

The OAS in the 1990s

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The role of the Organization of American States at the end of the Central American conflict, particularly in Nicaragua in 1989, showed the extent of its political visibility at the regional level. OAS Secretary General Baena Soares was part of the International Commission for Support and Verification (CIAV) of the negotiating process. As a result of the agreements signed by the Sandinistas at Costa del Sol in February 1989, he was given the task of monitoring and observing the Nicaraguan electoral process.

With observers in practically every province and district of the country, the OAS carried out this mission until April 25, 1990, when the new president took office. After the elections, the organization played an active role in the process of resettling the *contras* and reintegrating them into national life.

As a result of this experience, the OAS significantly increased its participation in the observation and supervision of elections in Paraguay, Haiti, Surinam, Chile and El Salvador.¹

In June 1990, in order to increase its functions in the electoral field, the

The OAS is involved in a huge range of activities, but I shall restrict myself to a brief description of the organization's involvement in the political aspects I consider to be of interest.

¹ See Jennifer McCoy, "Observing Elections in Latin America," *North-South* magazine, April-May 1992.

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OAS's General Assembly created the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, charged with "providing consultation to preserve or strengthen political institutions and electoral procedures" in those countries that request its assistance.²

The issue of representative democracy³

The main problem the organization has dealt with during this period has been guaranteeing the preservation of representative democracy. From a development perspective, the aim—at the request of U.S. administrations (and

² See OAS Resolution AG/RES 1063 (XX-0/90), "Unit for the Promotion of Democracy."

³ For reasons of space, I shall use the concept of "democracy" employed in OAS discussions—today one of the most manipulated terms in political and ideological debate. Its meaning and actual implementation in the Americas are very different from the superficial content it is given in the organization's discussions.

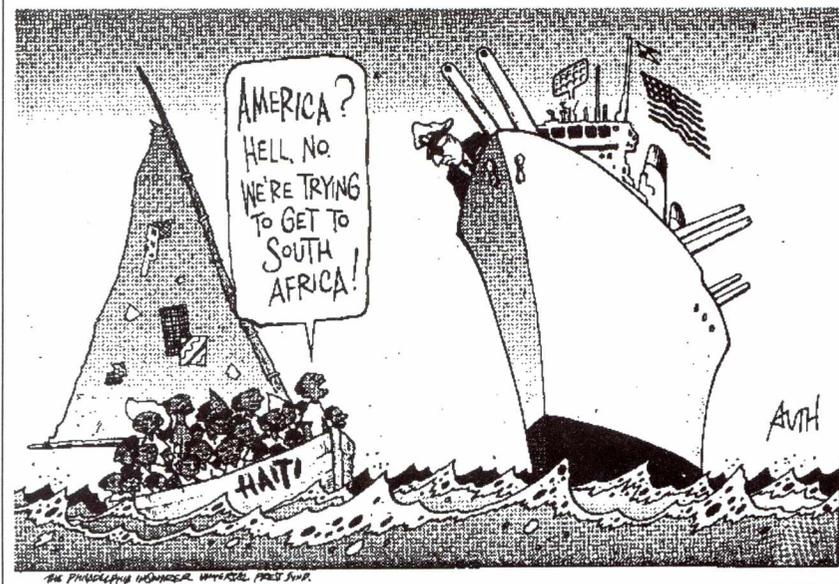
with the support of the majority of Latin American governments)⁴—is to create a supranational mechanism capable of dissuading and, where necessary, resisting changes in the status quo brought about by right-wing coups, or occasionally by left-wing processes.

The first problem in this regard arose with the 1989 Panama crisis. The 21st Foreign Ministers' Consultation Meeting, held on May 17 of that year, agreed to create an OAS mission to take charge of negotiations with the conflicting parties in Panama. The mission's five visits and two sessions of consultation did not produce the desired results. The United States, encouraged by the fall of the Berlin

⁴ Many Latin American politicians seek the creation of an international mechanism through the OAS that would act as a deterrent to possible military coups in their countries. Latin America's democratization process left military structures intact in many cases, and, in the case of Chile, even left the same generals in place.

As a result of the end of the Cold War, multilateral organizations have come to play a more active role in the international system. While the United Nations—regardless of opinions on its performance—has played a key role in major current crises (Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, Yugoslavia and North Korea), the Organization of American States has also shown signs of increasing revitalization.

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wall, ignored its commitments to the OAS and solved the problem itself.

The 82nd Airborne Division seized Noriega and took him to Miami, where a U.S. court sentenced him according to American law. The OAS Standing Council deplored the invasion, demanding the withdrawal of U.S. troops. Nothing more was done.

In view of the conflicts and scenarios posed by the case of Panama, and on the basis of its experience in observing elections, the OAS set about creating additional advance mechanisms to defend democracy. These mechanisms would on the one hand deter coups and, on the other, prevent a similar U.S. invasion from occurring under the pretext of restoring democracy.

However, the United States' relative increase in strength has influenced the region.⁵ It is worth

⁵ While the U.S. emerged from the Cold War economically weaker in relation to Europe and Japan, it increased its power vis à vis Latin America. This was due not only to its being the sole military and political superpower at the international level, but also to the fact that Latin America emerged from the '80s in a much weaker economic position.

mentioning the atmosphere of pro-democratic euphoria that swept the continent as a result of the wave of changes in the late '80s, the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe and the increased popularity of theories on limited sovereignty and democratic intervention. This was also the time when "neo-liberal," mostly pro-American governments came to power.

The starting point for this new trend was Resolution 1080 and the "Santiago Commitment to Democracy and Renovation of the Interamerican System" approved by the OAS General Assembly at a June 1991 meeting in Santiago, Chile.⁶

The resolution stated that the only system the organization accepts is representative democracy, rejecting the principle of ideological pluralism that, according to the 1985 Protocol, was a cornerstone of the OAS Charter. It also stated that if the democratic process were interrupted in any of the countries,

⁶ See AG/RES Resolution 1080, "Representative Democracy and the Santiago Commitment to Democracy and Renovation of the Interamerican System."

an *ad hoc* meeting of foreign ministers should be held within the following ten days to analyze the situation and take appropriate measures.

As a result of the coups in Haiti in September 1991, Peru in April 1992 and later the attempted coup in Guatemala, the OAS, in addition to implementing the Santiago decisions and showing its collective resolve in the face of these events, decided to strengthen its mechanisms even further.

Specific resolutions on the defense and strengthening of representative democracy were approved at the General Assemblies in Nassau, May 1992 and Managua, June 1993, with additional weight being given to the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy created in 1990.

In Nassau, it was agreed to revise the OAS Charter, a process that ended with the adoption of the Washington Protocol in December 1992. After a long discussion,⁷ with one vote against—Mexico's—the twice-reformulated Article 8 was adopted, stipulating the suspension of any member country whose government is overthrown by force.

After the General Assembly in Nassau in 1992, and increasingly so after the one held in Managua in 1993, there was a proliferation of OAS resolutions and actions on the subject of security, in connection with the preservation of democracy.

For example, as a result of Resolution 1181, adopted in 1992, it was agreed to carry out an in-depth study to determine the institutional links that ought to exist between the Interamerican Defense Council and the OAS. According to several

⁷ For an understanding of countries' different positions vis à vis the Washington Protocol, see "Report on the Special Commission on Charter Reforms," OAS Standing Council, October 16, 1992.

analysts, what is at stake is making the IDC's military apparatus available to the OAS's political structures for use in possible multilateral military operations in the western hemisphere.⁸

In addition, a Special Commission for Hemispheric Security was set up in Nassau to continue regional cooperation work on nuclear proliferation and weapons limitation, among other issues.

This Commission was mandated to continue its work at the General Assembly in Managua; a conference of experts on measures for fostering trust and security in the region was held in Buenos Aires under its auspices in March 1994.

In principle, security is one of the areas in which regional cooperation should be encouraged, particularly since the end of the Cold War. However, it is striking that this subject should be discussed in the context of a continual search for multilateral measures to guarantee the regional status quo. Moreover, it is part of a debate concerning the need to face the challenges of democracy through the use of force.

There have even been concrete proposals to create an inter-American military force to intervene in a range of situations that may arise.⁹ In the case of

Haiti, for example, the Clinton Administration publicly declared its intention to invade the island and was deterred only by its setback in Somalia.

Challenges and perspectives

The process of globalization has tended to generalize problems throughout the Americas. The Organization of American States is increasingly needed to meet the new challenges emerging in the sphere of economic cooperation—critical poverty, the fight against drug-trafficking, environmental problems and migration. In this respect, the OAS's current revival is positive.

However, the fact that the OAS has become virtually the only international organization which stipulates a particular form of government as a membership requirement and is currently creating a mechanism to deal with the collapse of this type of regime may have unwanted consequences.

It may lead to a situation in which representative democracy becomes an intrinsic feature of all the countries in the hemisphere, and the OAS's current measures become effective deterrents to possible changes from the right or left.

However, it is far more likely (as shown by the case of Haiti) that the internal complexities of each of the approximately thirty countries involved will go beyond the scope of the representative democratic pattern. In this case, the OAS's activity could gradually lead towards escalating confrontation, or even a military outcome as in the Dominican Republic in 1965.

At the same time, the OAS could gradually lose credibility if it proves incapable of carrying out its proposals. Perhaps the failure of Dante Caputo's mission in Haiti should be taken as a sign of things to come.

All this could take place, without even considering the fact that, as happened during the Cold War, imposing democracy from outside can lead to extremely counterproductive results, especially if force and foreign, albeit multilateral, intervention is used.

The short period following the Cold War has seen the establishment of precedents that, for good or for ill, have greatly surpassed Latin America's former achievements in its relation with the U.S. inside the OAS. Those achievements mainly involved the principles of non-intervention, sovereignty and ideological pluralism. It will be interesting to see whether the development of events in the '90s shows that these principles, negotiated over the course of many years, prove as obsolete as today's fashionable theories say they are, or whether they are in fact indispensable.

In projecting the outlook for the OAS, it is also worth asking whether the factors that have contributed to its current dynamism will still be present in the medium term. Is the "neo-liberal" model viable, can Latin American opposition forces achieve power by proposing alternative scenarios, and how will the Latin American military continue to react?

One should also pose the question whether the U.S. will continue its role as lone crusader in the fight to restore democracy if genuine processes of change emerge, leading to instability which could only be controlled by dictators or strong, Fujimori-style governments. It should be recalled that the U.S. obsession with democracy, a concept it has generally failed to observe during this century, extends to Latin America alone.

It is also worth examining prospects for the specifically Latin American process of integration and

⁸ See AG/RES 1181 (XXII-0/92), "Resolution on the Interamerican Defence Council." In addition, two Resolutions on Cooperation for Hemispheric Security were approved in Nassau (AG/RES 1180 and 11/79). Five resolutions on the subject of security were approved in Managua, concerning the IDC (AG/Res 1240), the Ban on Nuclear Arms (AG/RES 1239), Information on Military Spending (1238), the Meeting of Experts on Trust Measures (1237) and Security Cooperation (1236).

⁹ In his article "The Latin American Option," published in *Foreign Policy* magazine in 1992, Robert Pastor discussed the need to provide the OAS with a military arm. Pastor's name was seriously considered for the post of Under-Secretary for Latin America in the U.S. State Department.

The Fourth Ibero-American Summit: all quiet on the western front

The fourth annual meeting of the presidents and heads of state of 21 Ibero-American countries, held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia on June 14-15, raised few expectations. As on previous occasions, the leaders of the Ibero-American countries failed to establish concrete mechanisms of action for their initiatives, which are already beginning to show signs of wear.

The summit's aims and agenda, defined in 1991 during the first meeting in Guadalajara, are still the same: to foster political dialogue between participants, identify points of agreement, explore means for economic integration and trade, and gain a say in international affairs. The agenda focuses on three major themes: political affairs, economic and trade problems, and technical and cultural exchange programs.

In the midst of tight security, participants called for an acceleration of processes of trade and integration, alternatives for participation in the world economy, solutions to conditions of extreme poverty in the region, steps to combat drug trafficking and promote democratization. These subjects had been discussed, with greater or lesser emphasis, at previous meetings.

As usual, Cuba played a leading role at the meeting. Despite their severe economic problems, the Cubans arrived at this summit encouraged by the announcement that Canada had decided to break the economic blockade promoted by the United States, as well as the Mexican president's condemnation of the blockade a few days before the meeting.

Each summit also has the effect of mitigating criticism of Fidel Castro's regime, notwithstanding the presence of its habitual enemies —Argentina, Uruguay and Spain. The Cuban president proved that even his fashion statements are newsworthy, since for the first time ever he forewent his green fatigues, turning up at the summit in a loose-fitting white shirt. This prompted widespread speculation as to whether the change might herald other political changes on the island.

Castro was among those who received the most applause, even when he criticized the weakness of declarations in support of Cuba; as at previous summits, the support of many attendees did not translate into concrete actions. Likewise, the final summit document rejected the blockade without specifically mentioning it, couching all references to Cuba and the United States in diplomatic language.

In view of all this, Ibero-American leaders need to discover a formula for making these annual meetings productive, to prevent the next meeting, to be held in Argentina, from signalling the beginning of the end.

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agreement, as well as the nationalism of the region's ruling classes —particularly in the Southern Cone and Brazil, areas that are not as dependent on the United States and are more able to diversify their links with other international players.

Another topic that will inevitably be discussed is the Cuban problem. Cuba has always been a test case in hemispheric relations, since, in a contradictory way, it combines notions of Latin American independence and anti-Americanism with politico-ideological considerations constituting an alternative model.

There have been attempts, based on the criteria of non-intervention, respect for ideological plurality and the need to strengthen the organization further, to invite Cuba to join the OAS, from which it was expelled in the '60s.

So far, however, the policy of keeping Cuba out of the organization has prevailed, with the encouragement of the U.S., until such time as it carries out the internal changes needed to make it comply with the criteria set forth in the Santiago Declaration and consecrated by the Washington Protocol. Still, one should not

discount the possibility of further discussion of the Cuban case within the organization.

Analysts will also focus on the actual performance of the new Secretary General, César Gaviria. On the one hand he has supported a specifically Latin American approach, distancing himself from the U.S. approach on Cuba, for example. On the other hand he legitimized the U.S. military presence in Colombia and owes his new post to the maneuvering of U.S. diplomats and those of major Latin American countries. Will they ask for anything in return? ✕