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**THE UNITED STATES AND LATIN AMERICA
AFTER THE COLD WAR**

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THE UNITED STATES AND LATIN AMERICA AFTER THE COLD WAR¹

The Bush administration's Latin America policy to date has been most notable for its lack of strategic vision. A few high-profile actions have been taken--the invasion of Panama, the achievement of a bipartisan Nicaragua policy, a new debt plan, and a heightened war on drugs in South America--but they were reactive and disparate, aimed largely at winning points with the U.S. domestic audience rather than advancing a coherent policy framework. The Bush administration has conveyed no sense of where **U.S.-Latin** American relations are heading or what place Latin America has in the changing global posture of the United States. This exemplifies a lack not only of an organizing framework but also of any sustained high-level interest in Latin America. President Bush and his top advisers engage themselves in Latin America when an issue rises to such a level of visibility that it simply cannot be ignored; most of the time, however, they pay little attention to the region.

The obvious explanation for this lack of interest in and lack of policy framework for Latin America is that President Bush and Secretary of State Baker, and in fact most of the foreign policy team in the U.S. government, are preoccupied with the dramatic events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and simply do not have the time to spare for Latin America or other regions on the periphery. A related version of this explanation is that President Bush and his inner circle of foreign policy advisers are all

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mainstream Atlanticists who have an overriding interest in great power relations and little interest in the developing world generally. A further explanation is the argument that the Bush administration's lack of policy framework in Latin America is just one case of its general lack of vision with respect to U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s.

All of these explanations are valid, but even taken together they do not constitute a full answer. The current drift of U.S. policy toward Latin America is the result of something much more far reaching and long term than the inattention of a new administration. It is the result of a generational shift of political attitudes and conditions in Latin America, the United States, and the world generally. This shift can be summarized in bare terms as follows: first, U.S. policy toward Latin America since World War II has been based on anticommunism, the desire to prevent the emergence of leftist or perceived Communist governments from coming to power; second, the threat of communism in Latin America, as well as the perceived connection between the Soviet Union and Latin American leftist movements, has declined significantly in recent years; the result is that the traditional basis of U.S. policy toward Latin America is gone and the United States has found no replacement. The Bush administration is an actor without a script on the Latin American policy stage, improvising as crises arise, hoping only to avoid serious embarrassments before the curtain falls.

II

The contention that anticommunism has been the basis of postwar U.S. policy toward Latin America is not controversial. When the Cold War spread from Europe to the developing world in the late 1940s. Latin

America was one of the areas that the United States was most determined to keep free of leftist governments and Soviet influence. Anticommunism blended naturally with the policy the United States had been pursuing toward Latin America in the first half of the century, *i.e.*, resisting all extra-hemispheric encroachments and intervening militarily and politically to protect U.S. business interests. Successive U.S. administrations after the 1940s made anticommunism the basis around which all elements of U.S. involvement in the region, including economic aid, political relationships, and military cooperation, were organized.

Two versions of anti-Communist policy have alternated for preeminence during the past several decades: a pure Cold War policy, followed by the Eisenhower administration (until the final year or two of the 1950s) and the **Nixon** and Ford administrations, and a mixed policy pioneered by the Kennedy administration. The pure Cold War policy was marked by very low interest in Latin America except when the specter of leftism raised its head. When that occurred, such as in Guatemala in 1954 and Chile in the early **1970s**, the anti-Soviet, geopolitical angle dominated U.S. perceptions of the local political events and the United States intervened covertly to oust or help oust the leftist government in question. The mixed anti-Communist policy, best embodied in the Alliance for Progress, entailed a high level of interest in Latin America as a whole and an attempt to address the local economic and political causes of leftist revolutionary movements through economic assistance and support for democratic governments. The mixed version attempted to treat democracy and anticommunism as complementary goals. Anticommunism remained

the fundamental goal, however, and when the two goals appeared to conflict, democracy was sacrificed for anticommunism.

The Reagan administration pursued a mix of the two approaches. President Reagan arrived in office bent on returning the United States to a pure Cold War approach, emphasizing the Soviet role in the civil conflicts in Central America and pushing military-oriented solutions in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and elsewhere. Over time, however, pressure from congressional Democrats and the growing influence of moderates within the administration brought Reagan around to a mixed version of anti-communist policy in South America and most of Central America, particularly El Salvador. The one exception was Nicaragua, toward which the Reagan administration maintained a pure Cold War policy to the very end.

The only major exception to the anti-Communist orientation of postwar U.S. policy toward Latin America was President Carter's attempt to make human rights rather than fighting communism the main concern of the United States in Latin America. That effort foundered in Central America, however, with the fall of Somoza in Nicaragua to the Sandinistas and the growing fear that Central America was a cauldron of leftist guerrilla movements. By 1980, Carter had shifted to an anti-Communist policy in Central America, resuscitating the Alliance for Progress formula of combining military assistance with economic aid and support for democratic political change. In South America, where leftist revolutionary movements were in decline rather than ascension, Carter was able to maintain a significant human rights orientation.

III

The assertion that leftism is in decline in Latin America should also not be especially controversial. With the defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua there is only one leftist government in all of Latin America-- Fidel Castro's Marxist-Leninist government in Cuba--and it is increasingly weak and isolated. With his irredentist, quasi-Stalinist ideology, Castro is relegating Cuba to the club of small, obscure Communist countries, such as North Korea, Burma, and Albania, hostile to perestroika and glasnost. Castro is no longer a model for any significant number of Latin Americans and with the growing strains in the Soviet-Cuban relationship, the viability of his continued rule is beginning to come into question.

The defeat of the Sandinistas in the February 1990 elections in Nicaragua was a serious setback for leftists throughout Central America. Although sympathizers of the Sandinistas try to explain away the outcome as the result of U.S. economic and military pressure against Nicaragua (they argue that Nicaraguans voted for UNO not out of dislike of the Sandinistas but out of a desire to end U.S. pressure against Nicaragua), the Sandinistas' electoral defeat shattered the myth that populist leftist regimes are the natural people's choice in historically unjust and repressed Central American societies.

A number of Marxist-Leninist rebel groups are still active in Latin America, most notably in El Salvador and Peru, but also in Guatemala, Colombia, and Chile. Although these rebel movements are of real significance within their own countries, they are no longer seen by the U.S. government as harbingers of a region-wide revolutionary trend or as the

proxies of an expansionistic Soviet Union. Rather they appear as increasingly isolated holdouts from an earlier, dying era. Cuba still supports some of the rebels, but with the weakening of the Soviet-Cuban tie that support seems less significant to the U.S. government than it might once have.

In addition to the decline of active leftist insurgencies in Latin America, the hold of Marxism-Leninism on Latin American intellectual life has greatly diminished in recent years. In the 1960s and **1970s**, Marxism-Leninism **perfused** student, intellectual, and artistic circles in Latin America. This fact was related to the high currency of leftism in West European and North American intellectual circles, the existence of military dictatorships in most Latin American countries, and the anti-Americanism generated by the habitual support of the United States for those dictatorships. In the **1980s**, all those conditions changed and Marxism-Leninism faded as the prevailing orientation of Latin American intellectuals and, in particular, became much less popular among Latin American youth than before. The recent reversals of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have only accentuated that trend.

This argument about the declining state of leftist ideology in Latin America is not meant to imply that the underlying economic and political problems that have traditionally created pressure for radical societal change have disappeared. The problems of economic inequality and poverty remain grave in most Latin American countries and have even worsened in the past ten years. And although elected civilian governments have come to power in almost all Latin American countries,

some of those governments are dominated by reactionary military and business elites and almost all of them are plagued with serious problems of accessibility, honesty, and basic competence. Political instability may well worsen in Central America in the coming years and return to countries in South America currently enjoying democratic renewal. Such instability could lead to the downfall of elected governments, with the most likely outcome being civilian-military coalitions of national reconstruction, or outright military governments.

Although political instability may well occur in Latin America in the coming years, the United States is unlikely to react to it as in the past. Even if some kind of populist movement with a leftist orientation is a force in the breakdown of order in a particular country, the U.S. government will probably not feel greatly threatened or involve itself overmuch. The link between political instability and the Soviet Union has been broken in the U.S. government's thinking about Latin America. Even though the Soviet Union was not a major casual factor in past instances of revolution or political disorder in Latin America, the belief of the U.S. government that it was constituted a primary motivation for United States involvement. With the link broken, the U.S. government's proclivity to involve itself against leftist movements will almost certainly diminish. A good example is Peru, where leftist guerrillas have grown in strength for ten years and now represent a very powerful force. The United States has not sounded the anti-Communist alarm on Peru very loudly because the Peruvian rebels have little to no connection to the Soviet Union.

IV

The basis of postwar U.S. policy in Latin America has been anticommunism. The threat of communism in Latin America is at a low ebb and is unlikely to revive. The result of this trend is simple but profound: the United States is adrift in Latin America. The Bush administration's rather opaque Latin America policy becomes clear when it is seen in the light of this generational change; it is a policy defined by the collapse of a controlling paradigm and the absence of a replacement. The emphasis in the Bush policy on pleasing the home crowd is a logical consequence of this situation: because the policy has no real grounding in a view of U.S. interests in Latin America or in Latin America's own interests, considerations of U.S. domestic perceptions inevitably predominate.

The demise of anticommunism as the basis of U.S. policy in Latin America raises the question of whether the United States has any compelling reason to pay attention to Latin America in the absence of the conventional security threats. Some voices are beginning to be heard in Washington and elsewhere saying that there is no particular reason to stay involved in Latin America and that for better or worse the United States will inevitably turn its back on or disengage from Latin America in the 1990s. This projected disengagement is said to be one part of "the marginalization of the Third World" that will follow from the decline of the **U.S.-Soviet** struggle for global supremacy.

The disengagement scenario, although plausible, is unlikely. Anticommunism was long the dominant concern in Latin America, but it was not the only concern. The United States and Latin America have many

ties of many kinds. In terms of specific interests or reasons for **U.S.** attention to and involvement in the region, both negative and positive factors can be identified. The negative factors are several and are usually stated as harms Latin America can do the United States if the United States ignores the region's economic woes. It is said, for example, that Latin American debtors can bring down the international financial system, that Central America and Mexico can swamp the United States with needy immigrants, and that Andean countries can flood our country with illicit drugs. These and other negative possibilities are genuine concerns, though they tend to be overstated by commentators determined to convince U.S. policymakers to "pay attention or else" to Latin America. The tendency toward overstatement is an understandable reaction of U.S. Latin Americanists fearful of what they see as the growing disinterest of the United States in Latin American affairs. Yet it is a counterproductive approach--highlighting the negative things that Latin America can "do" to the United States is not a good basis for **U.S.-Latin** American relations; it tends to relegate Latin America to the category of headache zones in the minds of U.S. policymakers. And short-term scaremongering about what are really long-term problems ultimately proves unfruitful.

There are also specific positive inducements for the United States to stay involved in Latin America, not the least of which are mutual economic interests. The United States has considerable investment in Latin America, investment that will prosper if Latin America prospers. The U.S. investment in Latin America relative to investment in other parts of the world has shrunk from the early part of the century but remains significant. Trade is also important. The economic decline in Latin

America over the past ten years has reduced U.S. exports significantly and has cost the United States jobs at home; improved economic performance in Latin America will increase U.S. jobs at home. There are also mutual political concerns. Latin America strives to be democratic; the United States prefers to be part of a region that is democratic. It is hard to put a specific value on the U.S. interest in Latin America achieving and maintaining democracy. The interest has both symbolic **elements**, related to its own self-image as a democratic leader, and concrete ones, such as the fact that the United States finds democracies to be friendlier, more stable neighbors than nondemocracies.

V

Simply assembling a list of specific negative and positive interests the United States has in Latin America does not adequately describe why this fairly active relationship will likely continue. A comparative perspective is required, one too often ignored by U.S. Latin Americanists who focus on **U.S.-Latin** American relations without placing them in the overall global framework of U.S. foreign policy. Instead of just asking why the United States might pay attention to Latin America in the coming years, a broader question should be posed: assuming that the United States is inclined to involve itself actively in the world, why will it tend to devote some of its time, energy, and resources to Latin America as opposed to other regions of the world? The assumption of a U.S. inclination to be involved in the world is not unreasonable--the present period of U.S. foreign policy is characterized by considerable confusion about what the United States should do in the emerging post-Cold War international system, but the prevailing sentiment is that the United States should and

will be actively involved; little sentiment exists in favor of any kind of neoisolationism.

Seen in this comparative light, at least three basic characteristics of Latin America point toward continued U.S. attention to the region. The **first** is that along with Canada, Latin America is the only part of the world that shares the American land mass and the Western Hemisphere with the United States. In this age of rapidly modernizing transportation and communication, distances between continents and countries are shrinking, but the fact of Latin America's neighboring position remains a special tie. It has an intangible but important component--the idea of the Americas, a larger unity that joins North, Central, and South America and makes Latin American countries fraternal countries vis-a-vis the United States rather than simply friends or allies. It also has very tangible features--the sociocultural interpenetration of the United States and Latin America has exploded in the past generation and continues to grow rapidly. The border between the two is porous not only to people but to culture, language, and ideas. Hispanic culture has become a major feature of life in numerous areas of the United States. Spanish is by far the most common foreign language in the United States. In many states, such as California, Texas and Florida, Latin America is not a foreign region, it is a part of daily life. Seen from the perspective of those states, the idea that the United States can somehow disengage from Latin America is nonsensical.

The second distinctive characteristic of Latin America is that it is the only part of the developing world that is predominantly Western in its culture, language, and religion. The division between the First and Second

Worlds on the one hand and the Third World on the other is not only one between economically developed and developing countries but also one primarily between Western and non-Western countries. Latin America is the exception to that division, a fact often overlooked by commentators who tend to lump "the developing world" together and predict its growing insignificance to U.S. foreign policy. The fact of its being Western gives Latin America much more in common with the United States than other areas of the developing world, tends to facilitate the increasing growth of mutual contacts, and generally works against the possibility of Latin America simply dropping off the screen of U.S. foreign policy.

The third distinguishing feature is that Latin America is becoming the only major region in which the United States has much influence. The recent political changes sweeping the world--both the decline of communism and the trend toward democracy in many countries--appear to many Americans as a triumph for the United States. Yet the United States is finding that at the very moment it seems to be gaining global preeminence it is having less influence on world events than at almost any time in the postwar period. The causes of this puzzling phenomenon are multiple. One is that as the superpower conflict diminishes, major regions, such as Europe and Asia, are increasingly taking matters of economic and political import into their own hands--away from the United States as much as from the Soviet Union. Another cause is that the decline of communism is associated with another important trend in the world: economics is steadily overtaking politics as the primary subject of concern to most people and the medium by which the success of governments and the aspirations of peoples are measured. This latter trend coincides with

the relative economic decline (perceived or real) of the United States, which is losing clout economically at the very time economics is becoming the main issue of international concern.

The diminishing scale of U.S. influence in the post-Cold War world is evident in almost every area of policy. The political changes in the Soviet Union are dramatic and are naturally a focus of U.S. attention, but the United States actually has very little influence on them. Similarly, the changes in Eastern Europe are profoundly important to international order but are not greatly subject to U.S. influence, let alone control. To the extent external actors have a role in the transitions to democracy in Eastern Europe, West European countries have the lead. And with respect to Western Europe itself, the role of the United States is diminishing and the main current of West European affairs, the process of economic integration, is independent and tends to reduce the relevance of the United States.

In Asia, the United States is a leading trading partner of Japan and some of the newly industrializing countries, such as South Korea and Taiwan; but U.S. economic prestige has suffered in recent years and the long-standing deference to the United States among these countries is fading in corresponding fashion. Additionally, the role of the United States as Asia's military guardian is being called into question and the trend is toward reduced U.S. military and political presence in the region. Finally, in most of the developing world--Africa, the Arab world, and the **less-**developed countries of Asia--the United States has little presence or influence except in a handful of countries, such as the Philippines or Liberia, with which it has historical ties.

Latin America thus stands out as the only region in which the United States continues to have significant presence and influence across a wide spectrum of economic, political, and cultural dimensions. U.S. influence in Latin America is not what it was a generation ago--many commentators have noted the decline of **U.S.** hegemony in Latin America--but relative to other regions of the world it is still substantial. The fact of this influence will tend to lead the U.S. government to continue to engage in Latin American affairs. Great powers, by their nature, like to have influence and to exercise it. The United States will tend to find itself continuing to commit time and resources to Latin America if only because it will increasingly discover that Latin America is the only region where a relatively small such investment brings considerable influence and often even a dominant role, be it in economic policy, the settlement of political conflicts, or simply setting the diplomatic agenda.

This argument is not intended as an encomium to U.S. influence in Latin America. Such influence has been used in many unfortunate ways for generations. But influence is not itself evil; it can be used moderately or immoderately, productively or destructively, and the fact of **U.S.** influence in Latin America is another factor that distinguishes it from other regions and will tend to cause the United States to continue to engage itself in Latin American affairs.

To summarize, the United States not only has significant specific negative and positive inducements to pay attention to Latin America in the coming years, several distinctive features of Latin America relative to

other regions of the world point toward a continuing active relationship between the two. Latin America will probably not be a priority of U.S. foreign policy. The three main areas of primary concern are and will remain the Soviet Union, Europe and the economic powers of Asia. But Latin America will be a fourth area of concern, it will not drop off the map of U.S. foreign policy; the United States will not disengage from Latin America and relegate it to the set of distant regions with which the United States has little contact and pays little attention.

VI

The decline of the Cold War has weakened the traditional anti-communist basis of U.S. policy toward Latin America. Yet, as discussed above, there remain significant reasons why the United States will tend to stay involved in Latin America. The next question, therefore, is what policy framework should the United States adopt for the new era? When this question is posed, the U.S. tendency is to think in terms of a single issue or concept for the whole region. That tendency reflects the long-standing habit of basing U.S. foreign policy on a single overriding concern and of understanding foreign countries or regions through ideas projected from U.S. domestic experience rather than on their own terms.

The most likely contender to replace anticommunism is promoting democracy, which has appeared as a theme of U.S. policy toward Latin America off and on throughout the twentieth century, usually rhetorically but occasionally substantively. In the first part of the century, interventions in Central America and the Caribbean to protect U.S. business interests and ensure governments friendly to the United States were

justified as efforts to promote democracy. In the postwar period, promoting democracy was a common rhetorical label for anti-Communist activities, and during some periods, most notably the Kennedy years, real efforts were made to support democratic governments as a way of undercutting pressure for leftist revolutionary change. During the Reagan years, promoting democracy became the stated theme of policy toward all areas of Latin America--President Reagan and his advisers shaped almost every public statement of U.S. policy around the concept of promoting democracy and took credit for the striking democratic tide that was sweeping through the hemisphere. The promoting democracy theme was initially adopted as a way of selling hardline, militaristic anti-Communist policies in Nicaragua and El Salvador to a wary U.S. Congress and U.S. public. Over time the stated concern began to gain some real substance, and during the second Reagan administration the U.S. government at least jettisoned the earlier proauthoritarian policies in South America and actively supported democratic change in countries led by right-wing autocrats, such as Chile, Paraguay, Haiti, and Panama.

The Reagan administration's ardent invocations regarding promoting democracy were closely linked to the fervor of its anti-Communist outlook in Latin America. The early Bush administration, which was not fixated on anticommunism, was correspondingly less fervent in its prodemocracy language. Yet, as it searches for a definitional framework for its Latin America policy, the Bush administration is moving to embrace the "democracy doctrine." The invasion of Panama and the Nicaraguan elections encouraged this trend. The Bush administration publicly interpreted both events primarily as victories for democracy and began to

appreciate more concretely the appeal of the democracy theme and to look for other policy areas to fold into it. The democracy theme corresponds to the Bush administration's basic foreign policy instincts--it is a natural way to achieve a bipartisan consensus on controversial policy issues and is generally pleasing to the domestic audience.

Appealing as it may be at home, promoting democracy is not a good organizing principle for U.S. policy in Latin America. For many Latin Americans, the emphasis on promoting democracy evokes the disagreeable idea that the United States views its relations with Latin America as the fostering of a political community of which the United States is the head and from which it excludes those it believes are deviating from a certain political line. The United States emphasis on promoting democracy appears too much as a superficial substitute for the old anti-Communist line, one that maintains many of the negative trappings of that earlier policy, in particular the self-appointed right of the United States to judge the domestic political orientation of Latin American countries.

Furthermore, in emphasizing the promotion of democracy, the United States is not addressing the main concern of most Latin Americans, who are primarily concerned with their economic situation, a situation which in most countries of the region is very bad and getting worse. Economics is paramount over politics for many Latin Americans: on the one hand, if the economic decline continues, the fledgling democratic systems may well collapse; on the other, if any government achieved real economic gains, many people would forgive considerable democratic shortcomings (although not widespread political violence). The tendency of U.S. officials

to lard policy statements with panegyrics about the democratic achievements of Latin America in recent years tends to strike Latin Americans as hypocritical or at best ignorant; they feel that in overall terms their situation is very bad and that the United States has done little (outside of giving economic aid to a few countries) about it. Latin Americans have come to see the U.S. rhetorical emphasis on democracy as a way of overlooking or ignoring the realities of life for Latin Americans, and it is resented accordingly.

VII

Supporting democracy should certainly be one element of U.S. policy toward Latin America but **not** the central organizing principle. What then should that principle be? As is often the case when no good answer appears for a question, the fault lies with the question itself. There is not and should not be **any** single organizing principle of U.S. Latin American policy in the **1990s** and beyond. The United States must move away from a monochromatic conception of Latin America policy. We must recognize that no single issue **can** or should dominate U.S. policy toward the region and that the natural state of policy is that it must take on a host of complex, interrelated economic, political, and social issues that reflect the complex, interrelated set of relations between Latin America and the United States. The current set of issues includes debt, trade, drugs, immigration, civil conflicts, economic assistance, and democracy. That particular agenda will change over time. The important thing is to accept as the norm of **U.S.-Latin** American relations a messy, multiple set of issues not susceptible to reductionistic approaches. Low politics in the foreign policy sense must be accepted as high politics.

Moreover, the United States must also accept the fact that no single policy agenda or approach will fit the whole region. Because it was based on a single controlling idea, U.S. policy toward Latin America traditionally emphasized the commonality of U.S. interests in different countries of the region and lumped the countries together into an undifferentiated mass out of which particular crises **were** dealt with in discrete but reflexive fashion. President Reagan was not just demonstrating his own ignorance of the region but a long-standing tendency in U.S. Latin America policy when he declared on his return from his first (and only) trip to South America:

"And you'd be surprised, yes because, you know, they're all individual countries. I think one of the greatest mistakes in the world that we've made has been in thinking--lumping [together]--thinking Latin America. You don't talk that way about Europe. You recognize the difference between various countries. And the same thing is true **here.**"²

As several scholars of Latin American affairs have argued, such as Abraham **Lowenthal**³ and Georges **Fauriol**⁴, the United States must explicitly differentiate among different subregions in Latin America--treating Brazil and Mexico (whose populations together constitute 55 percent of all Latin Americans) as priority zones of their own, then considering separately subgroups such as the Caribbean. Central America,

² Remarks by President Reagan at a press briefing, December 4, 1982.

³ Partners in Conflict: The United States and Latin America, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

⁴ "The Shadow of Latin American Affairs." Foreign Affairs 69. No. 1 (1990).

the Andean countries, and the Southern Cone. For each of these countries or sub-regions the United States should have a separate policy agenda. Moreover, a hierarchy of interests must be explicitly recognized; Brazil and Mexico, for example, are far more important to the United States than Ecuador and Honduras. Making such explicit distinctions about the relative importance of various countries to the United States can result in hurt feelings; failure to do so, however, reflects a lack of seriousness about the region and prevents effective policy from being made.

Although a Latin America policy for the post-Cold War era should be heterogeneous, both in terms of the agendas it pursues and the target countries it focuses on, a number of general guidelines can be identified that should inform this policy and ground it in a basic understanding of the region. To start with, we must accept the priority of economics over politics in U.S. policy toward Latin America (and, in fact, toward most parts of the world). The U.S. government has long conceived of foreign policy as being about politics--monitoring the political makeup of other countries, forming political alliances, spreading U.S. political influence, and the like. Economics has been of marginal importance in U.S. postwar foreign policy, reflecting an assumption of the preeminence of the U.S. economy and the priority of the political struggle with the Soviet Union. That conception must be abandoned. Most issues of importance between the United States and Latin America are either primarily economic (such as trade and debt) or have strong economic components (such as drugs and immigration).

Second, the United States must get away from a policy in which 90 percent of its time, resources, and attention are devoted to 10 percent of

the region, **i.e.**, to Central America. Shifting from a policy based on ideological and security concerns to one grounded in diverse economic and political issues requires a massive adjustment of the focus away from Central America to other more important parts of the region. We must not, however, simply cease to pay attention to a region still stricken with devastating problems; too little attention would be as damaging as too much. But if Latin Americans in South America and **Mexico** are to take the United States seriously as an actor in the region there must be a major rebalancing away from the Central America fixation.

Third, we must give up the idea that **U.S.-Latin** American relations are a one-way street, that the bulk of the agenda consists of Latin American problems that the United States has to help them deal with. Latin America continues to have many serious economic and political problems, some of which represent potential trouble for the United States. But we also have serious domestic problems, some of which affect Latin America adversely. The powerful, widespread demand for illicit drugs in the United States, for example, which is a product of a host of domestic social and economic shortcomings, has a terribly destructive effect on several Latin American countries. We must approach Latin America with the open recognition that much of what we can do for Latin America we can do at home--be it reducing the demand for drugs, getting our fiscal balance in order and our interest rates down, or developing stronger export capabilities in order to reduce domestic pressure to close U.S. markets to developing countries.

Fourth, we must incorporate the lessons of the recent events in Eastern Europe into our policy toward Marxist-Leninist movements or governments in Latin America: Marxist-Leninist governments are not, as U.S. conservative ideologists have contended, capable of indefinitely suppressing the wishes of their people. Marxist-Leninist governments can be internally ousted and such change is nurtured not by isolating those countries from the West but by encouraging interaction and **exchange** in order that the people of those societies will see what democracy and free enterprise can bring. Our "pariah state" approach to leftist governments in Latin America, **i.e.**, to Cuba since the early 1960s and to Nicaragua in the **1980s**, resembles nothing so much as the old **pre-Nixon** China policy and must **be** brought up to date; If we want leftist governments to join the current of modern history, it makes no sense to ban them from the river of economic, cultural, and diplomatic activities that connects the community of modern nations. Similarly, leftist revolutionaries are not necessarily immune to change. Persons who embrace Marxism-Leninism and fight under its banner may in the right circumstances moderate their belief and go from fighting to participating peacefully in civil society. The recent example of former Tupamaro guerrillas in Uruguay abandoning armed struggle for participation in electoral politics is noteworthy in this regard.

Fifth, we must realize that close relationships between the United States and particular Latin American countries do not have to **be**, and in fact should not **be**, dependency relationships. Our closest relations in Latin America are with El Salvador, Honduras, and now Panama. In all three cases the defining feature of the relationship is massive **U.S.** economic assistance, and it is generally thought that the existing government will

collapse without U.S. support. Such relationships are ultimately bad for both sides. They breed a dependency culture into the recipient, undermining the possibility of genuine political or economic development away from the problems that prompted the creation of the strong U.S. tie. And for the United States the costs are enormous and the gains few. We must learn to forge our closest relationships with the most important countries in the region and to do so on the basis of mutual respect and exchange.

VIII

Given the centrality of anticommunism in U.S. policy toward Latin America during the past four decades, it should be obvious that the decline of the Cold War will have profound implications for **U.S.-Latin** American relations. More strongly stated, whether we realize it or not, and whether we like it or not, a new era in **U.S.-Latin** American relations is upon us. We can back into that era, confronting discrete problems as they arise and questioning the continued importance of Latin America to the United States. Or we can seize the emerging situation as an opportunity to cleanse a perennially troubled partnership of outdated assumptions and to set out a modest, realistic policy approach based on the significant mutual interests and concerns between the two regions. The United States is striving to define its role in the post-Cold War world. Latin America, a region close to home, is a good place to start.