

CELAC Defines Democracy and Cuba Is Fully Involved

By Arnold August, April 2012

In Chapter 2, I analyze in detail the words pronounced by Obama in Trinidad and Tobago (2009). In this article, I review his activities and speeches in Brazil, Chile and El Salvador (2011). The conclusion reached is that they constitute a smokescreen for the same imperial policy. In this context, it is instructive to briefly examine U.S. attitude and media policy toward the December 2011 constitution of Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños (CELAC — Community of Latin-American and Caribbean States). It is the most important regional occurrence in two centuries. The thrust of CELAC's definition of democracy and constitutional order is to allow and protect the right of each of the 33 member states to establish its own constitutional order. Moreover, all CELAC members are obliged to defend their right against any attempt to disrupt a member state's respective system. There are no conditions or preconceived notions on what democracy is or should be. This orientation is a major rebuttal to the U.S.-imposed definitions for the region it considered as its backyard since 1948.

The birth of the Organization of American States (OAS), under the aegis of U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall, took place on April 30, 1948, with the adoption of its charter. It was designed to include all countries, comprising also the U.S. and Canada.^{1:2} In its Charter (amended several times since 1948), Chapter II, under Principles, Article 3, "democracy" is defined in such a way that it is easily manipulated by the U.S. and any of its allies. For example, its Charter is based on "the effective exercise of representative democracy."³

The "Inter-American Democratic Charter" was adopted on September 11, 2001. It went further than the original 1948 general Charter. It required, as a basis of membership, "free, and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people, the pluralistic system of political parties."⁴

Cuba was a founding member of the OAS in 1948, when the island had a pro-U.S. government. However, soon after the 1959 revolution, at the OAS' Eighth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, held from January 22 to 31, 1962, Resolution VI was adopted. It is entitled "Exclusion of the Present Government of Cuba," with the goal of excluding Cuba from the OAS. The barring was based on the OAS principle of the "exercise of representative democracy." The exclusion resolution indicates

that it takes into account the OAS requirement of “respect for the exercise of democracy,” as “set forth in the Charter of the Organization” (cited above). It goes on to state that, whereas Cuba “has identified itself with the principles of Marxist-Leninist ideology,” the OAS excludes Cuba.⁵

On June 3, 2009, given the major transformations in Latin America and the Caribbean nations since 1962 (when Cuba was excluded), these countries forced the OAS to readmit Cuba to the Summit of the Americas via readmission to the OAS. A compromise agreement was reached that nevertheless put conditions on what “democracy” is, and should be, as a precondition. The OAS General Assembly adopted a resolution during the third plenary session held on June 3, 2009. It states that the exclusion resolution adopted in 1962 “hereby ceases to have effect.” However, there was still a condition: “The participation of ... Cuba in the OAS [would] be the result of a process of dialogue initiated at the request of the Government of Cuba, and in accordance with the practices, purposes, and principles of the OAS.”⁶ The conditions were then made explicit by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a June 2009 formal statement on the issue of Cuba’s reintegration into the OAS:

Cuba can come back into the OAS in the future *if the OAS decides* that its participation meets the purposes and principles of the organization, including democracy and human rights. Many member countries originally sought to lift the 1962 suspension and allow Cuba to return immediately, without conditions. Others agreed with us that the right approach was to replace the suspension — which has outlived its purpose after nearly half a century — with a process of dialogue and a future decision that will turn *on Cuba’s commitment to the organization’s values.*⁷
(emphasis added)

In other words, it was back to square one for Cuba, even though it meant an important partial victory. Ultimately, it was left to the OAS and the U.S. to decide whether or not Cuba was democratic based on the OAS–U.S. definitions of democracy going back to the 1948 OAS Charter and the “Inter-American Democratic Charter” of September 11, 2001. Cuba refused to go through this humiliating procedure. Time has proven the Cubans correct. This is so because, in the December 3, 2011, CELAC foundation, the definition of democracy is clearly laid out, namely that each country decides what is democratic. However, “anti-democratic” is

defined by CELAC as constituting an attempt to disrupt the constitutional order in any country. This is a historic development because it evacuates all preconceived notions and terminology based on Eurocentric definitions as embedded in the OAS 1948 Charter and 2001 Democratic Charter. According to the CELAC resolution, each country in effect has the right to go through its own process of democratization with the assurance that, in principle at least, CELAC protects this right.

Cuba travelled the tortuous road on the issue of democracy. It went from OAS exclusion in 1962 to partial acceptance in 2009. Cuba then became a key player represented by President Raúl Castro in the foundation of CELAC on December 3, 2011 — with no strings attached on the definition of a democracy. In addition, Cuba was named as one of the three troika (triumvirate) members, along with Venezuela and Chile. The troika's foreign ministers guide CELAC between summits. As a troika member, Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez will be president pro tempore of CELAC in 2013, when the third Summit is to be held in Cuba.

The new, open-ended definition of democracy emerged from the South, where CELAC is based, and not in Washington. The U.S. capital is where the OAS has all its main offices.⁸

However, this historic advance does not mean that there is a guarantee for CELAC member states. It is only the first step and there may be many obstacles. The U.S. is not standing by idly. This is revealed by the fact that much of the U.S. media, such as CNN, liberal by U.S. standards, completely censored CELAC's proceedings. From December 2 to December 5, 2011, covering the entire period that the CELAC Summit was being held and its immediate aftermath, CNN made *no mention at all* of CELAC's historical move for its 580 million inhabitants and 20 million square kilometres of territorial extension.

This concealing by the media is a manner of preparing U.S. public opinion for further adventurous acts of interference in the South by the Obama administration. In the crosshairs of the U.S. are the countries of the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA — Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America). ALBA comprises countries such as Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and others. They are spearheading this whole movement of integration. These countries exhibit a strong stance in favour of state sovereignty against U.S. interference. It is crucial for the imperial objectives that U.S. public opinion remain unaware of the civilized nature of the proceedings and decisions taken at that time for regional integration and cooperation. The mutual respect exhibited by all countries without exception among themselves was also censored

out of U.S. public opinion. The latter is not aware of the non-restrictive definition of democracy. This characterization also opposes any interference in the constitutional order of any country. If U.S. public opinion *were* aware of the accomplishments in the area to the South and the new values emerging in international relations, it would be that much more difficult to have the population accept any further adventurous actions.

The CNN policy coincided with the tone that emerged from the Obama administration. In the regular daily press briefing, on December 2, 2011, a journalist addressed the issue of CELAC, directing his question to U.S. State Department Deputy Spokesperson Mark Toner:

Question: Mark, Hugo Chávez of Venezuela has convened a meeting of Latin American and Caribbean countries that says they're forming a new grouping, and he says this is a counter to American influence in the region and kind of a successor to the venerable OAS. Do you have a response to that? I mean, is there any irritation here over it?

Mr. Toner: Well, we do — there's many *subregional* organizations in the hemisphere, some of which we belong to. Others, such as this, we don't. We continue, obviously, to work through the OAS as the *preeminent multilateral organization speaking for the hemisphere*. Am I done? Goodness.⁹ (emphasis added)

Had a journalist not raised the question of CELAC, the U.S. would not even have addressed it. However, the State Department did not deal with it directly. It only said that the U.S. will “work through the OAS as the preeminent multilateral organization *speaking* for the hemisphere.” In other words, the U.S. does *not* recognize CELAC. Toner was relieved that he was not questioned any further on this transcendental event, saying, in effect, “thank God there is nothing else on this issue.” The State Department made sure that there was no confusion on the issue. In the list of subjects treated in the briefing as published on the U.S. State Department website on December 2, the news of regional integration did not record “CELAC” as the official integration name. It is not even listed as a “new grouping” in the words of the reporter who asked the question. The subject was listed as “Venezuela: U.S. Continues to Work Through OAS.”¹⁰ The U.S., therefore, refuses to recognize CELAC.

Mass media, such as CNN, fell in step by completely concealing the news. This opened the door for further plans to undermine the constitutional order in Latin America and the Caribbean and to interfere in the South by trying to create divisions among CELAC members.

According to the CELAC Caracas Declaration of December 3, 2011, the 33 heads of state and government of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean met in Caracas, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. This took place within the framework of the Third Latin-American and Caribbean Summit on Integration and Development. The countries came together to set CELAC in motion. Many agreements were reached on economic, social, cultural and other issues. The emphasis was on mutual cooperation and benefit, rather than selfish financial and political interests. For our focus on democracy, CELAC gave rise to a modern definition of democracy suitable for the twenty-first century. This new CELAC definition remains on paper only and thus it does not mean that the battle has been won. It does, however, represent an important threshold that has been reached in adhering to a general common political concept that is in motion. The Caracas Declaration states that CELAC recognizes “the right of each nation to construct freely and in peace *its own* political and economic system”¹¹ (emphasis added). The most important point concerning democracy, as seen from the South, is the rejection of any attachment to a specific political structure (e.g., “multi-party democracy” and “free elections”) or an economic system (such as “capitalism,” or the more “politically correct” term “free market”). These concepts are manipulated in the most arbitrary manner by the North to impose their will on the South. The designation of democracy — as spelled out in the Caracas Declaration (cited above) — leaves democracy, as a concept, up to each state, with emphasis on the *construction* of the political and economic systems. This implies an infinite process of development and reflects what many of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have been going through. Therefore, they do not see themselves as the bearers of the “truth” either for one another or for others outside their region. Sovereignty vested in the hands of the people is the main value. There are no other conditions. Thus Latin America and the Caribbean (meeting without the U.S. and Canada) finally purged the region of U.S.-centric preconceived precepts of “democracy made in the U.S.”

The Caracas Declaration continues by asserting that political and economic systems are constructed

within the framework of respective institutions in accordance with the *sovereign mandate of its people ...* [and] respect for international law, the peaceful solution of controversies, prohibition of the use of threats of force, *respect for self-determination*, respect for sovereignty, respect for territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of each country, and *the protection and promotion of human rights and of democracy.*”¹² (emphasis added)

The notion of the people’s “sovereign mandate” is primordial. Alongside the right of each state and people to determine how this “sovereign mandate” is recognized and what constitutes democracy and human rights, this concept liberates the 33 countries from the grip of the North.

This very open-ended, broad definition of democracy could be questioned by some on the left. They may favour a more traditional and therefore restrictive definition of democracy. However, the Caracas Declaration was signed by 33 countries, characterized by a very wide spectrum of political and economic practices and concepts. If “democratization” is seen as an ongoing process continually seeking to invent and improve itself, then what is needed is peace and stability. This allows countries to carry on their respective experiences without outside interference, pressures and coups d’état. With regard to countries such as Cuba and Venezuela, what could help their revolution most (and, in this context, democratization) would be the absence of interference by the U.S. and its allies in Cuba’s and Venezuela’s political and economic endeavours. As far as countries on the right-wing side of the full gamut of options are concerned, such as Colombia and Chile, it is up to the people of these countries to bring about changes leading to more democracy without any interference. For Cuba, the new CELAC twenty-first-century definition of democracy also constitutes a 50-year redemption. Caracas, in December 2011, redeemed Cuba in favour of its opposition to the U.S.-controlled, OAS-arbitrary position on democracy and other factors, such as Cuba being judged by its adherence to an ideology. These were the pretexts used in 1962 to expel Cuba from the OAS regional bloc.

In Caracas, all of the countries agreed that the foreign ministers of Chile, Cuba and Venezuela constitute the troika (triumvirate) responsible for CELAC between summits. The first troika meeting was held in Santiago de Chile in January 2012. Chilean Foreign Minister Alfredo Moreno presided over the meeting on behalf of his country as the pro-tempore president of CELAC, since December 2011. Chile will thus host CELAC’s second Summit in 2013. At that

time, the Cuban foreign minister will take over the pro-tempore presidency in preparation for the third summit to be held in Cuba, tentatively in late 2013.

The “Special Declaration on the Protection of Democracy and the Constitutional Order in the Community of Latin-American and Caribbean States (CELAC),” issued on December 3, 2011, provides for definite mechanisms to protect the precepts enunciated in the Caracas Declaration. The Special Declaration on the Protection of Democracy “reiterate[s] that our community is based on unconditional respect for the rule of law, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the defence of democracy, the sovereign will of the peoples, social justice, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”¹³ Furthermore, while there are no preconditions for what democracy must consist of, leaving this in the sovereign hands of the people, there is, however, a proviso that “unconditional respect for the rule of law, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the defence of democracy” are “essential requirements for participation in CELAC”¹⁴ (emphasis added). Rule of law, like democracy itself, cannot be viewed in the abstract. For example, we can examine it from the contemporary point of view in countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras and Paraguay. Their constitutionally elected governments have been, and are, victims of U.S.-supported or -tolerated coups d’état. Therefore, for these and other countries that are in the U.S. crosshairs, the rule of law signifies the defence of these governments and leaders. The same applies to the constitutional order of Cuba. In contrast, from the domestic U.S. angle, the rule of law means defending the U.S. state representing the minority whose rule has been, according to their system, legitimized through elections. On the international scale, it basically amounts to the same orientation. For example, Obama said that with regard to Honduras and the putschist government legitimized by elections, “We laid the foundation for the return of the rule of law.”¹⁵ With Honduras as an example, therefore, there is the rule of law of a democratically elected government of Zelaya versus the U.S. rule of law that protects a pro-U.S., pro-neo-liberal regime brought into place by a military coup d’état. For CELAC, therefore, if a new government comes into being as a result of the violation of the rule of law, sovereignty, territorial integrity and the defence of democracy, then its CELAC membership is jeopardized. For example, there is the case of Honduras, as reviewed in Chapter 2. The military putschists collaborated with the U.S. to violate the rule of law and democracy in Honduras and, by this very fact, acted as a fifth column for the U.S., assisting it in transgressing Honduran sovereignty. If this type of situation repeats itself in post-December 2011 regional affairs, the country’s CELAC

membership would, in principle, be put into question. Of significance is that the CELAC democracy declaration has provided itself with measures for its application. The latter states:

When the constitutional government of a member state considers that there is a threat of disruption or alteration of the democratic order seriously affecting it, this situation may be brought to the attention of the pro-tempore president, who will make the situation known to all member-states with the assistance and support of the troika so that they can decide on taking concrete and concerted actions of cooperation and obtain a statement by the Latin-American and Caribbean community for the defence and preservation of its democratic institutionality.¹⁶

For example, while the U.S. and their allies supported a coup d'état in Venezuela in 2002 and fostered the same in Bolivia and Ecuador later on, as outlined in Chapter 3, were such events to take place today, all of the 33 member-states would be expected to take a stand.

¹ Organization of American States. n.d.a. "Charter of the Organization of American States (A-41)." Department of International Law. At <http://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_A-41_Charter_of_the_Organization_of_American_States.htm>.

² Marshall Foundation. n.d. "Detailed Marshall Chronology." George C. Marshall Foundation. At <<http://www.marshallfoundation.org/about/chronology.html>>.

³ Organization of American States. n.d.b. "Charter of the Organization of American States (A-41)." Ch. II, Art. 3. Department of International Law. At <http://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_A-41_Charter_of_the_Organization_of_American_States.htm#ch2>.

⁴ ———. 2001. "Inter-American Democratic Charter." Lima (September 11). At <http://www.oas.org/charter/docs/resolution1_en_p4.htm>.

⁵ ———. 1962. "Eighth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs." Punta del Este, Uruguay (January 22–31). At <<http://www.oas.org/columbus/docs/OEASerCII.8Eng.pdf>>.

⁶ ———. 2009. "General Assembly, 39th regular session, AG/doc. 5005/09." (June 3), San Pedro Sula, Honduras.

⁷ Clinton, Hillary Rodham. 2009. "OAS Resolution Press Statement." U.S. Department of State (June 3). At <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/06/124305.htm>>.

⁸ Organization of American States. n.d.c. "Our Locations." At <http://www.oas.org/en/about/our_locations.asp>.

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- ⁹ Toner, Mark C. 2011. “Deputy Spokesperson Daily Press Briefing, Washington.” U.S. Department of State (December 2). At <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2011/12/178090.htm>>.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ *Granma International*. 2011. “Caracas Declaration.” (December 11), Year 46, No. 50.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América. 2011. “Declaración Especial sobre la Defensa de la Democracia y el Orden Constitucional en la Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños [CELAC].” (December 3). At <<http://www.alba-tcp.org/contenido/declaraci%C3%B3n-especial-celac-en-defensa-de-la-democracia>> or Cumbre de la Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños. 2011. (December 3). At <<http://www.antv.gob.ve/documentos/4.%20DECLARACI%C3%93N%20ESPECIAL%20DEFENSA%20DEMOCRACIA.pdf>>.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Obama, Barack. 2012. “Remarks of President Barack Obama — As Prepared for Delivery — Summit of the Americas Opening Plenary.” White House (April 14). At <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/04/14/remarks-president-barack-obama-prepared-delivery-summit-americas-opening>>.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.