

US - Hegemony or Global Good Neighbor Policy? (Laura Carlsen & Tom Barry, IRC)

Thursday 23 February 2006, posted by [Aurora Scott](#)

[IRC](#) - Over the past few years we have faced two major challenges in conceiving of a new foreign policy in Latin America. The first is the relative lack of attention to the region, by both the U.S. government and public. The second is the increasing friction between the current U.S. administration's strategies for global U.S. hegemony and Latin American elected governments and grassroots trends toward greater independence and new models.}

The following policy review of U.S.-Latin American relations examines the salient new developments in Latin America and the Caribbean and U.S. policy in the region. It concludes with general guidelines for a more coherent and constructive U.S. Latin American policy in the region, along the lines of the "Global Good Neighbor Ethic for U.S. Foreign Policy."

I. Why Latin America Matters

Over the past five years, the United States had paid relatively little attention to Latin America. Since September 11, policymakers, media, and the U.S. public have kept the focus on the Middle East and Muslim countries. With the invasion of Iraq in 2003, foreign policy, while gaining greater public attention, has become nearly synonymous with the debate over the occupation of that country and the deteriorating conditions for peace in the Middle East.

The United States still retains a special sense of hegemony over its "near abroad" or backyard. But in an age of the global war on terror, global economic integration, and global communication, geographical proximity has reduced relevance in prioritizing international relations. As the only remaining superpower since the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, Washington has come to regard the entire globe as its natural domain.

One result of this global reach is that less importance is attached to relations with Latin America than to nations with more strategic resources, especially oil, more profitable investment locations, geopolitical importance, and those that offer expanding consumer markets.

The problem for Latin America is that the lack of coherent policymaking has led to stopgap and piecemeal policies, far more reactive than pro-active. These policies, while generally falling under the erroneous framework of the National Security Doctrine, are not based on a comprehensive and careful analysis of the region; nor do they take into account the needs of the countries themselves. Moreover, between the distinct policy areas-counter narcotics operations, development aid, anti-terrorism, immigration restriction, trade liberalization-they frequently contradict each other and fail to consider broader policy objectives in the region.

Historically, the reasons for Latin America's relevance to U.S. interests-as defined by the governing elite-have changed. Latin America and the Caribbean were traditionally linked to the United States by geography. In the early 19th century the U.S. government instituted the Monroe Doctrine to ensure that the Western Hemisphere would remain outside the dominance of colonial powers and mercantilists. In this way it asserted both its interest and its hegemony over the region. The purpose was not only to pull the new nations of the hemisphere into its sphere of influence but also to keep other countries out. This served both security interests and economic objectives.

The Cold War dictated a new set of objectives oriented toward eliminating what were defined as

communist threats. But since the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the “global war on terrorism,” Latin America has taken a back seat in U.S. foreign policy in relation to other parts of the world. The former rationales of proximity, defeating communism, and maintaining regional hegemony have fallen away to new, more complex forms of involvement.

For many who have analyzed or experienced firsthand the U.S. policies that fomented civil wars, supported military dictators, or helped overthrow elected governments, neglect may seem a positive development in U.S.-Latin American relations.

But the United States continues to exercise strong hegemonic ties in the region, whether through its expanding military presence, NAFTA-style trade agreements, or the dictates of U.S.-dominated international financial institutions. Latin America is still a crucial area for the United States. Moreover, recent political trends have placed it squarely in the center of major debates on the future of U.S. foreign policy and the course of globalization. Latin American nations have called into question the U.S. government’s efforts to militarize international relations under a counter-terrorism agenda that does not reflect the reality of the region and have increasingly protested the neoliberal model.

At this juncture, to base alternative U.S. policy in the region on a negative agenda-what the U.S. should not do in Latin America-would be short-sighted, and ultimately would be only a defensive position. Although regional attention has been spotty, conservatives developed a long-term and cohesive foreign policy agenda centered on U.S. global hegemony over a decade ago. To counter that agenda of military presence, intervention, corporate privileges, and deepening rifts between the rich and the poor, we too must develop a more comprehensive agenda.

What’s clear is that in today’s globalized world, the United States and Latin America remain inextricably linked-and in some ways even more so. The large U.S. market, expanding Latin American markets for U.S. goods, the international drug trade, immigration-all underline the strategic relationship that exists between the two regions.

It is also clear that many countries in Latin America are taking bold steps toward addressing some of the worst inequities of corporate-led globalization and their colonial heritage. A U.S. foreign policy that supports, rather than counters, these initiatives and that resolutely respects the right to self-determination could bring our nations into a shared community of values based on sustainable development, inclusive democracy and peace.

II. Continental Drift: Trends in Latin America

Despite the more dramatic developments in other parts of the world, Latin America has drawn world attention on an increasing number of occasions. This time it has not been due to major crises, such as the economic crashes that rocked the continent with Mexico’s peso devaluation in 1995 or the implosion of the Argentine economy in 2001. Instead, the region has made headlines for its new and unexpected political leadership that in some cases extends to the global stage.

From Brazil’s leadership of developing countries in international forums to Argentina’s negotiations with the International Monetary Fund to Bolivia’s new indigenous president, something new is happening across the continent. In the first years of this century, four countries (Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Bolivia) have moved from economically orthodox, conservative governments to center-left rule-and Mexico may very well follow after presidential elections in July 2006.

Popular movements against the privatization of basic services, transnational control over natural resources, and the exclusion of poor and indigenous populations from the benefits of economic integration have brought down some governments, shaken others, and forced powerful corporations to retrench.

These trends are far more complicated than locating nations on a simple ideological line, and while the trend to reject or modify U.S. hegemony in hemispheric relations is positive, there are also contradictions, exceptions, and countervailing trends. Brazil’s labor government-despite its leftist origins and

commitment to social movements-has adopted quite orthodox economic and financial strategies. Even one of the most vehement critics of the United States government, President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, has extensive economic and political ties to its northern neighbor. And many nations, instead of moving away from the U.S. sphere of influence, have entered into free trade agreements and cooperated willingly with expanded U.S. military presence in the region.

Nonetheless, the move to the left of important Latin American nations has produced a continental drift that has separated the North and South in the Americas. The ideological shift among its southern neighbors seriously irritates the rightwing Bush administration and has galvanized elements within the administration that seek harsher methods of repressing governments and movements they disagree with.

On the other side, Latin American nations have reacted strongly to the Bush agenda of U.S. hegemony and since the invasion of Iraq anti-U.S. sentiment has been on the rise. Conservative parties closely allied to traditional elite and foreign interests have taken a beating throughout the region. Their failure over the past decades to solve growing problems of poverty, inequality, and corruption has not gone unnoticed by the population.

The concept of a Western Hemisphere under the stewardship of the United States is being challenged. The strengthening of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) as an alternative to the failed Free Trade Area of the Americas, the recent formation of the Community of South American Nations, and Hugo Chavez's Bolivarian Alternative at a minimum represent attempts to create a counterweight to U.S. hegemony in the region. Led by the oil-rich and rhetoric-laden Venezuelan government, southern nations are building bridges that link them directly instead of passing through Miami, Houston, or Washington. Moreover, they are purposely diversifying economic ties, with Europe and increasingly China playing far greater roles. This changes the paths of globalization and the conduits of control in the region, even when many of the basic doctrines remain intact.

Moreover, more independent political leadership presents a new panorama for democracy in the region. Evo Morales' presidency will face the challenge of governing in favor of the marginalized and indigenous populations. He takes over a poor and heavily indebted nation with little margin for maneuvering between popular expectations and international obligations. In the past, this dilemma has brought down governments propelled to power by strong popular movements. U.S. government officials have already criticized Morales and the proposed reforms that would stop coca eradication programs, increase state control over energy production, and assert more control over the extraction of all natural resources. To what extent the distance between U.S. policy and Latin American tendencies could lead to more open conflict is one of the biggest questions facing U.S.-Latin America policymakers in the year to come. The answer will depend in large part on citizens' involvement in U.S. foreign policy and our ability to not only block interventionist moves but also to build an alternative policy framework. The Global Good Neighbor Ethic seeks to offer such a framework.

Global Good Neighbor Principles

Principle One: The first step toward being a good neighbor is to stop being a bad neighbor.

Principle Two: Our nation's foreign policy agenda must be tied to broad U.S. interests. To be effective and win public support, a new foreign policy agenda must work in tandem with new domestic policies to improve security, quality of life, and basic rights in our own country.

Principle Three: Given that our national interests, security, and social well-being are interconnected to those of other peoples, U.S. foreign policy must be based on reciprocity rather than domination, mutual well-being rather than cutthroat competition, and cooperation rather than confrontation.

Principle Four: As the world's foremost power, the United States will be best served by exercising responsible global leadership and partnership rather than seeking global dominance.

Principle Five: An effective security policy must be two-pronged. Genuine national safety requires both a well-prepared military capable of repelling attacks on our country and a proactive commitment to improving national and personal security through non-military measures and international cooperation.

Principle Six: The U.S. government should support sustainable development, first at home and then abroad, through its macroeconomic trade, investment, and aid policies.

Principle Seven: A peaceful and prosperous global neighborhood depends on effective governance at national, regional, and international levels. Effective governance is accountable, transparent, and representative.

We argue that under this new framework, the end of U.S. hegemony is not a threat but an opportunity to create more equal and neighborly relations in the region.

III. Current U.S. Policy and Why it Should Change

From the start of Bush presidency in January 2001, the administration's foreign policy team has been set on consolidating its dominant position in international affairs through a combination of aggressive military, diplomatic, and economic strategies. But its ambitious plan to exercise power as the world's only superpower through global military domination, regime change, "coalition of the willing" alliances, and extension of NAFTA-like trade accords-has hit a wall of domestic and international resistance.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although originally considered a prime testing ground for the vision for a New American Century, instead of consolidating control over the region the Bush government has watched in dismay as Latin America has moved out of its orbit and increasingly rejected the dictates of a Pax Americana under undisputed U.S. hegemony.

Moves to break out of this hegemony are viewed as anything but positive by the Bush administration, leading to increased friction in relations. Despite growing criticism of U.S. economic prescriptions and foreign policy, instead of making its positions more flexible, the administration has demonstrated an attitude of imperial hubris. Although not returning to the gunboat diplomacy of Teddy Roosevelt or the "national security state" interventions of the Cold War period, the Bush administration has repeatedly meddled in domestic politics and attempted to strong-arm Latin American and Caribbean nations to follow its bidding.

Whether it be on the Iraq invasion, trade policy, impunity for its soldiers in the International Criminal Court, or who should serve as their elected leaders, the Bush administration has demanded loyalty to its own agenda. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has dubbed this approach "transformational diplomacy," referring to the administration's assumed right to transform the domestic policies of other nations to reflect its interests.

Examples of this "transformational diplomacy" in action over the past five years include:

- Use of democratization aid through National Endowment for Democracy, USAID, and U.S. diplomacy to support the ouster of Haiti's elected president Jean Bertrand Aristide in 2004.
- Use of political aid and U.S. diplomacy to support various attempts to bring down the elected president Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, including at least implicit endorsement of the coup attempt in 2002 and active support for the unsuccessful referendum in 2004.
- Denial of U.S. military aid to countries that do not offer impunity for U.S. soldiers deployed in their

territory, thereby undermining the credibility of the International Criminal Court.

- Retaliation against nations that do not support U.S. positions in international forums, such as the postponement of the free trade agreement with Chile after Chile declined to support U.S. plans to invade Iraq in the UN Security Council.
- Heavy-handed U.S. attempts to have its choice (first Francisco Flores of El Salvador and later Mexico 's Luis Derbez) elected secretary general of the Organization of American States.
- Stringent economic embargo against Cuba, in disregard of international law, while also establishing a commission and special fund to shape the post-Castro political transition.
- Public declarations from State Department officials to warn voters in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia that the election of certain candidates would endanger good relations with that country-with obvious implications for continued aid and trade preferences.
- Support for the hard-line counterinsurgency plan of Colombia 's President Alvaro Uribe while failing to support peaceful channels to resolve the conflict or to insist that the leaders of the disarmed paramilitary units face justice for crimes in many cases committed in coordination with the U.S.-backed Colombian army.

In the area of security, U.S. military aid now surpasses economic aid to Latin America and the Caribbean, and the U.S. Southern Command has become the main U.S. interlocutor in U.S.-Latin American relations. Since the onset of the "global war on terrorism," Southcom has reconfigured its mission to include counterterrorism as its overriding objective, despite the lack of any identifiable anti-U.S. terrorist threat coming from the region.

Under the umbrella of counter-terrorism, the military has taken the lead in U.S. policy toward Latin America and in identifying what it considers the political, economic, and military trends in the region that put U.S. hegemonic control over the hemisphere at risk. The Pentagon now regards any move that counters the U.S. agenda on trade, security, or governance-whether from governments or social movements-as security threats to the United States. In addition, the Pentagon is advocating joint cooperation with the region's armed forces to address the new public safety concerns resulting from rising drug- and gang-related crime throughout the region, and most notably in Central America.

Strengthening the military leads away from democracy and tempts authoritarian tendencies in nations that still have not consolidated democratic institutions since the period of military dictatorships in the seventies and eighties. The fact is, neither the governments nor the social movements in Latin America and the Caribbean present any current threat to U.S. national security.

Leftist and rightist armed groups do exist in Latin America, mainly in Colombia, but these outlaw organizations do not have extra-territorial ambitions, and as such should be the concerns of the respective governments of these nations, and not the U.S. security apparatus. Likewise, multiple threats to the "human security" of the Latin American and Caribbean peoples persist throughout the region. But these nonmilitary threats-variously called "nontraditional," "emerging," or "multidimensional" threats-do not threaten U.S. national security, and should be addressed primarily, if not exclusively, by nonmilitary measures.

Hand in hand with the U.S. government's increasing military engagement in the region has been an active campaign to use economic policy as a parallel path to consolidating U.S. hegemony. By attempting to standardize commercial relations under the NAFTA model, using aid to foment dependency and force open markets, and conditioning international financing through multilateral finance organizations, the United States asserts its own interests while failing to take into account those of the region.

Latin America faces grave development challenges. Growth in the region has been accompanied by continued high poverty and unemployment, and a net outflow of capital. Very few sectors and only a handful of families benefit from increased foreign trade and investment. Meanwhile, poverty has grown from 200 million people in 1990 to an estimated 222 million for 2004. 185 million people in the region live on less than \$2 a day and four countries-Bolivia, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua-form part of the unenviable club of very poor Highly Indebted Poor Countries. The region suffers over 10% unemployment,

without taking into account forced emigration, the lack of jobs in the formal sector, and statistical methodologies notorious for underreporting. To meet the Millennium Development Goals, per capita GNP would have to grow 2.9% every year to 2015, something that has only happened twice since 1995.

According to the World Bank, Latin America is the most unequal continent in the world. The recognized measure of inequality, the Gini coefficient, shows high factors in almost all Latin American countries, where on average the top tenth of the population accounts for 36% of income and the bottom 40% get less than 14%.

The lack of steady growth and the inability to abate poverty and unemployment shows that something in the current model of trade-led growth is not working for the majority of Latin Americans. Regardless, the current discourse on “free trade” within the Bush administration promotes a simple equation between trade, development, and democracy. The U.S. government has launched a major offensive to impose NAFTA-style agreements on all the countries of the hemisphere. Unable to do this in one fell swoop under the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, current negotiations center on the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and the Andean Free Trade Agreement (AFTA), both closely modeled on NAFTA.

A Global Good Neighbor Ethic places sustainability, at home and abroad, as the highest goal of economic policy. However, policy reform imposed by the United States, whether through free trade agreements or the conditions required by IFIs under its dictates, are much to blame for the fact that Latin American economies are being forcibly restructured in ways that are unsustainable. Dependence on the export of primary sector products and natural resources represents a return to “dead end” economic development and a step back in development of national industry. Many value-added industries have been replaced by exploitation of raw materials or off-shore assembly plants. National production, particularly from small- and medium-sized businesses, has suffered.

Moreover, by ruling out national policies of greater state regulation of non-renewable resources, encouraging the “comparative advantage” of cheap labor that devalues work and exploits desperation and gender discrimination, and extending high-yield models of export agriculture that ignore rules of sustainable water and chemical use, U.S. economic policy is building an unsustainable architecture that benefits the few and deprives the many, especially future generations.

Our own country faces the same problems that our policies promote in Latin America. By assigning planning and allocation almost exclusively to market forces, we have unleashed a series of contradictions and problems with long-term impacts. New agricultural technology has led to record yields but significant problems in water and ground pollution, erosion, greater vulnerability of the food supply due to monocultures, oligopoly control, and market imbalances stemming from oversupply.

Outsourcing has resulted in the loss of U.S. jobs and downward pressure on labor rights and benefits. Fossil fuel dependence has dictated policies that are environmentally and politically dangerous, including increased drilling in fragile ecosystems, political alliances with non-democratic states, and aggressive actions to assure oil supplies from abroad. When the model is imposed on weaker foreign economies, such as Latin America, the risks are even greater.

Neither Leader nor Partner

In the course of the past five years, this ideologically driven U.S. foreign policy in Latin America has proved counterproductive. Public opinion polls show overwhelming disapproval of U.S. policies. Under the Bush administration, the highly ideological and self-referencing approach to U.S.-Latin American relations has severely undermined the U.S. position as a regional leader and even as a desirable partner.

But although President Bush, Secretary of State Rice, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, and U.S. trade negotiators were alarmed by the vehemence of anti-U.S. sentiment during their latest trips to the region, there are, as yet, few signs that the Bush administration is willing to alter its rigid postures about the policy paths to development and security.

Instead of taking to heart the criticisms of past policies—to a large degree foisted on Latin American nations by the U.S. government, U.S.-trained economists, and the international financial institutions including the IMF and World Bank—Washington has condemned the protests as a surge in “radical populism” that threatens to destabilize the entire region. In a return to Cold War logic, members of the administration have blamed foreign agents for leftward movements, especially Chavez, who was blamed for the rise of Evo Morales in Bolivia. Fears that the rejection of neoliberalism and conservatism will affect U.S. interests and erode its hegemonic control over hemispheric affairs have led Washington into petulant, defensive postures. Unfortunately, Washington has not recognized that this is an opportunity to shift course and aim to build more cooperative and forward-thinking relationships.

The immediate prognosis does not look good. There is reason to believe that without a change of course the current model of economic integration will face more and more frequent crises. Growth rates for 2005 are below 2004 with predictions for a further slowdown in 2006, and even Chile—the poster child for the neoliberal model—has a growing movement against the model and the inequities it has produced.

One of the major factors will be the fragile state of the U.S. economy itself. Confronted with unsustainable trade, a weakening dollar, and budget deficits, the U.S. economy will likely slow down and face some harsh readjustments in the years ahead. Among the probable impacts on Latin America will be shrinking market demand along with increased protectionist sentiment. Higher energy prices are already severely impacting the region, with the exception of the few energy-rich nations, notably Venezuela.

Today many popular movements and the new left-leaning governments in Latin America espouse social programs closer to FDR’s New Deal than to the “Washington Consensus.”

The Bush administration, however, shows no signs of altering its course. A Global Good Neighbor policy would interpret the growing rumblings in Latin America as a call to re-examine the current economic integration model and adopt greater flexibility.

If the U.S. government insists on imposing stringent terms of market access that displace local production, reduce government supports, strictly protect investments, and impose intellectual property rights that limit public health programs, it risks breaking the back of fragile economies by obstructing national development aimed at improving the quality of life for a long-suffering majority.

Likewise, a Global Good Neighbor approach to security policy reform would stress non-intervention, following the example of President Franklin Roosevelt when he launched his Good Neighbor policy by withdrawing U.S. troops from the Caribbean Basin countries. It includes a call to end military aid that not only responds to a new definition of the parameters of U.S. involvement but also recognizes that expanding military power beyond strictly defensive aims is most often a destabilizing and anti-democratic measure. Involving the military in domestic efforts unrelated to national defense—including anti-narcotics activities and immigrant smuggling—further raises fears of a return to military control and repression.

Like FDR’s decision to terminate three decades of Gunboat Diplomacy, the end of a U.S. military presence in the region is a radical step. However, it is the only way to establish the foundation for more cooperative, productive relations.

The U.S. government could also signal a commitment to being a better neighbor by taking concrete steps at home, specifically to refocus the U.S. military on homeland defense and end operations that task U.S. forces to involve themselves in campaigns against immigrant flows; drug production, use, and trafficking; and gang activity. These activities are best addressed by nonmilitary programs and policies. Washington should also use multilateral regional forums to encourage a process of demilitarization throughout the hemisphere and resolve disputes or pending threats.

As U.S. policymakers attempt to improve U.S.-Latin American relations, they must find new ways to constructively address the political trends mentioned above, be willing to abandon or significantly modify the failed policies of the past, as well as seek joint solutions with their regional counterparts to redress the deepening economic and social polarization in Latin American and Caribbean countries.

IV. Toward a Global Good Neighbor Ethic in Latin America

There is a precedent for stopping a strongly imperialist and militarist foreign policy. The Good Neighbor Policy of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt turned around a nation fed up with three decades of Gunboat Diplomacy, military occupations, and racism. In his inaugural address in 1934, FDR called for an entirely new approach to international relations—instead of imperialism and arrogance, respect and good neighbor ethics. (See “The Good Neighbor Policy—A History to Make Us Proud” online at <http://ggn.irc-online.org/ggncontent/99>).

The Good Neighbor policy contained cultural, diplomatic, and economic initiatives. It quickly led to dramatically improved U.S.-Latin American relations in the pre-war period.

Today we are again faced with the choice of enforcing hegemony or promoting mutual respect and cooperation. The combination of the hemisphere’s greater independence, the exhaustion of current models, and limits to U.S. military capacity all point to the need for a sharp shift in U.S. foreign policy direction.

By using FDR’s good neighbor model as an animating policy vision (not a blueprint), it is conceivable to develop a global good neighbor ethic in relations with our hemispheric partners that would reverse the rapidly deteriorating relations between the United States and its southern neighbors.

Current U.S. foreign policy seeks to strengthen U.S. hegemony and shape regional economies and governments around U.S. ideological, economic, and political interests. It insists on isolating nations that question hegemony and browbeating others into obedience will neither serve U.S. national interests and security nor improve the prospects for sustainable political and economic development in Latin America and the Caribbean. To the contrary, these policy approaches could lead to dangerous confrontations that do nothing to benefit Latin American or U.S. populations.

The rise to power of center-left political currents and the emergence of new social movements raise many questions and uncertainties that go beyond the scope of this paper. Clearly, though, this trend has placed equity and other social demands back on the hemispheric agenda.

If Latin America and the Caribbean are to have a brighter future, it must be one that is self-determined and responds to the interests of the poor majority. All nations deserve the right and the room to define national policies in the best interests of their people. Exercising these rights—as is happening increasingly in the region—is the sign of political health and can lead to the end of many of the structural obstacles that have impeded the region’s political and economic development.

In this context, Washington needs to chart a new approach to hemispheric relations that serves U.S. national interests and national security, and that does not antagonize, destabilize, or debilitate our closest neighbors. To be successful, such a new approach to national interests and national security must not ignore the common-sense notion that the entire community benefits when all neighbors respect one another.

The first principle of the GGN reads: “The first step toward being a good neighbor is to stop being a bad neighbor.”

Nowhere has that been as obvious as in Latin America, where the “bad neighbor” reputation of the United States is historically proven and is growing in contemporary times. The dirty wars in Central America, the involvement in overthrowing elected leaders, a long history of support for repressive governments—people remember these acts and regaining trust will be a difficult road.

To change course, the United States must, as FDR did, acknowledge the need to reject bad neighbor policies of diplomatic and military intervention, and non-negotiable terms of economic integration. To stop being a bad neighbor doesn’t mean to discard concerns about U.S. national interests and security but to become convinced that respect, cooperation, and more leadership with an eye to collective well-being are

more effective in serving those ends.

Instead of using our political stability and economic power to help the region move forward, more often than not our influence and interventions have retarded economic and political development. Responsible leadership and participation require a basic respect for the self-determination of all nations.

While our government or we as a people will always have differences with the policies and rhetoric of some other governments, we should not resort to our superior power to reprove or change those governments. Neighborhoods work best when rules are enforced not by vigilante action but by collective processes. In other words, U.S. unilateral action, either overt or covert, against neighbors we disapprove of contributes to a breakdown of the community and ultimately does not advance U.S. national interest and security.

The U.S. government should encourage and support reforms in Latin American nations that aim to spur broad development, protect the environment, protect human rights, create a generous social safety net, and reduce the widening gap in income distribution.

It should do the same thing at home. The U.S. could make a good start in this regard by respecting labor rights of U.S. workers, returning to a more progressive tax structure, shutting down torture cells, and clamping down on business-government corruption.

Recommended first steps toward better cooperation and away from U.S. domination in the hemisphere would be to stop treating the Organization of American States as an instrument of U.S. policy, end the embargo of Cuba, and encourage common solutions to common problems-including the illegal drug and immigration crises.

Good neighbor initiatives would include an offer to renegotiate NAFTA, CAFTA, and its bilateral trade agreements, a real commitment to meet millennium development goals through previously agreed levels of economic aid, and a public shift away from its insistence that neoliberal policy reform is a requisite for receiving bilateral and multilateral development aid. U.S. "democratization" aid to such countries as Nicaragua, Haiti, Cuba, and Venezuela has proved time and again to distort political transitions rather than helping to consolidate or advance democracy, and should therefore be terminated as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy.

Us and Them

As more governments and political leaders in Latin America and the Caribbean assert their differences with U.S. foreign policy and in doing so assert their determination to follow their own political paths, it's time for the United States to reconsider its hegemonic habits. Unfortunately, the Bush administration has reacted to political changes in the hemisphere with the same "us vs. them" policies that have been so disastrous elsewhere on the international stage.

The Bush administration can either accept Latin America's bid for greater policy independence or attempt to divide the continent into simplistic categories of "unconditional allies" that it will favor and "dangerous foes" that it will seek to undermine. And not just the economic costs. The policy of "with us or against us" exacerbates intra-regional tensions as well. Attempts to coerce adoption of U.S. trade and security policies have created a wave of resentment and anti-U.S. sentiment throughout the region.

A new foreign policy would be one that recognizes differences but does not view them as political or cultural divides. In this respect, we would do well to remember FDR's formulation of his administration's new foreign policy. "I would dedicate this nation," he said, "to the policy of the good neighbor-the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and because he does so, respects the rights of others."

In our hemispheric foreign policy, we must remember that the United States of America does not include all of the Americas.

But as an American nation we have a special responsibility and a special national interest in ensuring that in our regional partnerships and in our leadership we foster a mutual respect that results in mutual benefits.

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