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FEATURED Q&A

How Successful Was Obama's Trip to Latin America?

Q U.S. President Barack Obama visited Brazil, Chile and El Salvador on a five-day tour of the region last week, signing a variety of agreements on security, energy, education and trade. Which aspects of the trip were a success and which were disappointments? What could Obama have done better? How did Obama's agenda and speeches during the trip reflect changing political and economic dynamics in the region and what do they indicate for future U.S.-Latin American relations?

agreements to Congress for approval, (3) easing the tariffs, subsidies and quotas that protect U.S. agriculture from competition and block economic cooperation with Brazil, (4) pressing forward with some, even modest, reform of immigration policies, and, as repeatedly promised, (5) beginning minimally to curb the flow of assault weapons southward and take serious steps to deal with drug use as a health problem. Even two or three of these would be a good start."

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A Peter Hakim, member of the Advisor board and president emeritus of the Inter-American Dialogue: "Although overshadowed by events in Libya and only superficially reported in the United States, Barack Obama's trip to Latin America last week was, by all accounts, a clear success. He vividly demonstrated his own personal popularity and surely raised U.S. standing in the region as well. The president's repeated call for equal partnerships with the countries of Latin America was particularly well received—although many in Latin America have since expressed skepticism about the United States' readiness for partnership. What the United States has to do now is show it can be a reliable partner and ally. Some things that would help are (1) opening U.S. highways to Mexican trucks in accord with NAFTA obligations, (2) presenting the long-deferred Colombia and Panama free trade



Former Brazilian Vice President José Alencar Dies at 79

Former Brazilian Vice President José Alencar, who left office Jan. 1 after serving for eight years under Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, died Tuesday after a long fight with abdominal cancer. See brief on page 2.

File Photo: Brazilian Government.

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NEWS BRIEFS

Haiti Delays Announcement of Presidential Election Results

Haitian authorities said Tuesday that announcement of the preliminary results of the country's presidential runoff election would be postponed for four days, the Associated Press reported. Although the March 20 vote was commended by international monitors, the president of Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council, Gaïllot Dorsinvil, cited irregularities and fraud at the vote-counting center and said that lawyers would use now "more stringent verification measures." The results are expected to be announced on Monday.

Former Brazilian Vice President José Alencar Dies at 79

Former Brazilian Vice President José Alencar, who served for eight years under Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, died Tuesday at age 79 after a long battle with abdominal cancer, the Associated Press reported. Alencar had arrived Monday at the Sirio-Libanês Hospital in critical condition and died the next day of multiple organ failure. A multimillionaire who had owned several textile factories, Alencar was picked as Lula's running mate in 2002 in an effort to win the support of bankers, investors and business leaders.

U.S. Court Dismisses Suit Against Banco de La Nación Argentina

A U.S. district judge in New York dismissed a lawsuit on Monday by bondholders who sought to hold **Banco de La Nación Argentina** liable for judgments against the state for defaulted debt, Bloomberg News reported. The plaintiffs argued that the bank was Argentina's "alter ego" and therefore responsible, however the court ruled that U.S. courts do not have jurisdiction.

Political News

Former U.S. President Carter: Not in Cuba to Get Contractor

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who is scheduled today to end a three-day visit to Cuba, said Wednesday that he is not in the Caribbean nation to retrieve Alan Gross, the U.S. contractor who has been jailed on the island since December 2009, the Associated Press reported. Carter met Tuesday with Cuban President Raúl Castro and said he talked with Cuban officials about Gross, but added, "I am not here to take him out of the country," the AP reported. "We are here to visit the Cubans, the heads of government and private citizens. It is a great pleasure for us to return to Havana," he said in Spanish during a visit to a senior citizens' center. "I hope we can contribute to better relations between the two countries." Gross, an employee of Bethesda, Md.-based **Development Alternatives Inc.**, was in Cuba under a U.S. Agency for International Development contract and

was sentenced earlier this month to 15 years in prison. His family and U.S. officials have said his work in Cuba involved distributing communications equipment to members of the island's Jewish community to help them access the Internet. However, Jewish groups in Cuba deny working with him. Carter, during his trip this week met with Jewish and Roman Catholic leaders in Cuba and is scheduled to meet today with dissidents before leaving Cuba.

Jamaican Ponzi Scheme Mastermind Pleads Guilty in U.S.

A Jamaican financier charged with running a Ponzi scheme that bilked thousands of investors out of \$220 million pleaded guilty Tuesday in federal court in Orlando, Fla., Reuters reported. David Smith, who was extradited last year from the Turks and Caicos Islands, admitted to masterminding the scheme, which promised clients in the Caribbean and Florida average monthly returns of 10 percent if they bought foreign currency trading investments. As part of his plea agree-

Featured Q&A

Continued from page 1

A **Patricio Navia, master teacher of global studies at New York University:** "There is a clear lesson from Obama's trip to Latin America. U.S. presidents should refrain in the future from traveling to the region as a whole—unless they attend a regional summit—and instead should focus on traveling to individual countries within the region. Latin America has grown very diverse in terms of economic and social development. The political evolution of the region's democracies—or absence thereof in Cuba—has also taken on different paths depending on the specific countries. Relations with the United States have also evolved differently depending on the bilateral agenda items. Some countries are more concerned with immigration; others worry more about trade or drug policies. Thus, U.S. presidents should accept that Latin America is

no longer a homogenous region and they should refrain from seeking to send the same message to all countries. Different agenda items require different messages. Different priorities necessitate designing and implementing different policies. President Obama's trip to Brazil was successful because he focused on bilateral U.S.-Brazilian issues. The visits to Chile and El Salvador were less so because Obama brought a message to the entire region and did not pay sufficient attention to the bilateral issues those two countries have with the United States. Had Obama sought to reach more narrow objectives in his trip, addressing issues that concerned Chile and El Salvador, he would have sent a clearer invitation to other Latin American countries to engage bilaterally with Washington to advance their own agendas."

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ment, which stipulates that his wife will not face charges, Smith agreed to forfeit \$128 million immediately. He entered guilty pleas to 18 counts of money laundering and four counts of wire fraud. Each count carries a maximum prison sentence of 20 years. Prosecutors have argued that Smith lured approximately 6,000 people, including prominent Jamaicans such as politicians and doctors, into the scheme and that their money paid for Smith's \$2 million island home, expensive cars, jewelry and a down payment on a Lear jet. Smith ran the scheme from an investment house called Olint, which he set up five years ago in Jamaica. It was shut down before he moved to the Turks and Caicos Islands, where he was sentenced to six-and-a-half years in prison in connection with the scheme.



Smith

File Photo: Turks & Caicos Weekly News.

Company News

Portugal Telecom Has 25.3 Percent Stake in Brazil's Oi

Portugal Telecom SGPS has bought a 25.3 percent stake in Brazil's **Telemar Norte Leste**, known as Oi, for 8.32 billion reais (\$5 billion), a larger stake than it had

The stake is larger than Portugal Telecom had originally intended to buy.

originally sought to purchase, the Portuguese company said in a statement, Bloomberg News reported Tuesday. Portugal Telecom bought the stake through direct investments in Oi as well as through indirect stakes in the Brazilian company's main shareholders. The stake also includes 25.6 percent of **Telemar Participações**, which controls Oi.

In Focus

U.S. Seeking Stronger Connections in Region Through Technology

By Rachel Sadon

WASHINGTON—As the United States works to promote its strategic and national security interests by modernizing diplomacy for a digital age, the U.S. State Department is fostering new methods of engaging directly with Latin American citizens, a top official of the department said Tuesday. "We are shifting the spirit of public diplomacy from one-way messaging to two-way engagement," in Latin America and beyond, said Judith McHale, the undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs.

On the heels of President Barack Obama's trip to the region, McHale spoke about the State Department's efforts to use social media to engage directly with new and broader audiences in Latin America at a forum co-hosted by Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies and the NDN and New Policy Institute think tanks.



McHale

File Photo: U.S. State Department.

Citing this year's upheaval in the Middle East, McHale emphasized that new media are transforming social movements and the world. Because the Internet has opened unprecedented spaces for opinion and dialogue, it is impossible to control "how and when and through what medium people form their impressions" of the United States, she said. Thus, McHale echoed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's call for "21st Century Statecraft," or the practice of reaching beyond government-to-government communication and connecting directly with citizens around the globe.

"Latin America and the Caribbean provide us with a natural testing ground for broad-based diplomacy—the population is young, connected and hungry for education and information," said McHale, citing a host of mobile and Web-based technologies that the State Department has been utilizing in the region.

In addition to fostering relationships through **Facebook** and **Twitter**, the State Department has organized "tech dels" (short for technology delegations) and tech camps to bring together technology experts and community leaders with the goal of creating "citizen-level solutions to state-level challenges." Examples of these types of efforts include using text messaging tools to aid first responders in Haiti and developing an application to help Mexicans anonymously report crimes near the border.

Using mobile technology is a critical element of the State Department's efforts in the region, said McHale, who added that while only 6.4 percent, on average, of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean has broadband access, 89 percent has a mobile phone. "SMS programs and mobile apps allow us to communicate with broad segments of the population, many of whom we have few other ways of reaching and what makes mobile a powerful resource to promote our regional agenda," she said.

McHale added that social media is an important element of supporting the Obama administration's regional objectives of promoting security, economic opportunity and social inclusion, clean energy and transparent, democratic governance.

McHale's remarks were broadcast live over the Internet and many of the attendees tweeted about its contents. At least some found the State Department's policies lacking. "Quite disappointed with the State Department's view of the role of social media in Latin America: superficial, trite, U.S.-centric," said user diegoebas.

Featured Q&A*Continued from page 2*

A **Cynthia Arnson, director of the Latin American program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars:** "From a symbolic point of view, and as a way of demonstrating a changed U.S. attitude toward the countries of the region, the president's trip was a great success. Even before he left Washington, the choice of countries indicated that the Obama administration stood ready to embrace the politically and economically successful, if ideologically diverse, democracies of South America while not overlooking Central America's ongoing economic and security problems. There were very few surprises during the trip, although the president and his family were warmly received and no doubt solidified the overwhelmingly positive views of the United States that have characterized the region since Obama's election. As he did at the April 2009 Summit of the Americas, the president focused on partnerships and set out a framework for bilateral cooperation in each of the three countries. The size and stature of the U.S. delegation in Brazil indicated a U.S. recognition of Brazil's rise as a regional and global power, even if Obama was less categorical than some would have liked regarding U.S. support for a Brazilian seat on the U.N. Security Council. In El Salvador, the visit to the grave of Archbishop Romero, whose warnings about U.S. military assistance to El Salvador had been ignored by previous U.S. administrations, was a particularly poignant way to emphasize the

importance of human rights and the overcoming of Cold War divisiveness. Unfortunately, the trip did little to raise the profile of Latin America in the United States, as newspaper headlines focused

“The president focused on partnerships and set out a framework for bilateral cooperation in each of the three countries.”

— *Cynthia Arnson*

overwhelmingly on events in Libya and Japan. Ultimately, it remains unclear whether the trip will result in any greater willingness on the part of the administration to expend political capital on resolving complicated and conflictive issues of importance to the region, such as immigration reform, agricultural subsidies, import tariffs and the free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama. In other words, the messaging is spot on, but the domestic political climate poses formidable obstacles to substantive changes in U.S. policy toward the region."

The Advisor welcomes reactions to the Q&A above. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org with comments.

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