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Seventh Summit of the Americas: In Brief

Peter J. Meyer

Analyst in Latin American Affairs

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Introduction

On April 10-11, 2015, President Obama is scheduled to attend the seventh Summit of the Americas in Panama City, Panama. The Summits of the Americas, which have been held roughly every three years since 1994, serve as opportunities for the Western Hemisphere's leaders to engage directly with one another and discuss issues of collective concern. With Cuba expected to attend for the first time in 2015, the Summit of the Americas will be the only forum in the hemisphere that includes all 35 independent nations. The theme of the 2015 summit is "Prosperity with Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas." Although strengthening economic growth while reducing inequality will be one of the principal topics of conversation, the leaders of the hemisphere are also expected to discuss a variety of other issues, including education, health, energy, the environment, migration, security, citizen participation, and democratic governance.

This will be President Obama's third and final Summit of the Americas and could set the tone for hemispheric relations for the final two years of his Administration. While most leaders warmly welcomed President Obama at the 2009 summit, where he introduced his approach to the region, the 2012 summit proved to be more divisive. Many Latin American leaders criticized U.S. policy toward Cuba and U.S. counternarcotics efforts in the region, and some leaders chose not to attend. Some analysts assert that President Obama's recent policy shifts on Cuba and migration issues could pave the way for a more cordial 2015 Summit of the Americas and closer hemispheric cooperation. Nevertheless, some Latin American leaders may use the 2015 summit to condemn the ongoing U.S. embargo on Cuba and recent U.S. sanctions on Venezuelan officials. This could distract from efforts to forge more constructive relations.

Members of Congress traditionally have expressed considerable support for the Summits of the Americas. A resolution introduced in March 2015 (H.Res. 160, Castro), for example, welcomes the seventh Summit of the Americas and states that it will be an important forum for the United States to advance its interests in the region and for the leaders of the Western Hemisphere to work collaboratively to address common policy issues. As in previous years, numerous Members of Congress are expected to attend the summit. President Obama could call upon Congress to approve policy changes and/or appropriate resources relating to proposals he makes at the summit; the Administration already has requested \$2 million in foreign assistance to support initiatives stemming from U.S. participation in the 2015 summit.¹

Background

By the early 1990s, after decades of civil war and military rule in parts of the Western Hemisphere, 34 of the 35 countries in the region were governed by elected civilian democracies. Likewise, most of the governments in the region had moved away from state-led development in favor of economic liberalization. In order to build on these shared values and develop an agenda for the hemisphere's future, President Bill Clinton organized the first Summit of the Americas.

¹ U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, Appendix 3, Fiscal Year 2016*, February 27, 2015, p. 476.

Held in Miami in 1994, the Summit of the Americas was the first meeting of the region's leaders since 1967. It was attended by all 34 democratically elected heads of government in the region, excluding only Cuba. The region's leaders approved a comprehensive plan of action with 23 separate initiatives under four major themes: (1) preserving and strengthening the community of democracies of the Americas, (2) promoting prosperity through economic integration and free trade, (3) eradicating poverty and discrimination in the hemisphere, and (4) guaranteeing sustainable development and conserving the natural environment for future generations. Perhaps the most important initiative to emerge from the Miami summit was the agreement to work toward the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) that would include all of the attending countries. Although the FTAA was never realized, the process intensified regional dialogue on trade, leading to numerous bilateral and regional free trade agreements.²

Since the first summit in Miami, there have been five other Summits of the Americas and two Special Summits of the Americas. Many analysts have criticized the summits for producing numerous and oftentimes vague mandates that are rarely implemented.³ Nevertheless, most agree that the summits are valuable because they bring the leaders of the hemisphere together and focus their attention on hemispheric issues.⁴ The summits also have produced some notable hemispheric institutions and initiatives. For example, the second Summit of the Americas, held in Santiago, Chile, in 1998, led to the establishment of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, which has played an important role in highlighting threats to press freedom in the hemisphere. Similarly, the third Summit of the Americas, held in Quebec, Canada, in 2001, led to the creation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which asserts that the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and that their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it.⁵

The Obama Administration and the Summits of the Americas

As noted above, the 2015 summit in Panama will be President Obama's third and final Summit of the Americas. The atmosphere at the two previous summits reflected the broader state of U.S. relations with the hemisphere. In 2009, governments that had disagreed with the Bush Administration's foreign policy eagerly welcomed President Obama and the potential for a change in direction in the United States. By 2012, many leaders were expressing disappointment over the considerable degree of continuity in U.S. policy toward the region. In recent months, President Obama has announced several significant policy shifts that will impact Latin America

² For historical background on the FTAA, see CRS Report RS20864, *A Free Trade Area of the Americas: Major Policy Issues and Status of Negotiations*.

³ See, for example, Racquel Smith, "Summit Reform and Civil Society: Taking a Deeper Look," *FOCAL Point*, July-August 2008; and Juan Cruz Diaz, "The 2009 Summit of the Americas: A New Opportunity," *Council of the Americas*, July 22, 2008.

⁴ See, for example, Peter Hakim, "The Next Summit of the Americas: A Preview of Cartagena, Colombia," *Infolatam*, January 12, 2012; Eric Farnsworth, "The Cartagena Summit: Much Ado About What?" *Poder*, March 26, 2012; and "Council on Foreign Relations Holds News Teleconference on the Upcoming Summit of the Americas," *CQ Newsmaker Transcripts*, April 5, 2012.

⁵ For a list of Summit of the Americas accomplishments, see Organization of American States (OAS), *Outcomes of the Summits of the Americas Process: 20 Years of Summitry*, SISCA/doc. 1/14, November 4, 2014, http://www.summit-americas.org/sisca/summits_outcomes_20_yrs_en.pdf.

and the Caribbean, leading some analysts to suggest that the 2015 summit could be more cordial than the previous summit. Nevertheless disagreements remain over issues such as the ongoing U.S. embargo on Cuba and recent U.S. sanctions on Venezuelan officials. Some leaders in the region may seek to exploit those differences in an effort to win domestic and international support.

2009 Summit: President Obama's Introduction to the Hemisphere

The fifth Summit of the Americas, held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, on April 17-19, 2009, took place just three months after President Obama was sworn into office. The theme of the summit was “Securing Our Citizens’ Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security, and Environmental Sustainability.” President Obama used his summit address to introduce his approach toward the Western Hemisphere, stating “I pledge to you that we seek an equal partnership. There is no senior partner and junior partner in our relations; there is simply engagement based on mutual respect and common interests and shared values.”⁶ During three side meetings at the summit, President Obama met and listened to the concerns of the leaders of the countries of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Central American Integration System (SICA), and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and he made a point of engaging leaders—such as then-Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez—who had poor relations with the previous U.S. administration.

President Obama also laid out four areas for potential cooperation that have become the pillars of U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean during his Administration: economic prosperity with social inclusion, clean energy development, citizen security, and democratic governance. In support of those priorities, he introduced several new U.S. initiatives, which included:

- A **Microfinance Growth Fund for the Western Hemisphere**, to rebuild the lending capacities of microfinance institutions in the aftermath of the global financial crisis by providing them with stable medium- and long-term finance. The United States has disbursed \$112 million to the fund, which has supported access to finance for more than 100,000 micro- and small enterprises in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- An **Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas**, to increase regional cooperation on the promotion of energy efficiency, investment in renewable energy sources, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The United States and countries in the region have launched more than 40 different initiatives and projects under the umbrella of the partnership.
- A **Caribbean Basin Security Dialogue** to strategically engage with Caribbean nations on challenges such as transnational crime, illicit trafficking, and citizen security. This evolved into the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), which received \$327 million in U.S. funding from FY2010-FY2014.⁷

⁶ White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by the President at the Summit of the Americas Opening Ceremony,” April 17, 2009.

⁷ OAS, *Report of the United States Government on Implementation of Mandates from the Fifth and Sixth Summits of the Americas*, GRIC/INNA-26/14, May 29, 2014; U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, Appendix 3, Fiscal Year 2016*, February 27, 2015, p. 47.

President Obama's actions and initiatives were well received by observers throughout Latin America, and leaders from a variety of countries and ideological backgrounds praised him and declared the summit a success and the beginning of a new era in hemispheric relations.⁸ Nevertheless, the 34 heads of government were unable to produce a summit agreement with firm national commitments. In an attempt to establish consensus, negotiators transformed the summit's relatively focused draft declaration into a longer document with more ambiguous language and fewer measurable mandates. Still, some countries remained unwilling to sign the final declaration, asserting that it did not sufficiently address issues such as the international financial crisis and the reintegration of Cuba into the inter-American system.⁹

2012 Summit: Disagreements Concerning U.S. Policy

In contrast to the relatively cordial 2009 summit, the 2012 summit, held on April 14-15, 2012, in Cartagena, Colombia, was rather divisive. The theme of the 2012 summit was "Connecting the Americas: Partners for Prosperity," but many of the hemisphere's leaders focused on more controversial issues. Some insisted that Cuba must be invited to future summits and others criticized U.S.-supported counternarcotics policies in the hemisphere. The presidents of Ecuador and Nicaragua chose not to attend the summit, and the presidents of Argentina and Bolivia left the summit before it had concluded.

In his summit address, President Obama reiterated his approach toward the region and priorities for hemispheric cooperation. He also acknowledged frustrations with U.S.-supported counternarcotics efforts, but rejected legalization initiatives and asserted that the U.S. government was seeking to address drug trafficking-related violence by reducing the southbound flow of money and guns to the region and devoting resources to reducing drug demand in the United States.¹⁰

Most of the initiatives that President Obama unveiled were related to the summit's themes of regional integration and economic growth. They included:

- **Connecting the Americas 2022**, a joint initiative with the Colombian government under the umbrella of the aforementioned Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas that aims to ensure universal access in the hemisphere to reliable, clean, and affordable electricity by 2022.
- The **Broadband Partnership of the Americas**, a three-year initiative to provide faster Internet to more communities, particularly in rural areas of the hemisphere. Under the initiative, the U.S. government has shared technical and regulatory expertise through sub-regional meetings on universal access, broadband plans, spectrum and frequency management, and broadband deployment.

⁸ "Aporta Cumbre Confianza entre EU y América Latina, Dice Rafael Correa," Agencia Mexicana de Noticias, April 19, 2009; "Considera Uribe Vélez 'Positiva' V Cumbre de las Américas," Agencia Mexicana de Noticias, April 19, 2009; and "Afirma Chile que Cumbre 'Abrió Nuevo Clima' entre EU y Latinoamérica," Agencia Mexicana de Noticias, April 21, 2009.

⁹ For more information on the 2009 summit, see CRS Report R40074, *Fifth Summit of the Americas, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, April 2009: Background, Expectations, and Results*.

¹⁰ White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks of President Barack Obama – As Prepared for Delivery – Summit of the Americas Opening Plenary," April 14, 2012.

- The **Small Business Network of the Americas**, an initiative designed to foster small businesses' growth by increasing the number of small business development centers, increasing connections among business support centers, facilitating cross-border business-to-business connections, and providing resources for business development. In 2013, U.S. efforts reportedly generated \$98.5 million in guaranteed lending to small businesses in Latin America.
- The **Women's Entrepreneurship in the Americas** initiative, which is designed to leverage private-public partnerships to reduce barriers that women entrepreneurs face in starting and growing small businesses. The United States and its partners have awarded \$1.5 million in small grants, directly benefitting 20,000 women across 24 countries.¹¹

As was the case at the 2009 summit, disagreements among the leaders of the hemisphere prevented them from issuing a summit declaration. Nevertheless, they did establish near-unanimous consensus on how to move forward with two of the controversial issues that were discussed at the summit. On Cuba, every country in the hemisphere—with the exceptions of Canada and the United States—reportedly voiced support for Cuba's inclusion at the seventh Summit of the Americas.¹² The heads of state attending the summit also called for the Organization of American States (OAS) to analyze the results of U.S.-backed counternarcotics policies and explore alternative approaches that may be more effective. As a result, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the OAS prepared two reports that were published in May 2013. Among other findings, the reports suggest that member states may benefit from greater policy flexibility, potentially including decriminalization of marijuana.¹³

2015 Summit: Toward Closer Hemispheric Cooperation?

Some observers suggested that the divergence between the United States and many Latin American and Caribbean countries that was displayed at the 2012 summit might lead to the end of the Summits of the Americas. The region's insistence that Cuba attend future summits was particularly vexing to some U.S. policymakers, who called on President Obama to boycott the 2015 summit if Cuba was invited. In August 2014, the Panamanian government confirmed that it would invite Cuba to the 2015 summit, presenting a policy dilemma for the Obama Administration. If the President chose to boycott the event, it would likely lead to the end of the Summits of the Americas since the U.S. government has been a driving force behind the summits and Latin American and Caribbean nations have created numerous other forums through which they can engage with one another. If the President chose to attend the summit alongside Cuba, however, it could offer some legitimacy to the Cuban government.

In December 2014, President Obama announced a major shift in U.S. policy toward Cuba, moving away from a sanctions-based policy toward one of engagement and a normalization of relations.¹⁴ As part of this policy shift, the White House announced that President Obama would

¹¹ OAS, *Report of the United States Government on Implementation of Mandates from the Fifth and Sixth Summits of the Americas*, GRIC/INNA-26/14, May 29, 2014.

¹² Frank Bajak and Vivian Sequera, "US, Canada Alone at Summit in Cuba Stance," Associated Press, April 15, 2012.

¹³ The reports, *The Drug Problem in the Americas* and *Scenarios for the Drug Problem in the Americas: 2013-2025*, are available at http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Introduction_and_Analytical_Report.pdf and http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Scenarios_Report.PDF.

¹⁴ For more information on the shift in policy toward Cuba, see CRS Report R43926, *Cuba: Issues for the 114th* (continued...)

attend the 2015 Summit of the Americas but emphasized that human rights and democracy would be key themes of U.S. participation at the summit. The U.S. and Cuban governments are reportedly working on an agreement to reopen embassies prior to the summit, but it is unclear whether they will be able to adhere to that timeline.¹⁵

The shift in Cuba policy has been part of a series of significant Administration policy announcements that could impact Latin America and the Caribbean. In November 2014, President Obama announced an Immigration Accountability Executive Action that, among other programs, would defer the removals of as many as 5 million unauthorized aliens in the United States, many of whom came from Western Hemisphere nations.¹⁶ More recently, in January 2015, the Obama Administration requested over \$1 billion in foreign assistance to address the root causes of emigration from Central America by increasing economic opportunity, reducing crime and violence, and strengthening the effectiveness of state institutions.¹⁷ The Administration has not implemented these policies yet since legal challenges have stalled the executive action on immigration and Congress must appropriate assistance for Central America.

Given these recent policy announcements and the fact that President Obama is nearing the end of his term, it is unlikely that he will announce significant new initiatives at the 2015 Summit of the Americas. Nevertheless, Administration officials have indicated that the President may seek to place increased emphasis on civil society participation at the summit. A Civil Society and Social Actors Forum, a Youth of the Americas Forum, a University President's Forum, and a CEO Forum will be held alongside the 2015 Summit of the Americas, and President Obama and other leaders are likely to engage in at least portions of those proceedings. Likewise, the draft "Mandates for Action" that will be debated by the hemisphere's leaders calls on the OAS to establish and manage an Inter-American Forum of Civil Society Actors "without restrictions or limits on participation" to ensure continuous consultation with civil society.¹⁸ Cuban dissidents potentially could attend the forums.

Some analysts assert that President Obama's recent policy shifts on Cuba and migration issues could contribute to a more cordial summit and serve as first steps toward closer hemispheric cooperation.¹⁹ They argue that by addressing two issues that have traditionally strained U.S. relations with Latin America, the Obama Administration has begun to eliminate some barriers to partnership. The draft "Mandates for Action" for the 2015 summit contains commitments to address a number of transnational concerns that require multilateral cooperation. These include strengthening national health systems to respond to outbreaks of infectious diseases, particularly those with the potential for cross-border effects; identifying areas of commonality regarding

(...continued)

Congress, by Mark P. Sullivan.

¹⁵ Randal C. Archibold, "U.S.-Cuba Talks on Restoring Diplomatic Ties End Abruptly," *New York Times*, March 17, 2015.

¹⁶ For more information on the President's executive action, see CRS Report R43852, *The President's Immigration Accountability Executive Action of November 20, 2014: Overview and Issues*, coordinated by William A. Kandel.

¹⁷ For more information, see CRS Report R43702, *Unaccompanied Children from Central America: Foreign Policy Considerations*, coordinated by Peter J. Meyer.

¹⁸ OAS, *Prosperity with Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas, Mandates for Action*, GRIC/CA-VII/doc.3/14 corr.1, January 14, 2015.

¹⁹ See for example, Richard E. Feinberg, "For Latin America, U.S. Shift on Cuba Heals Old Wounds," *Fusion*, December 24, 2014; and Peter Hakim, "Obama's Legacy: Bringing US Latin American Policy into the 21st Century," *Folha de São Paulo*, January 25, 2015.

hemispheric positions on global climate change in preparation for the Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21) in December 2015; and developing and implementing programs to prevent and fight the smuggling of migrants and trafficking of persons.²⁰

Nevertheless, several Latin American leaders may use the 2015 summit to condemn a variety of U.S. policies. The January 2015 summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which includes every country in the hemisphere except Canada and the United States, included speeches by several Latin American leaders that criticized the United States on a range of issues, including the embargo on Cuba; the presence of the U.S. Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; and the status of Puerto Rico. It also produced a declaration that welcomed the recent rapprochement between the United States and Cuba but called for an end to the U.S. embargo and rejected Cuba's inclusion on the U.S. State Department's list of states sponsoring international terrorism.²¹

Many countries in the hemisphere have also criticized President Obama's March 9, 2015, executive order that authorized targeted sanctions against members of the Venezuelan government involved in human rights abuses and corruption.²² Using the standard language required to implement such sanctions, President Obama declared a "national emergency" to deal with the "unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."²³ Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro lashed out at the United States for the sanctions and began asserting that the United States was planning a military invasion of Venezuela. UNASUR, which includes every country in South America, issued a statement rejecting the executive order for intervening in the internal affairs of another country and called for its repeal.²⁴ Other leaders in the hemisphere have criticized the characterization of Venezuela as a national security threat to the United States.²⁵

Ultimately, the atmosphere of the 2015 Summit of the Americas and the potential for more constructive inter-American relations may depend upon the actions of the many moderate leaders in the region. While President Maduro and his close allies are likely to attack the March 2015 executive order and other U.S. policies at the summit, they represent a small minority of countries. They will only be able to monopolize the discussion and derail efforts at closer hemispheric cooperation if the other leaders in the hemisphere allow them to do so.

²⁰ OAS, *Prosperity with Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas, Mandates for Action*, GRIC/CA-VII/doc.3/14 corr.1, January 14, 2015.

²¹ III Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), *Political Declaration of Belén, Costa Rica*, January 29, 2015.

²² For more information on the situation in Venezuela and U.S. policy, see CRS Report R43239, *Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Mark P. Sullivan.

²³ White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Executive Order – Blocking Property and Suspending Entry of Certain Persons Contributing to the Situation in Venezuela," March 9, 2015.

²⁴ UNASUR, "Comunicado de la Unión de Naciones Suramericanas sobre el Decreto Ejecutivo del Gobierno de los Estados Unidos Sobre Venezuela," press release, March 14, 2015.

²⁵ "OAS Calls for Dialogue Between U.S. and Venezuela," EFE News Service, March 20, 2015.

Author Contact Information

Peter J. Meyer
Analyst in Latin American Affairs
pmeyer@crs.loc.gov, 7-5474