

# Tarnished Image

## Latin America Perceives the United States



**The Latin America Working Group Education Fund** conducts public education to encourage U.S. policies that promote human rights, justice and peace in Latin America. The LAWGEF serves a coalition of nongovernmental, religious, humanitarian, and grassroots organizations.

**T**he United States' image problem in Latin America is nothing new. U.S. military interventions, support for dictatorships in the Southern Cone and abusive militaries in Central America, and its reputation as an overbearing superpower is too pervasive in history, and too recent, to be ignored or forgotten. At the same time, the United States' democratic traditions, its constitution, its political ideals, and its popular culture and vibrant economy, have been widely admired in Latin America, and are so still.

Much has been made of a recent "turn to the left" in Latin America, which is indeed a significant trend. Some commentators have used this to explain the apparent growth of Anti-American public sentiment in the hemisphere. But negative perceptions of the United States in the region are not so much a reflection of a leftward trend, as a reaction to specific U.S. policies in Latin America and broader concerns about the use of U.S. political and economic power in the world today. The Bush Administration's choice to abandon international human rights standards, particularly in the detention and treatment of prisoners, has eroded U.S. moral authority in Latin America as well as in other parts of the world. Nothing reveals this more starkly than the decision by a dozen Latin American governments to turn down a portion of their U.S. military and economic aid over a moral principle: their right to full access to the International Criminal Court. In addition, many Latin Americans perceive the U.S. government as providing unreflective, unbudging support (under subsequent Republican and Democratic administrations) for economic policies that fail to deliver equitable development.

Declining U.S. support for development and disaster relief adds to the sense that neighborly generosity is on the wane and the United States is only out for itself. Finally, hardening policies on immigration—visually represented by the increasingly fortified U.S.-Mexican border—figuratively and literally divide the United States from Latin America.

### Rough Seas at Mar del Plata

President Bush's striking unpopularity in Latin America hit the front pages with a splash in November 2005, with the fractious Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina. In an article entitled "Latin America doesn't like Bush," Bolivia's *El Diario* led off: "The policies of U.S. President George W. Bush and his anticipated presence in the Fourth Summit of the Americas touched off massive protests throughout the continent."<sup>1</sup> The fault line in the meeting was trade and financial policy. Outside the summit anti-globalization protestors addressed by Venezuela's Chávez caught the world's attention. "Every one of us has brought a shovel, because Mar del Plata is going to be the tomb of the FTAA," said Chávez to the gathered protestors.<sup>2</sup> Within the talks, the schism was more subtle: an assertive Mercosur block of countries making a strong stance in favor of more balanced trade policies, including cuts in farm subsidies in developed nations. The summit dissolved without being able to produce even a unified statement—Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Uruguay, and Paraguay signed a separate statement. Mexican President Vicente Fox was visibly annoyed by the failure to advance on the FTAA—"Anyone who blocks an accord like this is certainly

By Lisa Haugaard  
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## Executive Summary

The United States' image problem in Latin America is nothing new. U.S. military interventions, support for dictatorships in the Southern Cone and abusive militaries in Central America, and its reputation as an overbearing superpower is too pervasive in history, and too recent, to be ignored or forgotten. At the same time, the United States' democratic traditions, its constitution, its political ideals, and its popular culture and vibrant economy, have been widely admired in Latin America, and are so still.

Much has been made of a recent “turn to the left” in Latin America, which is indeed a significant trend. Some commentators have used this to explain the apparent growth of Anti-American public sentiment in the hemisphere, reflected in polls discussed in this report. But negative perceptions of the United States in the region are not so much a reflection of a leftward trend, as a reaction to specific U.S. policies in Latin America and broader concerns about the use of U.S. political and economic power in the world today. The Bush Administration's choice to abandon international human rights standards, particularly in the detention and treatment of prisoners, has caused an erosion of moral authority in Latin America as well as in other parts of the world. Editorials and op-eds from Latin American major dailies reproduced here show this reaction. However, nothing reveals this more starkly than the decision by a dozen Latin American governments to turn down a portion of their U.S. military and economic aid over a moral principle: their right to full access to the International Criminal Court.

The tense fourth summit of the Americas vividly demonstrated how Latin American leaders and civil society groups are increasingly challenging the U.S. government's unreflective, unbudging support (under subsequent Republican and Democratic administrations) for economic policies that fail to deliver equitable development. Declining U.S. support for development and disaster relief adds to the sense that neighborly generosity is on the wane and the United States is only out for itself. The United States' tepid response to Hurricane Stan in Central America and Latin American perceptions of the disastrous response to Hurricane Katrina offer some insights into U.S.-Latin American relations. Finally, hardening policies on immigration—visually represented by the increasingly fortified U.S.-Mexican border—figuratively and literally divide the United States from Latin America.

While concern over U.S. human rights policies is widespread across the hemisphere and an increasingly strong block of nations aim to modify U.S.-Latin American trade arrangements, most of Latin America's center-left leaders nonetheless actively seek to maintain cordial relationships with the United States. Certainly, the United States is facing a more assertive Latin American posture by leaders across the political spectrum. The Latin American region today has more options in terms of international trade, aid and investment partners—it is no longer the United States' “backyard.” This maturing of U.S.-Latin American relations is a development to which the United States will simply have to adjust, and it will cause some friction. Yet the United States could make some changes in its own actions and policy which would help to mend the rift. These changes have to start with U.S. adherence to international human rights standards—but should also include listening to our neighbors on trade, aid, border policy and immigration.

looking out for their own interests and not the interests of others.”<sup>3</sup>

While there is no question that the summit was a setback for the United States’ version of a Free Trade Area of the Americas, the discussion was not anti-trade, but in favor of a version based on regional blocks, with greater attention to disparities of wealth and development.

development and size of the economies.” Covering the summit, Colombia’s *El Tiempo* noted “The United States seeks an agreement for the free circulation of merchandise without thinking of common policy for the free circulation of people, without changing the juicy subsidies it gives its agriculture, without talking about compensation funds for the poorest countries. President Clinton understood

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### **“I’m not obsequious, like many of the politicians you are used to listening to,” Argentina’s President Kirchner told George W. Bush.**

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Hardly inflammatory, the Mercosur countries’ statement noted that “the necessary conditions are not yet in place for achieving a balanced and equitable free trade agreement... that takes into account the needs and sensitivities of all partners, as well as the differences in the levels of

these aspirations a little bit better and during his administration the Summit took place in a climate of hope.”<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, Bolivia’s *El Diario* commented that “The United States refuses to open its agricultural markets and cut subsidies, but demands that the giant South American

### **George W. Bush meets Argentine President Néstor Kirchner As portrayed in Argentina’s *La Nación***

When they translated the phrase to him, George W. Bush sat up straight in his seat, got serious and said: “That’s a very negative term.”

From the other side of a small table, in a room at the Hermitage Hotel, Néstor Kirchner, his host, began to respond with a question about how he perceived economic integration in the Americas.

“Your country, as a hegemonic power, has a central role in the development of the continent,” he had said.

Bush didn’t like the word “hegemonic” at all and it changed the talk from a cordial chilliness to a moment of moderate tension.

Kirchner clarified rapidly... He explained that he didn’t mean to be pejorative; he was referring to the responsibility of the United States as the world’s primary superpower. “I’m not obsequious, like many of the politicians you are used to listening to,” he said, according to Argentine sources. It was one of the few times Kirchner smiled.

“From cordial chilliness to moderate tension,” *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 5, 2005.

## Anti-Americanism: The weight of prejudice

It is possible that a major part of the attention during the IV Summit of the Americas about to be celebrated in Buenos Aires this week will focus on the alternative summit convoked by a multitude of groups of divergent agendas, many of which share, at least, a central idea: their opposition to the presence of the President of the United States...

It is understandable that the foreign policy of the current President of the United States unleashes strongly-held opinions and sparks an intense debate – there are more than enough reasons for this in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, in the rejection of the Kyoto Protocol or in the idea of democratizing the middle East, for example....

But criticisms of U.S. policy or indeed, of the type of society that U.S. citizens have constructed should be able to be sustained on their own and not framed in an all-or-nothing attitude—anti-Americanism—which seems full of contradictions. To protest against President Bush because you disagree with his policies or ideas is legitimate and democratic. To do so solely because he is President of the United States – and in terms that leave little space for reasonable response—contributes little to reflective debate. This is the difference between rational arguments and irrational prejudice.

Editorial, *La Tercera*, Santiago de Chile, Chile, November 2, 2005.

nation [Brazil] end its restrictions on foreign goods and services.”<sup>5</sup>

During the proceedings, the host, Argentine President Kirchner, spoke frankly about his opposition to the “Washington consensus” of free-market economic policies, and his anger at the IMF’s rigid treatment of Argentina. “The market alone can’t reduce levels of poverty... a percentage point of growth in a country with strong inequality, will reduce poverty less than in a country which has a more egalitarian distribution of income.”<sup>6</sup> “We must create a kind of globalization that works for everyone, and not just for a few.”<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to these assessments, Bush’s unqualified insistence on U.S.-style trade agreements, without dealing with the issue of U.S. subsidies or Latin American products that could not compete, and with the implicit assumption that such trade agreements equate with democracy, seemed passé. “We’ve almost all of us been down that road, and it didn’t work,”



*American Globalization, Sergio Langer, La Prensa, Panama*

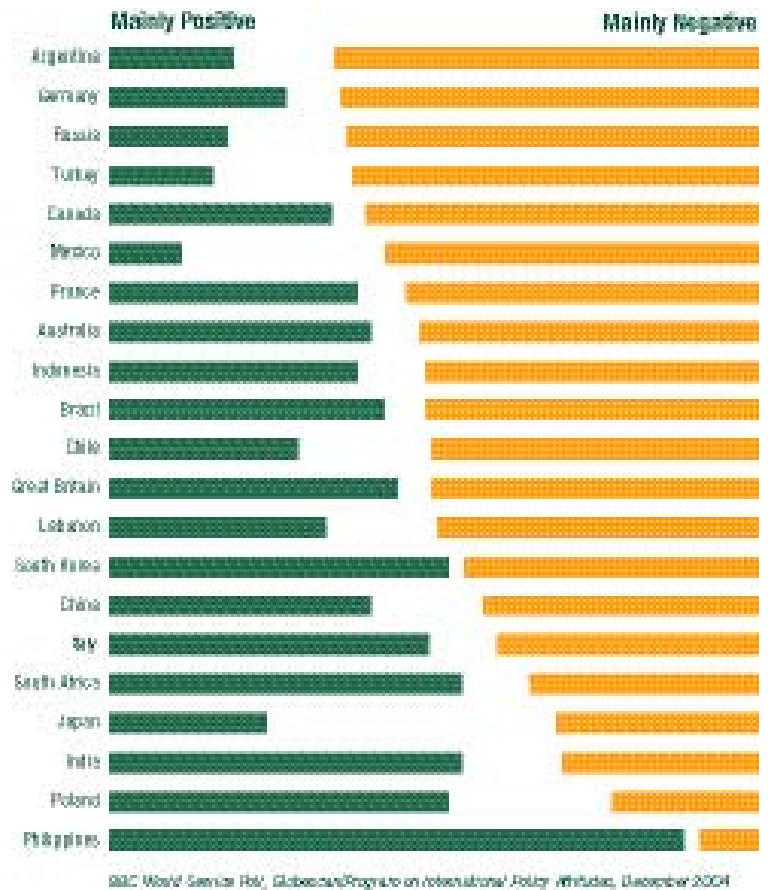


President Bush at the Summit of the Americas, Ares, Cuba

said a diplomat from one South American country, speaking on condition of anonymity so as not to offend the Bush administration. 'The United States continues to see things one way, but most of the rest of the hemisphere has moved on and is heading in another direction.'"<sup>8</sup>

The State Department's rather desperate Fact Sheet on "Accomplishments at the Fourth Summit of the Americas" featured Mr. Bush's homespun words, only serving

### Poll 1: Views of U.S. Influence in the World



remember the first Summit of the Americas I went to, which was in Canada. And in the opening comments, it struck me that it's

**“We must create a kind of globalization that works for everyone, and not just for a few.”**

to underscore the gap in understanding of a complex reality. “I’ve always felt that good foreign policy starts in your neighborhood. So this trip is a continuation of the United States working with different countries, and me working with leaders to have a good relationship in the neighborhood. I

an amazing neighborhood when... every country is a democracy except for one.”<sup>9</sup>

In the best line of his visit, Bush thanked his Argentine host and noted, “It’s not easy to host all these countries... It’s particularly not easy to host, perhaps, me.”<sup>10</sup>

While U.S. press coverage focused on Bush's unpopularity, Latin American commentators at times took pains to distance themselves from the rowdy alternative summit. "To protest against President Bush because you disagree with his policies or ideas is legitimate and democratic," noted an editorial in Chile's *La Tercera*. To do so solely because he is President of the United States—and in terms that leave little space for reasonable response—contributes little to reflective debate."<sup>11</sup>

five percent of Argentine respondents to a December 2004 BBC/Globescan/Program on International Policy Attitudes poll perceived the United States as having a "mostly negative influence in the world," with respondents in the other three Latin American countries chosen also registering negative images (Chile, 50 percent negative; Brazil, 51 percent; and Mexico, 57 percent). Positive images of the United States ranged from 11 percent in Mexico to a high of 42 percent in Brazil.<sup>12</sup>

### Feeling Worse about the United States

A variety of polls reveal negative perceptions about the United States and the second Bush Administration. Sixty-

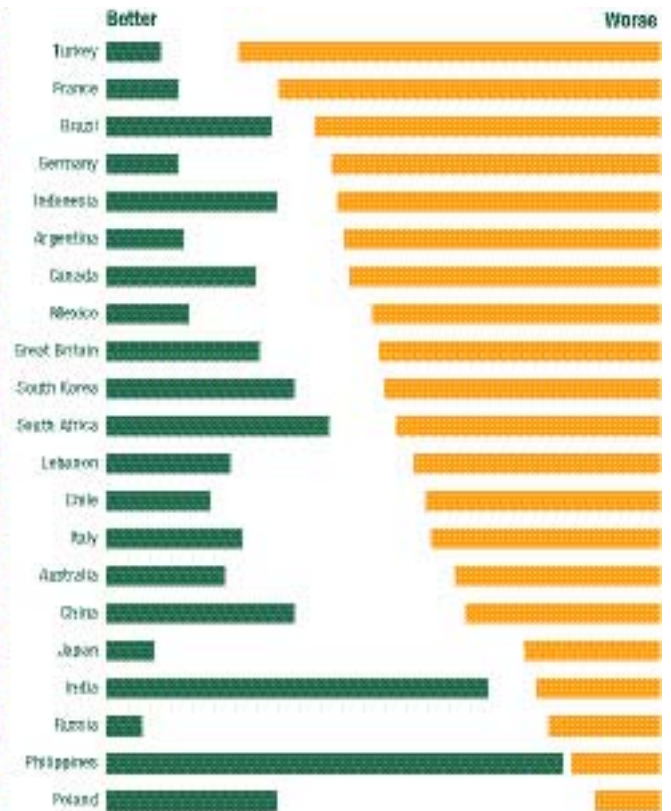
When asked whether it would be mainly positive or mainly negative if Europe became more influential than the United States in world affairs, Mexicans, Chileans, Argentines, and Brazilians polled in December 2004 responded "mainly

### Poll 2: Bush Reelection

As you may know, George Bush has been reelected as President of the United States. Do you think this is positive or negative for peace and security in the world?

### Poll 3: Feelings Towards Americans

How does the fact that George Bush has been reelected make you feel toward the American people?



BBC World Service Poll, Globescan/Program on International Policy Attitudes, December 2004

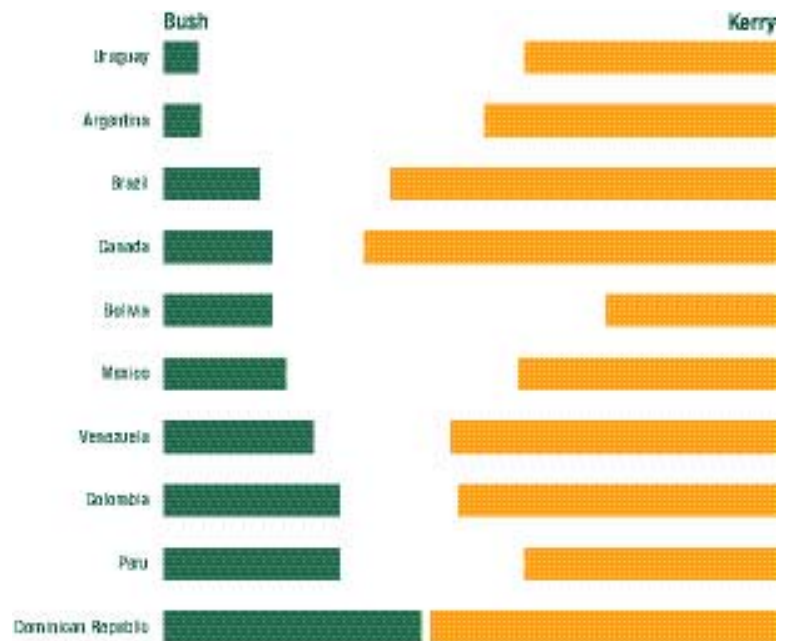
positive” at a range of 66 percent in Mexico to 48 percent in Chile. Among the 23 countries polled worldwide, France received the highest rating (58 viewed it positively), and Russia the lowest (35 percent viewed it positively), while the United States was viewed positively by only 38 percent of respondents. Commenting on the global implications of the poll, Steven Kull, director of the University of Maryland’s Program on International Policy Attitudes, explained, “What is notable here is that Europe and China, which have engaged the world primarily through economic relations—or soft power—are widely seen as having a mostly positive influence, while the countries that have very large militaries and have recently used them in a prominent way—the U.S. and Russia—are more often seen as having a negative influence. Some have argued U.S. military power deserves appreciation for making the global order possible, but with the Cold War a fading memory, this perspective seems to be fading as well. While trade might buy you love, guns clearly do not.”<sup>13</sup>

Latin American publics were alarmed by President Bush’s reelection. Seventy-nine percent of Argentines polled in a BBC World Service survey replied that the reelection was negative for peace and security in the world, followed by 78 percent of Brazilians, 62 percent of Chileans, and 58 percent of Mexicans. The poll finds that “these negative feelings about Bush have generalized to the American people,” with 59 percent of Brazilian respondents to 40 percent of Chileans answering “worse” to the question, “How does the fact that George Bush has been reelected make you feel toward the American people.” The pollsters noted, “given that Latin America has had less direct involvement in the foreign policy issues of the first Bush term, it is striking how negative public feelings are toward Bush there.”<sup>14</sup>

In a pre-election study, Latin Americans in all nine countries polled preferred John Kerry, although he received a majority only in Brazil and the Dominican Republic

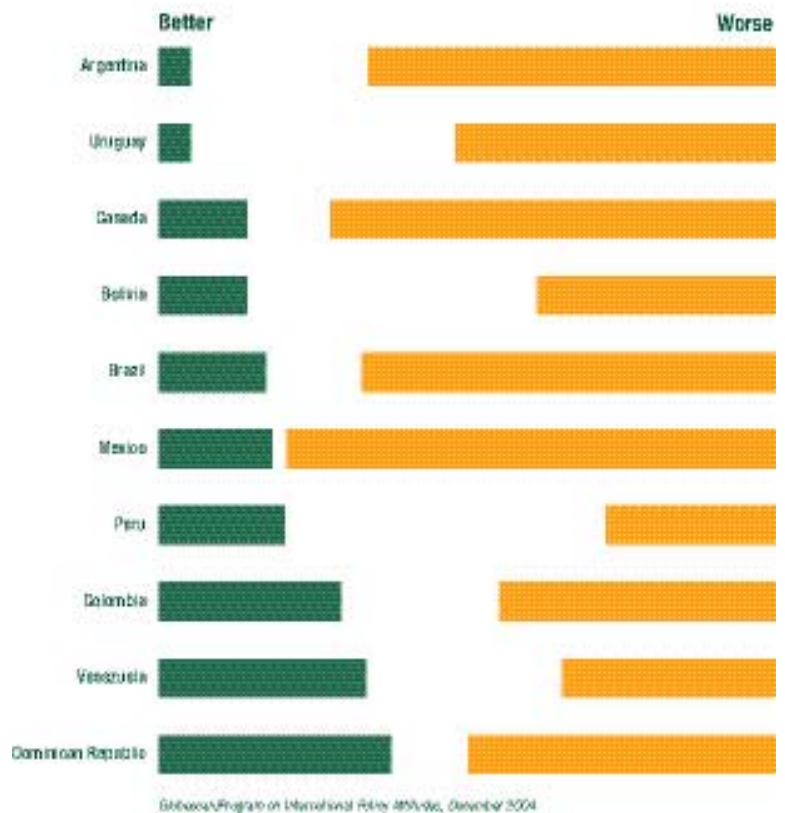
#### Poll 4: Bush vs. Kerry

In the upcoming United States Presidential election, which candidate would you prefer to win?



#### Poll 5: President Bush’s Foreign Policy

On balance, has the foreign policy of President George W. Bush made you feel better or worse about the United States?



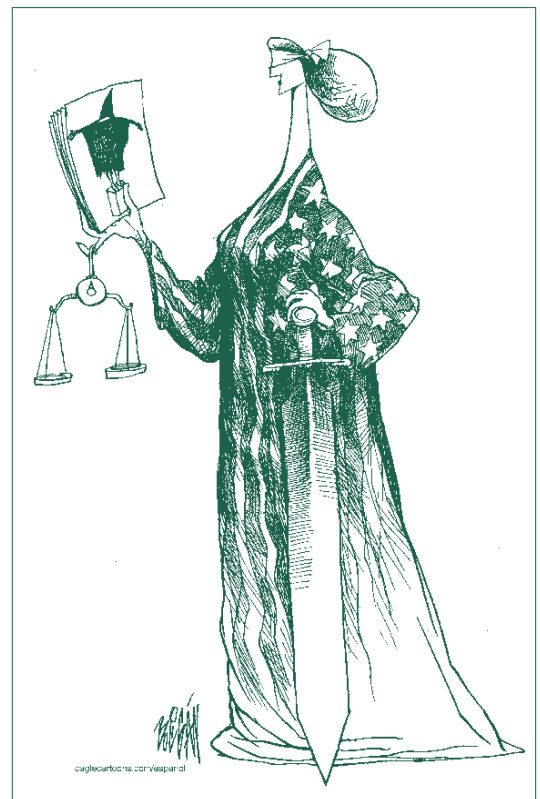
(with the remaining people responding “no difference” or “don’t know”). In response to the question, “On balance has the foreign policy of President George W. Bush made you feel better or worse about the United States?” responses ranged from a resounding 78 percent for “worse” in Mexico to a practically even 34 percent “worse” vs. 33 percent “better” in Venezuela, reflecting polarized views in that country. Interestingly, given the Bush Administration’s support for popular Colombian President Uribe, 44 percent of Colombians responded that with Bush’s reelection they felt “worse” about the United States, versus only 29 percent better.

Ironically, despite extensive U.S. support for Colombia and the Colombian government’s support of U.S. policy in Iraq and other global issues, 41 percent of Americans polled perceive Colombia as “not friendly” or as an enemy, in the bottom four of 25 countries mentioned, according to a 2005 Harris poll.<sup>15</sup>

In a study of 523 elite opinionmakers in Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina, only six percent said President Bush’s policies were better than his predecessors’, while half claimed they were worse for the region, rising to two-thirds in Mexico. Moderate-left President Ricardo Lagos of Chile was viewed as the best model of leadership, with 32 percent of respondents choosing him over others in a field ranging from Castro to Colombia’s Alvaro Uribe. Lula came in second at 18 percent, Uribe third at 12 percent. Chávez and Castro polled poorly among these elites at 5 and 3 percent, respectively. Pollster John Zogby claimed that “this year’s survey reveals a new pragmatism in Latin America—and a decline in ideology. Lagos is a leftist, as is Lula, but they are pragmatists as well. In this case, the elites seem to be responding to—more than anything—the fact that Lagos gets results.”<sup>16</sup> Among these elite respondents, concern about U.S. policies do not translate into support for the Bush Administration’s least favored Latin American leaders.

### “Who are you to say what we should do?”

The abusive treatment of prisoners by U.S. soldiers in Abu Ghraib and Afghanistan; the decision to invade Iraq based on dubious intelligence about weapons of mass destruction; the White House’s refusal to disavow the use of torture; the discovery of clandestine U.S.-run jails in Eastern Europe; the denial of access to U.S. courts of prisoners at Guantanamo—all these subjects were vigorously covered in the Latin American press. In news stories, coverage of human rights reports, political cartoons and editorial pages, what appeared in the *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and other U.S. newspapers was given strong play in Latin America’s major dailies and news magazines. On a particularly wretched news day for the United States, for example, headlines included: “United States rejects accusations of torture in Guantanamo” (*Clarín*, Argentina); “New images of Abu Ghraib horror” (*El Mercurio*, Chile); “Australian



*Blind American Justice*, Angel Boligan, *El Universal*, Mexico





TV shows abuse of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib” (*La Jornada*, Mexico); “U.S. rejects UN panel’s recommendation to close Guantanamo” (*El Tiempo*, Colombia); “UN asks the United States to investigate abuses committed in Abu Ghraib jail” (*La Tercera*, Chile).<sup>17</sup> International human rights reports about U.S. abuses received prominent play; for example:

*It wasn't the governments of the Third World upon whom Human Rights Watch concentrated its harshest criticisms and denunciations but the United States, for its double position as superpower and international standard. More than that, new evidence from 2005 demonstrates that torture and various illegal tactics are deliberate focuses of the strategy adopted by George W.*

*Bush's government since 2001 to combat terrorism, which undercuts global defense of human rights, according to the organization's director, Kenneth Roth.*

– *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, Argentina, January 19, 2006.

The United States’ abandonment of accepted international human rights standards was portrayed in Latin American editorial pages as disturbing not only for the United States, but for the world. As editorialized by Costa Rica’s *La Nación*:

*During the twentieth century, the United States was one of the planet's main champions of liberty and human rights. Its achievements for humanity were extraordinary. From Mrs. Roosevelt's efforts to found the U.N. system*

## The Torture Boomerang

### Editorial, Colombia’s *El Tiempo*

The scandal of torture in the Iraqi jail at Abu Ghraib and the inhumane treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo by U.S. agents, in retaliation for the terrorist attacks of 9/11 against New York and Washington, seem unimportant episodes compared to what the world has been finding out in the last few weeks. The harsh revelations about systematic violations of human rights by the CIA and other U.S. agencies in various parts of the world—especially in European countries which have maintained secret prisons—are casting serious doubt on Washington’s war on terror. The reason is basic: the superpower is taking extreme actions that are equal to or worse than those it accuses its enemies of taking. And those illegal practices are coming back to it like a boomerang.

Like a Pandora’s box—which, different from the myth, only contains evils—things are being uncovered which many had talked about, some had insisted upon but no one could prove with certainty. First was the revelation a month ago by the Washington Post about the existence of a secret network of detention centers in Eastern Europe, Thailand and Afghanistan, for the purpose of taking hundreds of supposed terrorists and submitting them to interrogation under torture. Then was the discovery that at least 800 clandestine flights to these centers had made stops in Germany, Spain, France, England, Sweden and other European countries without knowledge or authorization of the respective governments....<sup>18</sup>

Editorial, *El Tiempo*, Bogota, Colombia, December 12, 2005.

*to the universalization of human rights principles, the role of Washington was vital for progress in these arenas. Therefore, the current policy of the fight against terrorism must accept the limits of personal integrity and due process—recognized by a large number of U.N. norms—which act as a universally accepted guarantee of human rights. The United States, always attentive to human rights violations in other countries, must legitimize its own actions, which would give greater weight to its struggle against international terrorism and in favor of human rights and liberty.*<sup>19</sup>

The symbol for the choices the United States has made to deny legal rights to detainees in the “war on terror” is, of course, Guantanamo. Its location on the island of Cuba has provoked continuous commentary in the Cuban daily *Granma*: “It offends me as a Cuban that for many people in the world Guantanamo has become identified as a navy base, jail, torture center, and many other forms of ill-treatment of human beings carried out by military troops under the orders of the U.S. government.”<sup>20</sup>

In a remarkable series of editorials, Colombia’s main daily, *El Tiempo*, laid out a devastating critique of the U.S. failure to abide by international human rights norms and multilateral mechanisms (see boxes on pages 9 and 11). The United States’ loss of moral authority in Colombia has particular consequences, given that the Colombian military faces serious accusations including extrajudicial executions, torture, and aiding and abetting abusive paramilitary forces; the Colombian government’s practice of massive and arbitrary detentions is also a point of contention. The U.S. State Department is required to certify that Colombia is meeting human rights conditions in order to receive its full allotment of military aid, and U.S. diplomats raise human rights issues and specific cases regularly with the Colombian

government as part of this process. The recent blots on the U.S. human rights record has doubtless made this kind of dialogue more difficult.

Indeed, high-level U.S. military officials acknowledged that with Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and other examples of negative depictions of how the United States carries out its war on terror, “we’ve taken hits on our credibility.” “There’s definitely an impact,” in terms of the United States’ ability to raise human rights issues with Latin American militaries. “We’re getting the ‘who are you to say what we should do?’” As Senator Patrick Leahy warned when reports of mistreatment of prisoners in Afghanistan began to surface, “...when I think of how often I and other Members of Congress have criticized other governments for treating prisoners that way. It undermines our reputation as a nation of laws, it hurts our credibility with other nations, and it invites others to use similar tactics.”<sup>21</sup>

### Latin America Turns Down Aid

The most emphatic sign of dissatisfaction with U.S. human rights policy is the decision by a dozen Latin American countries to turn down U.S. aid rather than accept U.S. restrictions on the International Criminal Court.

In 2002, the Congress passed the “American Servicemembers’ Protection Act” to ensure that no U.S. soldier or government personnel could be tried by the ICC. The law cuts off non-drug, Foreign Operations-budget U.S. military aid to countries that are signatories to the Rome Statute establishing the ICC, unless the country has signed a so-called “Article 98” agreement, pledging not to seek prosecution of U.S. citizens in the ICC.<sup>22</sup> The sanctions were extended in FY05 to one category of economic aid, Economic Support Funds (ESF), excluding only countries eligible for the Millennium Challenge aid program (currently Nicaragua and Honduras in the case of Latin America). ESF-funded programs affected by sanctions include

efforts to strengthen judicial systems, support free and fair elections, fight corruption, promote local governance, and support civil-military dialogue.

Of the 22 countries worldwide currently prohibited from receiving assistance, twelve

are in Latin America and the Caribbean: Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela. U.S. embassies throughout Latin America have spent much diplomatic capital over the past

## The great hypocrisy

Editorial, Colombia's *El Tiempo*

Every war—even the most just and the least bloody—is a step backwards for civilization. But the Iraq war is causing a scandalous process of disintegration of the institutions of the United States, a society that has fought for these institutions and can boast of having reached important advances in coexistence, beginning with its own Constitution. The founding fathers who signed this pioneering document today would be ashamed of the actions of the current leaders. Those who murder innocents in the name of Allah are bloodily backward; but those of us who believe in other values are obliged to live by them.

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### **Institutions like habeas corpus and independent justice are left buried in the detention camps of Guantanamo.**

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George Bush and his government have not lived by these values. To begin with, they launched a war on the margins of international law, against the UN and on the basis of weak lies, for example about the weapons of mass destruction that Saddam Hussein never had.... Institutions like habeas corpus and independent justice, won through secular struggles of reason against barbarity, are left buried in the detention camps of Guantanamo, where there are prisoners who have languished through more than two years of mistreatment, without a defense lawyer or clear charges against them. Pacts like the Geneva Convention, agreed to by all countries to make war less cruel, were pushed aside by merely writing memos by someone who was later rewarded—distressing paradox—by being appointed Attorney General. Tribunals like the International Criminal Court, designed to judge crimes against humanity, have been the object of ridicule and attacks by the most powerful country on the planet....

The most deplorable is perhaps, the official campaign, in particular by Vice President Dick Cheney, to impose torture as a legitimate tool....

It seems incredible that these kinds of un-civilizing backward steps are coming from a country which declares itself the defender of western values and which has been so on more than one occasion.<sup>23</sup>

Editorial, *El Tiempo*, Bogotá, Colombia, November 20, 2005.

## The U.S. nightmare

Although Condoleezza Rice has demanded indignantly that those who have made denunciations should retract them, we already know the facts: the wholesale humiliation and torture of prisoners in U.S. military jails (Abu Ghraib in Iraq, Bagram in Afghanistan, Guantanamo in Cuba); the subcontracting of torture through the police forces of friendly regimes (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco), or even of enemies (Syria); the death of detainees (at least 25) the indefinite detention of thousands of prisoners without trial or POWs' rights, without even juridical status. George Bush's United States is creating its own Gulag, like there once was in the Soviet Union....

...The intention is to impose, by force and fear (or "shock and awe") what the neocons of the far right who have surrounded Bush call "The new North American century."

I talk about force and fear because in the twentieth century, which was in great measure a U.S. century, the United States got to that position in part also by persuasion. There was force, of course; from the conquest of the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico (and also Panama) at the end of the nineteenth century to the first Gulf War at the end of the twentieth, passing through two world wars, Korea and Vietnam. But there was also generosity, exemplified by the Marshall Plan. It was not just the military power of the United States that helped it dominate the entire century, but also its economic, political and social attractiveness; an example of what at the time it could call itself, though with some notorious imperfections, democracy and liberty. The United States was an imperialist country then, but it wasn't only an imperialist country: there was some reality in "the American dream."

Antonio Caballero, op ed, *Semana*, Bogotá, Colombia, May 30, 2005.

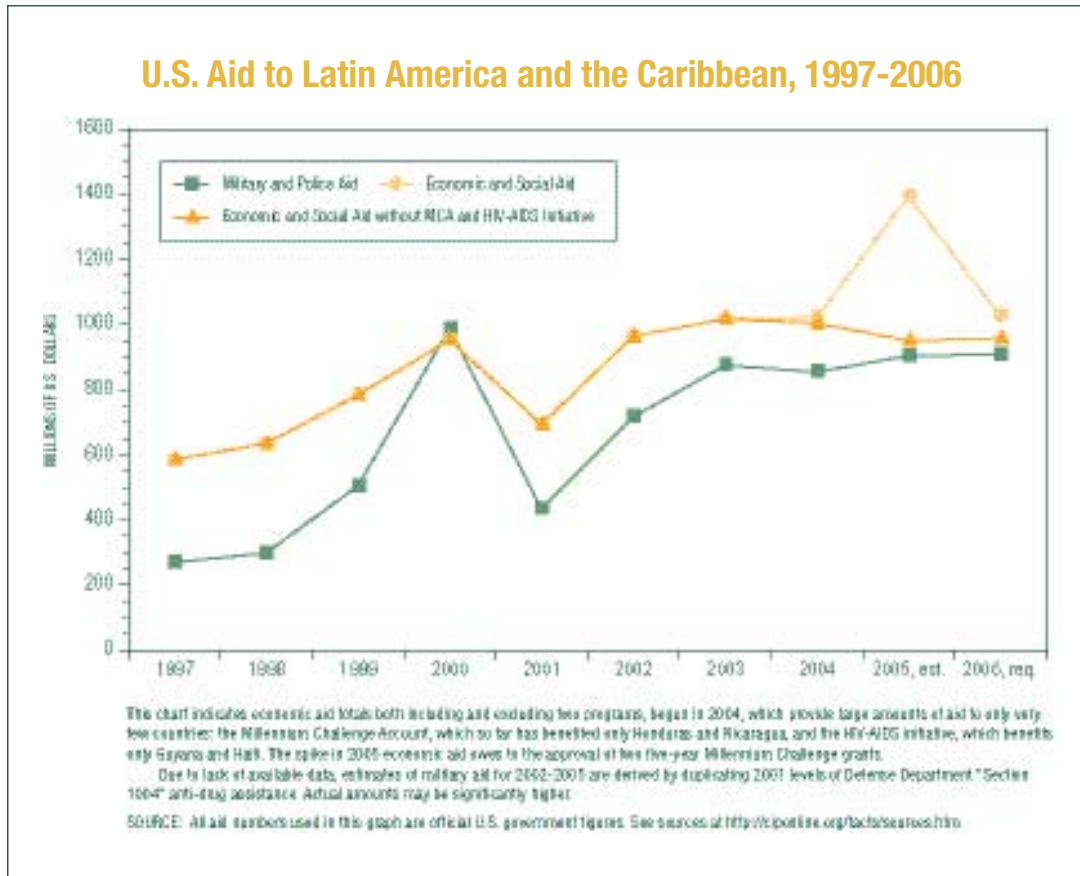
two years urging governments to sign Article 98 agreements, but with little success.

Mexico ratified the Rome Statute in October 2005, which led to the cutoff of an \$11.5 million judicial strengthening program through the Mexican government, although it will likely be reprogrammed through NGOs.<sup>24</sup> "This country will be irrefutable in supporting the protocols of the international court, whatever the cost," said President Fox's spokesman, Ruben Aguilar. "Nobody in the world should be immune from the action of justice."<sup>25</sup>

Southern Command chief General Bantz J. Craddock notes that the legislation "has the unintended consequence of restricting our access to and interaction with many important partner nations."<sup>26</sup> Human rights

objections to this legislation—especially to its extension to economic assistance—is that just as the United States should be asking Latin American governments to respect international law and to prosecute security forces for human rights violations, we are sending the message that our own soldiers should be protected from prosecution. The ICC is a popular cause in Latin America precisely because judicial systems have often failed to bring justice, particularly in cases involving security forces and the state, and Latin American civil society groups have thus turned to the international system for relief.

According to officials and diplomats in seven countries interviewed by the *New York Times*, "the cuts are generating strong resentment at what many see as heavy-handed diplomacy."<sup>27</sup> Ecuadorian



President Alfredo Palacio, whose country stands to lose one of the greatest amounts from sanctions—\$15 million since 2003 and perhaps another \$7 million this year—told a Quito TV station he would not budget for the United States. “Absolutely no one is going to make me cower.”<sup>28</sup> Costa Rican Foreign Minister Roberto Tovar called the immunity proposals “offensive” and added: “One can be poor, but dignified.”<sup>29</sup>

### U.S. Economic Aid Stagnates

U.S. military funding for Latin America has increased and become more visible as U.S. economic assistance has stagnated. While during the Cold War through the late 1990s economic assistance was more than double military assistance, beginning with the Plan Colombia aid package in FY2000, military aid has nearly equaled economic assistance (\$907.8 million in military aid and \$1.026 billion in economic assistance in FY2006).<sup>30</sup>

President Bush’s latest budget will compound this problem. The FY07 budget proposes a 17% cut from FY05 for Latin America in the three traditional economic aid programs, development assistance, child survival and economic support funds. Alternative development programs to encourage farmers to plant non-drug crops for Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru decreased 26, 44, and 21 percent respectively during the same time period. When Bolivian President Evo Morales protested the cut, making the logical assumption that aid had been slashed over concern with his government’s expected softening of coca eradication policies, he was told by U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia David Greenlee that the cut was solely due to overall revised budget priorities in Washington.<sup>31</sup>

The Bush Administration points to two programs, the Millennium Challenge and HIV/AIDS programs, as proof of its interest in developing nations. The

Millennium Challenge does hold out the promise of substantial aid for Latin America, but the aid announced with much fanfare has been glacially slow in coming and only targets a few countries in the hemisphere. Moreover, cuts in traditional development aid accounts are scheduled for countries receiving challenge grants. Divergent U.S.-Latin American perspectives are complicating HIV/AIDS programs. According to the *Washington Post*, USAID sent a letter to the Brazilian government declaring it ineligible to renew a \$48 million AIDS prevention grant. The United States

El Salvador is likely to receive a Millennium Challenge compact. During President Saca's February 2006 visit to Washington, the White House announced an extension of Salvadorans' Temporary Protected Status, allowing several hundred thousand Salvadorans to remain legally in the United States for another year.

While U.S. economic assistance has stagnated, Latin America nations have increasing options for aid, trade and investment elsewhere. European nations and, increasingly, China are important economic partners for the region. While

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**Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes was accompanied by presidents of the boards of directors of PepsiCo and Deere & Company, who agreed upon the necessity of helping those hurt by the storm, although they did not make any further offers of aid.**

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requires countries receiving AIDS funding to state that prostitution is dehumanizing and degrading, and Brazil was unwilling to comply, preferring a less judgmental response that has involved prostitutes in AIDS prevention outreach.<sup>32</sup>

The Bush Administration has rewarded two Latin American countries it considers important for the war on terror: Colombia, engaged in its own internal war, and El Salvador, which has provided the most steady (although small) supply of soldiers to Iraq. In the FY07 budget, Colombia is slated to receive another approximately \$724 million in aid, some 80 percent of which is security assistance—far outstripping U.S. aid received by any other Latin American nation. In FY06 and proposed for FY07, El Salvador's foreign military financing grant was boosted from \$1.4 million in FY05 to \$9.9 million in FY06 and \$5.5 million in FY07. Although spending on the three traditional economic assistance programs declined from \$34.1 million in FY05 to \$24.9 million in FY07,

the United States remains Latin America's most important trading partner—at some \$400 billion per year—China's trade with the region has grown from \$8 billion in 1999 to more than \$30 billion in 2005.<sup>33</sup> Brazil and Argentina, in a sign of both improved economies and a self-confident determination to gain space to maneuver, pre-paid their outstanding debt to the International Monetary Fund. Within the region, Venezuela has provided a new source of aid and subsidized oil, estimated by one source as \$3.6 billion in foreign aid per year, mostly to Latin American and Caribbean nations.<sup>34</sup> While the United States has less to offer, Latin American nations have new choices. As *Miami Herald* columnist Andres Oppenheimer notes: "You don't have to be a genius to figure out why Washington is losing influence in Latin America."<sup>35</sup>

### Hurricane Politics

Two hurricanes, Katrina in the United States and Stan in Central America,



offered some insights into the current state of U.S.-Latin American relations. Many Latin American nations rushed to offer something, even if only symbolic, to their powerful neighbor after Hurricane Katrina. New Orleans, through whose ports much U.S.-Latin America trade flows, occupies an important space in Latin America's positive images of the United States. Those offering aid included Mexico, Argentina, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Guyana, Jamaica, Paraguay, and Colombia.<sup>36</sup> Venezuela offered relief workers, aid and discounted oil. Cuba's offer of over 1500 doctors and medicine was turned down.

Latin American media noted the disorganization and callousness of the U.S. government's response to Katrina, with considerable surprise.

*Hurricane Katrina has laid bare many of the contradictions of the world's greatest superpower. The abyss that separates the poor from the rest of the rest of society is more evident. While many people of means evacuated New Orleans before the hurricane destroyed the city, the poor, the old and the sick were left behind. Hundreds of people faced death without receiving the most minimal aid from the United States.*

*The images that the television transmitted day and night seemed taken from a third world documentary... Hour after hour we could see an ocean of African Americans exhausted by the suffocating humid heat searching for lost relatives... The images reminded me of Haiti and its sad capital, Port au Prince. I thought that at any moment Juan Gabriel Valdes would appear on a UN jeep, coordinating aid and peacekeeping forces. But for days and days no one appeared, and they continued in the chaos, hunger and humiliation.<sup>37</sup>*

Other papers picked up on the situation of undocumented Latino immigrants in New Orleans, facing "discrimination and fear" that prevented them from seeking help.<sup>38</sup>

Venezuela's Chávez did not let the opportunity for criticism pass. "The U.S. empire is revealed as naked before the world. Jamaica [where Chávez was visiting] is better prepared, I've no doubt, to protect its population from hurricanes that pass through than the United States, the most powerful empire in history."<sup>39</sup>

When Hurricane Stan's destructive power ravaged Central America a few weeks later, the United States supplied aid by redirecting existing limited aid programs and lending military resources such as helicopters. However, the administration did not choose to provide a new, substantial aid package. This \$21 million response stood in considerable contrast to the U.S. response to Hurricane Mitch during the Clinton Administration (when aid reached \$750 million) and did not escape notice in the Central American press.<sup>40</sup>

When Karen Hughes in her capacity as undersecretary of state for public diplomacy—intended to improve the U.S. image abroad—visited Guatemala after the devastating hurricane, no amount of public diplomacy could make up for the fact that she arrived virtually empty-handed. Pressed by Guatemalan journalists on whether the United States would grant Temporary Protected Status to Guatemalans in the United States, allowing them to continue to send the some \$2 billion in annual remittances to their families and thus contributing to the relief effort, Hughes said that "having invested so much money in fortifying our borders," TPS would not be granted. Nor, as she toured areas destroyed by flooding, did she announce a major reconstruction aid package. As the Guatemala's *Siglo 21* rather devastatingly reported:

*Instead, the United States would offer mini-scholarships to children*

*in areas affected by Hurricane Stan, which seemed to be the main commitment made by the official.... She was accompanied by Steven Reinmund and Robert Lane, presidents of the boards of directors of Pepsico and Deere & Company, who agreed upon the necessity of helping those hurt by the storm, although they did not make any further offers of aid.<sup>41</sup>*

### Chavez, Morales and “Mr. Danger”

Most center-left Latin American leaders have chosen a different path than Chávez’s head-on challenge of “Mr. Danger,” as Chávez so enjoys calling Bush. While Kirchner, Lula, Lagos and other leaders are openly critical of specific U.S. policies, they do not appear to want U.S.-Latin American relations to deteriorate unnecessarily. As President Bush stopped in Brazil after the tense

Concern over a possible confrontation between the United States and Venezuela was one factor that caused Latin American governments to reject the United States’ proposal to create a new mechanism by which the OAS could measure how each country’s democratic institutions functioned. Latin American diplomats perceived the mechanism as “interventionist” and “were quietly resisting” the proposal, “saying they fear it was crafted to target Venezuela President Hugo Chávez.”<sup>43</sup>

While clearly some revel in Chávez’s head-on challenge to the United States, other columnists and editorial writers are keeping a wary eye on U.S. relations with Chávez and Bolivia’s Morales.

An editorial in Bolivia’s *La Razón* breathed a sigh of relief when George Bush phoned newly elected Bolivian President Evo

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**This wall will come to signify a step backwards in the history of humanity, a return to intolerance and the failure of dialogue. With this the United States will not only draw away from Mexico, but from the rest of Latin America.**

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Summit of the Americas, where Chávez had headed up the rally outside, Brazil’s President Lula took pains to distinguish his approach. “When I was elected president, there were those who foresaw the deterioration of relations between Brazil and the U.S.,’ Lula said after his midday meeting with Bush. ‘They were roundly mistaken. On the contrary, our relations today are going through one of their best moments ever.’”<sup>42</sup> On the other side of the spectrum, even the Bush Administration’s closest ally in Latin America, Colombia’s Alvaro Uribe, has refused to be drawn into rhetorical conflict with his neighbor, conscious of strong Venezuelan-Colombian trade relations and preferring to work out specific issues more diplomatically.

Morales and Morales responded in a measured way, calling for fairer access to U.S. markets for Bolivian products. “Bush’s phone call is important in that he opened a civilized channel for dealing with topics of bilateral interest. Bolivia has much to gain with good relations with the superpower.”<sup>44</sup> Political analyst Alvaro Vargas Llosa notes that without Chávez’s oil wealth, Bolivia’s Morales’ options are more limited, and Brazil may play a moderating influence. He advises that if Mr. Morales decriminalizes coca, “the United States should not overreact, because nothing much will change. Even with the restrictions that are in place now, there are already as many plantations in the Chapare as the demand for coca—and Bolivia’s capacity to make





cocaine from it—warrant. In any case, cocaine production and distribution will still be banned in Bolivia, Mr. Morales says. If Washington were to respond to coca de-criminalization by hindering Bolivia's exports of clothing and jewelry to the United States, tens of thousands of families in El Alto, one of Mr. Morales' indigenous power bases, would lose their source of income, and anti-American sentiment would pull Mr. Morales leftward."<sup>45</sup>

Colombia's *El Tiempo* editorialized that Chavez's "head-on anti-imperialist language" "has Washington's neo-con elite ever more on edge—the ones who like to find devils to fight." But the paper urges the Colombian government to "maintain its own capacity to maneuver with autonomy from Washington, at the same time that it insists that Caracas provides serious mechanisms of collaboration on issues like the economy, the border and armed groups."<sup>46</sup>

## The Wall

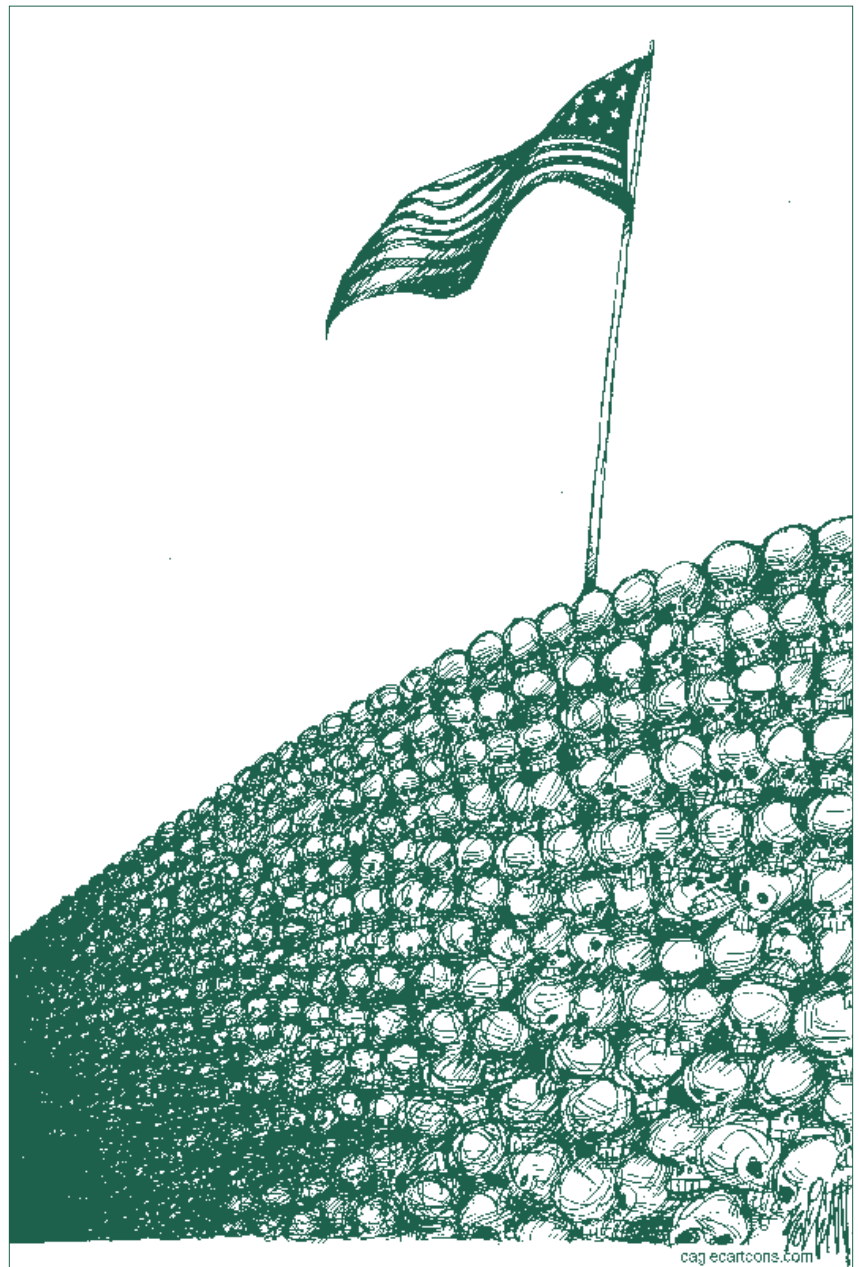
Nothing symbolizes the divisions between the United States and Latin America more vividly than the increasingly fortified fence on the U.S.-Mexico border. When in December 2005 the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill that included funds to construct 700 new miles of walls, the Mexican government reacted with dismay.

Mexican President Vicente Fox called the fortification of the wall "shameful and disgraceful" and asserted that it would be difficult to support the U.S. economy "without the productive and qualified work of our citizens there..."<sup>47</sup> Fox noted that "Walls are a thing of the past century; they were overturned by their own citizens, who dismantled them in the search for liberty and democracy; it isn't possible to construct walls between two nations that are brothers, partners and neighbors."<sup>48</sup> Heliodor Diaz, speaker of Mexico's lower house of Congress, concurred. "The immigration won't stop. Far from it. The only thing a wall will do is increase the number of deaths as people

head to more dangerous areas to cross."<sup>49</sup> Fox was vigorously critiqued for having been unrealistic in his expectations for an immigration accord with the United States and his rosy perception of his government's relationship with the Bush Administration.<sup>50</sup>

The House proposal to extend the wall was the subject of hundreds of articles in the Mexican press and scathing commentary.

*It seems like a preposterous fantasy.... Worthy of the kind of*



*Border of the Dead, Angel Boligan, El Universal, Mexico*



*Made in Berlin, Ares, Cuba*

*science fiction film made in the United States... only possible in a country which, it seems, is convinced that it is all-powerful... The wall is not going to work and not just because it will still leave open more than 2,000 kilometers of common space, but because the reality is no one wants to stop immigration. Immigration suits Mexico because the migrants alleviate pressure on the labor market and contribute significantly to the economy through remittances... But the United States also needs immigration... because who would do the work the illegal workers do for the wages they receive?<sup>51</sup>*

According to Amalia Garcia Medina, governor of Zacatecas, in an article entitled "Wall of Fear":

*This wall will come to signify a step backwards in the history of humanity, a return to intolerance and the failure of dialogue. With this the United States will not only*

*draw away from Mexico, but from the rest of Latin America.<sup>52</sup>*

Mexican Ambassador to the United States Carlos de Icaza implored, "We need more bridges and less fences," and called for an agreement regulating the flow of labor between the two countries. "We are neighbors. This is a marriage with no divorce."<sup>53</sup>

The Mexican government sought the support of Central American governments and initiated a lobbying effort to convince the Senate not to accept the House's plan. Even Central American leaders more careful to maintain their good relationships with the United States reacted with outrage. The wall is "absolutely intolerable" and "an affront to Latin America" said Guatemalan Vice President Eduardo Stein.<sup>54</sup>

Reacting to this wave of criticism, Undersecretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Thomas Shannon was put in defensive mode, having to claim that the fence "would not be like the Berlin wall."<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

While concern over U.S. human rights policies is widespread across the hemisphere and an increasingly strong block of nations aim to modify U.S.-Latin American trade arrangements, most of Latin America's center-left leaders nonetheless actively seek to maintain cordial relationships with the United States. Certainly, the United States is facing a more assertive Latin American posture by leaders across the political spectrum. The Latin American region today has more options in terms of international trade, aid and investment partners—it is no longer the United States' "backyard." This maturing of U.S.-Latin American relations is a development to which the United States will simply have to adjust, and it will cause some friction. Yet the United States could make some changes in its own actions and policy which would help to mend the rift. These changes have to start with United

States' adherence to international human rights standards—but should also include

listening to our neighbors on trade, aid, border policy and immigration.

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