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A large, dark teal silhouette map of the Americas, including North and South America, centered on the page.

SUMMITRY IN THE AMERICAS: THE END OF MASS MULTILATERALISM?

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The inter-American governance and civil society program at FOCAL provides policy-relevant research and analysis on hemispheric issues including governing institutions, multilateral organizations and hemispheric co-operation with a focus on both state and non-state actors. Working in collaboration with regional partners, we have several projects that focus on various aspects of democracy and the rule of law, as well as on other hemispheric initiatives such as the Summit of the Americas. The program seeks to increase understanding of Latin America in Canada and promote Canadian best practices in Latin America.



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Executive summary

Summits among large numbers of leaders that convene on a periodic basis are the “new diplomacy.” In the Western Hemisphere, summits continue to multiply, whether in response to specific issues or to the desire by certain countries to assert their leadership. At the same time, skepticism regarding the value of summits has become widespread. A common view is that summits are largely photo ops for leaders and that their lofty communiqués are soon forgotten, leaving a wide gap between aspirations and implementation. These frustrations notwithstanding, summits are here to stay. Gatherings of heads of state respond to our era of globalization and inter-dependence, when many common problems can only be addressed through international co-operation.

This policy paper will explore some of the many lessons learned during the five Summits of the Americas and two special Summits that have been held since the inaugural Miami Summit in 1994. Inter-American summitry has served a number of valuable purposes such as adding legitimacy to democratic norms and values, advancing specific initiatives, providing a forum for face-to-face engagement of leaders, compelling executive branch bureaucracies to focus on issues of inter-American interest and, on occasion, addressing crises of the moment. However, it has also suffered from evident shortcomings, the most serious being the following: the wide gap between words and deeds that has generated a summitry credibility gap; the limited engagement of existing multilateral institutions in partnering and helping to finance Summit initiatives; and the ups and downs of civil society inclusion.

Key recommendations:

1. Forge a more workable agenda and shorten the negotiating time for preparing Summit communiqués. The Organization of American States (OAS), not the host government, should be the principal driver of Summit preparations.
2. Better monitor and evaluate Summit implementation. Auditors should focus on a subset of priority initiatives. The evaluations —by external, independent experts— should be made public.
3. Mobilize resources more efficiently. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) should be invited to participate more fully in summitry, in return for more fulsome financial engagement.
4. Deepen participation in summitry. Expert non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can take part in the evaluation of Summit progress. Businesses can join in public-private partnerships that advance Summit goals.
5. Co-ordinate with other regional summits. Some summits could be nested within or even blended into other summits with largely overlapping membership and agendas. Summit communiqués could make reference to the work of other summits where goals converge.
6. Innovate to unfreeze Summit decision-making. Allow coalitions of like-minded states to pursue issues of mutual interest. Prior to the 2012 Cartagena Summit, negotiate a compromise that allows partial Cuban participation in specific initiatives where Cuban policies are congruent with Summit principles and goals.

Introduction: The “new diplomacy” of summitry

Summits among large numbers of leaders that convene on a periodic basis are an innovative form of diplomacy. This “new diplomacy,” as it has been labelled by the Secretary General of the Ibero-American Summits, Enrique Iglesias, dates just from the 1970s, with the inauguration of the Group of Seven (G-7) industrial countries.¹

This new diplomacy was only made possible by modern air travel. Historically, summits were typically one-off, specific affairs convened to end wars or sign major treaties, and leaders would spend weeks travelling laboriously by land or sea to reach their summit destinations. So we are very much in the early stages of modern summitry, and we are learning by doing. This policy paper will explore some of the many lessons learned during the five Summits of the Americas and two special Summits that have been held since the inaugural Miami Summit in 1994.

Skepticism regarding the value of summits has become widespread. A common view is that summits are largely photo ops for leaders and that their lofty communiqués are soon forgotten, leaving a wide gap between aspirations and implementation. With each passing year, there are more and more summits—global, regional and sub-regional—with overlapping mixes of countries and agendas, crowding the calendars of leaders and resulting in “summit fatigue.”

These frustrations notwithstanding, summits are here to stay. Gatherings of state leaders respond to our era of globalization and inter-dependence, when many common problems can only be addressed through international co-operation, and where serious problems in one country can readily spill over and cause problems for many states. Summits also respond to the globalization of business and of civil society. Summits respond to a world interconnected by the internet and telecommunications, where citizens increasingly recognize that their problems require supra-national responses and hence look for international solutions.

More generally, skeptics argue that international agreements add little value, that governments only sign agreements that obligate them to follow principles to which they already adhere or that they cynically intend to ignore.² Yet, international agreements can establish norms of behaviour that states will hesitate to violate; the agreements alter states’ cost-benefit analyses of potential behaviours. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, international agreements and the institutions that embody them can alter the balance of contending forces *within* countries. For example, human rights activists have looked to organs of the Organization of American States (OAS) to force their governments and judicial systems to honour inter-American norms.³

At the global level, the G-7/8 has expanded to the Group of 20 and has taken on new urgency as leaders address the fallout from the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, climate change and pressing international security issues. In the Western Hemisphere, summits continue to multiply, whether in response to specific issues or to the desire by certain countries to assert their leadership by inventing new diplomatic instrumentalities.

Is geography destiny?

Some analysts question whether the Western Hemisphere is a sufficiently coherent unit to warrant its own summit process. Justifications for mega-regional meetings begin with contiguous geography, cultural commonalities, economic exchange and social interconnectedness and at times, shared enemies. However, some underscore conflicting interests between the dominant United States and the weaker Latin American and Caribbean states. Yet, around the world, geographically-designated regional summits are commonplace, even where there are deep historical divisions and where countries vary greatly by size and level of development. Europe, Africa and Asia each have their periodic summits, some more consolidated than others. These mega-regional summits do not preclude sub-regional summits; for example, in Asia the wider East Asia Summit coexists comfortably with the sub-regional Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Western Hemisphere was the innovator in regional diplomacy, the OAS being the granddaddy of all such regional inter-governmental forums. It would be ironic and foolish for the Western Hemisphere to abandon mega-regional instruments —and summitry is the latest, highest form— just as summits are being routinely adopted in the rest of the world.

Within the Western Hemisphere, the debate as to whether the United States and Latin America have enough common interests to sit collegially around the same table is as old as Simon Bolivar, who at times seemed to answer “yes” to that question and at times “no”; in the end, the liberator invited the U.S. to attend the first pan-American Congress of Panama in 1826. Today, some countries are again questioning whether the United States and Latin America can usefully work together on common problems. Venezuela under President Hugo Chávez leads a coalition of small states, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), that perceive a pervasive antagonism with the U.S. and hence dislike inter-American summitry, except insofar as it provides a podium from which to denounce U.S. imperialism. Yet, this is a minority expression, and the challenge for inter-American summitry is to devise mechanisms for preventing rejectionist states from disrupting an instrumentality that remains relevant and useful to the large majority of players.

The new diplomacy of summitry will remain a feature —and almost certainly an increasingly important one— of international relations. The Sixth Summit of the Americas has already been scheduled for Cartagena, Colombia in 2012. Therefore, the task before us is to critically examine the summitry process as it has evolved since 1994 and draw lessons for its improvement.

Purposes of inter-American summitry

Despite some serious shortcomings, inter-American summitry has served a number of valuable purposes and has made contributions to the welfare of the peoples of the region. Analytically, one must be careful regarding attribution: often a policy initiative or trend has multiple causes, and summitry may be part of a wider stream of contributions. With such cautions in mind, inter-American summitry has served these functions:

- 1. Adding legitimacy to democratic norms and values.** When modern summitry began in 1994, many countries were just emerging from the horrors of authoritarian military rule. Summits have underscored that democracy is the only legitimate form of government in the region. Importantly, the 2001 Quebec Summit gave impetus to the Inter-American Democracy Charter, signed by foreign ministers in Lima, Peru, on Sept. 11, 2001.

Typically, international relations are understood as treating interactions among states. However, it is in fact often about relations among like-minded groups within different countries, as they seek to lend support to their brethren in their struggles against domestic foes. The assertion by summitry of the hegemony of the democratic ideal, therefore, lends support to democratic forces within member states. Where democracy is under threat, the pronouncements of summitry provide the norms for collective action in defence of democracy. Where democracy is gaining ground, summitry helps to lock in those gains.

- 2. Advancing specific initiatives.** Summits can catalyze collective action behind consensus goals. Many initiatives in the five plans of action have remained on paper, but some have come to life. For example, the Miami Summit fostered actions to eliminate lead in gasoline and to eradicate measles. Summits have originated the Inter-American Convention against Corruption and the associated OAS follow-up mechanism. They have also created the Justice Studies Center for the Americas that opened for business in Santiago, Chile.

Of course, the early Summits were dominated by the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The FTAA has fallen short of its end goal but did help to spawn a series of free trade agreements (FTAs) between the U.S. and Chile, Peru and Central America (and Colombia and Panama, although the U.S. Congress has yet to ratify them), whose members are now part of the Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas initiative. As Summits have added legitimacy to FTAs, these agreements among Latin American countries are now commonplace, and there is no suggestion of the U.S. objecting to sub-regional arrangements per se, even when the U.S. is excluded. The FTAA initiative demonstrates that when a concept —such as more open markets— has gained wide currency and several countries are interested in driving an initiative, Summits are valuable vehicles for gaining a formal validation and stimulating a powerful policy process.

Despite the contentious atmosphere at the Port of Spain Summit in 2009, several of the initiatives from the plan of action are showing signs of momentum. A follow-up energy ministerial was held in Lima, Peru. In the sphere of social welfare, some countries are working together to build on successful national experiences with conditional cash transfers (that require families to keep their children in school).

- 3. Providing a forum for face-to-face engagement of leaders.** Summits afford an efficient opportunity for heads of state to get to know each other and to develop some degree of mutual respect and confidence. Over the busy Summit weekend, the leaders meet in formal and informal settings, in plenary sessions, sub-regional gatherings and in one-on-one bilateral talks. These encounters develop the positive inter-personal chemistry between leaders and lay foundations for future co-operation and bargaining and for confronting crises as they may arise. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton put it this way in a recent press interview:

“I think that, of course, countries make decisions based on their own assessment of their national interests. But part of what you can attempt to do when you’ve developed a relationship is to offer different ways of looking at that national interest, to try to find more common ground. And it’s going to be a more likely convergence if the person with whom you’re talking feels that they’ve already developed a personal understanding of you and a personal connection with you... Because it is all about having enough trust between leaders and countries so that misunderstandings don’t occur, but also on the margins, there can be a greater appreciation of the other’s point of view.”⁴

Summits also allow for leaders to take the measure of their counterparts: it can only be surmised what Barack Obama and Hugo Chávez thought of each other after Chávez presented the young U.S. president at the Summit in Port of Spain, with a copy of Eduardo Galeano’s *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillages of a Continent*.

- 4. Compelling executive branch bureaucracies to focus on issues of inter-American interest.** The scarcest commodity of a head of state is his or her time. Mountains of pressing demands, domestic and international, compete for space on their crowded calendars. Periodic summits force chief executives to devote time—in preparation and in attendance—to the common problems confronting the assembled nations. Furthermore, the various agencies of the executive branch will be engaged for weeks and even for months prior to the Summit, participating in pre-Summit planning, in preparing their own government’s activities and talking points, and in taking decisions on the Summit’s agenda items. Controversial issues that the bureaucracy may have been avoiding are driven to the top of the decision pile.
- 5. Summits can, on occasion, address crises of the moment.** For example, the 2008 Rio Group Summit in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, facilitated the resolution of a border dispute between Colombia and Ecuador. An Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Auckland, New Zealand in 1999 allowed leaders to take decisive action to call for a United Nations (UN) military intervention in East Timor.

Another goal of mega-regional summits, some contend, is to forge regional perspectives on global issues that can then be articulated in global forums. That is, summits can help build a regional caucus to advance common interests in wider venues. This aspiration, however, is rarely obtained in any meaningful way. In APEC, for example, members have routinely agreed to work together to advance global free trade and to bring the Doha Round to a successful conclusion, only for member states to pursue their singular interests once they arrive at the actual negotiating sessions. In the Western Hemisphere, even if one were to exclude the United States, interests are typically too diverse among states to forge a unified stance on tough global issues (other than to articulate procedural requests for more attention to, or more voice for, Latin America). At the G-20, the three Latin American participants (Argentina, Brazil and Mexico) have yet to act as an effective unit. At the UN, the Latin American caucus does sometimes find common ground, but the squabble among Argentina, Brazil and Mexico over who could represent the region in an expanded Security Council suggests the limits of regional unity. The European Union has long struggled to forge a common foreign policy, and it has taken many decades and very strong regional institutions to register a still imperfect progress. Therefore, while inter-American summits can pursue a number of important goals, forging a mega-regional consensus and a unified front in global forums will generally be beyond reach.

Serious shortcomings of inter-American summitry

Summits will continue to populate the diplomatic landscape. But inter-American summits have suffered from evident shortcomings, the most serious being the following:

1. Planning procedures yield communiqués with initiatives whose ambition and numbers far outpace any will or capacity to realize them. As many commentators have noted, this wide gap between words and deeds has generated a summitry credibility gap.
2. There has been limited engagement of existing multilateral institutions in partnering and helping to finance Summit initiatives. Summit leaders themselves have hesitated to provide fresh budgetary resources and have handed the ball primarily to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and OAS. Yet, while the OAS has integrated summitry into many of its core functions, the organization's financial and human resources are very limited while the IDB maintains, for various reasons, that its programs often parallel summit initiatives but will not be driven by them.
3. The inclusion of civil society —NGOs and the private sector— has had its ups and downs. Whether for reasons of bureaucratic exclusivity and inertia, political prejudices, or simply lack of imagination, summitry has not taken full advantage of the benefits that civil society could offer.

In retrospect, the mid-1990s were a special moment in inter-American affairs, of convergence if not full consensus, on fundamental political and economic principles. There were strong emerging trends in Latin America toward constitutional democracy and more open markets, and governments looked to the United States to place its leverage behind those domestic reform movements. The inaugural Miami Summit (1994) took place amidst this era of good feelings. But the Summits of Mar del Plata (2005) and Port of Spain (2009) confronted a very different hemisphere, one more contentious, fragmented and polarized. The resurgence of authoritarian populism has injected a new political dynamic where certain bellicose leaders have sought to use Summit meetings not to reach agreements on common goals, but rather to explicitly reject the principles that had governed the earlier Summits and to denounce the United States and sometimes associated Latin American governments. The troublesome question arises: can inter-American summitry be productive in this divisive environment?

Recommendations

If the Summits of the Americas are to regain credibility, governments and international institutions need to confront the problems we have identified and design a more efficient and effective set of procedures and outcomes. Continuing the status quo is not a viable option. Problems that require correction include the elongated communiqués, faulty monitoring and evaluation of Summit progress, serious resource shortfalls, and disappointing civil society participation. Another challenge is the crowded calendar of competing summits. A revived summitry must also adjust to the less harmonious inter-American environment.

1. Forge a more workable agenda and shorten the negotiating time for preparing Summit communiqués

Large-scale multilateralism has an inherent tendency to produce large, unwieldy communiqués. With 34 countries at the table, if each country advances just three proposals, the total number of initiatives quickly surpasses 100. And the longer the preparatory talks, the more the temptation and time available to lengthen the list.

The Port of Spain plan of action was some two years in the making. What began as a reasonably orderly document—such that the Summit negotiators proudly made the draft text public—eventually morphed into the typically unwieldy and wildly unrealistic laundry list of proposals.

The Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) has the responsibility of preparing the Summit communiqués. But as its name implies, the SIRG is also responsible for overseeing Summit implementation. By spending fewer months negotiating the next Summit's plan of action, the SIRG would be free to devote more of its time to monitoring and evaluating the implementation of previous Summit accords. However, even this reform will not fully succeed in overcoming the inherent momentum toward producing overly ambitious plans of action.

One possible answer to the overflow of initiatives would be to have groups of interested countries first agree among themselves, preferably prior to the Summit meeting, to give serious, priority attention to a sub-set of initiatives. The creation of this abridged “priority list” would still allow countries to claim credit for having inserted their pet projects into the final communiqué and public opinion would not generally be aware of the privately held priority list. But the priority list of more vital initiatives would attract more of the resources and attention of the Summit follow-up process.

In setting priorities, countries should primarily tackle issues that have a prominent international dimension, such as trade, finance, climate change, crime and international security issues. However, exceptions might be allowed where there are strong domestic constituencies favourable to a behind-the-borders initiative. Summits can bolster already committed national leaders and strong social reform movements. In the words of Andrea Sanhueza, executive director of PARTICIPA and a close observer of summitry: “Summits can support political processes or public policies in countries only when the Summit initiatives strengthen local processes that are already ongoing.”⁵

In Summit preparation, the respective roles of the host country and the SIRG in preparing the Summit texts require clarification. Summit processes want to capture the energy and commitment of engaged hosts that have a big stake in the meeting's success. The host country will want to place its stamp on “its” Summit, and chair an event whose themes resonate with its domestic programs and constituencies. But an overly heavy hand by the host can depress SIRG creativity and create discontinuities with regard to previous Summits. Ideally, Summits should build upon one another and reflect the evolving agenda of the hemisphere, rather than merely the preferences of the pro tempore host governments. The OAS and SIRG, not the host government, should be the principal drivers of Summit preparations.

2. Better monitor and evaluate Summit implementation

The SIRG has made several efforts to monitor and evaluate Summit implementation. But these efforts have become bogged down by the overwhelming number of initiatives. And its reliance on self-reporting by governments robs their reports of objectivity and legitimacy.

As an alternative approach to fulfilling its monitoring responsibilities, the SIRG should focus evaluation on a subset of priority initiatives and should engage independent auditors. The external auditors can be corporate consulting firms or expert NGOs; their reports would be subject to commentary by the OAS and member states but would not require their approvals. These independent evaluations should be made public and given full consideration by the SIRG: initiatives that are succeeding might be given greater impetus. Initiatives that are failing would be amended or discontinued.

3. Mobilize resources more efficiently

The Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG) encompasses the major multilateral institutions seeking to foster regional economic development.⁶ The creation of the JSWG was a major success for the OAS in its drive to marshal more resources behind Summit goals. To demonstrate U.S. interest in summitry and in donor co-ordination and support for Summit initiatives, Hillary Clinton attended a JSWG meeting, convened at the principals' level, immediately after the Port of Spain Summit. Nevertheless, the work of the JSWG is burdened by the large number of Summit initiatives. Its labours will be made more efficient and effective if it focuses on a priority list of initiatives.

But the JSWG will become more adept in marshalling resources behind key Summit initiatives only if it receives more forceful direction from the relevant executive mechanisms within the OAS. The Summit of the Americas Secretariat within the OAS must have the capacity to understand the internal budgets and programs of JSWG member institutions and their potential synergies with Summit mandates. OAS professionals must enjoy the authority and expertise to argue persuasively that appropriate portions of the programs of JSWG entities could be aligned with Summit mandates. In that regard, it is important for the JSWG to meet from time to time at the principals' level, thereby allowing the OAS Secretary General the opportunity to discuss the implementation of Summit mandates with his influential counterparts.

As the institution with the lead responsibility for Summit implementation, the OAS should reach an understanding with the well-capitalized IDB, enumerating areas and programs for co-operation. Special attention should be paid to implementation of Summit mandates and the formation of related public-private partnerships. Both institutions could report on how current and planned programs support these goals. The inter-institutional understanding would invite the IDB to participate more fully in the various specialized ministerial meetings charged with Summit implementation. The understanding could also open doors to greater IDB participation in the planning of Summits.

4. Deepen participation in summitry

Inter-American summitry has repeatedly affirmed its interest in the participation of civil society, understood as including NGOs and private business. There are good reasons for these invitations: civil society can bring enhanced legitimacy and representativeness to summitry, and can often bring expertise and resources to public-private partnerships designed to implement Summit goals. But the engagement of civil society in inter-American diplomacy is a relatively new phenomenon that not all states are comfortable with, particularly where their domestic politics are not accustomed to such open access and interchanges. The resurgence of authoritarian populism in some countries has introduced another element of antagonism toward meaningful civil society access to summitry.

Summitry needs to strengthen the mechanisms for civil society participation. Over the 15 years of summitry, NGO enthusiasm has waxed and waned, reflecting in part the degree of access given by the various Summit host governments. As hosts, the U.S. and Canada were particularly welcoming to civil society, but other hosts, including most recently Trinidad and Tobago, were less so. Sanhueza, of PARTICIPA and the broad NGO network Red Democracia Activa, suggests an institutionalized dialogue with civil society organizations at the international, regional and national levels. She also proposes the creation of an institutionalized mechanism for the evaluation of Summit accords, to be implemented through OAS funding for collaborative alliances with civil society organizations.⁷

In the aftermath of the Miami Summit, the private sector was enthusiastic about the FTAA and en masse attended follow-up trade ministerials, indicating that the private sector will engage where its interests are at play. Since 2005, the OAS has convened a Private Sector Forum (PSF) just prior to Summits (and to OAS General Assemblies). This forum can be strengthened in various ways.⁸ For example, the PSF could be given well-orchestrated opportunities for interactions with ministers at the OAS General Assembly and leaders at the Summits. In doing so, the hemisphere can draw on the experiences of other regional summits. Each year, APEC divides its 21 leaders among four to five tables and invites private sector representatives to sit and dialogue with the leaders around a few pre-determined themes. The Ibero-American Summits offer private sector representatives, together with civil society spokespersons, the opportunity to present recommendations to several major presidents and prime ministers who, in turn, respond to the private sector commentaries.

However, the PSF must do more than dialogue. Rather than focus on yet another set of last-minute recommendations, it could encourage the formation of public-private partnerships that unite private sector interests with the priorities already presented in the draft Summit texts. In Port of Spain, Forum Empresa, an inter-American alliance of business associations advocating corporate social responsibility, presented a list of some 80 member firms interested in forging just such public-private partnerships. But will the official post-Summit machinery follow up on this extraordinary offer?

5. Co-ordinate with other regional summits

The inter-American summits are not the only forums that periodically gather leaders of the Western Hemisphere. The Group of Rio has convened annually but agreed in 2008 to a biennial calendar. In a recent attempt at institutional innovation, two Summits of Latin America and the Caribbean on Integration and Development (CALC) have been held, in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil (2008) and Cancún, Mexico (2010), even as they have yet to reach agreement upon a formal name for the new enterprise and are debating whether to meld with the long-standing Group of Rio. The Ibero-American Summit met for the 19th time in Estoril, Portugal in 2009. Five hemispheric countries participate in the annual APEC Summit, and five are members of the G-20. There are also numerous sub-regional summits, including the summits of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Andean Community, the Central American Integration System (SICA) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Issue-specific summits have included the South American Energy and the Petrocaribe summits.⁹ ALBA leaders confer frequently in ordinary and special sessions.

Each of these groupings serves somewhat different purposes and convenes under the leadership of a different constellation of states. Each has its own history and momentum. The main issue is whether these forums are largely complementary, advancing similar policy agendas, or whether they are fundamentally competitive. Can they be “nested” within common frameworks, or are they advancing divergent purposes? Are they serving as building blocks toward widening circles of integration, or is each led by a nation or nations that see their interests in conflict with those being advanced in other forums?

Measures could be taken to foster more collaboration among this expanding list of regional and sub-regional summits. As a start, efforts could be made to rationalize the annual summit calendar, and to determine whether it might be possible to fold some of the sub-regional summits into larger meetings where all relevant states are present. And as already occurs to some degree, there could be a systematic interchange of information among summits and their secretariats. It would be both diplomatic and useful if summit communiqués made reference to the work of other summits where goals overlap; even better, leaders could instruct their governments to collaborate where such common goals exist.

6. Innovate to unfreeze Summit decision-making

When it becomes impossible to reach consensus in large meetings, the obvious response for like-minded parties is to seek ways to act independently to make progress on issues of mutual interest. The country composition of the coalitions of like-minded states will vary from issue to issue. This type of pragmatism is not necessarily bad. It is easier to work effectively with a smaller number of genuinely interested governments than with an unwieldy crowd laced with disruptive elements. What the Europeans refer to as “variable geometry” would be the answer to a stalled mass multilateralism.

Optimally, the larger body—in the case of Summits, the full leaders meeting—will approve a generally worded initiative that grants some umbrella legitimacy to smaller group coalitions of constructively engaged governments. This pragmatic formula allows for both the consensus principle and functional progress.

Finally, in the realm of political contention, there remains the issue of Cuba. At the OAS General Assembly in June 2009, the resolutions under which Cuba was suspended from the OAS in 1962 were revoked, but the issue of Cuban participation in the OAS —and by proxy, in inter-American summitry— was temporarily shelved. The U.S. maintained that the active presence of an authoritarian state would contradict the basic tenets of the OAS and the Inter-American Democracy Charter. The Cuban government professed disinterest in resuming its OAS seat. Yet, the Cuba issue, which preoccupied diplomats at the Port of Spain Summit, continues to fester.

So long as the Cuban government eschews domestic reforms, its presence at inter-American summits remains problematic. The approval of Summit communiqués, whose language will inevitably contradict Cuban practices, would raise severe credibility questions for both summitry itself and the Cuban government. But compromise measures that allow partial Cuban participation can be envisioned. For example, Cuba could be invited to join in specific initiatives where Cuban domestic policies are congruent with the purposes of that issue-specific process. Issues where Cuban participation could be constructive might include social services, energy and biomass, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism. To prevent the Cuba issue from again becoming disruptive, such a compromise should be negotiated prior to the 2012 Cartagena Summit. It would also help if Washington were to begin, in earnest, to join the hemispheric consensus and move toward establishing more normal bilateral relations with Havana.

Endnotes

¹ Iglesias, Enrique V. “Desafíos, mirando hacia el futuro.” In *América Latina y La Diplomacia de Cumbres*, edited by Carlos M. Jarque, María Salvadora Ortiz and Carlos Quenan, 225-232. Madrid: Secretaría General Iberoamericana, 2009.

² Ikenberry, G. John. “State Power and the Institutional Bargain: America’s Ambivalent Economic and Security Multilateralism.” In *U.S. Hegemony and International Organizations*, edited by Rosemary Foot, S. Neil MacFarlane and Michael Mastanduno, 49-70. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

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⁴ “Meeting of the Diplomats.” *Newsweek*, January 4, 2010.

⁵ Author’s translation: “Así, las Cumbres pueden apoyar procesos políticos o de políticas públicas en los países solo cuando los acuerdos tomados en ellas fortalezcan procesos locales que ya están en marcha.” Cited in Andrea Sanhueza and Catalina Delpiano. “Las Cumbres de las Américas no deben ‘quedar en letra muerta’.” In Jarque *et al.*, 209-218, 2009, *op.cit.*, 210.

⁶ The 13 members of the Joint Summit Working Group include, in addition to the OAS and the IDB: UN Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (UN ECLAC), Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), Andean Development Corporation (CAF), Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), World Bank, International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Labor Organization (ILO), UN Development Program (UNDP), and the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (ICA).

⁷ Sanhueza and Delpiano, 2009, *op.cit.*

⁸ See: Richard Feinberg. *Private Sector Participation in the Inter-American System and in the Summits of the Americas: Strengthening Dialogues, Catalyzing Actions*. Washington, D.C.: Organization of American States, 2009. Available at: <http://www.sedi.oas.org/DTTC/papers/FeinbergReport.pdf>

⁹ For a chronology of presidential summits and meetings, and the membership of each grouping, see: Francisco Rojas Aravena. “Diplomacia de Cumbres e integración regional.” In Jarque *et al.*, 27-53, 2009, *op.cit.*

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