

The key problem is that the United States is unlikely to be constrained by even the strongest of regional institutions. As was clearly seen in the discussion of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the US Congress, a significant number of US politicians do not recognize the binding character of international treaties when they clash with the views of nationally elected officials. As Canada saw in the softwood lumber case, NAFTA does not qualify as a constraint for Congress or even for the executive. This means that a consolidation of regional multilateralism will further limit the autonomy of small and middle powers, for whom it will be exceedingly costly to challenge the autonomy and sovereignty of the only superpower in the region even within a multilateral institutional framework. For countries such as Brazil and Mexico, this is enough to justify resisting the consolidation of the OAS or of any binding regional government arrangements.

The Complexities of Summitry Fever

The post-Miami period gave rise to additional complexities in hemispheric diplomacy. Three new multilateral activities arose from the Miami summit that are not within OAS jurisdiction. The so-called Summit Process, initiated under US leadership in Miami, has been followed in April 1998 by another in Chile, involving a series of working groups co-ordinated by the US (SIRG—Summit Implementation Review Group). In addition, the Williamsburg Process initiated by US Defence Secretary Perry after Miami involves regular meetings of defence ministers throughout the Western hemisphere. Notwithstanding the existence of its new Permanent Committee on Security, the OAS remains in the shadow of this exercise. The final element in this multitrack confusion is the Trade Ministerial Process, which began in Denver (1995), continued in Cartagena the next year, and then in Belo Horizonte Brazil (1997), with the next summit occurring in mid-March 1998, in San José, Costa Rica. While the OAS trade unit is performing essential preparatory work for the trade ministerial conference in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the OAS again is a marginal player in the FTAA agenda. Although all three efforts are potentially beneficial, the issues of overall co-ordination and the OAS role must be addressed.

The summit frenzy that appears to have engulfed the hemisphere after Miami introduces a modicum of uncertainty in regional governance. Under-institutionalized by definition, proliferating summits

are open to raw power politics and thus give clear opportunities to the stronger player(s). At the same time, the summit process narrows the material basis of institutionalized multilateralism by absorbing significant amounts of human and financial resources. The outcome is certainly negative for the OAS, yet not necessarily advantageous for the United States, which predominates in the current arrangements. Countries such as Brazil, with a clear view of hemispheric politics, a coherent strategy, and a compact foreign policy establishment, might well benefit the most from such a *décloisonnement* of hemispheric political dynamics. Still, given the challenges confronting the region, it is hard to see much benefit in weaker institutional mechanisms. For if one accepts with Adam Przeworski (1988) that democracy requires the submission of all interests to uncertainty, it is only established when that universal uncertainty is institutionalized.

Competing Visions of Open Regionalism

The stakes in developing a stronger regional, multilateral order continue to grow for all countries in the Americas. All 35 of them recognize that they confront transnational issue-areas such as trade, sustainable development, and security that require co-operation. Every state is enmeshed in quite different ways within the multilateral networks at the global, regional, and subregional levels.

In trade policy, for example, the months following the Miami summit saw the end of general enthusiasm for NAFTA accession as the preferred model of hemispheric trade integration, while MERCOSUR emerged as an alternative mechanism for South America. The reasons for this mutation are complex, as are the long-term implications for multilateralism in the Americas. Fundamental questions are raised by the reality of the US and Brazil as anchor-states of NAFTA and MERCOSUR, respectively. Are the driving forces of regionalization creating not one but two economic regions in the Western hemisphere? Is MERCOSUR more appropriately viewed from a global perspective as a major trade integration bloc in its own right (as is NAFTA), or primarily as a subregional building block towards an FTAA? Is the Rio Group emerging as a counterpoint to the OAS? Is the vision of Bolivar disputing the Monroe Doctrine? Whatever the answers to each of those questions, the post-Miami summit era is clearly characterized by an increasing tendency towards decentralization in the Western hemisphere.

Each country, moreover, and particularly the major ones, has a different approach to multilateralism. While the United Nations sys-