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AMERICAS FIRST

Reorienting US Foreign Policy

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Secretary of State George Shultz often advised, “Foreign policy starts in your own neighborhood.”¹ One need not be Henry Kissinger to comprehend the cardinal purpose of this simple principle. The United States must prioritize diplomatic relations, economic engagement, and security cooperation in the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, it is foundational to the implementation of any American grand strategy designed to achieve aims of a global nature. The United States cannot successfully confront its enemies, support its allies and partners, and maintain its leading role in the world if its geopolitical neighborhood is insecure and unstable.² The pursuit of regional stability, an aim enshrined in the Monroe Doctrine, has occurred in various incarnations, but following its underlying strategic principle remains vital for policymakers today.³

What threatens Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has an impact on American national security. “If your neighborhood is unhealthy,” Shultz warned, “you’re going to have all sorts of problems.” This dilemma of hemispheric security has vexed decision makers throughout the nation’s history. Even now, the formidable power of the United States does not confer complete protection within its own hemisphere. Such a paramount concern for security in the Western Hemisphere has underpinned an enduring bipartisan consensus on preserving regional stability. As a priority for policymakers, its significance rises and falls with each administration. For Shultz, and for President Ronald Reagan, effecting a neighborhood policy was the first order of business in foreign affairs.⁴

In recent years, however, the United States has lost touch with its neighbors, an unfortunate and ironic geopolitical predicament. The migration crisis at the US-Mexico border has roiled American politics. In February 2024, it was the impetus for the rare impeachment of a cabinet secretary. After two votes, the Republican-led House impeached Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, mostly along party lines. In similar partisan fashion, the Democratic-led Senate dismissed the articles of impeachment in April. Alongside immigration, though, preventing narcotics from entering the homeland

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tops the concerns of Americans. The fentanyl epidemic ravaging the country, and the drug cartels supplying it, evokes the life-and-death matters that bind the hemisphere. To be sure, ordinary Americans hold an abiding interest in hemispheric affairs, even if foreign policy does not always reflect it. Recognizing the problem is the first step in redressing this major strategic deficiency.⁵

Uncle Sam's absence in the Americas undermines the national interest. It grants America's rivals greater leeway to displace the United States and further their malign influence in the Western Hemisphere. Washington's inattention to its neighborhood proves stupefyingly self-defeating amid a struggle to prevent Beijing and its despotic partners from upending the American-led global order.

Given the dire challenge of confronting the combined anti-American forces of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, the lack of a proactive policy for hemispheric security is strategic malpractice at best and superpower suicide at worst. The United States must exercise common strategic sense and reorient hemispheric relations. The American government possesses the tools and resources to do so, but it requires volition. Facing a period of increasing danger and uncertainty, policymakers must follow Shultz's guiding principle for American statecraft: America must prioritize the Americas.⁶

What follows examines the past and present of American hemispheric security. The essay begins by showing Shultz's guidance in practice. It explains why Reagan and Shultz prioritized the Western Hemisphere and how they executed their neighborhood policy. Next, the essay explores the current security landscape in LAC, with a focus on the grave threats posed by foreign powers and drug cartels. It then surveys the positive economic and political trends underway that augur a promising future for the region. An analysis of the efforts by the Biden-Harris administration and Congress to build regional security concludes the essay. It reveals both the grim shortcomings of current policies and the potential for the United States to recalibrate. An "Americas First" orientation in US foreign policy is not only essential but also realizable.

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The tumultuous years of Jimmy Carter's presidency bequeathed an uncertain world to Ronald Reagan. A fatal mix of civil and interstate conflicts, economic disasters, terrorism, and the apocalyptic danger of nuclear weapons wracked the international order. US-Soviet détente had seen better days. The Cold War reignited. The Soviet Union had upgraded its armed forces, which invaded Afghanistan, injected money and materiel into Third World revolutionary movements, and cracked down on millions stuck within the Soviet empire. In the Western Hemisphere, where the superpower struggles overlay other destructive forces, revolution and counterrevolution tore it asunder.⁷

The instability troubled Reagan, especially in Central America. Revolutionary movements supported by Cuba, the Soviet's heavyweight proxy, upended the region. This

Soviet meddling, Reagan perceived, violated the Monroe Doctrine. In response, the Reagan administration followed America's long-standing commitment to ensuring hemispheric security. Reagan underscored his adherence to the tradition in his 1987 State of the Union Address. "Our commitment to a Western Hemisphere safe from aggression did not occur by spontaneous generation on the day that we took office," the president declared. "It began with the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 and continues our historic bipartisan American policy."⁸

Reagan believed that addressing security problems in the Western Hemisphere would permit him to effectively confront the Soviet Union. To wage Cold War, the Reagan administration formulated a comprehensive plan with many dimensions, for which the neighborhood policy was a critical part. Reagan's grand strategy coordinated all prongs of American power—economic, diplomatic, informational, and military—to finally bring the Soviet Union to a "negotiated surrender." Reagan engaged the Soviets to reduce tensions and lessen the nuclear threat while he marshaled all the resources of the United States to "leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history."⁹

To advance his foreign policy, known as "peace through strength," Reagan used force and diplomacy in tandem. A powerful military, and a demonstrated willingness to use it, vastly improves a diplomat's chances at the negotiating table. "The truth is," Shultz once cautioned, "power and diplomacy must always go together, or we will accomplish very little in this world." For Reagan, peace through strength entailed more than a military buildup. It also involved supporting anticommunist insurgents worldwide under the "Reagan Doctrine," a key piece of his grand strategy applied famously in Afghanistan and infamously in Nicaragua. Confronting the Soviets directly in Eastern Europe would launch World War III. Defeating communism elsewhere, like Central America, would not produce mushroom clouds. The Western Hemisphere thus served as a central theater in which Reagan sought to strain the Soviet Union's resources and diminish its international influence.¹⁰

In his foreign policy agenda, Reagan prioritized the Western Hemisphere. At the outset, he pursued high-profile diplomacy, economic initiatives, and targeted covert action. His early actions reflect the region's significance. Eight days into his term, Reagan hosted Jamaican prime minister Edward Seaga as his *first* head of state guest at the White House. Seaga had unseated a communist-friendly prime minister in Jamaica's recent general election. "Though strategically insignificant by itself," historian William Inboden has observed, inviting "Jamaica sent a message about Reagan's support for democratic capitalism against communist inroads in the Western Hemisphere." The following day, during his *first* presidential press conference, Reagan proposed actively engaging Caribbean nations to sustain democratic governments. Over the succeeding weeks, his *first* four National Security Council meetings covered crises in Central America and the Caribbean, namely, how to resolve the thorny problem of Marxist revolutionaries. From these initial meetings, Reagan launched his policy to roll back the spread of communism in the Western Hemisphere and bolster endangered governments.¹¹

After Reagan set the policy and pointed the direction, Shultz joined the journey as secretary of state on July 16, 1982, eager to carry it out. Shultz shared Reagan's belief in the centrality of America's neighborhood in foreign policy. For Shultz, the strategic rationale transcended Cold War concerns. The Western Hemisphere mattered not solely because of the superpower conflict. "If you have a strong, cohesive neighborhood," Shultz once explained, "you have a much better base then, if something goes wrong." It is basic geopolitics. To act globally, policymakers must first think regionally. And so, they did.¹²

Reagan and Shultz executed a neighborhood policy with zeal. In October 1982, Shultz traveled to Canada and Mexico for his *first* two foreign trips. In Mexico, Reagan joined Shultz for a special cross-border engagement with President-Elect Miguel de la Madrid. It followed the symbolic display of neighborly relations that Reagan undertook with Mexican president José López Portillo on January 5, 1981. Even before taking his oath, Reagan ventured south of the border. He greeted López Portillo on the Cordova Bridge that stretches over the Rio Grande to connect Mexico and the United States. Afterward, they lunched in Ciudad Juárez. Nearly two years later, President Reagan greeted President-Elect De la Madrid in Tijuana, Mexico, before they headed to Coronado, California, for a luncheon. "We got along fine," Reagan noted in his diary.¹³

Weeks later, Reagan and Shultz embarked on a goodwill tour of Latin America. It focused on the three critical matters of democracy, development, and security. Seeking to replicate "the de la Madrid formula," Reagan modeled his trip after his productive engagement with the Mexican leader. As Reagan put it to his staff, he wanted to "drop in on a neighbor."¹⁴

Reagan and Shultz visited Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Honduras, conducting what Shultz called "gardening." Diplomatic gardening is the consistent practice of cultivating relationships with allies, partners, and potential friends. Regular engagement, especially meeting counterparts in their home country, not only strengthens relations but also makes the hard work of diplomacy easier if difficult issues arise. Above all, it builds trust, which Shultz deemed "the coin of the realm." In a Cold War, every act of diplomacy is crucial, particularly among neighbors.¹⁵

Reagan achieved many of his aims amid a tragic period. He developed the Caribbean Basin Initiative and, with Shultz's adroit statesmanship, performed the groundwork for the North American Free Trade Agreement, which his successor brought to fruition. Still, the Latin American debt crisis persisted, and economies suffered. Democracy promotion proved more fruitful. Reagan encouraged transition to civilian rule in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay. Shultz himself spearheaded US support for the Chilean plebiscite that ended the oppressive rule of Augusto Pinochet, whom Shultz strongly opposed both on democratic principles and for having "done monstrous things." Reagan's efforts to curtail Soviet influence were likewise effective, to major consequence and controversy. Operation Urgent Fury restored democratic governance in Grenada. Central America did

not morph into “a Soviet beachhead,” but the region soaked in blood. Reagan’s staunch support for an anticommunist insurgency against the Sandinistas pushed Nicaragua into democratic reforms. It also led to the Iran-Contra affair, which upended his presidency. Such is the duality of Reagan’s neighborhood policy.¹⁶

Although prioritizing hemispheric security will not guarantee every initiative succeeds, it places an administration in a more advantageous position to project power throughout the globe. Reagan and Shultz, for their part, aligned national power with grand strategic purpose in a bid to win the Cold War—and it started with a neighborhood policy. Now, as then, policymakers must grasp that regional prioritization is a prerequisite for pursuing a grand strategy to achieve global aims. The manifold challenges and threats currently facing not only the Western Hemisphere but also the international order demand such an astute approach.

TROUBLE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

America’s neglect of its neighborhood has not gone unnoticed by its adversaries. The despotic quartet of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea have advanced their malign influence in LAC. China, above all, has bid for regional dominance. Chinese economic, diplomatic, and military ties with LAC have grown exponentially in recent years. Trade and development have been driving forces, with the Belt and Road Initiative attracting twenty-two countries in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁷ Trade between LAC and China has increased from \$12 billion to \$315 billion during the first twenty years of this century and may double within the next decade.¹⁸ Chinese investment continues apace, as well. From 2005 to 2024, China invested an estimated \$240 billion in various LAC business sectors. The United States may still hold the status of top trading partner for the LAC region, but China is inching toward taking that title.¹⁹

As LAC countries pursue a strategy of “active nonalignment,” China’s aggressive posture reaps tangible benefits. It establishes a bridgehead for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), especially in South America, where China has become the region’s top trading partner and ingrained itself into the region’s digital and physical infrastructure. While China has targeted “new infrastructure,” which ranges from exporting information and communication technology to investing in renewable energy, the old infrastructure receives due attention.²⁰

China’s involvement in Peruvian critical infrastructure showcases the CCP’s ambitions. In Lima, China Three Gorges Corporation and China Southern Power Grid International now control the electricity sector. In Chancay, China’s COSCO Shipping will soon debut a \$3.5 billion megaport, much to the consternation of American policymakers. Inaction carries a steep price in a world of strategic competition. “The United States is present almost everywhere in the world with a lot of initiatives, but not so much in Latin America,” Peruvian foreign minister Javier González-Olaechea explained to

Wall Street Journal reporters. “It’s like a very important friend who spends little time with us.” Washington should make note of this invitation.²¹

Despite overlooking neighborly invitations, the United States has noticed the CCP’s disconcerting security assistance and intelligence activities. China exports advanced surveillance technology to not only assist authoritarian countries like Venezuela and Cuba, but also to spread its illiberal model of governance to other LAC nations looking to control their citizens. China has placed police outposts and private security companies in the hemisphere. It offers military training and professional education programs, as well as law enforcement training exchanges, notably with Cuban and Nicaraguan police forces. Chinese arms and military equipment sales remain steady, with its autocratic regional partners making the bulk of the purchases.²²

In Cuba, China has turned to old tactics to wage twenty-first-century espionage. The CCP operates electronic spy stations on the island to collect signals intelligence on US military activities, the space industry, and shipping enterprises, even capturing electronic data from ordinary citizens. Although espionage is a vintage trade of Cuba, from which the Soviets spied throughout the Cold War, China has accessed bases on the island since 2019, and satellite images have confirmed renovations to four bases. As with the Soviet Union, then, the United States now confronts its top geopolitical rival ensconced just off its shores.²³

Although less ambitious than China, Russia also prioritizes having a substantial presence in the Western Hemisphere. During a February 2024 regional visit, then Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev stated that building relationships with LAC countries was “one of Moscow’s key priorities.”²⁴ Moscow has sought to deepen its engagement with a region that has attracted Russian attention long before the era of great-power competition. In that spirit, Russia keeps its closest ties with Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, which remain stalwart allies in Russia’s hostility against the United States. Russia also sustains a strong partnership with Brazil, a founding member of the BRICS organization and a trading partner that Russia has become increasingly reliant on for purchasing its diesel.²⁵

Russia has made great strides in both strengthening its ties and exercising its influence in LAC. The country still sells billions in arms to the region and seeks to enhance military cooperation with friendly countries. Its trade relations have improved, too, with Russian president Vladimir Putin claiming in September 2023 that “trade turnover between Russia and Latin America has increased by 25% over the past five years.” Energy is the mainstay of Russia’s exports to the region, but Moscow acts on other ideas: Russia recently ventured into the Bolivian critical minerals industry, making an agreement with Bolivia to develop its lithium reserve, in addition to cooperating on nuclear technology for medicinal purposes. And to perform a bit of gardening of its own, Russia has dispatched its best diplomats to the Western Hemisphere, where they cultivate partnerships and lobby to further Russian interests. The region’s ambivalent response to Russia’s war against Ukraine provides a case in point.²⁶

Yet Russia wields more than silver-tongue diplomacy to counter the role of the United States in its own hemisphere. Putin deploys information operations to diminish America's regional standing, mold public opinion, and promote a kinder, gentler Russia.²⁷ Putin also uses economic coercion to thwart American security arrangements. In February 2024, Russia banned bananas from Ecuador, which jeopardized its roughly \$800 million market share, to prevent the country from receiving US-made arms to fight drug gangs in exchange for its Soviet-made weapons. Per terms of the arms swap, the United States would send the old weapons to Ukraine for its fight against Russia. Putin's banana cancellation worked, and the arms never went overseas.²⁸

Occasional projections of Russian naval power provoke tension too. In the summer of 2024, Russia docked ships in Cuba and Venezuela, sending a nuclear-powered submarine to Cuba and then warships to Venezuela after conducting planned exercises in the Atlantic Ocean. The United States responded in kind: the nuclear-powered submarine USS *Helena* surfaced in the waters off Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, a distinctive reminder of American power.²⁹

Like Russia, Iran preserves a host of diplomatic, economic, and security relationships in the region, particularly with the anti-American cadre of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Although Iran has not recently opened a new embassy, Iranians have further developed their defense ties. On July 20, 2023, Bolivia and Iran inked a defense agreement under which Iran would ostensibly help secure the Bolivian border, combat narcotics trafficking, and educate the Bolivian military. "This cooperative endeavor," Defense Minister Mohammad Reza Ashtiani proclaimed, "has the potential to serve as a pioneering model for other nations in South America." It has thus far resulted in military technology transfers from Iran to Bolivia, such as drones, and the furnishing of Bolivian passports to Iranians who carry out clandestine activities within the hemisphere. Equally concerning, Iran has undertaken a major bid to mold public opinion. Its Spanish-language outlet HispanTV partakes in disinformation campaigns, regularly broadcasting anti-American propaganda, often in league with Russia's RT and Venezuela's teleSUR. Iran's malign influence spreads in other ways, as well.³⁰

Hezbollah, the Islamic Republic's terrorist proxy, operates in South America. In the Triple Frontier area between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, Hezbollah operatives provide services for criminals and conduct a wide range of illicit ventures: arms dealing, counterfeiting, money laundering, narcotics tracking, piracy, and an assortment of other crimes. Millions in profits from these nefarious activities flow into the Middle East to finance terrorism. And Hezbollah remains eager to continue bringing this destruction to the Americas. On November 8, 2023, the Brazilian Federal Police, with the Mossad's help, executed Operation Trapiche to disrupt Hezbollah's plan to launch attacks on synagogues and the Israeli Embassy.³¹

Whether through criminal enterprise or defense cooperation, Iran plots to expand its engagement with the Western Hemisphere. As Iran's new president Masoud Pezeshkian

has signaled: “There is significantly more potential for cooperation between Iran and the countries of Latin America than what is currently being realized, and we look forward to further strengthening our ties.” The United States should take him at his word.³²

Not far behind Tehran, Pyongyang started its own LAC outreach program. North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un permitted the opening of a brand-new Nicaraguan Embassy, one of the few he permits to operate, drawing him ever closer to Daniel Ortega’s repressive regime. On June 11, 2024, Nicaraguan ambassador Manuel Modesto Mungula Martinez presented his credentials in Pyongyang to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, followed by a July 12 ceremony with Choe Ryong Hae, the first vice president of the State Affairs Commission and chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People’s Assembly.³³

In establishing the embassy, Nicaragua joins an exclusive club. Its anti-American regional ally Cuba, a long-standing partner of North Korea, continues to operate an embassy, dispatching a new ambassador to Pyongyang this year. Brazil also maintains an embassy, which recently reopened after a hiatus induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, the Brazilians, who criticize North Korea’s military actions, have a circumscribed relationship with the Kim dictatorship centered around agricultural aid and sports. Although North Korea has relations with American-friendly countries like Brazil, Kim’s bid to strengthen partnerships with LAC countries actively hostile to American interests proves ever more alarming.³⁴

In addition to state powers and their proxies, transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) present an acute threat to the Western Hemisphere. Of these, drug cartels pose the biggest security dilemma. Cartels produce and supply the preponderance of cocaine, fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine entering the United States. Drug trafficking, however, does not represent their sole occupation. Cartels engage in arms dealing, commodities theft, extortion, human smuggling, kidnapping, money laundering, murder, and sex trafficking, all the major illicit activities expected from well-funded and organized criminal outfits hell-bent on profit. The cartels’ enterprises spread corruption, foment violence, ruin legitimate businesses, and destabilize Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, while adding to the humanitarian catastrophe at the US-Mexico border and contributing to more than a hundred thousand annual overdoses in America. Their activity even ensnares presidents. In June 2024, Juan Orlando Hernández, the former president of Honduras, received a forty-five-year prison sentence for distributing four hundred tons of cocaine in the United States.³⁵

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) identifies the Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartels as the chief threats to the United States. These two cartels preside over global operations, maintain footholds in all US states, and dominate every aspect of the drug trade. America’s fentanyl epidemic, and its attendant two hundred deaths per day, owes chiefly to their designs. “The Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartels,” DEA administrator Anne Milgram

has declared, “are at the heart of this crisis.” Indeed, these cartels wreak havoc on the United States through drug trafficking—and China facilitates their operations.³⁶

Drugs have emerged as a major element of the US-China strategic competition. China has assumed a vital role in the Sinaloa and Jalisco fentanyl operations. Chinese companies export to Mexico the fentanyl precursor chemicals and pill press equipment necessary for producing the synthetic drug. A recent investigation by the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the CCP discovered that the CCP even subsidizes and shares ownership in the companies involved. China neither imprisons nor disrupts these manufacturers. The CCP, in fact, encourages them. And China provides much more than chemicals and equipment. Cartels now find in China the financial services required to launder the ill-gotten gains of drug sales.³⁷

Chinese Money Laundering Organizations (CMLOs) have evolved into a key resource for the Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartels, who use the Chinese underground banking system, among other avenues, to wash massive profits. In one version of the laundering process, cartels supply dollars to CMLOs based in the United States in exchange for cryptocurrency or pesos made available in Mexico. In turn, CMLOs furnish the dollars to affluent Chinese citizens seeking to avoid capital controls in China. With the insatiable American appetite for drugs, and the Chinese market for dollars, business booms for CMLOs. In 2022, the State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs found that \$154 billion was laundered in China per year, a figure which, based on how much cartels use the crucial services of CMLOs, has likely increased over the past two years. At every step of the drug trade, China now plays an important part.³⁸

A set of other governing challenges portend regional instability. Undergoing a steep financial crisis, Cuba lost 10 percent of its population during 2022 and 2023. Since October 2021, 645,122 Cubans have sought refuge in the United States, fleeing worsening economic conditions and an oppressive communist government.³⁹ In Bolivia, a disgruntled former general launched a failed coup d'état.⁴⁰ Haiti, for its part, avoided an outright coup but gang warfare in the wake of President Jovenel Moïse's assassination upended the nation. Dependent on a Multinational Security Support mission authorized by the United Nations Security Council, and funded by the United States, the interim Haitian government attempts to govern while Kenyan police officers help the Haitian National Police restore order. It has been a grueling process for Haitians, who see little progress. Amid the unrest, Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Port-au-Prince on September 5 to give the beleaguered interim government a show of resolve. Haiti's return to peace will take time and call for further US engagement.⁴¹

Meanwhile, judicial reforms in Mexico endanger both democracy and North American relations. Before leaving office in October, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador transformed how Mexico's more than seven thousand jurists join the bench, from the Supreme Court to federal, state, and local branches. Under his reforms, current jurists

will vacate their seats, and voters would elect new judges, who will simply need a law degree and minimal practice to qualify as candidates. The Supreme Court itself will reduce its membership and terms. It will also be subject to a new Tribunal for Judicial Discipline, which will be authorized to sanction and impeach judges. Judiciary workers embarked on a strike in protest. US ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar criticized the gambit, noting that it only serves to “help cartels and other bad actors take advantage of inexperienced judges with political motivations.” More damaging, these reforms will imperil the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement by violating its judicial independence clauses. Undeterred, López Obrador forged ahead despite these political and economic risks.⁴²

In Venezuela, meanwhile, an intractable problem brews. President Nicolás Maduro falsely declared victory over Edmundo González in the July 2024 presidential election to steal a third term. As international condemnation of his electoral theft mounted, Maduro ordered the government to crush his political opposition, sending González into exile, and suppressed any backlash among the populace, resulting in mass arrests and widespread abuses. In response, the United States imposed sanctions on officials assisting Maduro. For the moment, however, Maduro appears both determined to persist with his crackdown under “Operation Knock-Knock” and unlikely to voluntarily relinquish power. Brave protesters continue to rally in the streets while they await a full-throated, proper response from neighboring countries and Washington, DC.⁴³

POSITIVE VIBES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

If the present situation reflects challenging circumstances for LAC, positive economic and political trends indicate a brighter future for the region.⁴⁴ Its trajectory does not forecast another *Década Perdida* (“Lost Decade”). Despite democratic backsliding in a handful of countries, and authoritarian outliers in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, democracy has spread across the Western Hemisphere. Democratic governments rule to varying degrees of law. LAC governments are not perfect, and the United States may not always prefer the governing parties, but engaging with consolidated democracies in LAC will prove easier and more feasible than in the past.⁴⁵ On the global stage, the reception looks just as warm, where LAC countries seek to exert influence. Brazil typifies this by serving as the host of the next G20 summit in November 2024. In LAC itself, good vibes prevail. Gallup’s 2024 *Global Emotions* report finds LAC accounts for six of the top ten places where residents have positive experiences daily: Paraguay, Panama, Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. People thrive in the Americas.⁴⁶

Favorable economic conditions abound. A promising, steady GDP growth, which LAC had not experienced in years, has taken hold since the pandemic decimated the region. Although this growth may be lower than other regions—it is projected by the World Bank to reach 2.7 percent next year—conditions are ripe for further investment, increased

competition among firms, and American engagement to spur additional growth. In 2023, LAC attracted \$184.3 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI), a slight drop from 2022, which soared to over \$200 billion, but higher than the average over the past decade. The bulk of FDI flowed into services and manufacturing, followed by natural resources, and the United States provided most of it. Businesses are profitable, even though certain sectors of the LAC economy perform better than others. Agribusiness and energy are booming. Brazil, for instance, remains a top global exporter of agricultural products, and Guyana's oil production has become a driver in the expanding global crude oil supply.⁴⁷

LAC's future potential, particularly for nearshoring, outstrips contemporary risks. The Western Hemisphere houses vast repositories of critical minerals, ranging from copper and lithium to nickel and graphite. LAC can fuel the energy transition and power electric vehicles. Argentina recently announced a lithium production overhaul, including four additional mines, which should boost capacity by 79 percent. Next door in Chile, where the world's largest lithium reserves are located, President Gabriel Boric plans to authorize new mining projects, which would supercharge output in the "lithium triangle."⁴⁸

Yet LAC possesses more than strategic commodities. Advanced pharmaceutical industries that can benefit the United States reside in the hemisphere. So, too, do competitive workforces for semiconductor and automotive industries live in countries like Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Panama. On the demographic front, according to the International Monetary Fund, LAC may sustain a robust labor force, particularly if women continue joining at rates that close the participation rate gap between genders. With all these factors in force, the lofty goal of hemisphere-wide integrated supply chains is both within reason and reach.⁴⁹

From the LAC viewpoint, the United States presents renewed opportunity. As Pew Research has shown, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru view the United States positively. Such feelings are both an uptick in approval from past years and a known asset. A newly declassified August 2022 National Intelligence Estimate for LAC finds "that the region would be most open to US engagement on shared interests, such as improving access to quality education, attracting new private investment, and implementing a gradual strategy toward increasing renewable energy generation." Consistency, the National Intelligence Council contends, shall be key to assuring LAC leadership and securing partnerships for the long haul.⁵⁰

Most LAC countries warmly welcome an ironclad commitment, even if they have suffered a rocky relationship with the United States. Look at Argentina: In April 2024, President Javier Milei formally applied for the status of global partner with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The next month, Argentina and the United States held joint naval exercises for the first time in fourteen years. Argentina has begun realigning with the American-led world order, and others shall no doubt follow.⁵¹

VIEWING THE NEIGHBORHOOD FROM PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE

Although President Joe Biden grasped the geopolitical dilemma of hemispheric security, he has attempted to solve it with half measures. Upon entering office, Biden recognized the centrality of hemispheric relations to American national security, and the National Security Council formulated a strategy. The forty-eight-page 2022 National Security Strategy devotes two pages to defining it. “No region,” the document rightly declares, “impacts the United States more directly than the Western Hemisphere.” To achieve the political aims of “economic resilience, democratic stability, and citizen security within the hemisphere,” the Biden-Harris administration has sought to execute on a strategy of engagement and initiative, under which diplomacy, in conjunction with economic and security cooperation, would spur regional integration and create stability. Unfortunately, half-hearted geostrategic pursuits rarely succeed. Current US policy for the Western Hemisphere proves no exception.⁵²

The Biden-Harris administration’s approach to the Americas reflects indifference, not precedence. In the hierarchy of foreign policy priorities, LAC ranks lower than it frankly deserves. Europe and Asia absorb the president’s attention, for exigent reasons, and pack his itinerary. Biden prefers transatlantic flights to traversing LAC, entering the region only once thus far. In January 2023, he attended the North American Leaders’ Summit. Before leaving office, though, he may attend in November both the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Peru and the G20 summit in Brazil. By comparison, his travel schedule resembles his predecessor Donald Trump, who only visited Argentina for the G20 summit. During their first terms, in contrast, Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama visited five and six LAC countries, respectively, with each making multiple journeys to Mexico. Meanwhile, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has so far visited fourteen LAC countries, launching his travels abroad with a February 2021 “virtual visit” to Canada and Mexico. America’s chief diplomat undertakes many foreign trips, but direction and leadership still emanate from the commander in chief.⁵³

Biden has acted half-heartedly on regional trade and development. The United States now has a marquee initiative to stimulate regional economic integration. Announced by Biden during the 2022 Summit of the Americas, which the United States hosted in Los Angeles, the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) established a forum for “a new economic partnership” between the United States and eleven founding partner countries: Barbados, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay. According to Biden, APEP aims to “help economies grow from the bottom up and the middle out.” It will “foster innovation and help governments to deliver for their own people” and “tackle the climate crisis head on.” In practical terms, it seeks to revitalize investment and public administration, strengthen supply chains, advance the clean energy transition, and enhance trade in the Western Hemisphere. What began as a critical initiative with the right intentions, however, has given way to lackluster implementation.⁵⁴

Currently, APEP exists solely as a forum responsible for pledges, declarations, symposiums, workshops, and future planning. Its member countries, for the most part, previously secured free trade agreements with the United States. Strikingly, too, Argentina and Brazil declined to participate. Encouraged by the good faith effort, and tempered by its glacial pace, however, LAC officials have been cautiously optimistic. Congressional supporters, meanwhile, have expressed concern. In October 2023, Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA), the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, dispatched a letter to the Biden-Harris administration asking for clarification on why binding agreements were being avoided. “Absent binding commitments,” Kaine asks, “how does the Administration intend to ensure that this new structure is sustainable?” Indeed, following the 2023 APEP Leaders’ Summit and 2024 Foreign Affairs Ministerial, Kaine’s salient point lingers still. APEP has not originated binding agreements guaranteeing long-term commitments to spur transformation regional integration. Engagement is the necessary first step, but APEP requires more follow-through to achieve its vital purpose.⁵⁵

Biden’s approach to dealing with migration is diagnostic of the associated challenges. Recall, he tasked Vice President Kamala Harris with “the implementation of the Root Causes Strategy” to solve the Central American migration crisis. It yielded modest aid to affected countries but primarily produced more pledges and declarations than workable solutions. Biden also attempted to negotiate a bipartisan immigration bill. It collapsed under the weight of political theatrics and partisan differences over border security. At an impasse, and with public opinion souring, Biden made recourse to executive action in June 2024 to reduce asylum claims and fast-track deportations at the US-Mexico border. Likewise, he resorted to underwriting Panama’s repatriations of migrants crossing the Darién Gap, which the Panamanian government seeks to prevent. Here, Biden’s expedient actions demonstrate that, with willpower and follow-through, America can address regional issues critical to the national interest. Financing foreign repatriation programs and executive action, however, will not suffice in the long term. Congress must act with the president to reform the immigration system wholesale.⁵⁶

VIEWING THE NEIGHBORHOOD FROM CAPITOL HILL

Congress has not forgotten about the Western Hemisphere. It represents an area in which Democrats and Republicans labor in unison. In the Senate, Ben Cardin (D-MD), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), James Risch (R-ID), Tim Kaine (D-VA), and especially Marco Rubio (R-FL) are at the forefront of introducing and cosponsoring legislation to advance bilateral and multilateral regional security cooperation among democratic countries in the Americas. Such bipartisan bills that have come about include the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative Authorization Act, Western Hemisphere Partnership Act, and the Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act. These bills would add legislative punch to what the Biden-Harris administration, or any future administration, should be proactively pursuing in LAC.⁵⁷

Given the half measures of recent years, mandating the implementation of a coherent regional strategy may chart the optimal path. Take the Western Hemisphere Partnership Act, for example: it would establish the statutory requirement for “a 5-year strategy to promote security and the rule of law in the Western Hemisphere” and create “a comprehensive United States strategy for public and private investment, trade, and development in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.” The Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act, for its part, would establish its eponymous strategy, directing the Defense and State Departments to execute a multiyear version aimed at boosting humanitarian and security assistance while promoting human rights and combating TCOs and hostile state powers.⁵⁸

Beyond security cooperation, a bipartisan coalition from both chambers is also pursuing legislation to integrate the Americas. Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Representatives Adriano Espaillat (D-NY) and Maria Elvira Salazar (R-FL) have introduced the Americas Trade and Investment Act. It would “establish a regional trade, investment, and people-to-people partnership of countries in the Western Hemisphere to stimulate growth and integration through viable long-term private sector development.” As a formal program overseen by the executive and legislative branches, its central aims in LAC are the following: accelerate and incentivize reshoring and near-shoring; curb corruption with e-governance platforms; establish a nonimmigrant visa program for elder caregivers; create more cultural and educational exchange programs; found a multicampus American University of the Americas; spur essential infrastructure development; increase investment in local industries; and expand free trade, including the incorporation of high-income LAC partner countries like Costa Rica and Uruguay into the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement.⁵⁹

Indeed, the Americas Act may be too ambitious, too much of a panacea for hemispheric dilemmas. Sweeping solutions rarely materialize. The bill has not yet reached the floor of the Senate, although its time may soon arrive. In the interim, its goals and sheer scope deserve praise. The 118th Congress has moved to reorient the strategic focus toward America’s neighbors. A select few members have sought to give direction and grand purpose to regional policy. Still, with LAC policy adrift, and without meaningful legislation passed, the United States will suffer the consequences of half measures unless Congress finds the willpower to rectify it.

As the spirit of bipartisanship remains alive in remote corners of Capitol Hill, lawmakers must harness it for reestablishing a consensus on hemispheric security. Congress should therefore create a “Select Committee on Hemispheric Security.” Given the recent bipartisan interest and collaboration among senators on the vital issue, the Senate appears the chamber best suited for such a consequential committee. Yet it would excel by replicating the practices of the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the CCP, which has helped elevate and drive the agenda on US-China policy in a bipartisan fashion, leading to new laws and heightened awareness of America’s confrontation with China. By adopting a similar demeanor and approach, a

Select Committee on Hemispheric Security may give renewed purpose and direction to US foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere. The world order of the twenty-first century may depend on it.⁶⁰

WELCOME BACK TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

To paraphrase T. R. Fehrenbach, the United States currently inhabits a world in which it cannot outright win and from which it cannot retreat without utter catastrophe.⁶¹ The contemporary international system presents security dilemmas with long horizons that require a potent cocktail of novel solutions, active engagement, and strategic patience. The moment calls neither for misguided retrenchment nor excessive intervention. Rather, the United States must prudently manage the decline of its enemies. On a prolonged timeline, the survival rate collapses for the authoritarian regimes in China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. No regime lasts forever. Eventually, a moment of disjuncture will bring about another government.⁶² Whether or not those new governments constructively participate in the American-led global order will depend on many factors. Still, such an open world order should be available to them. The United States sustaining its preeminent role in global affairs and supporting a free and prosperous Western Hemisphere surely enables it.⁶³

Enhancing security, stimulating development, and fostering friendlier relations in the Western Hemisphere only demands common strategic sense from American policymakers, not the least of which is recognizing that the United States must regularly engage with its neighbors. Those on the front lines see it. At the July 2024 Aspen Security Forum, General Laura Richardson, commander of US Southern Command, rightly emphasized “that economic security and national security are going hand-in-hand here in this hemisphere.” To ensure that American initiatives revitalize both LAC economies and regional partnerships, Richardson requested far more than money: “I need more visitors to the Western Hemisphere. I need more visitors to the Caribbean. I need more visitors to Central America. I need more visitors to South America.”⁶⁴ The Americas beckon Americans. In recalling Shultz’s wise counsel, America must begin greeting the neighborhood and tending the diplomatic garden.

Like Reagan and Shultz, policymakers must again align national power with grand strategic purpose—and it starts in the neighborhood. The United States holds the resources and tools. The instruments of national power are available and ready for coordination. Dedicated public servants standby to undertake the task. Political leadership must now set the policy and follow through with full measures.

In prioritizing the Western Hemisphere in American foreign policy, however, Shultz’s guiding principle charts the direction for decision makers, not the specific policies. Cultivating an integrated hemisphere is a long-term objective that will span multiple administrations and require recalibration along the way. Each policy must be calculated and suited for the historical circumstance. Policymakers will have to balance ends, ways,

and means based on contemporary assessments and reassessments. In looking at present circumstances, then, what better time than now to put the Americas first?⁶⁵

The United States must actively engage its neighbors to parlay the encouraging developments underway in the Western Hemisphere into long-term prosperity and stability. In doing so, discord and interventionism, the hallmarks of a bygone era, should remain Cold War relics fit for display in historical scholarship, not products of contemporary policy. Mutually beneficial cooperation and integration are the political aims. Present circumstances permit their attainment with sound strategy. A new configuration in hemispheric order awaits.

NOTES

1. George Shultz quoted from James E. Goodby, "Groundbreaking Diplomacy: An Interview with George Shultz," *Foreign Service Journal* 93, no. 10 (December 2016): 58–59.
2. "Grand strategy" is the coordinated use of all facets of national power in pursuit of political aims. Throughout its history, the United States has pursued a quartet of political aims: security, sovereignty, expansion, and democracy. For the history of American grand strategy and the aims underpinning it, see Donald Stoker, *Purpose and Power: US Grand Strategy from the Revolutionary Era to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).
3. Major credit is due to Ryan Berg and Hal Brands for both recognizing the Western Hemisphere's significance for great power competition and raising some of the regional security issues examined in this essay, all of which have worsened since 2021. In providing "an intellectual starting point," Berg and Brands argue for an updated version of "strategic denial," which the Monroe Doctrine codified, to prevent foreign rivals from challenging American interests in the Western Hemisphere. See Hal Brands and Ryan C. Berg, "The Return of Geopolitics: Latin America and the Caribbean in an Era of Strategic Competition," *Jack Gordon Institute Research Publications* 37 (June 2021): 1–24. On Latin America and great-power competition, see also Irina A. Chindea, Elina Treyger, Raphael S. Cohen, Christian Curriden, Kurt Klein, Carlos Sanchez, Holly Gramkow, et al., *Great-Power Competition and Conflict in Latin America*, RR-A969-4 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2023), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA900/RRA969-4/RAND_RRA969-4.pdf; on the Monroe Doctrine generally, see Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011); on the Monroe Doctrine's origins, see Ernest R. May, *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); on the Monroe Doctrine during the twentieth century, including emphasis on the Reagan era, see Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945–1993* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994).
4. On George Shultz's views about the importance of the Western Hemisphere, see pp. 9–10 of George P. Shultz, interview by Stephen F. Knott, Marc Selverstone, and James Sterling Young, December 18, 2002, Stanford, California, Ronald Reagan Oral History Project, Presidential Oral History Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/ronald-reagan>.
5. Lydia Saad, "Inflation, Immigration Rank among Top US Issue Concerns," *Gallup*, March 29, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/642887/inflation-immigration-rank-among-top-issue-concerns.aspx>; Jeffrey M. Jones, "Immigration Surges to Top of Most Important Problem List," *Gallup*, February 27, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/611135/immigration-surges-top-important-problem-list.aspx>; Lisa Mascaró, "GOP-Led House Impeaches Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas—by One Vote—over Border Management," Associated Press, February 13, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/house-mayorkas-impeachment-vote-border-security-80cbd5bbb8f512c6814f155f825a1214>; Impeaching Alejandro Nicholas Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security, for High Crimes and Misdemeanors, H.Res. 863, 118th Cong. (2023–2024), <https://www.congress.gov/118/bills/hres/863/BILLS-118hres863rds.pdf>; Luke Broadwater, "Senate Dismisses Impeachment Charges against Mayorkas without a Trial," *New York Times*, April 17, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/17/us>

/politics/senate-alejandro-mayorkas-impeachment-charge.html; Jacob Poushter and Laura Clancy, *What Are Americans' Top Foreign Policy Priorities?*, Pew Research Center, April 23, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2024/04/pg_2024.04.23_foreign-policy-priorities_report.pdf.

6. This essay derives from the author's presentation at the annual summer Hoover Institution Board of Overseers Meeting. The author wishes to thank the following for enhancing this essay: Norman Naimark for comments on the presentation; members of the Shultz Salon for their feedback on an earlier presentation; and Daniel Sargent for suggesting the title and workshopping the concept. Portions of this essay also expand on arguments made in the author's previous work. See Joseph A. Ledford, "Foreign Policy Starts in Your Own Neighborhood," *RealClearDefense*, May 1, 2024, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/05/01/foreign_policy_starts_in_your_own_neighborhood_1028621.html; and Joseph A. Ledford, "Whither the Monroe Doctrine?," *The National Interest*, March 18, 2024, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/whither-monroe-doctrine-210086>. On the volatility of the present world order and the dangers posed by the anti-American partnership of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, see Philip Zelikow, "Confronting Another Axis? History, Humility, and Wishful Thinking," *Texas National Security Review* 7, no. 3 (Summer 2024): 80–99.

7. On Jimmy Carter's efforts to contend with world order, see Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 229–295. For an overview of "detente in downward flight" in the 1970s, see Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 427–503. On the global Cold War and its effect on the Western Hemisphere, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

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9. For the official document that defined Ronald Reagan's grand strategy, see National Security Decision Directive NSDD), No. 75, "US Relations with the USSR," January 17, 1983, RAC Box 4, Folder "NSDD 75 [US Relations with the USSR] (1)–(4)," Executive Secretariat, National Security Council (NSC): NSDD: Records, 1981–1987, RRPL. On the concept of a negotiated surrender, see William Inboden, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink* (New York: Dutton, 2022); on Reagan's grand strategy, see also Hal Brands, *What Is Good Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 102–143; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 342–379; Simon Miles, "Peace through Strength and Quiet Diplomacy: Grand Strategy Lessons from the Reagan Administration," in *Before and After the Fall: World Politics and the End of the Cold War*, ed. Nuno P. Monteiro and Fritz Bartel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 62–77; and Stoker, *Purpose and Power*, 497–524. "Ash-heap of history" quoted from Ronald Reagan, "Address to Members of the British Parliament," June 8, 1982, in *Public Papers of Ronald W. Reagan*, RRPL, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-members-british-parliament>.

10. For Reagan's views on peace through strength, see Ronald Reagan, "Televised Address by Governor Ronald Reagan 'A Strategy for Peace in the 80s,'" October 19, 1980, in *Public Papers of Ronald W. Reagan*, RRPL, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/televised-address-governor-ronald-reagan-strategy-peace-80s>. On George Shultz's cautioning about power and diplomacy, see George P. Shultz, "Shaping American Foreign Policy: New Realities and New Ways of Thinking," *Foreign Affairs*, March 1, 1985, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1985-03-01/shaping-american-foreign-policy-new-realities-and-new-ways-thinking>. On May 20, 1982, Ronald Reagan signed NSDD 32, which directed the United States "to contain and reverse the expansion of Soviet control and military presence throughout the world, and to increase the costs of Soviet support and use of proxy, terrorist, and subversive forces." See NSDD, No. 32, "US National Security Strategy," May 20, 1982,

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11. Credit is due to William Inboden for highlighting the significance of the Western Hemisphere to Reagan's foreign policy agenda. As Inboden contends, Reagan "viewed the region as foundational to his effort to turn around American foreign policy." On the centrality of LAC to Reagan's foreign policy agenda, see Inboden, *The Peacemaker*, 59, 69-72; Ronald Reagan, "Toasts at the Luncheon Honoring Prime Minister Edward Philip George Seaga of Jamaica," January 28, 1981, in *Public Papers of Ronald W. Reagan*, RRPL, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/toasts-luncheon-honoring-prime-minister-edward-philip-george-seaga-jamaica>; and Ronald Reagan, "President Ronald Reagan's First Press Conference in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building (OEOB)," January 29, 1981, Records of the White House Television Office (Reagan Administration), Video Recordings, January 20, 1981-January 20, 1989, National Archives and Records Administration; online version available through the Archival Research Catalog (NAID: 137879046), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/137879046>. See the minutes for the four NSC meetings in Folder "NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] (1)"; Folder "NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] (2)"; Folder "NSC 00002 02/11/1981 [Nicaragua Finding and Central America, Cuba Policy, Intelligence, Caribbean, Poland]"; Folder "NSC 00003 02/18/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland, F-15 Aircraft, Saudi Arabia, El Salvador, Nicaragua] (1)"; Folder "NSC 00003 02/18/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland, F-15 Aircraft, Saudi Arabia, El Salvador, Nicaragua] (2)"; Folder "NSC 00004 02/27/1981 [Poland, Caribbean Basin, F-15 Aircraft, El Salvador] (1)"; Folder "NSC 00004 02/27/1981 [Poland, Caribbean Basin, F-15 Aircraft, El Salvador] (2)"; Folder "NSC 00004 02/27/1981 [Poland, Caribbean Basin, F-15 Aircraft, El Salvador] (3)"; Folder "NSC 00004 02/27/1981 [Poland, Caribbean Basin, F-15 Aircraft, El Salvador] (4)"; all in Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files: Records, 1981-1988, RRPL.

12. George Shultz, quoted from Goodby, "Groundbreaking Diplomacy," 58-59. On George Shultz's views about foreign policy priorities and his first two foreign trips, see pp. 9-10 of Shultz, interview.

13. For George Shultz's foreign travels as secretary of state, see "Foreign Travels of George P. Shultz," US Department of State Archive, https://1997-2001.state.gov/about_state/history/sectravels/shultz.html; Diane Curtis, "President-Elect Ronald Reagan and Mexican President Jose Lopez Portillo," United Press International, January 5, 1981, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/01/05/President-elect-Ronald-Reagan-and-Mexican-President-Jose-Lopez-Portillo/1435347518800/>; Steve R. Weisman, "Reagan Meets Next President of Mexico," *New York Times*, October 9, 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/09/world/reagan-meets-next-president-of-mexico.html>; and Ronald W. Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 105.

14. George Shultz emphasized these three issues in the NSC meeting prior to Ronald Reagan's visit to Latin America; see Minutes, NSC Meeting, "Issues and Objectives for President's Latin America Trip," November 23, 1982, Folder "NSC 00067 11/23/1982 [President's Trip to Latin America]," Box 91284, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files: Records, 1981-1988, RRPL. Reagan quoted from Raymond Seitz Diary; see Raymond Seitz Notebooks, Transcript for Wednesday, October 20, 1982, in George Pratt Shultz papers, Box 1109, Folder "Seitz Notes: Central America 1982 August-December," Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.

15. For George Shultz's views on "gardening," the neighborhood policy, and his first foreign trips as secretary of state, including the Latin America visit, see George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner, 1993), 128-134. On Shultz's concept of diplomatic gardening as a form of American power, see Nicholas Burns, "The Diplomat as Gardener: What George Shultz Understood about American Power," *Foreign Affairs*, February 19, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-19/diplomat-gardener>; and George P. Shultz, "Trust Is the Coin of the Realm," Hoover Institution, December 13, 2020, <https://www.hoover.org/research/trust-coin-realm>.

16. George Shultz denounced Augusto Pinochet during an NSC meeting on Chile policy. See NSC Minutes, NSC Meeting, "November 18, 1986, 11:07 a.m.-11:50 a.m., Cabinet Room, Subject: Chile,"

Folder: "NSC 00139 11/18/1986 [Chile] (2 of 3)," Box 91304, Executive Secretariat, NSC Meeting Files: Records, 1981-1988 Files, RRPL. Reagan referenced the establishment of "a Soviet beachhead" in several speeches; see, for instance, Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States," October 7, 1987, in *Public Papers of Ronald W. Reagan*, RRPL, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-permanent-council-organization-american-states>. Despite Reagan's many policy successes, appraisals of his record in LAC are predominately critical, even with the reevaluation of his presidency in recent years. For an attempt at a balanced reassessment, see the introduction and five contributions in "Policy Roundtable: Reagan and Latin America," *Texas National Security Review*, December 18, 2018, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-reagan-and-latin-america/>. On the Iran-Contra affair, see Malcolm Byrne, *Iran-Contra: Reagan's Scandal and the Unchecked Abuse of Presidential Power* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014). The literature on Central America during the 1980s is extensive. For what is still the best study, see William LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). On democracy promotion, see Thomas Carothers, *In the Name of Democracy: US Policy toward Latin America in the Reagan Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Evan D. McCormick, "Breaking with Statism? US Democracy Promotion in Latin America, 1984-1988," *Diplomatic History* 42, no. 5 (November 2018): 745-771; and Evan D. McCormick, "Freedom Tide? Ideology, Politics, and the Origins of Democracy Promotion in US Central America Policy, 1980-1984," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 60-109.

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