

SSI panel focuses on energizing U.S. relations

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SSI panel focuses on energizing U.S. relations with 'The Americas'



Douglas Lovelace, director of the Strategic Studies Institute provides an overview of security in the western hemisphere at the "Agenda for the Americas" colloquium. Fellow panelist Michael Shifter from the Inter-American Dialogue and Carlo Dade from the Canadian Foundation for the Americas also addressed security issues at George Washington University in Washington D.C. on Tuesday, April 7. Photo by Kelly Schloesser.

April 8, 2009 - Anticipating President Barack Obama's first official trip to Latin America, eight security and economic analysts convened to discuss future objectives in the region for the new administration. It foreshadowed the discussions of the "Summit of the Americas" April 17 in Trinidad and Tobago, where President Obama will meet with 34 heads of state from

Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean.

George Washington University hosted the event co-sponsored by the university's Center for Latin American Studies and the USAWC Strategic Studies Institute to explore the summit's theme: "Securing our citizens' future by promoting human prosperity, energy, security and environmental sustainability."

"It is the goal of the panel not to re-hash traditional policy objectives, but rather identify a short, practical to-do list for the new administration and congress," said Dr. Max Manwaring, professor of National Security Affairs in SSI.

Despite a clear objective, coming to agreement on a "practical to-do list" was not quite so easy.

Economics panel: failing international markets and state of the economy in the region

"You may have thought Latin America would be worse off. However, they have appeared to navigate their way through the failing world economies," said **Mustafa Mohatarem**, chief economist for General Motors Corporation.

"As long as the U.S. economy turns in this year -- and I think it will -- then, the Americas will continue to do moderately well," he continued.

The first panel debated the economic hurdles Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean are currently facing. The economic panelists - Ines Bustillo from the United Nations, Peter DeShazo from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Eric Farnsworth from the Council of the Americas- urged the U.S. government to ratify trade agreements with several nations in order to facilitate economic recovery.



In contrast, two panelists argued that the region's economy has significantly slowed in the past year and is terribly behind many of the developing nations in Asia. **Inés Bustillo**, director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean, and **Eric Farnsworth**, vice president of the Council on the Americas both pointed to technology to curb this slowdown.

"We are behind and will continue to slip behind industrial nations in Asia. Science, innovation, research, and development of technologies is the future," said Bustillo.

Not all of the policy goals roused debate however. The panelists came to consensus on trade agreements and improving relations with Brazil.

"The first and foremost objective of this administration would be to complete the trade agreements that were set in place but never enacted with Colombia and Panama," said Mohatarem.

Other trade agreements throughout the region were discussed and all labeled as a top priority for the U.S. government.

Encouraging a greater relationship with Brazil was also a point of agreement. The panelists suggested that we should facilitate a relationship with Brazil similar to the one we have with China.

"We should see them as a partner," said **Peter DeShazo**, director of the Americas Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Despite commonalities on improving relationships through economic ties, Cuba managed to inspire great debate. The panelist argued that Cuba is the single most contended point in U.S.- Latin America policy.

"Our administration needs to decide how they are going to deal with the Cuba," said Farnsworth. Some panelists argued against the previous administrations no-talking policy with the Cuban government and urged the new president to open communications. Other panelist went a step further and argued it was necessary to remove U.S. imposed trade embargos, an idea that is often fiercely contested in congress.

Security panel: hemispheric shift from threats of ideology to threats of crime



"As long as the U.S. economy turns in this year -- and I think it will -- then, the Americas will continue to do moderately well," said Mustafa Mohatarem, chief economist for the General Motors Corporation.

"We are no longer looking at simply military answers like we did in the past. That kind of defense worked for the border disputes in the 1980s and '90s," said retired Col. **Douglas Lovelace**, director of the Strategic Studies Institute.

"Today we are facing larger security challenges that are socio-economic and political in nature. In which case, we are looking at all elements of national power," continued Lovelace.

The "war on drugs" was the most contested topic of the panel. Even the name inspired debate.

"We should have never deemed it a war. It's transnational crime and there is no bigger risk to democracy in the hemisphere than the crime fueled by drugs," said **Michael Shifter**, vice president of policy for the Inter-American Dialogue.

With the rise of violence in Mexico, the drug trade has once again risen to the forefront of foreign

policy in the region. As a result of the resurgence, many academics, economists, and foreign policy experts have recently advocated for the decriminalization of drugs said Shifter.

"I don't believe that the decriminalization of drugs is the answer to this," said **Lino Gutierrez**, former U.S. Ambassador to Argentina and Nicaragua.

"I don't want to tell my daughters and granddaughters that our solution to this problem was to throw up our hands and give up," he said.

"I will disagree with my fellow panelist on decriminalizing the drug trade, I think there may be many benefits that we need to look at more closely," said **Carlo Dade**, executive director of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas.

Promoting democracy was considered an important objective by the security panel. They all agreed that many of the democracies in the region are fragile at best and strengthening them should be a major priority of this administration.

"The word democracy is no longer appealing to the region. It's become a negative. The U.S. spent the last several years carrying out the 'war on Iraq' in the name of democracy," said Shifter.

Shifter and the other panelists suggested implementing a different kind of rhetoric, in hopes of "detoxifying" democracy. Many on the panel voiced hope that our new president could do just that.

For more information on the summit visit: <http://www.fifthsummitoftheamericas.org/>