

A LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE





© creative commons



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

The 7th Summit of the Americas – heralded as a historic event



Birgit Lamm

Regional Director for Latin America

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom

The 7th Summit of the Americas was held in Panama City on 10-11 April 2015. The central topic addressed by the triennial summit was “Prosperity with Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas”. However, the official theme attracted little attention beyond the walls of the conference centre where the Summit was held. Media interest was almost exclusively centred on the historic meeting between US President Barack Obama and Cuban leader Raúl Castro. The announcement by the United States in December 2014 that it intended to restore diplomatic relations with Cuba was a historic development that marked a radical shift in the policy pursued by the US since the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and raised huge expectations around the world. In this respect, the 7th Summit of the Americas certainly was a historic event, since it was the first time that all the region’s Heads of State had attended (with the exception of Chile’s President Bachelet who could not be present due to the devastating flooding in her country). Representatives of the Cuban government had not been invited to previous summits because their government failed to comply with the OAS democracy clause.

This issue has always divided opinion and caused a certain amount of unease among the Latin American representatives – and not only among the politicians and Heads of State that share a similar ideology to Cuba. Cuba has never been a clear-cut case. On the one hand, it has acted as a symbol of opposition to the hegemony and “imperialism” of the United States, a role that has enjoyed the support of many Latin Americans, irrespective of their own government’s political persuasion. On the other hand, the island’s socialist regime and the massive backing it has provided for similar ideologies in certain Latin American countries has caused some resentment among the region’s non-socialist governments. Despite these qualms, when the 2nd CELAC summit was held in Havana in January 2014, even Chile’s conservative president Sebastián Piñera and Mexico’s PRI party president Enrique Peña Nieto allowed themselves to be photographed alongside Fidel Castro. This in itself gave a clear indication that there is a widespread consensus in favour of Cuba taking part in this type of meeting, despite the fact that it is not a democracy. This is why the United States’ announcement that it intended to restore diplomatic relations with Cuba was welcomed with some relief in the region. At last, this contentious issue that has dominated the political debate in the Americas for decades will no longer cloud the important relationship between Canada and the US and their southern neighbours.

A HISTORIC MEETING ANNOUNCED



A HISTORIC MEETING ANNOUNCED

The news was also enthusiastically received in Europe. The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, had already visited Havana in March 2015 in order to formally resume the political dialogue with Cuba. The Cold War, and in particular the division of Germany prior to 1990, have led to the widespread belief in Europe that dialogue and inclusion are a preferable and more efficient means of improving the multilateral political environment than ostracising a particular government. Europe's history demonstrates that, in general, external pressure on a country is unlikely to make it change its political course and will if anything strengthen support for that country's government in the face of a common enemy.

In a repeat of what has happened at previous summits, the participants once again regrettably failed to adopt a final declaration on the central theme of "Prosperity with Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas".

Nonetheless, the thaw in US-Cuban relations is set to change the course of the multilateral political dialogue in the Americas and will probably allow more attention to be focused on some of the most important common challenges facing the continent, such as weak institutions, endemic corruption and economic development.

The articles in this collection provide the reader with a wide range of sometimes contradictory viewpoints from different countries. The Liberal Network for Latin America (RELIAL) hopes that the selection of ideas presented here will encourage readers to reflect on recent events and form their own opinions about their significance.





The historic Summit of the Americas once again highlights the ideological divide within Latin America

Agustín Etchebarne

Fundación Libertad y Progreso (Freedom and Progress Foundation)

<http://www.libertadyprogresonline.org/>

There is a well-known anecdote that encapsulates Ronald Reagan's thinking on international affairs. Before he took office as president, he attended a lengthy meeting with his team of foreign policy advisors. Reagan appeared bored, or perhaps a little confused. In any event, after listening for quite some time, he summed up the meeting as follows: "In other words, our country's policy is to appease our enemies and criticise our friends ... I am going to do the exact opposite". Once he became president, he branded the Soviet Union the "Evil Empire", ramped up the arms race and brought huge pressure to bear on the Soviet regime. In doing so, he helped to accelerate the demise of the Soviet bloc and to liberate 20 republics.


With Cuba, however, it has not been possible to achieve the same results. In the words of President Obama: "After 50 years, it was time for us to try something new". Obama admitted that the embargo had failed and, at a single stroke, changed the policy that the United States had been pursuing towards Cuba for the past 50 years. The problem is that he did this without asking for anything in return. We must not forget that, after 56 years, what really needs to change is the repressive and dictatorial Castro regime that continues to violate human rights to this day, making a mockery of its claim to be a "democratic republic". In March this year alone, more than 600 new political arrests were reported on the island. Let us not forget, the Castros have been in power since 1959.

The number two problem facing our continent is Nicolás Maduro's Chavista regime in Venezuela, which throws its opponents in jail and sanctions the kidnapping, torture and murder of student leaders, among a litany of other human rights abuses. At the same time, the country's economy is collapsing, with the highest inflation rate on the planet accompanied by a deep recession and a series of severe shortages.

Now that Obama has decided that the United States is to adopt a non-confrontational stance towards Cuba, the spotlight has shifted onto the leaders of Latin America. The onus is now on them to bring about change in our continent's oppressive regimes, even though the US is keeping up the pressure on Venezuela, having issued an executive order declaring the country a threat to its national security.

Unfortunately, Latin America is deeply divided on this issue. The presidents of Ecuador, Argentina, Bolivia and Nicaragua have elected to maintain a confrontational stance towards the United States whilst at the same time choosing to ignore the human rights violations perpetrated by Cuba and Venezuela. In her speech to the Summit of the Americas, Cristina Kirchner praised Maduro and was trenchant in her criticism of Obama, who was so upset by her words that he left the room. Evo Morales also slammed Washington and called for Cuba and Venezuela not to be abandoned. Rafael Correa echoed the arguments of the 21st-century socialists, once more condemning US interference in Latin America and avoiding any mention of Venezuela's human rights abuses.

“
As usual, the Pacific Alliance countries are focused on continuing to expand trade among themselves while maintaining a pragmatic relationship with the US.



As usual, the Pacific Alliance countries are focused on continuing to expand trade among themselves while maintaining a pragmatic relationship with the US. Mexico remains a committed member of NAFTA and its President, Enrique Peña Nieto, highlighted the rapprochement between the United States and Cuba in his speech to the Summit. Although Chile's President Bachelet was unable to attend owing to the devastating flooding in her country, her Minister of Foreign Affairs welcomed the "beginning of the end of the cold war" with Cuba. This sentiment was echoed by President Santos of Colombia and President Ollanta Humala of Peru, who furthermore welcomed the fact that all of the countries of the Americas were finally present at the Summit.

However, perhaps the most significant development – and one that might tip the scales in Latin America towards a focus on free trade – was when Brazil's Dilma Rousseff distanced herself from the Bolivarian Axis and called on Venezuela to free all the incarcerated opponents of the regime and put an end to the violence on the streets. "We do not believe that the best way of dealing with the opposition is to imprison them at will", she said. Rousseff also defended Brazil's austerity measures and made it clear that she will have to seek international support if local support diminishes. Rousseff has also arranged to meet President Obama in Washington in order to promote bilateral trade between their two countries, which was worth USD 72 billion last year.

Uruguay's moderate President Tabaré Vázquez called on Venezuela to settle its disputes through dialogue, but spoke out against the excesses of the United States. The Paraguayan President Horacio Cartés also adopted a very moderate stance, concentrating on seeking investment to sustain the growth that has been such a prominent feature of his country in recent years.

Looking ahead, it is likely that the result of the elections in Argentina will be key to changing the balance within Mercosur. It seems probable that if Mauricio Macri wins October's elections, the next Argentinian government will be much more inclined to support Brazil and Mercosur in working towards a free trade agreement with Europe. This would constitute a significant step towards curtailing the protectionist tendency within Mercosur and would open up the possibility of boosting free trade throughout the continent.

“

However, perhaps the most significant development – and one that might tip the scales in Latin America towards a focus on free trade – was when Brazil's Dilma Rousseff distanced herself from the Bolivarian Axis and called on Venezuela to free all the incarcerated opponents of the regime and put an end to the violence on the streets.

Dilma goes to the Summit. Meanwhile, back in Brazil...

Ricardo Gomes

Instituto de Estudos Empresariais

<http://www.iee.com.br/>

Porto Alegre

The Summit of the Americas in Panama could not have come at a better time for Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff. It was the perfect opportunity for her to get away from her own country where – once again – hundreds of thousands of people had taken to the streets to demonstrate against her government. The protests brought together two million people on 15 March and around 800,000 on 12 April in more than 400 towns and cities across Brazil. However, these domestic troubles failed to bring about any change in the positions supported by Rousseff at the Summit. It was all business as usual as far as Brazil was concerned, with the only real interest being provided by the rejuvenated relationship between Cuba and the United States (this was welcomed by Dilma, who used the opportunity to call for an end to the North American embargo).


Once again, Dilma used a meeting of Heads of State as a platform to trumpet the economic growth achieved by Brazil over the past decade, together with the social programmes rolled out by the Workers' Party during the Lula and Dilma administrations (she neglected to mention that the Brazilian economy has not grown for the last two years). She admitted that fiscal austerity measures will be required to reduce the government deficit, but she reiterated her claim that the international environment is to blame for the Brazilian government's problems.

Rousseff did not deem the serious crisis in Venezuela to be worthy of mention and restricted herself to condemning the sanctions imposed on Nicolás Maduro's government. In her speech, she argued that the way to promote growth and social welfare is through social justice and opposing the concentration of income in the hands of the few. According to the President, this should be done through social policies administered by the State.

Dilma's speech was, quite frankly, embarrassing. Listening to her, someone who hasn't been to Brazil might almost imagine that we are now a member of the First World and that Lula and Dilma have succeeded in bringing "development" to our country. The reality is very different. The wealth transfer programmes imposed by Lula (the famous Bolsa Familia programme) have proved to be unsustainable. The government is no longer able to afford them. Two weeks ago, the front pages of Brazil's major newspapers carried headlines revealing that the government had failed to transfer the funds to pay for these welfare benefits to the state-owned Caixa Federal bank. In other words, it was the bank that ended up funding this government policy, allowing the government to avoid declaring its cost in its accounts (so that it could make it look like it had reduced the budget deficit). Proceedings have been started before the Audit Court that could lead to the President's impeachment.

Moreover, the need for austerity measures is not due to the global economic climate as Rousseff claims. Government spending has grown faster than both government revenue and GDP. While in 2003, current expenditure stood at 15.1% of GDP, by 2013 it had risen to 18.8%. In 2014, the nominal public sector deficit reached almost 85 billion dollars. Shockingly bad management has been exacerbated by corruption,

“
Dilma's speech was, quite frankly, embarrassing. Listening to her, someone who hasn't been to Brazil might almost imagine that we are now a member of the First World and that Lula and Dilma have succeeded in bringing “development” to our country. The reality is very different



causing the cost of all government investments to spiral. For instance, the cost of building Petrobras' Abreu e Lima refinery alone soared from an original budget of \$2.4 billion to a final figure of \$18 billion. In other words, the austerity measures are needed because of domestic problems within Brazil connected with the growth of the State.

Last year – which was an election year – all government-controlled prices were artificially lowered in order to give people a false impression of prosperity. The energy, fuel, water and road maintenance companies are all in serious financial difficulty and have stopped investing. There are now clear signs that the infrastructure which depends on those government-controlled prices is deteriorating, while the prices themselves have started to go up in order to prevent the utility companies from going bust.

On top of all this, there are growing claims of corruption implicating people close to the President. The treasurer of the Workers' Party has been arrested for his involvement in the Petrobras scandal. The state-run oil company admits that corruption has cost it \$6 billion. This figure equates to 3% of all the contracts signed by the company, since this was the value of the kickbacks paid to the politicians who approved the contracts.

After 12 years of record approval ratings, the Workers' Party government is now facing serious problems. Although they have tried to blame the “global crisis”, these problems are in fact clearly caused by domestic factors: mismanagement, corruption, price interventions and an overblown State. Rousseff now finds herself confronted with strong opposition in the National Congress and particularly on the streets. So it was the perfect moment for the President to travel to Panama in order to talk about US-Cuba relations and express her support for her good friend Nicolás Maduro. But the problems will still all be there when she gets back, waiting for genuine solutions. And these are problems that will not be solved by speeches alone.

“ *Last year – which was an election year – all government-controlled prices were artificially lowered in order to give people a false impression of prosperity. The energy, fuel, water and road maintenance companies are all in serious financial difficulty and have stopped investing.*



From Cartagena to Panama: A quantum leap in inter-American relations?

Andrés Molano Rojas

Instituto de Ciencia Política “Hernán Echavarría Olózaga”

<http://www.icpcolombia.org/>

Bogotá

The 6th Summit of the Americas “Connecting the Americas: Partners for Prosperity”, which was held in Cartagena de Indias in 2012, ended up leaving a bittersweet taste in the mouth. Host nation Colombia’s lofty ambitions for a highly technical summit revolving around five key themes (the physical integration of the Americas, access to and use of technology, measures to prevent and respond to natural disasters, security and the reduction of poverty and inequality) were dashed when proceedings ended up being dominated by three issues that, ironically, did not even strictly form part of the official agenda: Cuba’s participation in the Summit, the need for a new approach to tackling the drugs problem and Argentina’s claim to the Falklands/Malvinas. As at the previous Summit in Trinidad and Tobago, there was no final declaration, since the different delegations were unable to arrive at the necessary consensus. Some Heads of State failed to attend in protest at Cuba’s absence, while others left the meeting early.

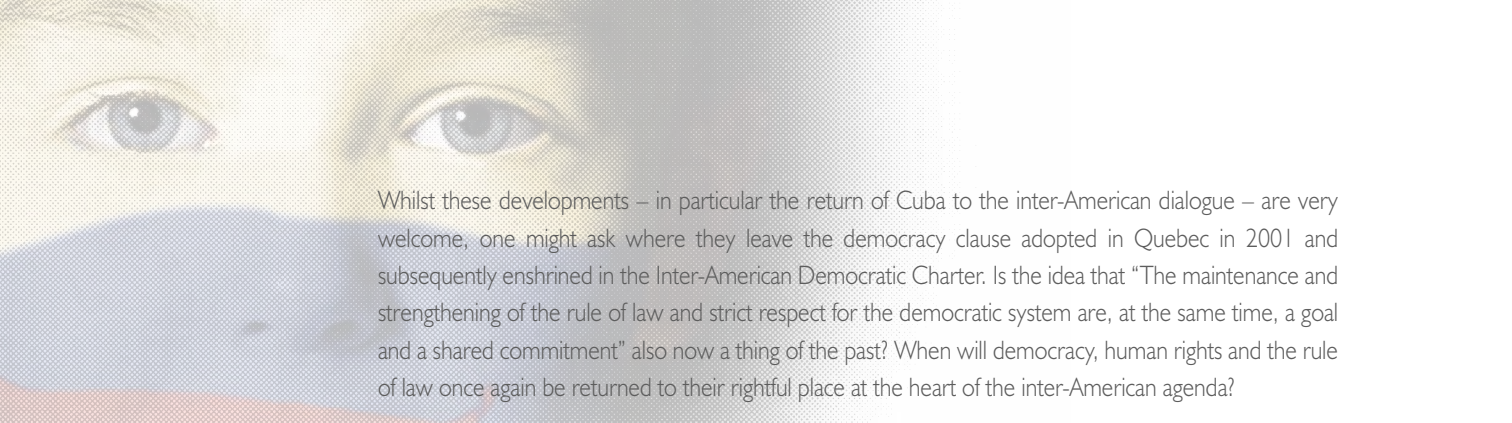
The picture was very different at the 7th Summit of the Americas which has just been held in Panama City. This was not only due to the fact that all the region’s leaders – with the sole exception of Chilean President Michelle Bachelet – attended the meeting (and stayed for its duration). It was also because the turnaround in bilateral relations between Washington and Havana that was announced by the two governments in December 2014, having been brokered by Canada and Pope Francis, meant that what would have been completely unthinkable in Cartagena was now suddenly possible – the return of Cuba to the inter-American stage after an absence of half a century. This served to make the event a historic occasion, even though the participants once again failed to agree on a final declaration, something that appears to be becoming a tacit convention. In addition, the United States’ bold diplomatic manoeuvre of sending Thomas Shannon (an adviser to Secretary of State John Kerry and a veteran of inter-American diplomacy) to Venezuela on the eve of the Summit ensured that the Panama meeting was not dominated by tensions between the two countries.

The agenda beyond the agenda: liberal concerns about the future of democracy

The central theme chosen for the Panama Summit was “Prosperity with Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas”. Once more, however, the summit will be remembered less for the specific content of its official agenda than for events on the sidelines and in particular the presence of Cuba. These events included the magnanimous terms in which Raúl Castro spoke of President Obama and the explicit avowal by the United States that the days of the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary that fuelled US interventionism in Latin America are now a thing of the past.

Both of these pronouncements go a long way towards neutralising the discourse of the “socialism of the 21st century”, lending a hollow ring to the traditional anti-“imperialist” diatribes of those leaders in the region who subscribe to this ideology. And all this at a time when the Venezuelan model is undergoing a profound crisis that is casting doubt not only on its aspirations to act as a regional leader and its ability to conduct diplomacy but also on its very legitimacy, as the authoritarian and absolutist nature of the Chavista regime becomes increasingly apparent.

“
As usual, the Pacific Alliance countries are focused on continuing to expand trade among themselves while maintaining a pragmatic relationship with the US.”



Whilst these developments – in particular the return of Cuba to the inter-American dialogue – are very welcome, one might ask where they leave the democracy clause adopted in Quebec in 2001 and subsequently enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Is the idea that “The maintenance and strengthening of the rule of law and strict respect for the democratic system are, at the same time, a goal and a shared commitment” also now a thing of the past? When will democracy, human rights and the rule of law once again be returned to their rightful place at the heart of the inter-American agenda?

Colombia at the Summit: promoting peace and education

Colombia had two goals for the Panama Summit and succeeded in achieving both of them. Firstly, President Juan Manuel Santos' government wished to win international endorsement for the negotiations with the Farc guerrillas currently taking place in Havana. Cuba's involvement in this process is not only as the venue but also as a guarantor, perhaps motivated by a desire to show the United States beyond any doubt that it no longer sponsors terrorism and is in fact helping to find a peaceful solution to the last armed conflict in the Western hemisphere. The explicit support obtained at the Summit is particularly important in terms of legitimising the process and protecting it against criticism both from the international community and from public opinion within Colombia. Furthermore, it sends a clear message to both sides which could add further impetus to the negotiations at a time when they are addressing crucial issues relating to the victims, transitional justice and the implementation of the agreements.

Secondly, Colombia put forward a proposal in Panama regarding the implementation of an “Inter-American Education System”. The aim is to create a common education area throughout the Americas in recognition of the fact that education is the best tool for combatting the inequity that perhaps constitutes one of the greatest impediments to growth, development and social change in Latin America. The system will be supported by the Inter-American Development Bank, the CAF (Development Bank of Latin America) and various other multilateral agencies. This is a very promising, albeit complex, initiative that could help to address the shortcomings in the field of education that still exist in many of the region's countries. Interestingly, it also ties in very neatly with the priority being attached by the member states of the Pacific Alliance (Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Chile) to their scholarship and student mobility programme, which is itself closely linked to their ambition to create a huge, highly skilled labour market and become a magnet for innovation and technology.

“ *The central theme chosen for the Panama Summit was “Prosperity with Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas”. Once more, however, the summit will be remembered less for the specific content of its official agenda than for events on the sidelines and in particular the presence of Cuba...* ”

Costa Rica at the 7th Summit of the Americas

Marielos Alfaro Murillo

Alejandro Barrantes Requeno

Instituto Desarrollo, Ambiente y Libertad

IDEAL Latinoamérica

San José

Costa Rica has achieved global recognition for its level of human development and as one of the continent's most consolidated democracies thanks to the speed with which it opened itself up to the global market, combined with government policies that promoted the emergence of a thriving middle class and fostered upward social mobility. This was accompanied by a variety of other factors, including significant reductions in social inequality, poverty, hardship, hunger, illiteracy, unemployment and disease and a healthy and skilled workforce. In view of the above, it is no surprise that, one day before the start of the 7th Summit of the Americas, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) agreed to open formal membership discussions with Costa Rica. This makes it the first Central American country to be invited to begin the membership process and only the fourth in Latin America, after Mexico (1994), Chile (2010) and Colombia (where negotiations are ongoing). Nonetheless, a number of major challenges will need to be addressed if membership is to be achieved. The 20th State of the Nation Report¹ charts a decline in the indicators between 1990 and 2013. For example, unemployment rose from 4.3% to 8.5% during this period, while the number of households living in poverty climbed from 131,981 to 285,467.

In addition, the country continues to suffer from a number of serious failings that are affecting its competitiveness. To name but a few examples, Costa Rica ranks just 83rd in the Doing Business 2014 index (which includes 189 countries)². It comes 51st overall in the Global Competitiveness Index (144 countries), 73rd for infrastructure, 93rd for macroeconomic stability, 92nd for financial market development and 120th for efficiency of government spending³. This is compounded by two key problems: the excessive rise in the fiscal deficit (to 6% of GDP) and the fact that international credit rating agencies such as Fitch, Moody's and Standard and Poors rate Costa Rica as a high investment risk, both because of the deficit alluded to above and because of the high level of government debt⁴.

Costa Rica is no longer a regional leader of the international agenda that it has traditionally promoted, based on foreign policy pillars such as the promotion of peace, democracy, human rights, freedom and solidarity.

This was all too evident at the Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) held in Costa Rica in January 2015. Far from using the opportunity to show leadership on the above issues, the Costa Rican President Luis Guillermo Solís gave a lacklustre performance, ending the summit several hours earlier than scheduled because of his failure to manage the controversy sparked by Nicaragua's President, Daniel Ortega.

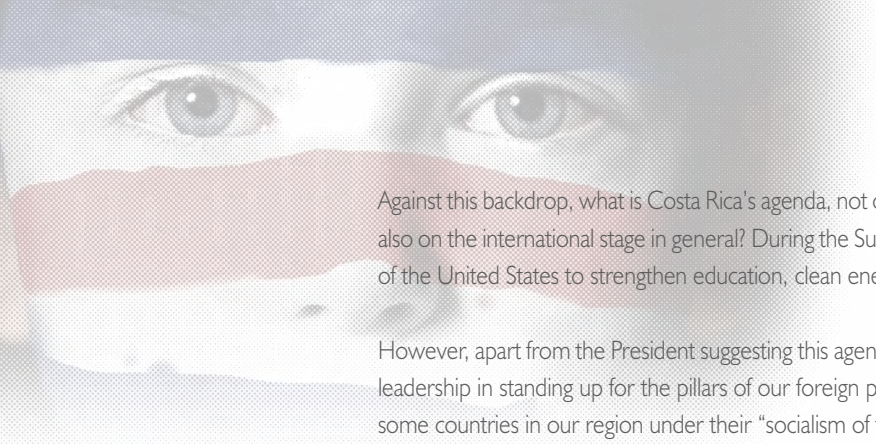
¹ Programa del Estado de la Nación. XX Informe del Estado de la Nación. CONARE: San José, Costa Rica 2014. Available online (in Spanish) at: <http://www.estadonacion.or.cr/20/#capitulos>. [Accessed 9 April 2015 at 18.38]

² World Bank. Doing Business rankings 2014. Available online (in Spanish) at: <http://espanol.doingbusiness.org/rankings>

³ World Economic Forum. The Global Competitiveness Report 2014. Available online at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2014-15.pdf

⁴ Secretaría Ejecutiva del Consejo Monetario Centroamericano. Informe de riesgo-país. I Trimestre, 2015. Available online (in Spanish) at: <http://www.secmca.org/INFORMES/07%20RiesgoPais/RiesgoPais.pdf>

“
Costa Rica is no longer a regional leader of the international agenda that it has traditionally promoted, based on foreign policy pillars such as the promotion of peace, democracy, human rights, freedom and solidarity.



Against this backdrop, what is Costa Rica's agenda, not only in terms of the 7th Summit of the Americas but also on the international stage in general? During the Summit, President Solís Rivera called on the President of the United States to strengthen education, clean energy, infrastructure and investment.

However, apart from the President suggesting this agenda to his US counterpart, Costa Rica failed to show leadership in standing up for the pillars of our foreign policy and speaking out against what is happening in some countries in our region under their “socialism of the 21st century” governments.

As a result, the Summit was ultimately a disappointment – just like at other international forums, the issues that matter to the region were not discussed in sufficient depth. From a Costa Rican perspective, the biggest letdown of all was that President Solís Rivera failed to advocate a clear and unequivocal declaration supporting democracy in Venezuela and condemning the Maduro government's assaults on freedom. This silence is both unacceptable and shameful for a country that played a leading role in bringing peace to Central America in the 1980s, resulting in one of our former Presidents being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Furthermore, Costa Rica is a transit country for drugs that are produced in the south of the continent and sold in the north. Accordingly, our agenda should stress the urgent need to shift the focus of the fight against drug trafficking away from repression and “war” towards a process of decriminalisation. However, it was very evident at the Summit that this topic does not feature on our current government's agenda, despite the risks that it poses to our country.

It is simply unacceptable that one of Latin America's oldest democracies and a country with one of the highest standards of living and levels of human development in the world should fail to speak out on such momentous issues. It is a long time since a Costa Rican delegation at a regional meeting made so slight an impression as it did on this occasion – there was a complete lack of personality, character and leadership and the delegation failed to do justice to our country's former reputation as an influential nation.

“ Costa Rica failed to show leadership in standing up for the pillars of our foreign policy and speaking out against what is happening in some countries in our region under their “socialism of the 21st century” governments

The United States perspective on the Summit of the Americas – unresolved challenges

Gonzalo Schwarz

Atlas Network

<https://www.atlasnetwork.org/>

Washington D.C

The recent Summit of the Americas was a historic occasion of global significance. After more than 50 years of stormy relations, a US president and his Cuban counterpart finally sat down together at the same meeting and formally resumed contact between the two countries.

According to some surveys, 59% of people in the United States now support the restoration of diplomatic relations with Cuba – similar surveys conducted in 2004 found just 39% in favour. Nevertheless, just because an event is historic does not automatically mean that it is also a good thing.

The United States remains fixated on the old models of socialism and communism rather than devoting its attention to the “democratic” authoritarianism that has emerged in the region in recent years. Cuba is still an authoritarian communist regime stuck in the Cold War and is currently in difficulty owing to the lack of economic aid from its closest ally, Venezuela. The factors that could bring down the region’s populist regimes include both external economic factors (e.g. the fall in the price of oil in Venezuela’s case) and internal institutional factors (e.g. corruption in the case of Brazil). Now that the Castro regime is in real trouble as a result of external economic factors, if the United States decides to lift trade restrictions or remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism without making this conditional on improvements in human rights and democracy, it is quite possible that it could exacerbate the problem rather than improving conditions for the Cuban people.

The US administration has not yet taken these steps – or rather, it has been unable to do so unilaterally without the support of Congress. But if it did, it would only prolong the existence of the Castro regime in the region. In the best-case scenario, it would result in a brand of Chinese-style capitalist authoritarianism where human rights violations persisted, while the next-best scenario would involve some form of “democratic” authoritarianism that would only serve to prolong the life of the Castro regime without putting a stop to its political and human rights abuses – just as is currently happening in Venezuela.

“
The United States remains fixated on the old models of socialism and communism rather than devoting its attention to the “democratic” authoritarianism that has emerged in the region in recent years.



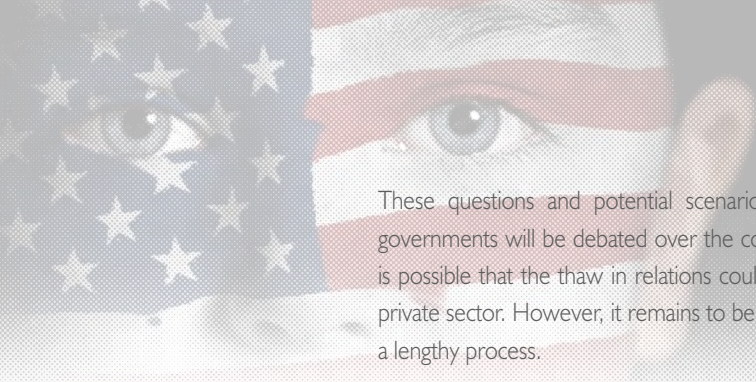
“ The delegations failed to agree a joint declaration on the Summit’s theme of “Prosperity with Equity” and the leaders instead used the plenary sessions to deliver speeches that simply highlighted the ideological differences that divide the continent’s governments





“
Media interest was almost exclusively centred on the historic meeting between US President Barack Obama and Cuban leader Raúl Castro.

“
The meeting should have provided Maduro with the perfect platform to list the achievements of the socialism of the 21st century in terms of economic growth, education, health, social security, law and order and science, as well as to highlight the advantages of socialism compared with the “neoliberal capitalism” that the Venezuelan leader so loves to criticise. However, given that Bolivarian Socialism has in fact achieved so little to shout about, he instead opted to directly confront Barack Obama.



These questions and potential scenarios for the resolution of the negotiations between the two governments will be debated over the coming months, now that the Summit of the Americas is over. It is possible that the thaw in relations could lead to the fall of the Castro regime by empowering Cuba's private sector. However, it remains to be seen whether this actually happens and even if it does it will be a lengthy process.


During the summit, there was another high-level meeting between President Obama and the Presidents or representatives of Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay, although this meeting did not receive the attention it deserved. The three countries in question have – albeit to different extents – all recently condemned the violations of democracy and human rights and institutional abuses in Venezuela. The Uruguayan government did so through its foreign minister, while the Costa Rican government fired its ambassador to Venezuela for expressing support for the Maduro regime. The agenda and content of the meeting were not disclosed. However, in view of the recent sanctions imposed on the Venezuelan government by the Obama administration, it would not be unreasonable to speculate that Washington is trying to garner support among the few governments in the region that have openly criticised Maduro's regime – governments that also happen to represent the countries with the strongest institutions in the region.

Unfortunately, the US is unlikely to take on much of a role in the region beyond its purely commercial interests. Trade with the rest of the Americas currently accounts for 38% of total US trade. However, a breakdown of this figure reveals that 30% comprises trade with Canada and Mexico (NAFTA), while just 8% is with the rest of Latin America. Apart from its efforts in the field of international diplomacy, during the last two years of the Obama administration the United States has shown little interest in influencing the situation within the region. Against this backdrop, the development that would add the most value for Latin America would be if its huge northern neighbour were to join free trade initiatives such as those being promoted by the Pacific Alliance countries or to sign bilateral trade agreements.

It will be the people of Latin America who have to solve their own regional problems. Many of these problems are economic in nature and received little attention during the discussions at the recent summit in Panama. Nevertheless, they will be extremely important over the next few years, when Latin America will be faced with a slowdown in economic growth as a result of less favourable external economic conditions than in the past decade. The region will need to work much harder over the coming years to cope with falling tax revenue but similar or even higher levels of pressure from different social groups and a significantly larger middle class. In the words of the Uruguayan economist Ernesto Talvi, the region will need to invest more in its ability to generate revenue rather than simply relying on revenue generated by favourable external conditions.

It will also be necessary for the region to adopt a harder line with regard to violations of human rights and democracy. This will require strong leadership, something that is in short supply among the current crop of governments and is, if anything, mostly coming from former leaders. But although their efforts are to be applauded, they currently lack the clout to have any real influence on policy in the region. Solving these issues will require more than the international diplomacy seen at events like the Summit of the Americas – it will call for an ongoing effort on behalf of whoever emerges as the regional leader prepared to take on these threats to individual freedom.

“
It will be the people of Latin America who have to solve their own regional problems. Many of these problems are economic in nature and received little attention during the discussions at the recent summit in Panama.



The Panama Summit: a symbol of Pan-American unity or disunity? Implications for Mexico and the region as a whole.

Valeria Marina Valle

Center for Research on North America (CISAN)
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)
<http://www.cisan.unam.mx/>
México D.F

The 7th Summit of the Americas was held in Panama on 10-11 April 2015. The choice of venue could hardly have been more appropriate – Panama is home to the Bridge of the Americas, a symbol of unity for the continent. This summit was different to previous ones. However, although it witnessed events and rapprochements that are of great significance to the region, it was not without tensions. Consequently, it is worth taking the time to analyse its implications, both for Pan-American relations in general and specifically for Mexico.


The Summit had eight key themes, all of which are important to the countries of the Americas: education, health, energy, the environment, migration, security, democratic governance and citizen participation. It is interesting to note that free trade does not figure as a priority among these eight themes, although it was included implicitly, especially in connection with the topic of energy. Mexico is a good example and President Obama congratulated his Mexican counterpart for implementing reforms that will serve to encourage private investment in this area. President Peña Nieto also highlighted the progress on trade liberalisation achieved among the four members of the Pacific Alliance.

The Summit was also significant because it was the first time that all 35 Pan-American states were present. Furthermore, it came at a symbolic and historic moment owing to the rapprochement between Cuba and the United States, following the announcement by both countries on 17 December 2014 of their intention to restore diplomatic relations. At this summit, for the very first time, the US Secretary of State John Kerry and the Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez both attended the ministerial meeting, while Obama and Castro shook hands at the meeting of Heads of State and Government.

Notwithstanding this historic encounter, however, the Summit also revealed a divide within the Americas between opponents and supporters of the United States – in other words, between the socialists and the liberals. The first camp included Argentina, Ecuador and above all Venezuela, a country that had recently had sanctions imposed on it by the United States. The second camp, meanwhile, included Panama and the members of the Pacific Alliance.

What did this summit mean for Mexico? In principle, it provided an opportunity to strengthen relations with some – but not all – of the other countries in Latin America. On this occasion, the Mexican President held bilateral meetings with his counterparts from Brazil, Colombia, Panama and Peru. As members of the Pacific Alliance, Mexico has started to develop close ties with Colombia and Peru, as well as with Chile. The absence of President Bachelet meant that it was not possible for all four Pacific Alliance leaders to meet at the Summit. However, the three leaders who were able to attend discussed issues relating to education, health, migration, energy and the environment. Education deserves a special mention, since the Pacific Alliance countries have increased the number of academic exchanges between them over the past two years. This is a very important aspect in terms of efforts to promote integration among the four

“
Notwithstanding this historic encounter, however, the Summit also revealed a divide within the Americas between opponents and supporters of the United States – in other words, between the socialists and the liberals.



member states. Every single person who takes part in an education programme in another country will become an ambassador for their own country, gain valuable experience, expand their network of contacts – some of whom they will stay in touch with for many years to come –, share and acquire knowledge and help to overcome prejudices. The sum of all these individual experiences will translate into closer ties between the four current members and potentially also Costa Rica and Panama, which have both applied for full membership, although it is not yet clear when they will actually become members. At the summit, the minister from Costa Rica stated that free trade with Colombia and Peru could be harmful to his country and that he will therefore be seeking to put off joining the organisation until circumstances are more propitious.

Mexico's contacts with this select band of countries from the region also deliver benefits at the level of multilateral meetings. For instance, Colombia and Mexico have worked closely together in leading the design of the post-2015 agenda, the process geared towards building a new international development cooperation architecture.

One other interesting aspect of this summit was the organisation of a Business Forum where President Peña Nieto met with his Brazilian and Panamanian counterparts. By developing ties with these countries, Mexico can gain access to alternative markets other than its main trading partner to the north, thereby reducing its huge dependence on trade with the United States. The President pointed out that Mexico has signed free trade agreements with 45 countries, equivalent to a market of more than 1.1 billion consumers. He also stressed his country's commitment to promoting business and assured his audience that Mexico is a safe bet for foreign investors, with its forward-thinking government policies and leadership role within the region.

While the rapprochement between Cuba and the United States will undoubtedly have repercussions for Mexico, these will only be felt over the longer term. President Peña Nieto stated that "México supports, recognises and is prepared to act as an ally in this process of dialogue and understanding", although he did not give any details about what this support will involve in practice. While it is still too early to know for sure what the impact of the changes will be, Mexico needs to prepare by analysing their potential implications. In the medium to long term, if the United States develops closer trading links with Cuba and starts investing there, it could result in US trade and investment being diverted away from Mexico. Moreover, the Mexican tourist industry also stands to lose out, since Cuba has the advantage of being regarded as a safer destination than Mexico. If Mexico continues to receive bad press because of organised crime, Cuba may benefit from a wave of American tourists curious to discover the island, together with businesses keen to invest and do business there. However, Cuba has yet to develop a sufficiently large hotel infrastructure, especially luxury hotels capable of attracting the US mass tourism market. Furthermore, the necessary investment in telecommunications and transport and road infrastructure is also something that will not happen overnight.

In conclusion, it can be said that this historic and symbolic summit dealt with a number of issues that are of great significance to the region. At the same time, however, differences emerged between the supporters and detractors of the United States. Cuba's rapprochement with its old "enemy" was the exception in this respect. Mexico must make the most of the new situation, strengthening its ties with like-minded countries while also being alert to the potential impacts of the new relationship between the United States and Cuba. In actual fact, the competition could provide Mexico with an opportunity to further improve its own infrastructure and tourist facilities. Moreover, Mexican businesses also stand to make money from investing in Cuba. Only time will tell whether the Bridge of the Americas was able to work some kind of magic and maintain unity rather than spreading disunity within the region.



The 7th Summit of the Americas: A historic occasion or an alarm bell for democracy?

Elisa Vásquez

Fundación Libertad

<http://www.fundacionlibertad.org.pa/html/>

Panama City

A number of issues remain shrouded in uncertainty following the conclusion of the 7th Summit of the Americas, held in Panama City on 10-11 April 2015.

Despite this, commentators and the media celebrated the Summit as a historic occasion, since Cuba's presence there meant that it was the first time that all 35 of the region's countries had attended.

The Summit's outcomes were achieved at three different levels: the official meeting of the Heads of State and Government, the open forums for civil society and the formal meetings with private business.

The first of these levels delivered few tangible results. The delegations failed to agree a joint declaration on the Summit's theme of "Prosperity with Equity" and the leaders instead used the plenary sessions to deliver speeches that simply highlighted the ideological differences that divide the continent's governments. On the other hand, the forums provided a platform for civil society actors from the different countries in the region to present concrete proposals to an international audience regarding alarming issues such as the lack of freedom and democracy in the continent.

The parallel business forums, meanwhile, delivered significant, tangible results, many of which are partly responsible for the benefits that Panama was able to achieve as the Summit's host.

Plenaries reveal a deep divide

At the 7th Summit, Cuba's chair was occupied by Raúl Castro. The Caribbean dictator was applauded for agreeing to attend the meeting and congratulated alongside US President Barack Obama for deciding to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries after a break of 53 years.

Castro was accorded special treatment, for example he was allowed to speak for longer than the other leaders during the plenary sessions. He promised that his speech would make up for the lost time of the six summits that Cuba had not attended and he certainly kept to his word. Argentina's Cristina Fernández described his participation in the event as a triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

Despite the cordial tenor of the discussions that Castro is currently engaging in with the US government, he supported Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's calls at the event for the United States to repeal the executive order imposing sanctions on seven government officials in Venezuela and describing the country as an unusual and extraordinary threat to US national security. This issue was a recurring theme in the meeting of the Heads of State and Government and, as we will see later, a source of disagreement among the continent's representatives.


The speeches given by the Presidents of Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay led the calls to support the Venezuelan government against the United States on this issue and were echoed by the majority of the other leaders who took the floor – 33 out of 35, according to Bolivia's Evo Morales. Those who touched upon the issue in their speeches argued that Venezuela does not constitute a threat to any of the continent's countries. However, the United States has made it quite clear on other occasions that the executive order is a sovereign decision concerning who is allowed to enter the US and do business there and that the measure will have no impact on people in Venezuela.

The commentator Pablo Gutiérrez, who is a member of the Fundación Libertad and the Panama Open Society Foundation, believes that most of the region's countries supported Nicolás Maduro's position on economic grounds, even though this is to misunderstand Obama's executive order. In their speeches, the leaders of the United States and Canada did not respond in detail to the repeated criticisms made by the Latin American representatives. However, they did emphasise their commitment to championing democracy and freedom of speech and the press and to opposing the "imperialism" of the past.

"When we speak out on something like human rights, it's not because we think we are perfect, but it is because

“

The 7th Summit provided Panama with an opportunity to show itself to the rest of the world. Just two days before the event, an ECLAC report concluded that Panama would experience the highest growth of any country in the region in 2015 (7%).



we think the ideal of not jailing people if they disagree with you is the right ideal", said Obama.

A broken consensus

After a string of meetings and plenary sessions, the Heads of State achieved a consensus on almost 90% of the issues, adopting 42 of the 48 final mandates included by the different delegations in the Summit's working document. In his statement to the media at the end of the meeting, Panama's President Juan Carlos Varela set out the points that had been agreed on by the participants. These are summarised below. The participants ratified the right to education without discrimination and equitable access to a quality education. They also agreed to create an Inter-American Education System to provide better coverage and help improve the quality of education. In addition, they supported efforts to ensure universal access to health as a basic human right.

In the field of energy, they reached agreement on actions that will guarantee access to energy from a range of sources that are environmentally friendly and economically affordable. With regard to climate change, they adopted mandates for the protection, conservation, restoration and correct stewardship of the environment.

Finally, recognising the relationship that exists between migration and development, the leaders reached agreement on actions to bolster cooperation among their States and to protect the human rights of migrants. In the discussion of the joint document, which was never officially made public, it was the United States and Venezuela that were unable to overcome their differences.

According to the Colombian news channel NTN24, the Venezuelan delegation called for the inclusion of three points in the Preamble demanding that the United States should repeal the executive order. While we know that these points were rejected by the United States and Canada, the exact stance taken by the other countries is not known.

Parallel events warn of threats to democracy

The civil society forums saw much criticism of the region's governments. At events run by organisations such as the Latin American Youth Network for Democracy, Parlamentarios por la Democracia, the Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba, the Fundación Libertad de Panamá and the Interamerican Institute for Democracy, participants expressed their opposition to the totalitarian regimes blighting Cuba and Venezuela, as well as sounding warnings about the lack of democracy and independent institutions in Ecuador, Bolivia and Nicaragua.

These events, that began on the Monday before the Summit, were attended by Cuban and Venezuelan dissidents who sought to draw attention to the human rights abuses suffered by people in their countries and urged the Heads of State taking part in the Summit to include these issues on their agenda. The President of the Fundación Libertad, Surse Pierpoint, argued that the civil society forums would have a greater impact than any other aspect of the Summit. "Not everything is rosy in our region and we need to learn the lessons of those countries where the socialism of the 21st century has had tragic consequences", he explained.

One of the most significant demands was made by 25 former Ibero-American presidents who called for the release of Venezuela's political prisoners and put forward proposals for the re-democratisation of its government institutions. However, none of these proposals were included for discussion in the Summit's agenda.

The eyes of an entire continent turn to Panama

The 7th Summit provided Panama with an opportunity to show itself to the rest of the world. Just two days before the event, an ECLAC report concluded that Panama would experience the highest growth of any country in the region in 2015 (7%). The Minister of Tourism, Jesús Sierra, estimated that 50,000 foreign visitors came to the country during the week of the Summit, while the President of the Panama Chamber of Tourism, Jaime Campuzano, predicted that the revenue generated by the event would be in excess of US\$100 million. In Pierpoint's opinion, the thousands of foreign visitors who came to Panama for the Summit would learn more about the country from actually being there than they ever could from even the glossiest marketing brochure: "A visit will always be better than reading about it in an article".

During the Summit, Presidents Obama and Varela attended the signing of a US\$6.6 billion deal for Copa Airlines to buy 61 Boeing aircraft in order to upgrade its fleet. Nevertheless, commentator Pablo Gutiérrez believes that the most important outcome of the Summit as far as Panama is concerned was the launch of Internet.org in the country, the Facebook-led initiative that brings free Internet access to poor communities. "This will provide people from poor backgrounds with more tools and opportunities to climb up the development ladder", he said.

Coming down from the summit

Paul Laurent

Instituto Político para la Libertad

<http://www.iplperu.org/>

Lima

How many Peruvians actually knew that their President had gone to Panama?

Admittedly, this isn't a completely fair question. In general, the vast majority of Peru's thirty million people have little or no interest in politics. Quite understandably, the presence of President Ollanta Humala at the 7th Summit of the Americas aroused little public interest in the wake of the recent vote of no confidence (the first time in fifty years that such a vote had been lost) that enabled the opposition to oust Prime Minister Ana Jara and the appointment of her replacement, the liberal Pedro Cateriano.

Of course, there were undoubtedly one or two "nerds" who did follow what was going on at the Summit, although not because of anything that Peru's President might have had to say. In fact, the real interest surrounded Cuba's return to the Organization of American States (OAS) and the crisis in Venezuela.

In view of the above, it is hardly surprising that the average Peruvian should prefer to devote their attention to "other matters", i.e. matters that are relevant to their everyday lives. As the man in the street is always saying, why do politicians always travel to far-off places when the problems they need to solve are right here?

Vox Populi, Vox Dei?


According to liberal principles, the sole purpose of governments is to look after the interests of their citizens. This principle forms part of the discourse that advocates limiting the role of government. As such, it can be argued that events such as the Summit act as a distraction to governments when they should be tirelessly focusing all of their energy on what is happening within their own jurisdiction. Nevertheless, if we look back at history it soon becomes clear that our governments, in their ivory towers, have concocted a romantic narrative about the importance of Pan-Americanism, despite the countless fiascos that this has resulted in.

In the field of medicine, schizophrenics hear voices that make them change their behaviour. In politics, on the other hand, our leaders listen to their own voices telling them to change everyone else's behaviour. This is precisely the case of the hackneyed rhetoric about the "brotherhood of the Americas" which, at least within the Latin American part of the region, has a proven track record of contempt for the rule of law. Indeed, the ambition to promote integration fits in very well with the region's long history of dictatorships.

Could this be why it is almost always the most divisive and controversial people who steal the show at these meetings? People like Cuba's Raúl Castro, the current leader of the world's longest-standing dictatorship. Or Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro who, with his classist diatribes, is continuing the destruction of the rule of law begun by his predecessor Hugo Chávez. All this made it particularly hard to swallow when President Humala used his speech to welcome Cuba's return to the OAS and claim that "with their vast armies of doctors and teachers they have selflessly cooperated in the development of our nations". Selflessly? It is common knowledge that, ever since the 1960s, those "vast armies of doctors and teachers" have been used to train and finance subversive movements in order to export the Cuban Revolution.

“

The official goals of the OAS (which was founded in 1948) and of the many international conferences that have been held in our region to strengthen civil rights and democracy have, for the most part, not been delivered.



The benefits of the unofficial approach

Informality is a typically Latin American trait and it was through informal channels that the Summit's most important outcome was achieved. On 9 April, two days before the Summit began, more than twenty former Heads of State (including Alejandro Toledo, but not Alan García) signed the Panama Declaration. The purpose of this document was to speak out against the crisis that is enveloping Venezuela due to the actions of a regime that is destroying not only its people's economy but also their basic rights and the rule of law itself.

Might this declaration have played a crucial role in preventing a consensus in favour of Maduro's proposal to condemn the United States for its decision to classify the Caracas regime as a threat to its national security?

Whatever the answer, the fact is that once again (just as in Cartagena in 2012) the 35 leaders who came together in Panama failed to reach an agreement. And even if they had, would it have done anything to change the fortunes of their countries? Lest we forget, the theme of the summit was "prosperity with equity". This is Humala's favourite subject – and indeed the reason for the poor growth of the Peruvian economy under his stewardship, which has put public spending before attracting new investment.

It is worth emphasising that the official goals of the OAS (which was founded in 1948) and of the many international conferences that have been held in our region to strengthen civil rights and democracy have, for the most part, not been delivered. This alone is enough to explain the public's scepticism about these meetings where it is hard to tell where the politics ends and delusions begin. Meanwhile, in the Pacific Alliance – a purely economic organisation – things could not be more different, and this is undoubtedly the key to its success.

Ultimately, the most significant aspect of the Summit was the presence of opponents of the Cuban dictatorship. The reason this was so important is that the Summit gave them the chance to tell people about their concerns for freedom on the island, even if the communist regime's henchmen tried to silence them with blows and insults. Sadly, not a single Head of State reacted. Nobody even batted an eyelid.

“ Ultimately, the most significant aspect of the Summit was the presence of opponents of the Cuban dictatorship. The reason this was so important is that the Summit gave them the chance to tell people about their concerns for freedom on the island, even if the communist regime's henchmen tried to silence them with blows and insults.

The Venezuelan government: anti-Americanism in action

Trino Márquez

Centro de Divulgación del Conocimiento Económico para la Libertad

<http://cedice.org.ve/>

Caracas

The background: Obama's decision

Two key events affecting Venezuela occurred in the run-up to the Panama Summit. The first was the decision of the US Congress in December 2014 to impose sanctions (refusal of visas and freezing of their US assets) on 56 Venezuelan officials accused by the US administration of committing human rights violations during that year's anti-regime protests. The second was the executive order signed by Barack Obama in March endorsing Congress's decision, declaring a "national emergency" with respect to the "unusual and extraordinary" threat posed by Venezuela to US national security and imposing sanctions on seven Venezuelan officials singled out as having committed the type of crimes in question.

The Maduro government responded to the US President's decision to issue the executive order by launching an all-out campaign to discredit what it referred to as the "Obama Decree", labelling it an imperialist intervention in Venezuela's internal affairs. Under the slogan "Obama, repeal the decree", the regime orchestrated a high-profile campaign through the powerful government-controlled information machine. The government claims to have collected more than ten million signatures opposing the decree in Venezuela, Cuba and Ecuador. In Venezuela, many of these signatures were obtained by blackmailing and threatening civil servants and people on State benefits.

All of this meant that the atmosphere in the run-up to the Summit was charged with tension between Washington and Caracas, causing a lot of concern, especially in the host nation. Panama brought all of its diplomatic skills to bear in order to prevent the meeting from being marred by clashes between the US and Venezuela. At the same time, there were huge expectations due to the fact that this would be the first occasion that Cuba had attended a Summit of the Americas.

Anti-Americanism: a mask for authoritarian regimes to hide behind

The Summit's central theme was "Prosperity with Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas". This topic is hugely relevant to the region, since although most of its countries have been able to achieve growth, there are still enormous socioeconomic disparities that act as an obstacle to sustainable development and stability.

The Venezuelan government did not contribute any official documents to the meeting and President Nicolás Maduro barely mentioned the Summit's theme in his rambling 40-minute speech (according to protocol, each speaker is entitled to a maximum of 8 minutes). The meeting should have provided Maduro with the perfect platform to list the achievements of the socialism of the 21st century with regard to economic growth, education, health, social security, law and order and science, as well as to highlight the advantages of socialism compared with the "neoliberal capitalism" that the Venezuelan leader so loves to criticise.

“
All of this meant that the atmosphere in the run-up to the Summit was charged with tension between Washington and Caracas, causing a lot of concern, especially in the host nation.



However, given that Bolivarian Socialism has in fact achieved so little to shout about, he instead opted to directly confront Barack Obama with four demands::

1. The United States should reform its policy towards the Venezuelan government and respect the country's sovereignty and the legitimacy of the Bolivarian Revolution.
2. He should repeal the "decree" and accept that Venezuela does not pose a threat to the United States.
3. He should dismantle the "machine of war" that the US Embassy in Venezuela has become.
4. He should put a stop to the "plotting" of Venezuelan and foreign groups in Miami, New York and other North American cities..

This anti-American rhetoric provided Maduro with the perfect pretext to dodge the fundamental accusations levelled at him by Obama and the US Congress: the ongoing human rights abuses in Venezuela, the repression of student protesters, the failure to uphold the rule of law and due process, the large number of political prisoners, the unwarranted arrest of leading opposition figures such as the mayor of Caracas, Antonio Ledezma, and the mayor of San Cristóbal, Daniel Ceballos, the jailing of a major political leader like Leopoldo López and the control of the media by the regime. None of these critical issues were resolved in Panama.

“
Nicolás Maduro managed to avoid any mention of the lack of prosperity and equity in Venezuela by hiding behind the mask of anti-imperialism.

Maduro's anti-American posturing also enabled him to avoid having to explain why socialism has – once again – failed in Venezuela. The country has the highest inflation rate in the world (forecast to top 100% in 2015) and is suffering the worst shortages of basic commodities that it has ever known. Food and healthcare are the two areas facing the greatest problems. Food prices are rising even faster than those of other products, while there simply aren't enough medical supplies to go round, be it for chronically ill patients or people with nothing more than a common cold. The images of long queues at supermarkets and chemists that have become so familiar around the world bear witness to this parlous state of affairs. This crisis is the result of fifteen years of socialism, of the dismantling of private industry, the persecution of private enterprise, stifling controls and the appropriation of privately-owned property. The statist regime has brought the country to its knees.

Nicolás Maduro managed to avoid any mention of the lack of prosperity and equity in Venezuela by hiding behind the mask of anti-imperialism. However, the 26 former Presidents and Heads of State – including Felipe González and José María Aznar – who signed the Panama Declaration, with its detailed exposé of the real situation in Venezuela, made sure that the smokescreen created by Maduro could not hide the truth.

No consensus in the end

The Venezuelan government's insistence that the Summit's final declaration should include a call for Barack Obama to repeal the "decree" ensured that there would be no consensus and that the participating countries would fail to adopt a joint declaration. As the host nation, Panama will draw up a summary of the event's conclusions for subsequent consideration.

The countries that adopted the most aggressive stance at the Summit were the ones that have abolished any limits on how often their leaders can be re-elected. They were the countries where the government controls the other institutions and restricts the freedom of the privately-owned media. In other words, they were the countries with the least democracy.

“ *The Liberal Network for Latin America is the region’s largest association of liberal organisations. It brings together political parties and think tanks committed to progress and development in their countries in order to disseminate and implement liberal principles under the banner of defending democracy, respecting human rights, upholding the rule of law and promoting the market economy – values shared by individuals who are responsible towards themselves and their society.*



City of Panamá

This publication is the property of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom and the Liberal Network for Latin America. The copyright to this work is owned by the authors and/or the respective original sources. The copying (using any media), reproduction or adaptation of this document's content is prohibited.

Edited by: Silvia Mercado, FNF – RELIAL Project Coordinator: silvia.mercado@fnst.org
Graphic Design: Carlos Durand: www.carlosdurand.net

**Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom
Liberal Network for Latin America RELIAL**

Cerrada de la Cerca N° 82. Col. San Ángel Inn
01060 - México D.F.
Tel. (+5255) 5550 1039 - Fax. (+5255) 5550 6223

<http://www.reliat.org>
<http://www.la.fnst.org>