

# GLOBAL AMERICANS

## Recommendations for U.S.-Latin America/ Caribbean Policy, 2016 Elections

*Conclusions of Global Americans Campaign Working Group*

### Executive Summary

This consensus paper, developed by a working group of 23 leading U.S. scholars of the region, lays out a series of nonpartisan proposals for a new administration to strengthen and leverage the U.S.'s relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. We believe Latin America and the Caribbean is a region where a small, focused effort can help build allies for other global issues, reap great rewards for our domestic, regional and global interests, and prevent disruptive crises from erupting south of the United States. In other words, in terms of U.S. priorities, it's a region where a little effort can go a long way.

But today, not just any effort or more of the same will do. It is time for a substantive reassessment and shift in our strategy and relations. This requires a sober, honest assessment of U.S. interests in the region and its tools to affect them. We believe that it is necessary to reframe U.S. policy discussions (as is often done in other regions) around a more basic premise of U.S. and regional interests, inter-state (and non-state) relations, and the U.S.'s power to achieve those. The first place to start is, rather than talking about building walls, framing the discussion around building bridges with like-minded governments in the region and with citizens and NGOs across the Americas.

This paper provides some background analysis on several of the topics and countries around which those bridges can be built. It concludes with a series of specific proposals for U.S. policy after 2017 that reflect both the new realities in the region and the opportunities and constraints of U.S. power regionally and internationally. **We argue that despite the many possibilities for collaboration and growth, one of the greatest challenges the region and the U.S. will face in the near future is the potential popular and economic fallout from declining economies and states that have failed to seriously improve accountability and the delivery of key social services such as education and health care.**

U.S. interests and strengths in the region remain strong. Below is a brief summary of some of the ways the next administration—Republican or Democrat—can further U.S. interests by taking advantage of its soft and hard power assets:

1. Create a positive economic pole within the region of deepened commercial and financial relations with U.S. markets by harmonizing existing trade agreements and strengthening bilateral commercial, taxation, and investment discussions and agreements;
2. Collaborate with friendly groups of nations such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico on targeted issues such as: supporting Caribbean economies on their energy needs post-Petro-Caribe; collaboratively promoting institution rebuilding and greater respect for political and civil rights in Cuba and Venezuela; assisting in the implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; sharing information to promote social inclusion in areas such as gender, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation;
3. Shore up regional and international norms to defend and promote human rights and democracy. This should include promoting—when applicable—independent, international commissions to finally clear up pending matters of human rights violations, such as the AMIA bombing in Argentina and the disappearances in Mexico, and strengthening regional commitments to defend representative democracy;
4. Engage other countries in the region to augment and assist in the U.S.’s package for Central America’s Northern Triangle, Alliance for Prosperity, to address crime, insecurity, violence, and the lack of economic opportunity in Central America;
5. Establish a rational, humane immigration system in the United States that both meets U.S. demands for labor and creates a pathway to citizenship for immigrants who are here illegally. This should include, as first steps, ending the deportations of children who are fleeing violence in Central America and allowing those who qualify under DACA and DAPA to remain in the United States;
6. Continue to press governments in the region, particularly recipients of U.S. anti-narcotics and security assistance, to abide by human rights standards and expand assistance to continue to professionalize police forces and civilian oversight of those forces; and
7. Work to lift the U.S. embargo on Cuba while also insisting that Cuba continue to provide opportunities for collaboration on a number of fronts, including human

rights, and encouraging other Latin American governments and international bodies to assist promoting human rights and the opening of political space on the island and in the country's much-needed economic reforms.

The impressive economic growth of the past 15 years brought dramatic gains in prosperity, including lifting 50 million people out of poverty into a fragile middle class and rising expectations and demands over the efficiency of the state and the integrity of public officials. But the economic boom is temporarily cooling, and many of those who were celebrated as joining the middle class are in a precarious position, with limited access to social services and formal jobs or job security. The region now faces a time of deteriorating economic expansion and public funds for social programs at the same time that governments face rising public demands and frustration.

U.S. partnership in working with governments in the region to address these issues will be key and will help shore up the U.S.'s role in the region as a partner, especially as other countries —many of which were often the target of misplaced fears or conspiracy mongering—are also confronting problems of their own and unable to provide the levels of assistance once counted on. The greatest challenge will be Venezuela.

This and many of the issues above will require cooperation with Latin American and Caribbean countries bilaterally or multilaterally (when possible). Unfortunately the proliferation of weak multilateral groups and the weakening of the regional Organization of the American States (OAS) make it difficult to address many of the most pressing issues of human rights and democratic governance through existing multilateral bodies. While the next administration should work to strengthen the OAS and be willing to assist new sub-regional organizations address regional needs, the most effective, flexible and accountable multi-state method to address many of the region's challenge will be through informal groups of countries, what has been termed "mini-lateralism."<sup>1</sup>

# Recommendations for U.S.-Latin America/ Caribbean Policy, 2016 Elections

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## I. Introduction: Pursuing U.S. Policy in a Changed Region

This consensus paper, developed by a working group of leading U.S. scholars of the region, lays out a series of nonpartisan proposals for a new administration to strengthen and leverage the U.S.'s relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. We believe Latin America and the Caribbean is a region where a small, focused effort can help build allies for other global issues, reap great rewards for our domestic, regional and global interests, and prevent disruptive crises from erupting south of the United States. In other words, in terms of U.S. priorities it's a region where a little effort can go a long way.

But today not just any effort or more of the same will do. Decades of democratic governance, robust economic growth (though now cooling with many countries entering recession) of the region from 1997 to 2013, the emergence of new multinational, regional forms of collaboration, and the increased economic and diplomatic presence of China and other extra-hemispheric actors mean that Latin America and the Caribbean is a region in flux. It is time now for a substantive reassessment and shift in our strategy and relations.

This requires a sober, honest assessment of U.S. interests in the region and its tools to affect them. All too often U.S. policy has drifted from a rigid, narrow ideological focus to indifference or lack of attention, each with different but damaging consequences for our relations and interests. The era of viewing Latin America as the U.S. backyard has ended, as has the U.S.'s power to directly, unilaterally affect policies and actions of governments to its south. That said, the U.S. retains multiple foreign policy tools—both soft and hard power—at its disposal that, if exercised consciously in a targeted way, can help build a more prosperous, more secure and stronger hemisphere and closer partnerships that will further U.S. interests in the region and globally.

We suggest building on America’s longstanding national priorities: democracy and economic prosperity. America’s national security interests are best served when we place democracy and economic growth at the heart of our strategic engagement with our Latin American and Caribbean neighbors. Further, we are confident that the mutual interest in strengthening democracy and economic prosperity shared by our neighbors is a strong foundation from which to build bilateral and multilateral partnerships on a variety of issues.

We begin this paper by outlining what we believe are the looming national interests of the U.S. in the region and the U.S.’s capacity to advance those. Too often U.S. policy interests and the implementation and discussion of U.S. policy have been boiled down to a handful of specific topics: anti-narcotics, trade, development, and immigration, among them. While important, we believe that it is necessary to reframe U.S. policy discussions (as is often done in other regions) around a more basic premise of U.S. and regional interests, inter-state (and non-state) relations, and the U.S.’s power to achieve those.

This paper provides some background analysis on several of those topics. It then concludes with a series of specific proposals for U.S. policy after 2017 that reflect both the new realities in the region and the opportunities and constraints of U.S. power regionally and internationally.

**Interests** Geographic proximity, close historical, cultural and economic ties, and personal and familial relations mean that the U.S. has very powerful interests and multiple sources of influence in the region. However, the history of how the U.S. has acted in the region must also be taken into account. Below is a list of what we believe to be the outstanding, enduring interests of the United States in the Western Hemisphere.

1. *The Economy* The oft-cited statistic among those who follow Latin America is that 24% of U.S. exports flow to its southern regional partners. If you include Canada that increases the hemisphere’s share to 40% of U.S. exports. In fact, U.S. trade to the region is greater than to China and the European Union combined. A large part of this stems from U.S. free trade agreements with Canada and Mexico (NAFTA), Central America and the Dominican Republic (CAFTA-DR), Chile, Peru, Colombia, and Panama. These exports mean U.S. jobs. In addition, the U.S. recently signed—but has yet to approve—a historic pan-regional trade agreement with countries along the Pacific Rim, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that will include in our hemisphere the U.S. Chile, Peru, Mexico, and Canada.

2. *Citizen Safety* The U.S. has a stake in the internal security in countries in the region. According to AmericasBarometer,<sup>2</sup> security is one of the top concerns of citizens in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the majority of citizens in the region believe that security has deteriorated in recent years. In the summer of 2014, those fears led to the unexpected uptick of unaccompanied minors from Central America to the United States and other neighboring countries (though immigration is fueled primarily for other reasons). The problem extends beyond Central America, with citizen insecurity increasing across the region; Caracas, Venezuela is one of the leaders in murders per capita in the world. The presence of transnational criminal networks means that addressing the problem goes beyond any one country's already overstretched security capacity. Failure to help citizens in the region address crime rates and insecurity will not only fail to address immigration from the region, it will also directly affect U.S. interests in other areas including democracy, business investment and operations, and economic stability and growth.
  
3. *Democracy and Human Rights* Since the late 1970s, the region has undergone a democratic revolution that has dramatically changed the hemisphere in myriad ways, such as economic and social inclusion, respect for basic political and civil rights, prosperity, and peace between and within states. Though, in many countries, those advances and rights remain limited or at risk. As the past 20 years have demonstrated, a truly democratic region is in the U.S.'s economic, strategic and diplomatic interest. And it remains in the U.S.'s interest to sustain this democratic wave. But democracy is increasingly under strain with the emergence of hybrid regimes that combine aspects of elections and limited space for rights and expression, with often targeted efforts to marginalize political opponents, remake the state to remove the checks and balances of representative democratic governance, and sustain current governments in power. At the same time, some multilateral processes and institutions to defend and promote human rights and democracy have been weakened and in some cases are under attack. We detail below how by working collaboratively the U.S. can shore up the region's variegated democratic wave and the region's commitment to international democratic norms.
  
4. *National Security* Latin America and the Caribbean are not an immediate security threat. Nevertheless, the U.S. shares multiple national security interests with the region that include ensuring safe, secure and humane borders to its north and south, reducing the flow of narcotics into the U.S. and the flow of guns and weapons to the south, and reducing the risk of failed states—overtaken by crime and corruption. In addition, the increased presence of non-hemispheric actors such as China, Russia and Iran have raised concerns particularly among some policymakers and

thinkers. More recently, a number of groups and candidates have raised the possibility of infiltration of terrorists among the flow of immigrants—though many experts downplay that possibility relative to other threats related to terrorism. It is essential that the U.S. do everything necessary to ensure that its borders are safe but also establish an immigration process that is economically rational and humane. Guaranteeing border security does not have to mean antagonizing our southern partners or passing the blame on to them. Instead, it also means taking responsibility for the flow of guns to the south, instituting a responsible immigration program north of the border, and avoiding the pattern of excessively militarizing our relations with governments on issues of narcotics and security. Regarding the increasing economic and diplomatic activities of countries like China, Russia and Iran, any future administration will need to separate real threats from the realities of a new global economy (with the emergence of new economic actors) and from the posturing of governments that simply want to antagonize the U.S. but that lack the capacity to truly threaten the U.S. security interests.

5. *Partnership* It's an overused term. But as successive presidents and secretaries of state—from both parties—have stated, Latin America remains an area of often untapped partnership for U.S. policies globally. Whether in UN Security Council votes, UN peacekeeping missions, climate change talks, or development assistance, Latin America and the Caribbean can be a powerful ally and base of support for the U.S.'s foreign policy agenda. Yet the U.S. does not tend to devote enough effort to cultivate those relations. In Latin America those governments that have felt passed over have often staked out non-committal or ambiguous positions or come out against U.S. positions altogether. In this, the U.S.—as we explain below—can do more to build political will and assuage age-old animosities and knee-jerk reactions. The normalization of relations with Cuba has the potential to help considerably, but much more can be done, especially in advancing responsible, democratic reforms in multilateral bodies. For example, in one area, the U.S. should work with other regional partners to help facilitate the peace process in Colombia—which represents a huge opportunity for the region and the United States and its interests.
  
6. *Health and Environmental Concerns* As the rapid spread of the Zika virus has proven in early 2016, the geographic proximity of Latin America and the Caribbean implies that unforeseen epidemics can easily spread to the north, becoming a source of concern for the United States and its citizens. Likewise, the depletion of natural resources and other environmental issues such as pollution in the Latin American and Caribbean region can have an impact at the global level, particularly in the Western Hemisphere as a whole.



7. *Environment, Natural Resources, Energy, and Climate Change* Latin America's natural resources include 25 percent of the planet's arable land, 22 percent of the world's forest area, 10 percent of its oil reserves, 5 percent of natural gas reserves, and 40 percent of its copper and silver reserves. Of the world's 17 mega-diverse countries, six (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela) are in the region. The region is estimated to have 31 percent of the earth's freshwater resources and is a major supplier of food and other natural resources to world markets. Latin America also has the second largest reserves of oil outside the Middle East and has the potential to be clean energy leader. According to the Inter-American Development Bank, Latin America can meet its future energy needs through renewable energy sources, including solar, wind, marine, geothermal, and biomass energy—sufficient to cover its projected 2050 electricity needs twenty-two times over. At the same time, Latin America and the Caribbean are extremely vulnerable to climate change impacts including floods, droughts and extreme weather events such as hurricanes with important implications for national and hemispheric security.

**Tools** What are the U.S.'s powers and capabilities to advance its interests in the region? They are not the same as they were 30 years ago, but they exist and remain strong, many of them under appreciated and many linked to the cultural, political and personal links mentioned above.

1. *Soft Power* The much-discussed and debated decline of the power of U.S. popularity in the region is exaggerated. In fact, according to recent studies, Latin America is the region with the highest levels of pro-U.S. feelings in the world. According to research by [Andy Baker and David Cupery](#),<sup>3</sup> those positive feelings toward the U.S. are strongly linked to immigration and trade with the United States. [Other studies](#)<sup>4</sup> have also found that Latin American citizens who receive remittances are less likely to distrust the U.S. government. The relationship makes sense: the more people are exposed to the U.S. at a personal level—through commerce or contacts through relatives and friends living and traveling to the U.S.—the more they are likely to have positive feelings about it. But these strengths have not always translated into support for U.S. policies, nor does the current negative and, at times, ugly debate over immigration and immigrants further the ability of the U.S. to pursue national interests with partners south of its borders. In part, this is also due to populist leaders exploiting the sentiments of populations who have had little personal contact with the U.S. and its citizens. More can be done to leverage the U.S.'s significant soft power assets in the hemisphere through: educational, cultural and scientific exchanges; better, more humane immigration policies; more focused and ramped up public diplomacy efforts; closer business ties;



and facilitating more and better communication and more streamlined processes for student and scholarly visas.

2. *Markets and Investment* The U.S. remains the first or second trading partner of every country in the region—with the exception of Cuba—and it is also the largest single source of foreign direct investment in the region, double today what it was ten years ago. The flow has also gone the other way; according to [one study](#)<sup>5</sup> from 2000 to 2014 foreign direct investment from Latin America and the Caribbean to the United States increased 43 percent. The global rise of Latin American multinationals (the so-called *multi-latinas*) has also been instrumental in that growth. In addition, the U.S. has free trade agreements with 12 different countries in the region, tying these countries—and their people—to our markets, values, and our citizens in ways that promote development and prosperity and closer personal relations. Should concerns over specific clauses and conditions in the 12-member proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) be addressed, the agreement holds the potential to exponentially deepen and expand market potential and economic allies, help create a positive pole in the Western Hemisphere for other countries to join, and build one of the most important trans-regional institutions since World War II. As several Latin American governments—such as Brazil, Argentina and Peru—attempt to diversify their exports away from commodities now in the wake of the commodity correction, the U.S. can play an important role.

At the same time, financially, the region is deeply tied to U.S. markets. Between 2010 and 2014, Latin American governments issued on average \$40 billion in bonds per month, increasing their relationship with international credit markets while also raising concern for some as U.S. interest rates increase.

3. *Development and Democracy Assistance* The U.S.'s bilateral development assistance program for Latin America and the Caribbean is not as large or even important as it was even eight years ago, totaling in [2014 only \\$2.0 billion compared to \\$3.2 billion in 2006](#).<sup>6</sup> The decline is, on the whole, a good thing; it reflects the economic growth and greater levels of prosperity achieved in the past 20 years. Both the declining development budget and the region's growth, though, have reduced the power of U.S.'s traditional bilateral assistance as a foreign policy tool. But there are still pressing needs which U.S. development assistance can help address, with the buy-in of host governments.

U.S. development assistance should focus on four areas: targeted assistance that reduces the risk of the new middle class slipping back into poverty; support for

broader social inclusion; strengthening and improving institutions and their capacity to deliver public goods, particularly in the area of rule of law and governance and fighting corruption; and expanded programs that provide opportunities away from crime and drugs. A more focused development program should also build partnerships with some of the other larger, more economically advanced countries. In addition, the U.S. should work with the multilateral donors—such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank—to increase their focus in these critical areas. Coordination with other donors such as the European Union in certain countries of the region is also critical for the success of U.S. programs.

4. *Regional Multilateral Organizations* The Western Hemisphere has a thick network and history of multilateral institutions and forums for inter-state collaboration. The Organization of American States (OAS) and its inter-American system for human rights are global leaders in the protection and promotion of human rights and democracy. Despite the existence of protocols and processes to defend human rights and representative democracy, however, in recent years individual countries and the OAS have shied away from standing up in their defense. Even the esteemed inter-American system of human rights has been under assault<sup>7</sup> and underfunded by a number of governments in the region. In the past decade several new organizations have also emerged, including the South American Union (UNASUR) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Pacific Alliance, and Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA). While these new groups offer alternative forums for resolving local issues, the risk is that the proliferation of these groups will further dilute regional commitments to human rights and democracy and weaken standards in areas such as independent election monitoring. The U.S. and regional partners need to work together to reinvigorate the older institutions like the OAS and support their efforts to strengthen the normative and institutional foundations of the newer multilateral organizations.
5. *U.S. Defense Support* The days when the U.S. directly intervened in countries south of its border or used its military facilities to train Latin American counterterrorism armies that repressed their own citizens have ended. Today, the U.S. military has proven a welcome and steadfast ally, whether in conducting joint operations with its partners in the region to combat transnational crime or offering humanitarian support, providing training and materiel, or working with civilians to strengthen democratic oversight of the armed forces and their operations. In the case of the latter, however, there is significant room for expansion, on either side of the Rio Grande.

These are some of the greatest assets the U.S. has in the region to advance its interests. What follows is a summary of some of the immediate threats or challenges that go beyond traditional relations that will shape U.S. policy toward the region.

## **II. Addressing the Costs of Bad Governance**

One of the greatest challenges the region and the U.S. will face in the near future is the potential popular and economic fall out from declining economies and states that have failed to seriously improve accountability and the delivery of key social services such as education and health care.

The impressive economic growth of the past 15 years brought dramatic gains in prosperity, including lifting 50 million people out of poverty into the middle class and rising expectations and demands over the efficiency of the state and the integrity of public officials. But the economic boom is temporarily cooling, and many of those who were celebrated as joining the middle class are in a precarious position, with limited access to social services and formal jobs or job security. The region now faces a time of deteriorating economic expansion and public funds for social programs at the same time that governments face rising public demands and frustration.

U.S.'s working with governments in the region to address these issues will be key and will help shore up the U.S.'s role in the region as a partner.

The greatest challenge will be Venezuela. Years of corruption, economic mismanagement, autocratic leadership, and an unsustainable oil-giveaway program have eroded state institutions, created an economic crisis, and built a circle of Caribbean and Central American countries dependent on Venezuelan oil that will eventually end. Fortunately, the U.S. has a growing list of countries—including Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay—that it can partner with in areas such as institution building, rule of law, social inclusion, and economic integration.

In Central America, corruption and the scourge of drugs and crime have led to some of the highest murder rates in the world and contributed to unprecedented levels of immigration, not just to the U.S. but also to neighboring countries, to escape the violence. These problems are particularly critical in the so-called Northern Triangle countries (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras), which have weak government institutions and capabilities.

And in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru declining economic growth rates or economic contraction are also likely bring popular protests and turmoil. At the same time, many of these countries have challenges relating to social inclusion, human rights and poor public services. Not coincidentally, those countries that will suffer a smaller economic contraction are those that have better integrated their economies into the global market and invested wisely or avoided public profligacy during the commodity boom years.

Last, there is Cuba. More than 50 years of a state-controlled economy and of authoritarian government under first Fidel Castro and currently under his brother Raúl have left the country poor and desperate and the regime potentially fragile. Raúl Castro has promised that he will step down in 2018, but what precisely will succeed him in terms of a government and its economic plans remain unknown. As the Cuban government struggles to figure out how to replace the 90,000 barrels per day of oil from Venezuela that has kept it afloat, it is also confronting the challenges of the economic and social dislocations by the eventual unification of its dual currency system, attracting foreign direct investment, providing for its own people, and modernizing its economy (eventually)—all in the midst of a leadership transition. U.S. and regional leadership can play a constructive role by facilitating change through openness and contact, while continuing to press for greater political opening and respect for human and political rights.

### **III. Regional Cooperation: How the U.S. Can Lead on Key Issues Bilaterally and Multilaterally**

Many of the issues illustrated above will require cooperation with Latin American and Caribbean countries south of the border, bilaterally, multilaterally (when possible), and through informal groups of countries—what has been termed by Moisés Naím “mini-lateralism.” The changing hemisphere and U.S. priorities elsewhere will mean that it will need to pursue many of its interests in the region bilaterally or through informal groupings of countries that share a common concern or interest in a specific policy area.

There are a number of immediate issues and future topics that will lend themselves to this form of diplomatic leadership and informal alliance building, with logical regional partners like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico, all of which have comparative strengths in many of these issues. Possible points of collaboration include:

- Creating an informal grouping of countries dedicated to social inclusion to share practices and support each other through legal reform and social programs to

improve access for women and Afro and indigenous-descendent populations and to expand LGBT rights;

- Working with regional governments, the private sector and civil society in the implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change adopted last December and create a regional budget—with public and private funds—for preparing at-risk areas from the effects of extreme weather caused by climate change;
- Collaborating with governments from the region—particularly Mexico, Colombia and Brazil—to augment and help implement the \$750 million U.S. assistance package to support development and security in Central America’s Northern Triangle under Alliance for Prosperity;
- Expanding and consolidating Vice President Joe Biden’s Caribbean Energy Security Initiative to develop an energy plan and package of potential assistance for Petro-Caribe countries should Venezuela’s program end or dramatically decrease—as is likely;
- Working with partners in the region to assist Colombia in the consolidation of peace and integration of former combatants;
- Developing a coordinated response in the hemisphere to address the Zika virus in addition to the \$1.8 billion in emergency funding requested by President Obama;
- Expanding military-to-military contacts and civil and military education programs that have fallen victim to budget cuts and working with other countries to share the burden of these programs and broader humanitarian efforts; and
- Exploring the possibility, with regional governments, of establishing an independent, international truth commission to investigate the long-standing, polarizing cases of corruption or human rights violations, such as the AMIA bombing and mysterious death of investigator Alberto Nisman in Argentina and the Ayotzinapa massacre and the more than 20,000 disappeared in Mexico. These could be similar to the UN-created and internationally supported CICIG in Guatemala. This topic is expanded on below.

There are other issues that the U.S. will need to take a leadership role in, but also for which it can find regional allies and partners. Among those are the following.

In the past fourteen years, while the **Organization of American States (OAS)** has played an important role in heading off political crises in Bolivia and Nicaragua and observing elections in Panama, and its inter-American system of human rights has remained a global leader, the OAS has failed to uphold the guarantees it established in the 2001 Inter-American Democratic Charter and to succeed in applying its technical leadership to matters of elections monitoring. Restoring the OAS to a leadership position in the hemisphere will require leadership from the U.S. working with other member governments from the region and with the recently elected, reform-minded Secretary General Luis Almagro. That should include reviewing the organization’s budget and operations, and, if necessary, redefining and narrowing its infamously broad mandates and projects. This also requires downsizing or even offloading to other multilateral organizations, OAS offices and functions such as the Inter-American Children’s Institute, the Pan American Institute of Geography and History, and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture. For all its political paralysis and dysfunction, the OAS remains the only regional body with an organic, comprehensive institutional and normative framework that includes all the democratically elected governments in the region.

**The creation of integrated energy systems**—renewable and carbon-based—and electrical grids has been a long-discussed and under-delivered promise. The next administration should commit a cabinet level official to work with energy companies, country regulatory agencies and private and multilateral banks to speed up this process by identifying comparative advantages and harmonizing the thicket of regulations that have stalled this process. One place to begin to start is the [Zero Carbon Latin America](#)<sup>8</sup> report.

Given the deep reserve of trust and shared history among citizens of the Americas, the next administration should seek to **deepen and broaden the ways that U.S. citizens and Latin American and Caribbean citizens interact and communicate**. This could include—but is not limited to—expanding the 100,000 Strong in the Americas program that sends U.S. university students to study in Latin America; work with other countries in the region to create programs similar to Brazil’s Science Without Borders (which unfortunately is winding down) that sent Brazilian students to U.S. universities for study in science and engineering; explore ways to increase internet access and connectivity in the region; renew and update the U.S.’s badly weakened public diplomacy program in the hemisphere; and explore ways to work with U.S. grammar and high schools to have students link up with students in other countries in the hemisphere via the internet for discussions and joint education.

The region is seeing both the benefits of improved rule of law and suffering the turmoil of increased attention on public and private-sector corruption. From Mexico to Argentina, citizens are demanding greater accountability and transparency from their public officials. In many cases, independent judiciaries and prosecutors are stepping up. In the case of Guatemala that has also involved a UN mandated special corruption unit. While the Guatemala example cannot be replicated wholesale in other countries, **the model of an independent, internationally sanctioned, managed unit to address endemic corruption and transnational crime remains a powerful model that can be adapted for other countries.** Along these lines the next U.S. president should work with willing governments to establish an independent panel of regional jurists and government officials to coordinate the regional battle against corruption in all its dimensions, bribery, influence peddling, narcotics trafficking, arms trafficking, and impunity, and to recommend reforms and escape the increasing and troubling politicization of critical issues in our region. This effort should build on and work with the vibrant and professional pool of citizens organizations that have emerged across the hemisphere and that work on issues of rule of law, transparency and accountability.

President Obama's **executive actions regarding the U.S. sanctions toward Cuba** have opened up a new era of relations with the island and have led to important negotiations on migration, the environment, mail service, and property claims, though human rights abuses and the lack of political opening remain. As the U.S. continues to pressure the Cuban regime for greater respect for human rights—we hope in alliance with its Latin American partners and multilateral organizations—the next president should begin the process of negotiating with the U.S. Congress and Cuba to end of the U.S. embargo on Cuba. The next administration should be aware that across Latin America, regardless of the ideological orientation of the government, the U.S. embargo and the exclusion of Cuba from the inter-American system and the Summit of the Americas are regarded negatively. It will and should be hard for the incoming administration to find allies in the region that want to reverse the opening toward Cuba.

Whatever the outcome of re-examination and presentation to Congress of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) treaty, **the next administration should continue to consolidate a strong, broad array of countries and economies in the hemisphere oriented toward free markets,** but also focused on the risks and downfalls of the market. Part of this should be done by building on the efforts of the TPP negotiations and the efforts at integration of the Pacific Alliance (which includes Mexico, Peru, Colombia, and Chile). Such an effort should be focused on extending a welcoming hand to other countries—especially those now in the midst of economic doldrums—to



deepen economic relations and to help assist in that process by engaging in bilateral commercial negotiations in areas such as investment and taxation treaties and increasing access to markets. Along these lines, U.S. development assistance can also be re-directed to helping countries prepare for and address greater economic opening, including targeted job-training programs, infrastructure, reform of customs agencies, and educational exchanges of the sort mentioned above.

Last, infrastructure in the Americas—within countries and across borders—remains woefully inadequate. While the BRICS bank (the New Development Bank), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Chinese promises of investments in railroads and highways in countries like Brazil and Argentina are welcome—provided the relevant social and environmental safeguards are realized—even if they come to fruition, they will not be sufficient. A 2004 study by [Cesar Calderon and Luis Serven](#)<sup>9</sup> for the World Bank concluded that one of the most important factors explaining Latin America’s underperformance in trade and economic growth relative to East Asia was the region’s insufficient infrastructure. **The U.S. and the U.S. private sector should assume a greater leadership role in supporting and seeking financing for bold new infrastructure projects**, including cross border efforts that will help build a broader market and deepen the trade-oriented steps that are being taken. Sufficient and thorough social and environmental safeguards must be included in this effort.

## **V. Conclusion: A Ten-Point Plan for Advancing U.S. and Regional Interests**

U.S. interests and strengths in the region remain strong. Below is a quick summary of some of the ways the next administration—Republican or Democrat—can further U.S. interests by taking advantage of its soft and hard power assets:

- 1. Create a positive economic pole within the region of deepened commercial and financial relations with the U.S. markets by harmonizing existing trade agreements and strengthening bilateral commercial, taxation and investment discussions and agreements.** The benefits of these relations should be extended across the hemisphere to countries that want to participate. Part of that should also include ensuring that there are proper safeguards for environment, labor and fair arbitration of countries’ interests vis à vis transnational corporations;
- 2. Collaborate with friendly groups of nations such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico on targeted issues** such as: supporting Caribbean

economies on their energy needs post-Petro-Caribe; collaboratively promoting institution rebuilding and greater respect for political and civil rights in Cuba and Venezuela; assisting in the implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; sharing information to promote social inclusion in areas such as gender, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation; and establishing a regional task force to share information and collaborate on issues of corruption and impunity. In all of these cases, given shrinking U.S. bilateral development budgets, the emphasis should be on burden sharing with partners in the region and multilateral development banks;

3. **Shore up regional and international norms to defend and promote human rights and democracy.** This should include promoting—when applicable—independent, international commissions to finally clear up pending matters of human rights violations, such as the AMIA bombing in Argentina and the disappearances in Mexico, and strengthening regional commitments to defend representative democracy;
4. **Collaborate with countries in the hemisphere,** members of the U.S. Congress and the OAS Secretary General **to reform and streamline the Organization of American States** to bolster its leadership in the new Americas;
5. **Engage other countries in the region to augment and assist in the U.S.’s package for Central America’s Northern Triangle,** Alliance for Prosperity, to address crime, insecurity, violence and the lack of economic opportunity in Central America;
6. **Broaden and deepen the opportunities for U.S. and Latin American citizens to interact,** including through expanded student exchange programs, an improved, updated U.S. public diplomacy program and efforts to bring internet connectivity and communication between grade and high schools across the borders. To this end, the president should also enlist the networks and support of civil society and businesses;
7. **Work with multilateral organizations, governments and U.S. business to expand infrastructure investment** both within countries and across borders;
8. **Establish a rational, humane immigration system in the United States** that both meets U.S. demands for labor and creates a pathway for citizenship for immigrants who are here illegally. This should include as first steps ending the deportations of children who are fleeing violence in Central America and allowing those who qualify under DACA and DAPA to remain in the United States;

9. **Continue to press governments in the region**, particularly recipients of U.S. anti-narcotics and security assistance, **to abide by human rights standards and expand assistance to continue to professionalize police forces** and civilian oversight of those forces; and
  
10. **Work to lift the U.S. embargo on Cuba while also insisting that Cuba continue to provide opportunities for collaboration on a number of fronts, including human rights**, and encouraging other Latin American governments and international bodies to assist promoting human rights and the opening of political space on the island and in the country's much-needed economic reforms.

## VI. Signature page

All of the signatories below have signed in their individual capacity. Their institutional affiliations are listed for identification purposes only. In no way does their individual support represent the views and opinions of their institutions or the employees, members or board members of those institutions. This document was developed through a diverse working group and as such represents a general consensus view; individual members may not be in agreement with specific details or implications of all the recommendations.

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