

USOAS

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Four Lessons from the OAS

Farewell Remarks
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Permanent Council
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It has been an honor to serve the United States in this Council. It has been a pleasure -- even a joy -- the Ambassador of Uruguay caught it very well when he used the word "alegria" -- to work with you. And I am obviously distressed to leave this Council and this Organization where I have been able to do both some of the hardest and some of the most productive work of my career.

When I was named, there were some who questioned whether the United States should even send an Ambassador to the OAS. Ultimately the decision was made positively, and after some delays actually carried through. The reason that carried the day was one attribute of the OAS that is of supreme importance, one that is often mentioned here: that the OAS is the natural forum for dialogue in the Americas. Regardless of what specific views one might seek to advance, it is important to use the "bully pulpit" -- as some say in English; this "caja de resonancia," as the President of Argentina said during his visit here -- to put them forward.

I have taken great pride -- and perhaps on occasion too much time -- presenting to this body the views of my government on an enormous variety of issues before us. And that variety represents another characteristic of this organization. It really is impossible here to become so obsessively tied up in any one issue as to lose sight of the whole.

What organization but this would enable me now not only to thank you, my colleagues, for the extreme generosity of your farewells to me, but also to look across to my friend the Ambassador of Suriname and say to him in the words of my government that, quote, the United States Government attaches the highest importance to the principle that a country's military forces should be subject to the direction of its elected government and congratulates President Venetiaan for the progress he has made in applying this principle in Suriname, unquote. And by saying that across this Council table to my friend, I am also saying it publicly in the presence of representatives of all the countries of the hemisphere so that all know where the United States stands on this point.

As this is the last time that I have the privilege of addressing you, I would like to talk a little about four lessons that I bring away with me from my experience here.

The first is that democracy is as important among nations as it is within nations. "La democracia entre las naciones es tan importante como la democracia dentro de las naciones."

I chose to begin with this point because it is in the struggle for democracy that the OAS is clearly making its mark right now. We are forging a new solidarity of democracy. It is a fragile solidarity; it is difficult solidarity; and it one which requires enormous balance. But there is no doubt that this, the world's oldest international organization, is asserting its own uniqueness in recognizing democracy.

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as the basis of international cooperation. The solidarity that we have given each other in support of democracy, most formally in the General Assembly of 1991 in Santiago where Resolution 1080 was adopted by consensus, has brought with it consequences with which we are all still struggling, for it has projected upon us complicated and difficult responsibilities many of which we did not at first foresee.

But whatever the difficulties, there now is a stark contrast between what happens here and in the United Nations. In this Permanent Council, all belong; all participate; -- in many decisions of the United Nations only a small fraction (less than 10 percent) of the members actually sit on the Security Council and share in the making of vital decisions.

This is a region of democracy. Our Canadian colleague and friend Jean Paul Hubert pointed out that our membership is now complete: all sovereign states of the hemisphere now belong to this organization. Even so, I think that the Caribbean and North America, Central America, South America, still have much to learn in their coexistence. In fact even my choice of the word "coexistence" reveals a difficulty, because where our objective is cooperation, we need interaction; we need respect; we need active mutual support. And respect operates on many levels. Respect for individuals reflects the importance that we have always assigned to human rights -- and again this organization stands out contrast to other international organizations in its commitment to human rights. This is fundamental. We start, everything starts, with respect for the dignity of individuals. But respect has to reach beyond individuals to encompass the rule of law and the opportunities of governments to be heard, and to be heard on a sound basis.

Perhaps the proudest and in many ways the most difficult thing during my ambassadorship was to conclude the negotiations with the Secretariat and with the Secretary General on the Headquarters Agreement. A "birthday present" we were able to give to our distinguished Secretary General Ambassador Baena Soares on May 14, a year ago. I believe that the agreement will be ratified. I believe also that this new American administration headed by William Jefferson Clinton will seek to ratify the central instruments of the inter-American system, by which I mean the amendments to the Charter and the American Convention on Human Rights. I say "I believe," because I am not in a position here to announce that that is the case, but I believe it will be the case and my delegation has so argued internally.

I have a second lesson. This is the most difficult for us, I think, precisely as a big power. It is that the best way is not necessarily the most direct or the quickest way. "El mejor camino no es el más directo; no es el mas breve o el mas rapido."

During my confirmation process, one of the angers expressed against the OAS by some associated with the U.S. Senate was that the OAS never votes. The OAS always does things by consensus; always in a wishy-washy fashion, as if they were afraid to vote, afraid to stand up and be counted.

I still believe that voting is an important way to come to grips with a problem. But I have also come to appreciate the wisdom of prior debate as a means to build understanding. And that is how I interpret the search for consensus in this Organization, which represents the extraordinary variety of this hemisphere.

In preparing the amendments to the Charter adopted by last December's Special General Assembly, what characterized the debate and the work of this Permanent Council and its Special Committee was the search for consensus; seen as an active search to bring people together around a set of principles that all could adopt; that all could respect; that would allow all to retain their originality; that would allow all to breathe. Such consensus is also what brings about commitment in support of action.

We are I think a bit in "mid-flight" here at the OAS. We are beginning to forge the principles of commitment; but we have yet to fully discover or evolve the principles of joint action. And for these very reasons, consensus is fundamental, time is fundamental, patience is fundamental.

The third lesson is that history counts but so do people. "La historia vale, pero tambien valen los individuos."

It is history that reveals the dangers inherent in the asymmetry of power in this hemisphere. It is history that has taught us that principles like nonintervention and the sovereign equality of states are vital aspirations. In a way, these particular principles are more rather than less vital in a world that is as rapidly changing as is ours today. And in which it is terribly hard to find traditional moorings in the midst of change.

And that is why people and the relationships among them matter so much. It is why my wife and I have really so enjoyed working with you; working with all of you around this table. One of the things I have learned in the OAS is that sometimes one should not name too many names. You have named mine, I will not name all of yours, but allow me to remind ourselves of some of those who have been with us and who have left just in my period. I was looking at the list of some of the ambassadors with whom I was able to work, but who have now left:

Edmund Hawkins Lake; Juan Carlos Bertramino and then Juan Pablo Lohle; Margaret McDonald; Sir William Douglas; Dario Castro Alves; Javier Illanes; Miguel Vasco; Miriam Cabrera; Leon Paredes; Keith Johnson; Antonio de Icaza and then Santiago Onate; Marcos Martinez Mendieta; Edmundo Haya de la Torre; Angus Albert Khan, to whom I presented my credentials, in a different phase; Edilberto Moreno.

They are all friends, as are all of you. They and we are all part of this texture of cooperation and mutual solidarity that we have been trying to build.

Let me say that you have praised me and I am grateful for that praise, but I think that it is important to realize how terribly hard the members of the U.S. Mission have worked. Many of them are here. I have driven them -- through my own perfectionism and my own desire to really make the most of this opportunity -- extremely hard. Harder, probably, than any of you can know because in addition to our work together in this Council and its Committees and Subcommittees, we have also had to fight the terrible internal battle of making known the presence and the achievements and the potential of this Organization, within our government and to the extent that we could do so within our society.

I have had also a very rewarding relationship with the people of the Secretariat; with the Human Rights Commission; with CICAD, with two Assistant Secretary Generals -- Val McComie and Christopher Thomas.

Let me say one thing about the only Secretary General that I have had the honor and pleasure to work with. I have found him to be a man of such principle that he made action possible. The obvious example is that if Joao Clemente Baena Soares was not a fervent and solid supporter of the principle of nonintervention, the United States, Canada, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and all the others who pushed would never have succeeded in creating a Unit for the Promotion of Democracy. In a sense, we have a Secretary General whose devotion to the old principle of nonintervention became a personal guarantee that allowed the new principle of democratic solidarity to begin to take root institutionally without fear that it would be abused. He is also a man of caution, and a man of very high intelligence. And, Mr. Secretary General -- despite the many times you and I disagreed -- a man of very good judgment.

This has been a family. It has even been a family in terms of the concerts, the music upstairs in the Hall of the Americas that we have so often enjoyed and which has enabled us to witness all kinds of not only individual performances, but also the musical accomplishments of this extremely talented hemisphere, this extremely vibrant hemisphere.

So it is true that we will still be in Washington and that I will still be interested; but we will miss this family, and we will miss what it does very much.

My fourth and last point: I leave convinced that this region, the Western Hemisphere, has a future -- an important future -- and that this organization, the Organization of American States, also has a future.

I said a moment ago that we are now in "mid-flight" between what we have been and what I am confident we will become. The opening has not just been made possible by our cooperation as individuals; it has not been made possible just by the changes in the global scene, by the extraordinary speed of economic integration, or by the end of the cold war. It has been made possible by all of these things together.

I think it is important to realize that these are not easy times. There was a moment when people thought, "Ah, the cold war was so bad; we're so glad it's over. There was so much tension; we're so glad its over." And those appreciations were fine -- as far as they went. But we are still trying to find our way from the end of the cold war.

It is good, of course, that the risk of nuclear annihilation and the frozen rigidities of that confrontation are now part of the past. But there are new risks, including risks of simple anarchy in the international system, that are very much with us and that underscore the importance of the role of this organization and of multilateral cooperation generally.

I think we don't know yet whether we will have the courage to really consolidate democracy; understanding that democracy really does require mutual support; and inclusion -- rather than exclusion -- and a willingness sometimes to lose power. It is not clear how we will translate democracy from something that we have and can enjoy at home within our own cultural frameworks, within our own idiosyncrasies, into something we can share with others and on which we can build collectively.

I am convinced that we have it easier in this hemisphere than elsewhere from this standpoint, despite all of our differences and even in a world in which sometimes the speed of integration on so many levels is so rapid. But it is still not clear what fair sharing means, with regard to the burdens of preserving, defending, extending, democracy.

Now these are all questions that we have discussed in this Council and that you will continue to discuss. But they are my questions too, and they will stay my questions, because as a Senior Advisor in the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff, I have already been asked these questions by my new colleagues in the Department.

I know that I will now look at some of these questions in a different perspective, often from a global perspective; but I leave knowing that the OAS and the countries of the Americas are a very important part of the globe and that you are very important part of my life. Thank you very much.

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