
Remarks Presented to the Council of Americas

By

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The theme of the conference is about as important and topical as you can get because this has been an incredible year in terms of elections. I lost count somewhere in the course of the year, but I think we have had something like thirteen presidential and head of government elections. And when you count legislative elections or parliamentary elections, I believe that number bumps up to sixteen. I think the last election, in Saint Lucia, is taking place this week.

So we are closing a cycle which is really amazing. Nearly half of the democracies in the region have had some kind of important election. And as we begin the new year, we're going to be looking across a hemisphere with a new and distinct leadership structure, and this, offers us a great opportunity to engage afresh with new governments and new legislatures and to carry on work which is vitally important for the United States but also vitally important for the Americas.

I thought I would discuss three themes today. First, to take a look at the elections, how we view them, how we see the outcomes, and then talk about what we think it means for us. As I just indicated, what I think it means for us is that we have a great opportunity to engage with new governments and reengage with partners that we've already been working with to advance not only our agenda as the United States in the region, but also an agenda that is a common one, and largely shared by the 34 democracies in the Western Hemisphere.

I want to close by talking about the spirit of pan-Americanism and seeing if we can interpret and understand not only events in the hemisphere but also our engagement in the hemisphere as a way to reinforce a spirit of pan-Americanism that I think is absolutely essential to the future and the well-being of the hemisphere. In regard to 2006 there are profound expectations about what democracy can deliver. An abiding belief that for democracy to be successful it has to have social content. In other words, democratic government has to deliver the goods. It has to show that it is capable of facing up to the social agenda that this region faces, especially in terms of battling poverty, battling inequality and battling social exclusion. I think to a certain extent what we have seen in the region is a race to the electorate by leaders and by political parties, and the winners in each of these elections are those politicians who get to the electorate first. It is no coincidence that all politicians, whether they are the right, or the center, or the left, have a social agenda today. In fact, I was just in Central America and had the opportunity to go to El Salvador, Nicaragua and Panama.

In El Salvador, in a conversation I had with President Tony Saca, he talked about the importance of a social agenda, and about the importance of right-of-center politicians making sure that they had a strong social agenda and couldn't be outdone by the political parties. The success or failure of political leaders, the success or failure of political parties, and the growth of left-of-center politics or right-of-center politics in the individual countries is going to be determined by results. It is going to be determined by which leader shows that they can reform the state, inflame the bureaucracy and identify the resources and the polity tools necessary to address the huge social agenda the region faces.

In this regard not only do we have now an electorate which has been coalescing around a center which is really committed to democracy, but to a certain degree, with a few exceptions, (is) committed to finding some kind of national political consensus and avoiding social confrontation and conflict. I also think that in the elites there is now an understanding that they need to make a new offer; that they understand that the well-being of their countries, the well-being of their economies, and their own well-being depends on a new social compact in the Americas. To a certain extent, both electorates and elites are looking for political leaders who can articulate this moment and who can find the political tools to link voters and elites in a common national project.

This is an amazing moment and a hopeful one, and one which, if we engage intelligently and in common, not by ourselves but in common with our partners in the region, we can have a significant impact. And this leads me to the second theme, which is what this year of election means for the United States. From my own point of view and those of my principals at the Department of State, having worked through this year of elections we're now looking at what we will call a year of engagement. Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns talked a bit about this in Washington several weeks ago at a Council of the Americas event in which he underscored that now that we're going to have this new cadre of leadership throughout the region, now is the time to engage afresh with this group but reengage with our existing partners in the region and really begin to focus on how we can play a meaningful role in helping these governments be successful.

I believe that if you look at what happened in the voting, with a couple exceptions, for the most part there's a recognition among electorates, among elites and among political leadership that a good relationship with the United States is important. It is important for governments to have the tools, the market access, and the assistance in multilateral development banks and other institutions to be successful. It is important that they have access to the resources necessary to meet the tremendous social agenda that they face.

This is incredibly positive because it gives us a space to engage. It also underscores something that we've been talking a lot about, which is partnership in the region and the necessity of working with others on a common agenda; again, not an agenda that is wholly our own but an agenda that is seen and understood by all partners as a shared agenda. There might be one or two exceptions to this understanding and I am happy to talk about them later. The most obvious one is Venezuela. This is something we are working on. As we reach out in the region and as we build partnerships, what we are going focus on is our willingness to work with anybody who wants to work with us. Because at the end of the day, as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has noted, from our point of view, whether you are left, right or center is immaterial; what matters is whether or not you're committed to democracy, whether you are committed to the kinds of economic reforms necessary to create prosperity, and more importantly whether you are committed to investing in your own people and creating the capacity necessary to take advantage of economic opportunity. In this sense we really have to a significant degree, washed the rhetoric and the ideology out of our diplomacy. We really are at a point in which we are engaging directly in the region face-to-face in a very clear-eyed fashion for the first time in a long time. Through multilateral processes, through the Summit of the Americas process, through the Organization of American States and the different components of the inter-American system, we really have constructed, we believe, the framework for a common agenda. That all indicates our continued engagement and good intentions.

But one thing we have learned over the last several years is that as we deepen our engagement in the region we have to communicate better. Communication is a two-way street obviously and we can improve our communication, but if people are not prepared to receive it, they will not receive it. We feel that we have worked hard to prepare the terrain and we think in the results of these elections we detect a receptiveness to our message, and so now we have to focus on what that message is.

In this regard, as we communicate in the region, we need to make clear to people or to explain to people, how our actions affect the daily lives of people in the hemisphere, and how it really does help them get a better job, how it really does improve educational opportunities for their children, how it really does enhance health care, how it really does have an impact on personal security and the security of their democratic institutions. We believe that our assistance in the region, our political engagement in the region and the way we work with people on policy issues does have that impact. We are looking for political leaders to be those connectors. We need to find ways in our dialogue in the region to use existing institutions and help. I think we will. When Secretary of State went to Santiago for the inauguration of President Bachelet, had an opportunity to speak to lots of heads of state in the region. She asked Karen Hughes and I to go to Brazil and then slowly to work our way north and talk to political leaders, talk to opinion makers, talk to university students and businessmen to get a better feel and understanding for how the region understands us, how it understands our message.

And following that trip, it became evident to us that our message wasn't getting through and so we've been working hard to give a new vocabulary to our message and to find new ways to underscore what it is we're doing in the region. But more importantly, and I think this is a really crucial point, ultimately our bilateral relationships in the region are a very pale reflection of the relationships between societies and relationships between markets and private sectors and universities and non-government organizations and faith-based institutions. And one of the things we hope to do in the coming year as we engage politically and diplomatically in the region is to look for ways to highlight the engagement that is taking place right now. Because as Secretary Rice noted last year at the Washington Conference of the Council of the Americas, we are building in the Americas today an alliance of peoples. Integration is taking place and it is taking place at a fundamental level and it is taking place in a way in which governments can play a role as facilitators but they cannot control or stop it.

This is a positive thing and it is a thing that we need to highlight, because ultimately what happens in the United States does have an impact on the daily lives of people living in Central America, South America and the Caribbean. And what happens in those areas of the Americas has an impact on the daily lives of us living in the United States. The degree to which we can build this common understanding of integration, this common understanding of connectedness, it will actually facilitate our government's ability to engage.

I would like to just take a moment to talk about what I call recapturing pan-Americanism. This might be considered a slightly odd topic because there are lots of people in the region today who talk about the differences in the region, who talk about the fracture that has taken place in the region; some people talk about Monrovia countries and the Bolivarian countries, some people talk about the Pacific countries and the Atlantic countries, some people talk about the free-trading countries and the non-free-trading countries. So there seems to be many ways to describe differences.

If you look at what happened in New York in the General Assembly during the Grupo Latino Americano Caribeños efforts to select a single representative and the trials and travails that they went through as the countries first couldn't come to terms between Guatemala and Venezuela, and then seemed to be lost as they looked for some way to find a consensus candidate, you might say, well, maybe there is some reason here, when people talk about a region, that has allowed a lot of little problems to accumulate and somehow prevent a more regional approach to issues.

There is a certain degree of truth to that. But at the same time, these really are smaller problems. They are the kinds of problems that can be overcome with concerted effort and dialogue. And I think it is worth noting and forgive me for doing this, but you know, 2006 is the 100-year anniversary of

Secretary of State Elihu Root's trip to South America. But actually, historically it is a very important trip because it was the first time a sitting Secretary of State had ever traveled to South America. And Secretary of State Root traveled to Rio de Janeiro for the Third Pan-American Conference. Again, I am sure all of you will remember that the First Pan-American Conference took place in 1889 in Washington and the Second Pan-American Conference took place in 1901-1902 in Mexico. They were taking place at odd intervals at that period of time.

But in 1906 it took place in Rio and Secretary of State Root traveled to Rio, and then following that he visited a variety of republics whose capitals he could access by sea. After Rio he went to Uruguay, Argentina, Peru, Panama and Colombia; later in 1906 he visited Mexico. This was a trip that was significant for a variety of reasons. Not only was it the first trip that a Secretary of State had made to the region, dispute resolution mechanisms and creating a basis for kind of international law in search of peace. And he won the Nobel Peace Prize for this. He was the first Secretary of State to win the Nobel Peace Prize. If I remember right, that prize was awarded in 1912.

He postponed The Hague Conference in order to go to Latin America. But more importantly, in postponing the conference he also insisted that all the republics of the Americas be invited to The Hague Peace Conference that took place in 1907. In the previous Hague Peace Conferences of the American republics, only the United States, Mexico and Brazil had been invited. Root, by insisting that all the American republics be invited, sent a strong signal to the region that the United States considered all these republics to be valid interlocutors in the international realm and to be important players in a larger search for international peace.

This was a profound message at the time and it was received very well in the region. Root brought with him on his trip to Latin America, a message that I would describe as one of solidarity, purpose and hope. Solidarity in terms of a recognition that the Americas is a special place and that American republics had a special project, which he called the Project of Popular Government, but also a special purpose in the world in attempting to create institutions that would resolve difficulty through dialogue, which would focus on cooperation and which would understand all countries, no matter how strong or how weak, as equal partners in a project.

I think it was a message of hope because he understood and recognized that in democracies, especially new democracies, failure is the norm, that problems are the norm and that we need not become downcast because of these problems, that we need to expect them to a certain extent, but more importantly that we need to engage and grow closer to the countries that find themselves in moments of democratic crisis.

This is a great message for today, and to a certain extent this is a message that the Bush Administration has tried very hard to articulate through its engagement in the Summit of the Americas processes, through its engagement in the OAS, through its engagement in all aspects of the inter-American system and includes the following commitments:

- Committed to this region
- Committed to a common project or the region
- We believe that common project is about democracy and about not just democratic government but democratic states
- Creating understandings of citizenship that are not just political but also economic and social

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- We are creating understandings of citizenship that are not just political but also economic and social
 - We are prepared to commit our resources, our political capital and our policy time to building this

I would like to just read a quote from a speech that Secretary of State Root gave in Rio de Janeiro, his opening speech at the Third Pan-American Conference in which he described the intent and purpose of the United States in the region. He said,

We wish no victories but those of peace, for no territory except our own, for no sovereignty except sovereignty over ourselves. We deem the independence and equal rights of the smallest and weakest member of the family of nations entitled to as much respect as those of the greatest empire, and we deem the observance of that respect the chief guarantee of the weak against the oppression of the strong. We neither claim nor desire any rights or privileges or powers that we do not freely concede to every American republic. We wish to increase our prosperity, to expand our trade, to grow in wealth and wisdom and in spirit. But our conception of the true way to accomplish this is not to pull down others and profit by their ruin, but to help all friends to common prosperity and growth that we may all become greater and stronger together.

I think that is a statement that could today describe the policy of President Bush and Secretary of State Rice and it is a policy that I am committed to.