

tem appears best equipped to handle some agendas, regional institutional arrangements, such as the OAS, could have a comparative advantage in others. This challenge of subsidiarity requires careful attention: Mexico is pleased with the 'Puebla process' (on migration) precisely because it is not in the OAS. Ad hoc subregional initiatives have in fact been more successful than formal region-wide machinery in dealing with the accelerating rate of interstate co-operation in the Americas since 1990. Moreover, the integration process comprises a broad, complex, and multidimensional community-building process that goes beyond trade and involves growing civil society interaction.

An Overview of the OAS

The OAS, created in 1948 but evolved from a long pan-American tradition, remains the central focus of regional governance despite its inadequacies. Comprising all the governments except Cuba—which remains suspended—the OAS is unique in its representative function: the one regional political forum to include Latin America, the US, the Commonwealth Caribbean, and now also Canada. Whatever the strength, or continuing vitality, of regional consciousness associated with the century-long inter-American system, the OAS would have to be created if it did not exist: there is a strong consensus among all countries from the Southern Cone to the Arctic Circle, including Washington, on the need for something like the OAS. The problem facing the organization as the 1990s draw to a close is the continuing lack of consensus among the 34 governments on its appropriate role, structure, and authority in a period of increasing interdependence. That the OAS faces a historic debate is not in doubt. According to the most recent report reviewing the future of inter-American governance, the OAS is the logical and principal mechanism through which governments can collaboratively engage each other—and civil society—in the management of hemisphere affairs, and it should therefore constitute the central hub of the hemisphere's multilateral network (InterAmerican Dialogue, 1997: 3). But the emergence of the OAS from the sidelines, where it remains, to the centre of the political integration of the Americas depends on the 34 national governments.

The OAS is now accepted as an essential part of the regional architecture in the Western hemisphere. Although, during the 1980s, its very existence seemed in doubt, this is no longer the case. In the early 1990s significant achievements such as Resolution 1080 (Santiago Commitment, General Assembly, 1991) breathed new life into the bat-

tered institution, fuelling hopes that at last the OAS would emerge as the dynamic core of inter-American governance. (That resolution, inserted in the OAS Charter in 1992, created an automatic mechanism for the OAS to react to military coups and the overthrow of elected governments in member countries.) The advent of a new Secretary-General in 1994—César Gaviria, former President of Colombia—speaking the language of democratic liberalization and co-operative security also augured well for OAS renewal. The overall inter-American mood was upbeat when the 34 heads of government assembled in Miami in December 1994 for the first Summit of the Americas since 1967.

From one perspective, the OAS has come a long way since 1990. In several key agenda areas—such as the promotion of democracy and co-operative security—major advances have been achieved, crowned with the establishment of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD) and a Permanent Committee on Hemispheric Security. Resolution 1080 has been invoked four times. Electoral observation remains an important OAS activity, most recently and successfully in Nicaragua. The new Inter-American Council on Integral Development (ICDI) offers the possibility of tidying up the small OAS technical assistance program and, more importantly, of providing an instrument for more effective inter-American leadership on socio-economic and sustainable development issues. The new trade unit has been a runaway success. The Secretary-General's Office maintains a heady production of 'vision' documents on all subjects. Nevertheless, despite every effort of the Secretary-General, this incipient OAS strengthening process has already largely stalled in the aftermath of the Miami summit. Since then the OAS (and the overall inter-American mood) has encountered unexpected turbulence, blunting the reform process undertaken by Secretary-General Gaviria, raising doubts, and lowering expectations of its role. There has been a recent drought of creative initiatives like the Santiago Commitment (Resolution 1080) and a sense of drift in the Permanent Council. Collectively and individually, the advances since 1990 have confirmed the presence and potential of the OAS, but these advances have not decisively shored up its legitimacy. The US, Brazil, and other governments are in arrears on funding commitments, lowering further the morale of the secretariat. Difficult to revive, easy to deflate, the cash-strapped OAS stands in the towering shadow of the Inter-American Development Bank, which has become the primary regional institution in the Americas.