



the Advocate

LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP Action at home for just policies abroad

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Latin America Outlook for 2005

In 2005, the Bush Administration will deepen US involvement in the Colombian conflict, and continue its hard-edged Cuba policy. Increasing tension with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is a possibility. However, the administration is likely to avoid conflict with the many Latin America center-left governments currently in power. Gradually increasing military aid and training to the region while cutting back on social aid is a disturbing, persistent trend.

Odd Man Out

Mr. Bush is “odd man out” among the center-left presidents currently governing much of South America. The gap between Mr. Bush and the continent’s leaders was symbolized by the tensions during Bush’s brief Latin America trip to attend the Pacific summit in Chile, where Chilean President Ricardo Lagos cancelled a state dinner, ostensibly over disagreements about the size of the US security force. Center-left governments preside over Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Ecuador. Hugo Chavez maintains his popularity, despite strong opposition in Venezuela. Carlos Mesa in Bolivia must tread carefully with strong popular movements, since their protests—over natural resource decisions and killings of protesters by the security forces — led to the resignation of the previous president.

At another moment in history this center-left resurgence in Latin America could lead to a strong diplomatic and then military reaction from the United States. Mounting tensions are still a possibility. Yet three factors exist that make escalating US-Latin American tensions, apart from Cuba, unlikely. First, the Iraq war and continued tensions with Iran and North Korea suggest that even this combative US administration would be unlikely to take on a new challenge. Two, the leftist Latin American presidents have, by and large, proved to be moderate pragmatists. Only Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez is more confrontational in rhetorical terms towards the United States, but the ratification of his popularity in the 2004 recall referendum, deemed fair by international observers, makes it more difficult for the Bush Administration to call his legitimacy into question. Three, Colombia’s conflict provides more than enough focus for the Bush Administration’s military programs in Latin America.

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About LAWG

The Latin America Working Group (LAWG) and its sister organization, the LAWG Education Fund, serve a coalition of over 60 national religious, humanitarian, grassroots and policy organizations. LAWG staff coordinate advocacy and public policy education to shape US foreign policies toward Latin America that promote human rights, justice, peace, and sustainable development. By offering strategic advice and training for activists nationwide, and through other coalition efforts, the LAWG helps US citizens play a more active role in shaping foreign policy. The LAWG Education Fund, a 501 (c) 3 organization, was established in 2002 to carry out the coalition's educational activities.

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For more information, see our website at www.lawg.org.

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Mr. Bush's quick stopover in Colombia on his return from Chile – on an island outside the historic port city of Cartagena, one of the Colombia's most secure places – indicates his strong support for conservative leader Alvaro Uribe. Bush will have to make the case this year why Plan Colombia, the United States' massive, largely military aid package, should be renewed. Sold to the Congress as a five-year, one-time deal, the administration is arguing that the plan needs to be extended. The administration will present statistics showing a drop in the number of acres planted in drug crops in Colombia, while sweeping under the rug the statistics that show that the price and availability of cocaine remains virtually constant in the United States. The administration will also portray Uribe as a strong ally in the war against terror, depicting Colombia's decades-old conflict as another front in the US campaign against terrorism. The administration is asking Congress to renew the more than \$700 million dollar package to Colombia and the Andean region that it has sent each year since 2000.

US involvement in the Colombian conflict in 2005 deepens with the passage of legislation doubling the number of US troops permitted to 800 troops, along with 600 civilian contractors. Since the US troops are advisors, this represents an enormous investment in training and guiding Colombia's army. The continued human rights violations, threats against human rights defenders and union leaders, and linkages between the army and rightwing paramilitary forces in the very area where the United States has a maximum presence – Arauca province, the location of the oil pipeline – is a source of great concern.

The Colombian government has begun a demobilization process for a part of the paramilitary forces. However, the demobilization is taking place before the Colombian Congress has approved legislation providing for a measure of truth and justice. The administration would like to fund this demobilization, and it is highly questionable how much the US Embassy will push to ensure that those leaders involved in massacres and major drug trafficking are prosecuted. The paramilitary demobilization process is a pressing human rights issue, because without truth, justice and accountability, the cycle of violence will begin again.

While the Bush Administration enthusiastically endorses President Uribe, many members of the US Congress continue to be concerned about the human rights record of the Colombian military, and this, and the process of paramilitary demobilization, will be a focus of debate.

Cuba

The Bush Administration has shown no signs of softening its hard-edged Cuba policy. To the contrary, the administration is stepping up pressure. This has been seen in several areas:

- The latest toughening of the travel restrictions. These fell hardest on Cuban-Americans, who are now limited to one family visit every three years to the island – and their travel is restricted even if their mother falls ill or dies, for example. And the administration has re-defined "family" to exclude aunts, uncles, nieces, nephew, and cousins—very foreign to the

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BORDER | Efforts to Militarize the Border Speed Up

As it works openly on terrorism and social security reform, the White House is quietly intensifying its war against migrants at the US-Mexico border. And it appears that Bush will have to spend very little political capital to oversee the continued militarization of the region. In fact, instead of spending political capital, he is using the issue to accumulate more.

Border security has quickly become tied to the debate over immigration sparked by President Bush's January 2004 speech calling for new legislation to create a guest worker program. His announcement has created a rift within the Republican Party between conservatives who want to restrict migration into the US and moderates who see greater access to new, foreign labor as essential for a growing economy.

Many of the restrictionists in Congress have identified the chaos at the US-Mexican border as one of the key reasons that tighter controls are necessary (rather than

of the US-Mexico border, beginning in the Pacific Ocean and ending in the mountains east of San Diego. The use of two fences creates a "security zone" between them where Border Patrol agents can easily apprehend migrants trapped between the two fences. The system closely resembles the way the Berlin Wall served to trap East Germans trying to flee west. This proposal would have added a third fence, and second security zone, to the San Diego infrastructure. Thankfully, the proposal was removed when the Senate refused to accept this language.

The fencing provision that Congress considered just before last year's election came as part of a larger set of amendments aimed at restricting immigration into the US, and penalizing undocumented migrants who are already in the country. Though the majority of these provisions were removed from the final bill, the member of Congress orchestrating these amendments, James Sensenbrenner (R-WI), got a promise from both the Republican leadership and

The current chaos at the border is caused by a lack of options for legal migration.

seeing it as a symptom of a broken system). Their response to the situation calls for increased militarization of the border. In an effort to gain their support for his immigration reform proposals, we now see President Bush bowing to demands to tighten the border.

Shortly after the November elections, the US Border Patrol began to release a series of proposals for expanding their operations in Arizona and Texas. Both plans call for a significant increase in fencing and other infrastructure in Yuma, Arizona and Laredo, Texas.

These proposals also contain provisions to dramatically increase Border Patrol access to environmentally sensitive areas with off-road vehicles, potentially damaging pristine habitats. It appears that the Border Patrol sees a second Bush term as a new mandate to expand their presence in the Southwest. It also sends a strong signal to restrictionists that the administration is willing to give them what they want in terms of increased border security.

During the same time period, a proposal to finish construction of the "triple fence" in San Diego, California won passage in the House of Representatives. The triple fence currently consists of two fences running 14 miles

the White House that they would be given a chance to go to the House floor for a vote as a freestanding bill in 2005. From this point forward, it became increasingly clear that the Bush strategy is to trade increased border security for support for immigration reform. His freestanding bill, known as the REAL ID bill, was introduced in January 2005, and came up for a vote on February 10, 2005. It contains the San Diego fencing provisions mentioned above.

Discussions about tying border security to immigration reform have now become the norm in Washington. Multiple legislative proposals are being drafted to respond to President Bush's call for immigration reform. In contrast to the many bills introduced last year on this issue, by both Republicans and Democrats, all of the new proposals will contain new provisions on "enforcement." Last year, no immigration reform proposals did.

The danger in tying the two issues together is that the current chaos at the border is largely caused by a lack of legal options for migrants to enter the United States. Ideally, with serious comprehensive immigration reform, the majority of the undocumented flow that the Border Patrol now works to stop would begin to enter the country through legal channels. Logic would argue that the Border Patrol would

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Latin American definition of family.

- In an apparent effort to discourage US agricultural sales to Cuba, the Bush Administration halted in November the transfer of money to US agricultural firms making sales to Cuba and is reviewing its definition of a law requiring that Cuba make "payments in advance" for US agricultural imports. The proposed rule change, which would require Cuba to pay for US agricultural products before they are shipped, would reduce agricultural sales and possibly halt them altogether.

- Academic programs have been hit hard by the restrictions, which have effectively ended academic exchanges and study abroad that is shorter than a full semester and denied Cuban scholars visas to scholarly conferences.

These irrational restrictions are causing a backlash and will ensure a strong challenge this coming year by members of Congress, the academy, moderate Cuban-

licenses to illegal immigrants - on the 9/11 intelligence reform bill. While they failed to include many of these provisions, the debate over immigration and border policy is likely to be intense in 2005. Already, proposals are circulating on Capitol Hill to tighten or reform our immigration system.

Citizens' groups are likely to increasingly raise the humanitarian impact of tightened border policies on migrants, highlighting the many people who die each year attempting to cross the US-Mexico border. New proposals are circulating that would ramp up border security and enforcement with increased technology, staffing and infrastructure in the region. These proposals will be a focus-point of fights to challenge the growing militarization of the region.

This type of project pushes migrants into the most remote desert areas as they try to avoid detection by the Border Patrol, leading to an increase in deaths. The work will largely take place in the grassroots domain, as

The administration will be facing strong grassroots resistance to many of its policies.

Americans, the business community, and the public.

In addition to regulatory actions affecting travel and agricultural sales, movement towards easing restrictions is likely to be hampered by the election of a Cuban American to the Senate, Senator Mel Martinez of Florida. His voice is likely to be used in the Senate to further the administration's goals and policies regarding Cuba.

The Bush Administration may have ventured too far afield from the positions of some key sectors (academic, business/agriculture, Cuban Americans) and will be facing some strong resistance to its policies towards Cuba.

Immigration

One of the few areas affecting Latin America where the Bush Administration has announced an interest in exploring new solutions is immigration. President Bush has stated his interest in providing some path to legalization for illegal immigrants, although he is not expected to back any kind of comprehensive immigration reform. However, he is opposed by a number of members of his own party, who have been increasingly vocal in opposition to even minor steps towards immigration reform. Members of Congress attempted to place provisions cracking down on illegal immigration - for example, by denying driver's

Congress is intent on increasing security in the post-9/11 world. Congress seems determined to implement these security programs despite their proven inability to diminish the number of undocumented entries into the United States.

CAFTA and AFTA

The Central American Free Trade Agreement, already negotiated, was postponed for congressional action until after the November 2004 elections, given how unpopular a yes vote on CAFTA would be in certain congressional districts. Now, however, it is likely CAFTA will be brought to a vote. The Andean Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) is still being finalized and could be presented to the U.S. Congress this fall.

CAFTA is controversial not just because of the potential impact of the remaining textile jobs in the United States, but also because of the poor record of labor law compliance in Central America and concerns that its provisions will undermine small farmers in the region. AFTA is particularly controversial because Colombia leads the world in assassination of trade unionists, and unions will be questioning the rationale for signing an agreement where freedom of assembly is threatened through violence. While it is absent from debate, the potential impact of AFTA

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Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2005: Make All Things New

Register for the Latin America track now!

Make All Things New is the theme of the third annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days gathering in Washington, D.C. addressing urgent global issues. It takes place in the context of a new presidential term, a new Congress and a new opportunity for people of faith to learn together and raise their voices in advocacy for a more just and peaceful world. The conference takes place March 11-14.

Advocacy Days will highlight the urgency of pursuing wise and peaceful solutions to conflicts and the need for aid, debt and trade policies that benefit our impoverished brothers and sisters throughout the world. Participants will examine U.S. policy regarding the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Latin America, global economic justice, global security, eco-justice and U.S. domestic issues. There will be challenging speakers, issue briefings and training in advocacy. Participants will visit their members of Congress or policy staff on Monday following the briefings and training.

Sign up for the Latin America track! The Latin America Track will focus on the growing militarization of U.S. policy towards the region, with an overview of U.S. military programs and an emphasis on the U.S./Mexico border and policy towards Colombia. Gain insights into congressional advocacy and learn what peacemaking looks like from our Latin American brothers and sisters, who show that peace is truly possible. Workshops and plenaries cover immigration, border issues, Plan Colombia II, grassroots initiatives for peace in Colombia, and CAFTA and AFTA trade agreements. Gather inspiration to continue walking with our Latin American partners through advocacy and solidarity in our home communities.

To register for the conference:
http://www.advocacydays.org/2005/2005_registration.htm

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leading to renewed planting of drug crops due to increased competition affecting small farmers' legal crops should be a subject for discussion.

Guatemala

The Bush Administration, concerned with corruption in the Portillo Administration, had lent support to an initiative to create an International Commission to Investigate Illegal and Clandestine and Security Apparatus (CICIACS). The Berger Administration, taking office in January 2004, formally supported the creation of CICIACS, but failed to vigorously pursue in the Guatemalan Congress ratification of the agreement establishing the commission. With the Guatemalan Congress failing to ratify CICIACS, progress on investigating these groups and individuals, believed to be behind corruption, drug trafficking and threats and attacks against human rights groups, is stalled.

The challenge for human rights in Guatemala will be how to encourage investigation of these groups and of the landmark human rights cases now that CICIACS seems to be blocked. The Bush Administration, encouraged by Berger's cuts in the military budget and other steps, appears willing to ease up on pressure too quickly. In late 2004, the Congress included a provision in the foreign operations bill to permit use of the military aid (for "nonlethal" defense items) which had remained frozen "in the pipeline" after the United States initiated a ban on military aid to Guatemala in 1990. The pipeline aid can be released if the State Department certifies that there is progress on establishing CICIACS, on establishing a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights office in Guatemala, and on instituting military reforms included in the peace accords. The Bush Administration is arguing that these conditions are met and will likely request Congress lift the ban on military aid in 2005. Whether Guatemala has sufficiently instituted such military reforms will be a focus of debate this year.

Military vs. Development Aid

A disturbing trend to monitor is the US military's increasing efforts to expand the roles of Latin American militaries. Despite the lessons of history – in which Latin American militaries with poorly defined roles instigated coups, conducted repression, and undermined the stability of governments—the United States continues to encourage Latin American militaries to be involved in public security efforts, tasks that should largely be left to the police. Also disturbing is the gradual drift upward in US military aid and

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Border Militarization

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therefore need either fewer resources given a smaller workload, or a new strategy to better focus their work on terrorists instead of migrants. However, this new marriage of immigration reform and border security largely looks to provide more resources to the Border Patrol in order to continue the strategy that they have been pursuing for the past decade – one focused on migrants and not terrorists.

Even more troubling is that the experiences of the past decade have shown that our current border security policies are completely ineffective at achieving their stated goals. The Border Patrol began implementing a “deterrence” strategy in 1993, whose aim was to erect barriers to migrant entry. Since that time, fences, lights, cameras, and other infrastructure have blossomed along the US-Mexico border.

However, rather than reduce migration, these projects have only served to shift the flow of migrants to new sections of the border. According to Border Patrol statistics, migration in San Diego, where the double fence is, has been reduced by 75 percent since 1994. However,

in the same time period, migration through Arizona has increased 500 percent. And during the time that the “deterrent” policy has been implemented, the number of migrants estimated to be entering the United States was actually revised upwards in 2002, from 250,000 per year to 375,000 per year. This policy has failed to achieve its stated goals, and yet the White House and Congressional Republican leadership seem intent on continuing to throw valuable resources towards it.

President Bush has begun to address immigration reform as a gesture to the growing political clout of Latino voters. However, in trying to produce that policy victory, he may be doing more to harm than help.

The militarization of the border has put the presence of over 10,000 armed Border Patrol agents in border communities, which are largely Latino. Civil and human rights violations have grown in these communities as a result. And as a result of the flow of migrants into Arizona because of the “deterrence” strategy, over 2000 migrants have died in the treacherous deserts of the Southwest. Increasing our border security policies will surely continue to magnify the negative impact upon Latino communities in the region.

By Sean Garcia

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training to almost all countries in the region.

At the same time as military aid gradually increases, development assistance has suffered cuts. Latin America does not benefit substantially from the Bush Administration's most heralded new aid programs, the Millennium Challenge Account and the President's HIV/AIDs initiative. Only three countries from Latin America are even being considered for the MCA program, and not even those three will all be included. Adding to the concerns about Latin America aid is the need to provide generous emergency and reconstruction assistance in response to the tsunami. Such assistance is absolutely essential, and should be a priority – but it should not come primarily from raiding the accounts of emergency and development assistance for other developing nations. As the Bush Administration announces a tighter budget for next year and searches for new aid for tsunami reconstruction, Latin America development assistance is once again on the chopping block.

Conclusion

Latin America is hardly at the top of the Bush Administration's agenda. However, the administration's single-minded focus on the war on terror, leading to deepened involvement in the Colombian conflict, escalating hardline measures towards Cuba, and increasing military aid, has a strong impact on the hemisphere.

By Lisa Haugaard, Mavis Anderson and Sean Garcia

Take ACTION!



Oppose the REAL ID Bill

On January 26, 2005, Congressman James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) introduced the REAL ID bill. It mandates proof of citizenship to obtain a driver's license, curtails the rights of people seeking political asylum in the U.S., and provides the Department of Homeland Security with a blanket exemption from all national and state environmental laws to complete infrastructure construction such as fences.

REAL ID came up for a vote on February 10, 2005 in the House of Representatives, and passed by a vote of 261-161. It is up to the Senate to stop this bill from becoming law.

Call or write to your Senators and tell them to oppose REAL ID. You can contact the Capitol Switchboard at 202.224.3121, and ask to be connected with your Senator's office. For talking points on REAL ID, visit the Latin America Working Group's website at www.lawg.org.



VOICES/VOCES | No Justice Has Been Done

Soledad Aguilar is the mother of Cecilia Covarrubias, one of over 400 women murdered in Ciudad Juarez over the past decade. No one has been charged with the crime.

“My daughter was murdered nine years ago and no justice has been done. She was carrying her daughter at the time and both disappeared mysteriously. Later, my daughter’s body was found with two bullets on her back. She was raped and her body was found brutally beaten. However, the body of my granddaughter was never found. She would have been eleven years old on October 20, 2004, but she is still missing. The most important part for me is the fight to find my granddaughter as she is the only thing that was left. I lost both of them at the same time. I hope that you will help me pressure Mexican authorities so that justice is made. There are many mothers currently undergoing a lot of the same pain. We have seen our daughters leave one day and later come back in a coffin. It is very painful for all the

mothers. It is something we never expected, especially in the way that they were murdered.

We have waited for justice for nine years and the Mexican authorities are not working to help us. Someone has covered up for those responsible of all of these crimes. We know that they know who the culprit is. It is not a coincidence that all of the lines of investigation and evidence have been lost. Nor that so many young women have died the same way. It is very sad to see that nothing has been done after every murder and that the Mexican authorities are not interested in resolving these cases. However, it is important that we continue looking for answers so that one day we find those responsible. Justice will not be done until the day women are no longer murdered. It has been nine years since we started this fight, but if we just stay home we will never live to see peace in our neighborhoods. My family’s life and my own have been threatened since we broke the silence, but there is no other way to get justice.”

Interview by Aranzasu de la O



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