCC; FTA's and the goal of an FTAA; small business enhancement; military exchanges; SOUTHCOM's hugely important engagement with professional militaries throughout the region; Caribbean/Third Border initiatives launched by Secretary Rice in security and trade.

Mexico and Brazil

In addition to traditional strong ties with Canada in the North America/NAFTA construct, two important countries deserve special policy attention: Mexico with 107 million Mexicans, and Brazil with 188 million Brazilians.

The U.S. Mexican relationship and the success of our contiguous neighbor are of vital importance to the U.S. The economic, trade, investment, security, political, law enforcement, cultural, and people ties need no elaboration. The key elements of the relationship will continue to be migration, border management, making NAFTA work better, security, anti-crime/narcotics/arms flows cooperation, the welcome Merida initiative, and cooperation in multi-lateral institutions.

A standing inter-agency task force approach to this vast relationship under White House direction would be a useful operational way to manage it on the U.S. side, plus regular ministerial meetings.

Brazil, as the largest and most influential South American democracy, exerts huge regional and multi-lateral influence. Our shared objectives and successful cooperative programs in so many areas (usually below the radar) serve our mutual interests very well. The Biofuels Partnership is a harbinger of more joint efforts. The U.S. should continue to welcome the positive Brazilian role in the region, such as in Haiti. An ongoing

challenge will be more cooperative work in multilateral institutions, and of course, on the trade agenda.

Style—As Important As Substance

How we convey the message is hugely important. perhaps as important as the policy itself. Cabinet level visits are excellent vehicles, and the recent record is commendable. However to maximize the impact of the new administration's new policy, the U.S. will need the presence in the White House of someone who has the ear of the President.

Such a person would enhance U.S. policy and the perception of the U.S. in multiple ways. It would start with respectfully listening to Latins and Cribbeans in travel through the region. It would include public diplomacy both in the region and explaining the region's importance throughout the U.S. It would provide another vehicle to keep the Congress informed. And internally, it would help break down the inevitable stove piping and turf battles in Washington.

As a veteran of the Clinton and Bush administrations at senior policy and execution levels, I saw how Mac McLarty fulfilled that role, and how the absence of a Mac McLarty-type person would have helped us. However it is vitally important that the person in this position be the right one, someone who truly has the access, and the ability to do the job with our neighbors. Without such a person it would be better to have no one at all in such a job.

A final word: there is a real opportunity for the new United States Administration to proffer a serious, newly energized, bipartisan approach to the Americas. However, unless and until the poisonous debate on immigration is overcome by serious policy, and until we have closure on outstanding trade agreements, particularly Colombia, the regional reaction will be one of cynicism, at best polite, but not necessarily so.

This is a hugely full plate. And it includes all the elements of CSIS' Smart Power recommendations. But, I submit that the next President and his or her team will be especially motivated to deal seriously with Latin America and the Caribbean, using smart policies that represent smart use of U.S. power. And their motivation will be influenced, molded, and tempered by the new and future demographics of the United States. But that is for another CSIS study and event.

February 11, 2008

As prepared for delivery