

region. In this regard our relationship with Cuba serves us well).

A comparison of the two countries' position on the human rights question in Cuba is instructive in this regard. In June of 2003 at the annual meeting of the foreign ministers of the Organization of American States in Santiago de Chile, this matter was hotly debated. (In March of that year Cuba had arrested some 75 government opponents, and had executed 3 people who had sought to hijack violently a small ferry boat to the United States). Canada actively supported the U.S. lead in attacking Cuba—but failed miserably to get its message across, and in fact squandered much of its hard-earned political capital. Despite lobbying by Secretary of State Powell, the OAS refused to pay any heed to U.S. appeal: “The bold projection of the United States power in Iraq didn’t build a lot of goodwill, either. Furthermore, the United States persisted in pursuing a selective agenda: the need for change in Cuba.”¹⁶

Unfortunately Canada went along with the U.S. approach—a dangerous strategy in the O.A.S., where a wariness of U.S. motives is commonplace. Yet Canada sponsored a resolution expressing “deep concern” on Cuba. John Graham, chairman of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas, noted the vigorous Canadian support for Washington over this question: “I can’t think of another time when Canada has adopted such an aggressive stance on Cuba at the OAS” he correctly remarked.¹⁷ The widely held response to the U.S. position was voiced by the Barbados delegate, Michael King: “No one condones what took place in Cuba ... But knee-jerk reactions aren’t helpful”.¹⁸ The Mexican reply, given almost two months earlier, was also circumspect: “The Government of Mexico does not consider the Permanent Council of the OAS to be the most appropriate forum for this topic to be discussed, among other reasons because Cuba is not an active member of the Organization.”¹⁹ Canada would do well to seek to understand better the dynamics around the question of Cuba, not just within the O.A.S., but also within the body politic in Latin America. And of course the Mexicans in particular need to be consulted.

It can be argued that the Mexican approach to Cuba has been consistently inconsistent, with most (if not all) presidents paying lip service to the fraternal ties between the two countries, while quietly supporting U.S. objectives. (And of course, under Vicente Fox this has not been carried out so tacitly). There have indeed been exceptions, but these are limited. The bottom line was instead to remain on good terms with the powerful northern neighbour—at all costs. Overlying this vital political objective was at all times a sophisticated layer of nationalism, but the bottom line was the need for Mexico to look after its own strategic goals.

The Fox agenda has changed that to a noticeable extent, in essence because it has greatly removed the appeal to nationalism, and has been noticeably clear in its Cuba policy—particularly when Jorge Castañeda was at the helm of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. An extraordinarily ambitious programme (in terms of proposed domestic change as well as in its projections for an enhanced emphasis on respect for human rights and democratization abroad), it has thus gone against the grain of seven decades of PRI policy. Will this radically different approach have a noticeable impact on Mexican relations with Cuba? Three years later, the jury is still out. To be fair to Fox, he has sought to apply the same approach to the domestic political scene as he has to