

## HEMISPHERE HIGHLIGHTS

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## Upcoming Events

Friday, March 20

10:00a.m. - 11:30a.m.

Cuba Outlook 4: The Foreign  
Policy of Cuba

Tuesday, March 24

9:00a.m. - 4:00p.m.

Demographics, Development,  
and Retirement  
Policy in an Aging  
Latin America

*"The real challenge will be whether the United States can move beyond the rhetoric of partnership on trade, energy, and climate change."*

## Headlines

Latin America draws attention in the U.S. Congress, and an independent commission of former Latin American heads of state criticizes U.S.-led international counternarcotics policies. A wave in gang-related violence in **Canada** is tied to the drug wars in Mexico and the U.S. crackdown on Mexican drug cartel activity. Human rights groups in **Mexico** clash with the Secretariat of Health over legislation determining the rights of rape victims, and the country's central bank undertakes massive monetary intervention to stabilize the peso. Underdevelopment in the highway system of **Honduras** begins to threaten the economy and public safety of the country. The President of **Haiti** is the first head of state to meet with Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, amid controversy over the country's exclusion of certain candidates from the upcoming Senate elections. Speculation continues over the political future of the president of **Colombia**. The government of **Bolivia** spars with investors over rights to the country's lithium reserves. Several senators and deputies in **Argentina** announce their departure from the government coalition, weakening the Kirchner government's chances in the upcoming October elections.

## Regional

A hearing in the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere in early February brought an unusually large crowd together to consider U.S. policy in Latin America in 2009 and beyond. Subcommittee chairman Elliott Engel (D-NY) noted the turnout as a positive indication that this relatively peaceful region could still command attention and that it underscored the importance of the hemispheric partnership as well as a desire to consider the value of U.S. relationships with countries of the Americas as a cornerstone of the new administration's foreign policy agenda. The search for deliverables on President Obama's pledge during the campaign to create a special envoy to the Americas and to open travel to Cuban American families were two of the issues under discussion. With increased violence at the U.S.-Mexico border, a Summit of the Americas looming in April 2009, ongoing challenges to democratization in Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Bolivia, and a free-trade agreement with Colombia still pending, there was much to consider in this hearing. There were also recommendations for actions that could signal change, such as the recommendation that President Obama support Mexico and Brazil's inclusion in the G-8. As one witness, former Clinton administration special envoy Thomas F. McLarty, noted, "it is very difficult for the United States to really command credibility in terms of our leadership with the world if we don't have constructive relationships with our own neighbors." *Given the legitimate U.S. preoccupation with the economy, Latin America will continue to compete for attention with other urgent international issues such as the war in Afghanistan and the conflict in the Middle East. While there is consensus that the new administration will certainly provide a welcome change in terms of tone and collaboration, the real challenge will be whether the United States can move beyond the rhetoric of partnership on trade, energy, and climate change. One thing is certain, however, from all those who testified: right now the best thing that the new administration can do for Latin America is to get the economic stimulus right so that trade, credit, and investment can flow once again southward. Bolstering the more fragile economies dependent on the U.S. resources—from Mexico south—coupled with a revisiting of U.S. policy toward Cuba could go a long way toward building confidence beyond the Summit of the Americas and 2009.* **Johanna Mendelson Forman**

## Recent Events

Thursday, February 5

Cuba Outlook 3: Cuba's  
Armed Forces

"In the past there has not been such an instance of actors from across the region calling collectively for a shift in U.S. drug policies."

U.S.-led international drug policies are counterproductive, according to a report released on February 11, 2009, by the Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy (LACDD). The report, entitled *Drugs and Democracy: Toward a Paradigm Shift*, is the product of an independent commission comprised of three former Latin American presidents—Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil, César Gaviria of Colombia, and Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico—and 14 independent contributors which evaluated the effectiveness of current drug policies. They found that despite prohibition efforts included in the U.S. war on drugs, Latin America continues to be the world's major producer of marijuana and cocaine and is quickly becoming a key exporter of opiates and synthetic drugs. As a recent report by the Brookings Institution points out, despite domestic antidrug campaigns, demand for drugs in the United States has remained static over the past 20 years. Additionally, according to the LACDD report, a major unintended consequence of drug policies has been the dramatic expansion of violent organized crime relating to the drug trade, which places a greater burden on law enforcement and judicial agencies. The commission suggests three main guidelines, which include: to treat drug use as a public health concern rather than a criminal issue; to reduce drug consumption through education, information, and prevention; and finally, to focus on the enforcement of laws against organized crime. *Drug use and drug-related violence have become more prevalent throughout Latin America in recent decades, threatening citizen security from Mexico to Jamaica to Brazil, making the release of the LACDD report timely. While some of the report's prescriptions, such as the legalization of marijuana, are controversial, the report's main point is that present policies are not working and a deviation from the status quo is necessary; whether there will be an actual shift in drug policy in the United States is unknown. However, the potential importance of this report lies in its authorship: the three former heads of state that lead the commission all draw wide respect among the international community. In the past there has not been such an instance of actors from across the region calling collectively for a shift in U.S. drug policies. The commission's hope is that the Obama administration will have a more open attitude toward reevaluating current policies.* Leslie Taylor

## North America

### Canada

A recent wave of drug-related violence in Vancouver, British Columbia has city residents and authorities concerned and has prompted the federal government to introduce legislation cracking down on gang-related crime in Canada. In the month of February 2009 alone, there were 18 gang-related shootings in the city, seven of them fatal. The month also saw several kidnappings and other murders authorities describe as "targeted" gang-related killings, including one instance of a man dying after being pushed from the balcony of an apartment building. Authorities have been making some progress, including the arrest this week of five members (one a prominent leader) of the United Nations Gang, one of the province's most powerful crime syndicates. But despite increased efforts, the death toll has continued to rise dramatically in recent months. Last week, B.C.'s attorney general and solicitor general visited Ottawa and met with the federal justice minister in a plea for stronger anti-drug legislation, including tougher sentencing, disclosure and surveillance laws. Meanwhile, prime minister Stephen Harper travelled to Vancouver to address the same issue, meeting with regional police chiefs and victims' families. He made a speech urging members of parliament to vote swiftly in favor of the Act to Amend the Criminal Code, introduced by the attorney general in the House of Commons the same day, which if passed will increase the penalties for gang-related violent crimes. Almost all of the cocaine in Canada is trafficked through Mexico, either bought directly from Mexican cartels or via intermediaries in U.S. cities such as Los Angeles. *Recent reports have started to*

link the violence in Vancouver to the escalating drug wars in Mexico, which have led to thousands of deaths over the past year. The connection of Canadian drug gangs to Mexico was mentioned by Royal Canadian Mounted Police superintendent Pat Fogarty in an interview this week, and Canada came up several times in a news conference last week given by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The recent U.S. push against Mexican drug cartels operating in the United States, titled "Operation Xcellerator," has sent the price of cocaine soaring, leading to turf wars among Vancouver's drug-dealing gangs. Though Canadian gangs are generally not directly affiliated with the Mexican cartels, the DEA has stated that organized crime in Canada does have connections with Mexico's Sinaloa and Gulf cartels, with Canadian traffickers trading shipments of ecstasy and marijuana for Mexican cocaine. The problem of rising violence in Vancouver is especially pressing given that the city is slated to host next year's 2010 Olympic winter games. Justice is therefore likely to be a key issue in the B.C. provincial elections scheduled for May 2009. **Jessica Horwitz**

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## Mexico

News that the text of a pending rule to protect the rights of rape victims had been watered down at the last minute led women's and human rights groups in Mexico to clash with the Secretariat of Health in February. As approved last July by a committee of experts and non-governmental organization representatives, the draft of Norma Oficial Mexicana 046 (NOM 046): "Violencia Familiar, Sexual y contra las Mujeres" originally contained language obligating officials to protect the rights of rape victims to prevent or terminate a pregnancy resulting from assault. Supporters anticipated that the rule would be formalized through publication in the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* sometime in the fall after a period of public commentary. But following a series of delays and what some critics asserted was an "irregular" January committee meeting, the text was revised to require doctors to advise rape victims seeking emergency contraception of the risks and side effects associated with it. The revision also stated that health officials "could" offer rape victims abortion services and allowed medical personnel who morally object to abortion to opt out of any obligation to offer the service. Reacting to public outcry over the changes, the Secretariat of Health delayed publication of the rule and convened the committee in late February to develop a compromise text. The new version, which should be slated for publication in the *Diario Oficial* following legal review, asserts that medical personnel "must" allow rape victims to terminate a pregnancy resulting from assault and obligates all federal health centers to employ some doctors who do not object to performing abortions on rape victims. The requirement that doctors elaborate on the side effects associated with emergency contraception has been deleted. *The development of NOM 046—and the debate surrounding it—is an outcome of the controversy sparked by the failure of authorities in Baja California to protect the rights of a 13-year-old girl raped at knife point by two men in 1999. On learning that she was pregnant as a consequence of the assault, Mexicali resident Paulina del Carmen Ramirez Jacinto sought an abortion in accordance with state law. However, she was repeatedly prevented from undergoing the procedure by public officials, including doctors at the state-run hospital who refused to provide the service on moral grounds. Feminist and human rights groups took the case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an autonomous body of the Organization of American States. In March 2006, the Inter-American Commission brokered a "friendly settlement" among the parties. The settlement affirmed that denying women access to abortion services to which they are entitled is a violation of human rights. An estimated 120,000 women are raped each year in Mexico. Katherine E. Bliss*

"The settlement affirmed that denying women access to abortion services to which they are entitled is a violation of human rights."

**“The Mexican situation is sure to improve or worsen in lockstep with the U.S. economy, and the peso is unlikely to develop against that trend.”**

To fight the economic crisis Mexico's central bank has lowered interest rates for the second time in two consecutive months and throughout February undertook massive interventions in the money market to stabilize the peso. For the first time in a decade, Banco de Mexico bought concealed amounts of pesos directly from banks to discourage speculation against its currency. This, however, did not prevent the peso from hitting an all-time low on March 2 of 15.45 pesos to the U.S. dollar. Since August 2008, when the extent of the financial crisis became evident, the peso has lost more than 30 percent of its value against the dollar, even though Mexico's central bank has spent some \$18 billion to support it. The cut in interest rates became possible as inflation had slowed in January. In February, however, inflation picked up again due to higher import prices. This limits the possibilities for further interest rate reductions to support the economy. *The weakness of the peso is largely imported. Mexico's financial condition was sound before the crisis, and the domestic banking sector has proven stable throughout. Yet, the economic downturn in the United States and the associated low oil prices affect Mexico more than any other country in Latin America. Mexico accounts for 60 percent of the region's trade with the United States and for 14 percent of U.S. oil imports. Consequently, the Mexican situation is sure to improve or worsen in lockstep with the U.S. economy, and the peso is unlikely to develop against that trend. The fact that the cut in interest rates temporarily took pressure away from the peso also shows clearly that concerns about the real economy dominate the current decline of the peso. In addition, however, the peso is suffering as a result in the contraction of the international banking sector, especially in Europe, where banks have heavily reduced their exposure to emerging markets. To fully recover, the peso would need that money to return as well.* **Hendrik Hagedorn**

## Central America

### Honduras

**“Dilapidated roads in the Olancho and Colón states have led to daily accidents causing significant problems in commercial as well as public transportation.”**

Underdevelopment in the Honduran highway system has proven in recent months to be a mounting challenge that is beginning to threaten both the economy and public safety of the country. Dilapidated roads in the Olancho and Colón states have led to daily accidents causing significant problems in commercial as well as public transportation. “The situation is critical because producers... are losing sales due to the inability of vehicles to traverse the zone,” noted the president of the Honduran Farmer and Ranchers Association. Tourist regions near the coastal city of Tela are also experiencing difficulties as a result of the state of the road networks. Specifically, Braulio Martínez, president of the Foundation for the Improvement of Triunfo de la Cruz, a tourist region off the northern coast of Honduras, has struggled to receive help from the municipal authorities in repairing the roads. He is concerned that the normal influx of tourists they receive for Holy Week (April 5–11, 2009) will choose an alternative tourist location rather than deal with the dangerous road systems. The Fondo Vial (Road Fund), a government agency responsible for managing the distribution of resources for highway reconstruction in Honduras, has admitted that the highway system is “a disaster.” César Salgado, the recently replaced director of the Fondo Vial, claims that the decrepit state of the roads is due to a lack of funding from the Department of Public Works, Transportation, and Life (Soptravi). Salgado states that the Fondo Vial has already had to spend nearly half of the funds allotted by Soptravi in operating costs, project supervision, and repairing of previous construction mistakes on highways that are not part of the official road network being addressed. The remaining funds, approximately \$34 million, must be used for modernizing 15,000 kilometers of official roads, 3,000 of which are paved, while the remaining 12,000 kilometers are dirt roads. Salgado also qualifies the difficulty of the task by explaining that, of the paved roads that are already in place, many have suffered so many years

of degradation that the base and sub-base will need to be replaced. Despite this, Soptravi announced that it will be stricter with the Fondo Vial in developing the road system. Given such a state of affairs, Salgado believes that “with this level of resources, we are unable to give attention to the entirety of the official road network.” Salgado has stated that he expects the Fondo Vial to be able to reach merely 22 percent of the total network. *Clearly, a new approach is needed in addressing this issue. Infrastructure is critical to the development of an economy, and without a safe, traversable road network, Honduras will face an increasingly difficult path to development. Furthermore, strife between the Fondo Vial and Soptravi will only serve to complicate matters, slowing what little progress on the issue has been seen. New direction in how the Honduran government addresses the issue of road networks will be critical in the country's economic development.* **John Mulqueen**

## Caribbean

### Haiti

President René Préval became the first head of state to meet with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in February. Préval's visit to Washington was part of his quest to gain support among the donor community to keep Haiti in their economic assistance programs, especially as the country is still trying to recover from the deadly blows suffered when four hurricanes destroyed parts of the country in September 2008. Haiti figures high on the agenda of the Obama administration, due to the history of the U.S.-Haiti relationship, and there is a desire to demonstrate concern that the region's poorest nation is only an hour's flight from Miami. In preparation for the donor meetings that are scheduled for April 2009 to review the state of support, one hopeful note was sounded with a report prepared by Oxford economist Paul Collier for the UN secretary-general. The report calls for renewed commitment to launch a coordinated strategy among the key donors—the United States, Canada, the European Union, and Brazil—to move forward in a way that most effectively uses resources and takes advantage of some factors that would make Haitian recovery possible. These factors include Haiti's proximity to U.S. markets, a large and active diaspora in the United States and Canada, and specific advantageous trade legislation—HOPE I and HOPE II—that encourages investment in textile assembly, which Collier believes could create many new jobs over the next decade. *Given the United Nations' role in providing security for Haiti and its commitment to stay there until at least 2011, it is time that reconstruction be managed in a way that takes advantage of important contributions made by Haitians abroad and the investment opportunities that are now available, and incorporates a strategic financial plan that reflects the positive potential that Collier documented, in order to advance a capable and stable state. Whether the donors and the Haitian government will adopt Collier's proposal is yet unclear. But if the World Bank and the United Nations have their way, they will try to convince the Préval government that the current situation is actually a glass half full rather than half empty, given the sense of donor fatigue that has until this point plagued reconstruction efforts in Haiti. At the very least, the Collier report provides a basis for economic development that could really advance the desperate situation that Haiti is in after four storms and the continued challenges to state capacity that these natural disasters have wrought.* **Johanna Mendelson Forman**

**“At the very least, the Collier report provides a basis for economic development that could really advance the desperate situation that Haiti is in.”**

“Some fear that unrest could develop in parts of the country where Aristide is still popular despite his current exile in South Africa.”

On February 5, Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) barred 40 of the 105 candidates who had registered to run for senate seats in the upcoming election from doing so. The election, which will be held on April 19, 2009, will select 12 of Haiti's 30 senators. Among the 40 prohibited are all 17 of the candidates from two different factions of the Lavalas Family (FL) party, which is headed by former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The FL has been beset recently by internal disputes that have left it unclear to outsiders how the party selects its candidates. The CEP gave no detailed explanation of its decision, although its president told a radio program that the conflict within the FL had no bearing on the exclusion of its candidates and that they were barred due to procedural mistakes and missing signatures. Another candidate who failed to receive approval from the council was Guy Philippe, who led an insurgency in 2004 against Aristide and is suspected of involvement in narco-trafficking. Moïse Jean-Charles, a supporter of President René Prével, did receive approval despite his alleged involvement in murders carried out by a mob he is accused of leading. The U.S. embassy in Haiti as well as the Canadian government issued statements criticizing the exclusion of all candidates of any single party, and some fear that unrest could develop in parts of the country where Aristide is still popular despite his current exile in South Africa. *The senate elections will serve as a useful measuring stick of how far democracy in Haiti has progressed. Since 2004, country has been aided by the UN Stability Mission in Haiti, which had its mandate renewed for a 12-month period and is now due to expire on October 14, 2009. The 2006 elections were deemed to have been run reasonably freely and fairly by observers despite allegations of fraud and threats of boycotts by opposition parties. After five years of assistance, international observers will be keen to see concrete political progress in addition to other rebuilding processes. With presidential elections not due until 2012, the election of senators represents a real opportunity for Haitians to demonstrate their commitment to democratic processes.* **Matt Potter**

## South America

### Colombia

With just over a year to go before congressional and presidential elections, Colombian politics are stalled. President Álvaro Uribe has so far refused to declare whether he will seek a third consecutive term in office. Although Colombian tradition limited presidents to only one consecutive four-year period, the constitution was amended four years ago to allow the highly popular president to run for a second term. It could—with difficulty—be done again. Polls suggest more than two-thirds of Colombians admire him. A group working to allow a third term submitted a petition to the Congress last year. It gathered many times more signatures than needed. But the next step, approval of a special referendum to approve the initiative, has been bogged down in Congress. There have been accusations of financial irregularities tainting the collection of signatures and suspicions that the real goal of the process was somehow to remove term limits from all elected executive offices nationally, i.e., governors and mayors. Moreover, grammarians, much to the glee of Uribe's opponents, say that the wording of the petition would actually not allow the president to run again immediately but only after someone else had had a turn at leading the country. Whatever comes out of the Congress will need a review and approval by the constitutional court, and a referendum, if there is one, would not occur until late this year. It would then need not just a 50 percent “yes” vote but also have to draw high voter turnout. (Uribe won majorities for his political reforms in 2003, but the referenda he proposed failed to meet the required participation threshold.) At this point, the “third term” proposal looks increasingly unrealistic. *Some close to Uribe believe the president is trying to put off being treated as “a lame duck.” His remarks at times, though, suggest real doubt that any of his followers could keep*

the country on course, especially in ending the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla threat and achieving a free-trade agreement with the United States. One of those clearly ready to give it a try is Juan Manuel Santos. He organized the largest party in Uribe's electoral coalition and now serves as minister of defense. His leak to Medellín's leading newspaper El Colombiano claiming the president had finally decided not to run again in 2010 was quickly slapped down by Uribe. Senators Germán Vargas Lleras, the leader of the second-largest party in the coalition, and Marta Lucía Ramírez, Uribe's first minister of defense, are ready to begin campaigning if and when the president signals he will step aside. Andrés Felipe Arias, a young Uribe look-alike and loyalist, has been a controversial minister of agriculture. In perhaps the clearest sign of Uribe's plans, Arias announced his candidacy to succeed his mentor and resigned his cabinet post as he must according to Colombian law if he expects to run in his Conservative Party primary in March 2010. Uribe's failure to declare his intention seems also to be affecting the opposition Liberal and Polo Democrático parties. Without a clear idea of what kind of forces are likely to face them on the right, each is suffering leadership and identity crises. **Phillip McLean**

“Without a clear idea of what kind of forces are likely to face them on the right, each [opposition party] is suffering leadership and identity crises.”

## Bolivia

Global calls for greater automotive fuel efficiency and new investments by major car manufacturers, specifically Mitsubishi and Toyota, have brought attention to the rich lithium resources located in Bolivia's barren salt lake, the Uyuni. Japanese corporations Mitsubishi and Sumimoto and French industrialist Vincent Bolloré have all been turned away recently by the Bolivian government after seeking mining rights in the Uyuni salt flats. According to the United States Geological Survey, the Uyuni, located in the western department of Potosí, contains more than 50 percent of the world's known lithium deposits. Lithium, a critical component in modern batteries, has seen increasing global demand due to investment from automakers, environmentally friendly government policies, and the popularity of consumer electronics. Lithium is generally expensive and capital intensive to extract, but is most economically mined from large salt flats such as Uyuni, where the lithium is evaporated from salty brine in ponds lined with toxic chemicals. Political instability over the past decade and more recently a series of nationalizations by Bolivian president Evo Morales have scared off foreign investment from the country; foreign direct investment (FDI) has dropped from more than \$1 billion in 1999 to \$204 million in 2007. The new constitution passed on January 25 of this year with provisions guaranteeing indigenous land and resource rights has created yet another serious obstacle to foreign investment. *Bolivia has a long history of commodity exploitation—from silver mining in Potosí during the Spanish occupation and tin mining in Oruro during the early twentieth century to hydrocarbons currently in Tarija and Santa Cruz. Saúl Villegas, a director at the Bolivian Mining Corporation (COMIBOL), the operative wing of the Mining Ministry, admitted that they “lack know-how and need investment to pull this off,” but reiterated that the foreign actors would be accepted only as minority partners or clients. This statement suggests that Bolivia hopes to find investors who are willing to provide the enormous up-front capital and technical expertise necessary to mine the lithium without having a guarantee of future profits or a controlling and managing stake—needless to say, such investors might be hard to come by. In 1999, booming FDI reflected the belief that Bolivia was positioned to become a major energy provider in South America. Those hopes have faded as nationalization and a capital flight have caused Bolivia to fail to live up to its current contractual gas exporting agreements. Lithium holds potential promise for Evo Morales and Bolivia; however, current hard-line policies suggest it may become another wasted opportunity.* **Thomas Cook**

“Lithium holds potential promise for Evo Morales and Bolivia; however, current hard-line policies suggest it may become another wasted opportunity.”

“Three of five radical governors who ran as candidates of the government coalition that carried Cristina Kirchner to the presidency in 2007 have now joined the main opposition force.”

## Argentina

Most political experts believe that in Argentina's October elections the government coalition will lose the control of both houses of Congress that it has enjoyed for many years. February witnessed a series of desertions that may bring about that result long before the elections. Four senators and several *diputados* left the pro-government congressional blocs this month. Others are likely to follow their example. The most important leader among the dissenters is Senator Carlos Reutemann. A former Formula-One racing vice champion, Reutemann became a rancher and later entered politics. Always popular in Argentina as a whole and particularly in his province, Santa Fe, he has been repeatedly elected as governor and senator. He is regarded as a strong presidential hopeful for 2011. Another important Peronist leader that followed Reutemann's move was Senator Carlos Romero, a former governor of the province of Salta. Parallel to this process of weakening control of Congress is the loss of territorial power. Three of five radical governors who ran as candidates of the government coalition that carried Cristina Kirchner to the presidency in 2007 have now joined the main opposition force, the Coalición Cívica, formed by radicals and socialists. Another front that may have a decisive influence in some of the most important districts involves the chief of government of the city of Buenos Aires, Mauricio Macri, and former governor of the province of Buenos Aires, Felipe Solá. Dissident *justicialistas* are leaving the party to join them. *Perhaps in all human societies expectations tend to be self-fulfilling. In Argentina, their self-fulfillment tends to be explosive. When the Kirchners basked under very high popularity ratings, party discipline was more automatic than in most democracies, and non-Peronist political leaders rushed to join the government coalition. Now that lower ratings seem to anticipate potential defeat, even the radical vice president has become an opponent.*

Carlos M. Regúnaga

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