

COHA Policy Analysis

OAS secretary-general race: the Clinton Administration's
costly indulgence in Dollar Diplomacy

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- *Washington, with a strong assist from Ottawa and Mexico City, played hardball against Costa Rica's favorite son to achieve an ugly victory*
- *Lures and inducements used by Clinton Administration organ grinders to get their figures to promenade*
- *A long list of entries on Hemisphere's roll of dishonor*

Was it a tempest in a teapot or just another astonishing blunder by the Clinton Administration Latin American policy makers? You wouldn't know it from the April 5th speech by Grenada's Ambassador H.E. Denneth Modeste, which turned out to be little more than a sputtering ad hominem attack against Costa Rica and its foreign minister, Bernd Niehaus, when presumably he should have been giving lofty inaugural remarks on the occasion of his assumption of the Chairmanship of the Permanent Council of the OAS. His outrageous and posturing performance further confirmed his government's unattractive role in accommodating itself to Washington and the other big regional powers through repudiating its original commitment to Niehaus to support him in his bid for the OAS secretary-general position. But it should be granted that Grenada's backing was not as firm as it was from some of the other Caribbean nations, and there were indicators were a number of weeks ago that it might falter in its support for him. Ironically, Modeste assumed his high OAS office not because of the grandeur of Grenada and its small population, but because of the practice of rotation and the principle of sovereign equality of states—the very ones which he trampled by casting his vote for the president of Colombia.

However much Grenada needs Washington's good will, as Modeste well knows, no candidate from a non-South American nation has held the secretary-general seat since the OAS' founding in 1948, a fact that presumably would cause chagrin for the Grenadian diplomat and the CARICOM defectors. But rather than cast their lot with the other small nations which were insisting upon establishing an important political statement flowing from the principle of the juridical equality of sovereign states in international law, Grenada and five other English-speaking Caribbean nations, along with Ecuador, did the practical thing by bending a knee to the U.S.-supported candidate, Colombia's President Gaviria.

Representing a government which is a direct descendant of the one that Washington formed after it invaded Modeste's island on October 25, 1983, under the entirely false justification that the lives of U.S. students attending St. Georges' medical school were in mortal danger (a canard repudiated at the time by the vice rector of that institution, the late Geoffrey Bourne, who categorically stated that the danger to his students almost entirely arose from the enormous fire power being used in the U.S. military attack against the local leftist authorities), the Grenadian ambassador was more intent on fabricating a tale that Costa Rica was not sympathetic to the English-speaking Caribbean regional organization's position on the privileged access of its bananas to the European market, then to serve his country's honor.

CARICOM votes for sale

If Grenada has found it difficult in recent years to achieve the status of a self-respecting sovereign state in deed as well as in mind, this situation differed in only degree from the psychology and depressing financial realities facing a number of Caribbean island nations. Surely Ambassador Modeste's speech, though peppered with noble biblical allusions and elevated literary references, could be much better described as gutter babbling than an address offering sweet reason. In spite of the indignation in his tone, the fact is that Grenada, along with Antigua and Barbuda (whose current leaders are notorious for the fiduciary value they assign to their votes), St. Lucia, Dominica and St. Vincent, and unbelievably enough, Guyana, decided to support Washington, not so much on the subterfuge represented by the banana question, but on the pragmatic realization that the U.S. could do far more for each of them than a small sister-republic like Costa Rica.

Clearly, the good will and the services which could be rendered by the hemisphere's most powerful government, had much greater cachet than the self-respect which the delegations of St. Kitts, Barbados, The Bahamas, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica were able to walk away feeling, through staying the course and honoring a commitment even though it was to an outgoing foreign minister of a Central American country whose government was about to change hands in any event.

The Treason of the Dean

St. Lucia's voluble Joseph Edmunds besmirched his standing as the dean of the Caribbean diplomatic corps by being a major quarterback and one of Washington's main hands in the defection to Gaviria of half of the CARICOM votes which originally had been pledged to Niehaus. His move could have been motivated as much by a desire to advance his own self-serving prospects as nurturing the interests of his nation. Ambassador Edmunds also may have been aware that several fellow St. Lucians are alleged to have been involved in what could be a major breaking scandal affecting the OAS monitoring mission in Haiti. Of course, the ultimate responsibility for the monitoring scandal lies not with St. Lucian authorities but with the OAS headquarters' staff. The lack of effective oversight of that operation most appropriately could be laid at the door of the organization's highest professional officer, the Secretary-General's chief-of-staff, Hugo de Zela. He is the one who supposedly was supervising the OAS' hapless and corruption-riven Haiti monitoring effort led in the field by Trinidad and Tobago's Colin Granderson.

Whose to blame?

The villains in the drama surrounding the OAS race are many, with Edmunds being more a minnow than a whale. In spite of the State Department's present feel-good campaign to patch up shattered relationships and broken trust, the damage done to important intra-regional relations are deep, if not fundamental, and will fester for years to come. The question that must be asked at this point is what overpowering motivation existed that made it necessary for Washington to play such a disruptive role in order to achieve its choice for a post which previously it either ignored or treated with contempt? Unfortunately, one won't be able to find the full answer here, even though it is not that difficult to understand why a number of Latin American leaders were so eager to swallow the crumbs being cast to them.

Among those who tarnished their reputation in what has turned out to be a sordid affair, was Guyana's President Cheddi Jagan, probably Latin America's most distinguished leader at this time. Almost to the last minute Jagan's foreign minister, Clement Rohee, was sworn to Niehaus. Even though Rohee had been personally guaranteed by Niehaus that Costa Rica had withdrawn its objection within GATT to the all-important arrangement whereby West Indian banana-growing islands would continue to have privileged entry into the EC until the year 2000, Guyana ostensibly switched to Gaviria over its concern for the status of this commodity. But others, perhaps less charitably, believe that the blandishments of Colombian foreign minister Noemi Sanin, who tirelessly worked to advance her candidate's prospects, as well as the offer of President Gaviria's personal jet, which was dispatched to fly Jagan on a state visit to Bogota, along with an agricultural extension program to increase Guyana's rice production, helped gain Georgetown's goodwill and its vote for the U.S.-backed candidate. But was this really reason enough for President Jagan to taint his otherwise unblemished previous reputation for personal rectitude, by so blatantly giving in to Washington?

The Script to Install Gaviria: Pork Barrel Politics

The origin of the campaign to elect Gaviria as secretary general seems to have originated as much in the National Security Council as in the State Department. What is incontestable is that some veteran State Department hands and other Latin Americanists sprinkled throughout the Clinton Administration have shared with COHA their personal outrage over its heavy handed campaign for Gaviria and the bare-knuckled tactics which some of its few Carter-era liberals were prepared to use to achieve victory—a depressing example of the Kissinger syndrome, whereby etiolated intellectuals, once armed with the appanages of power, are almost effortlessly transmuted into opportunistic Dr. Strangeloves.

Costa Rican Foreign Minister Bernd Niehaus, a conservative and somewhat aloof figure, who had first formulated his candidacy at the 1991 OAS annual meeting in Santiago—at least in part at the behest of the Chileans, who later were to display their political courage by standing by him—seemed to have the race wrapped up until only hours before the vote. But Gaviria, the late entrant, whose name was being discussed privately within the Clinton Administration as early as last October, became an avowed candidate only in December when he called up his Venezuelan competitor, and urged him to drop out of the race because the

Colombian president had just received confirmation of Washington's definitive commitment to his cause.

The Clinton Administration had some reason to feel a bond with Gaviria despite his country's deplorable human rights and mixed anti-drug records. This was because he was prepared to confront the wrath of his own legislature and a charge by a good part of the media over his purported sacrificing of national sovereignty by permitting 150 U.S. army engineers to come to the country last January and February to participate in several civic action programs.

How did Niehaus, who professedly had twenty-two committed votes—far more than necessary to win—shortly before the actual balloting, lose out by almost the same margin by which he had hoped to win? The answer seems to be that for some unaccountable reason the Clinton Administration's already embattled foreign policy team decided that U.S. set-backs in Somalia, Bosnia, and Haiti were projecting an image abroad of a decision-making process in disarray, as well as a timorous, rather than a doughty White House. To counteract this perception of aimless drift, it was decided that a diplomatic "splendid little war" was needed, so all stops were opened in seeking a win against the nominee of one of Latin America's smallest and most honorable nations—Costa Rica.

There is no question that the main factor behind Gaviria's triumph was Washington's aggressive campaigning, even if it meant walking over the aspirations of a longtime ally as well as most of the other Caribbean Basin nations. But it was not only Washington which played a bullying role in this scenario. Canada and Mexico, in a blatant display of what is now being darkly perceived as "NAFTA" diplomacy, also leaped into the fray.

The State Department's torrid promotion of Gaviria represented a prima facie intrusion into the natural course of a diplomatic process which would have witnessed a non-South American leader evolving into the OAS secretary-general post for the first time in the organization's history. Also, for the first time, Washington broke a long standing practice by announcing its preference for the vacancy beforehand, as well as turning its back on the primacy of rotation, which had just allowed U.S. ambassador to the OAS, Hattie Babbitt, the opportunity to gain the chair of the OAS Permanent Council before turning it over to Modeste. When you have the power of an economic giant like the U.S. arrayed on one side of an issue, which is willing and able to persuade recalcitrants to change sides by unseemly implicit as well as explicit acts of pressure, you are caricaturing rather than honoring a free and fair process. The Clinton Administration's well executed strategy—with some help from its friends—won the day for Gaviria, but not without producing a major maelstrom in doing so. Some observers have noted that U.S. energies would have been far better spent on finding constructive diplomatic solutions, instead of the bumbling policies now in place regarding the Cuban and Haitian crises, rather than ambushing a defenseless Central American adversary who barely knew what had hit him.

Canada and Mexico Get Sucked In

In an article which ran over Canada's Southam news wire and appeared in early April in the Montreal Gazette, crack investigative reporter David Todd established the depth to which Washington's NAFTA allies were being dragged into its campaign on behalf of Gaviria. According to Todd, Lisa Fuentes, Mexico's ambassador to Canada, insisted that "Canada not only helped tip the balance for Gaviria, it was instrumental in securing victory for him." Ambassador Fuentes herself observed that "we [Mexico and Canada] lobbied together very, very strongly," although she conceded that Canada was a little bit reluctant at the beginning, because it felt that "sometimes it was counterproductive to try and push the Caribbean countries...."

But according to Todd, a senior Canadian foreign ministry official took exception to Ambassador Fuentes' analysis, saying his country does not "try to intimidate small countries that are OAS members." The official, undoubtedly looking south to Washington, went on to, perhaps wryly, observe that although "other countries have a reputation for doing that, we do not, and we want to keep it that way." However, he did acknowledge that Mexico specifically requested Canada to join its NAFTA partner in supporting Gaviria's candidacy for the OAS post and that Ottawa proceeded to notify all fellow OAS delegations that the Colombian president was its official candidate.

In contrast to Mexico's Ambassador Fuentes, who stressed the point that Canada had lobbied to secure votes for Gaviria, Christine Stewart, Ottawa's increasingly controversial Secretary of State for Latin America, maintained that to her knowledge Canada hadn't pressured other OAS members. Here she might be hiding behind a technicality because such campaigning likely took place mainly in the capitals of the various OAS members rather than in Washington or Ottawa. Conceding that Gaviria had thanked Canada for its support, Stewart cryptically commented that, "you can infer from that what you like."

Pressure Points

Just as Stewart appeared to be waving off Canadian culpability for serving Washington by gently attempting to cajole Niehaus supporters to switch to Gaviria, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott was insisting on the eve of the balloting that no U.S. pressure had been applied on OAS members to change their votes. Unfortunately, either Talbott (who is famous for his lack of either experience or interest in the region) had been misinformed by his colleagues or he has a very piquant sense of humor, because those closest to Washington's withering campaign on behalf of Gaviria attest to the fact that the Clinton administration left few stones unturned to procure a favorable vote in the secretary-general race.

For example, it may have proven instructive to have had access to the intense private conversation between Ambassador Modeste and U.S. trade representative Mickey Kantor just prior to the vote. Could the themes touched upon have included references to enhanced CBI privileges, textile tariff relief that would be in harmony with concessions being granted to Mexico under NAFTA, as well as Washington's order of priority in which nations would be considered for adhering to the trade agreement?

As for Ecuador's midnight conversion from being pro-Niehaus to casting its ballot for Gaviria, it is possible that Ambassador Peñaherrera had read a leaked copy of the State Department's confidential "talking points" on his country in which, in a most velvety manner, Quito is nudged to take note that: "By maintaining your commitment to Niehaus, Ecuador risks sending the signal that Ecuador puts a low priority on the defence of democracy in the hemisphere. Unless a bold, high-profile leader is elected OAS chief," the Ecuadorians were to be told, "the U.S. financial contribution will be increasingly difficult to defend to Congress in this era of across-the-board budget cuts... We hope, now that the Inter-American system needs your vote to get the most qualified leadership, you will take into account how important this is to us and vote for Gaviria," the document adds.

Surely the above is the work of skilled blackmailers dressed in mufti. There are reports now coming from Quito that the country's diplomatic perfidy could lead to the ouster of Ecuador's foreign minister for sanctioning the change, due to a sense of national shame being felt in many sectors of society, including among legislators, over how he stabbed Costa Rica in the back at the last minute, probably as a result of U.S. intimidation.

Buying Votes

Several of the small English-speaking Caribbean islands began the defection process to Gaviria around the time their foreign ministers met with AID Administrator J. Brian Atwood and his chief assistant for Latin America, Mark Schneider. The venue for these encounters was at February's OAS meeting on poverty in Mexico City. Newly appointed Latin American aide Richard Nuccio, who had been forced upon the State Department by his former boss, Congressman Robert Torricelli, as a reward for having drafted the House Western Hemisphere Subcommittee's bumptious piece of restrictive legislation on Cuba known as the Torricelli Act (which even President Bush initially opposed for its mischievous provisions), along with OAS public affairs official Roger Noriega, funnelled the West Indian foreign ministers and ambassadors to the Atwood-Schneider team for them to jawbone over the approaching secretary general's race and to take inventory of what AID bestowals were available for services rendered. Noriega's role was particularly astonishing since he now worked for the OAS' public information department and was no longer a member of the U.S. Mission to the OAS. To put it mildly, his conduct was entirely inappropriate.

L'Affaire Noriega

During the Bush presidency, Noriega had served as a relatively low-level political appointee at the U.S. Mission to the OAS. After Bush's defeat, that administration's ambassador to the OAS, Luigi Einaudi, interceded and helped get Noriega a political appointment to the OAS, where he, because of his borrowed clout from Einaudi, in effect, runs the public information office, rather than its nominal head, Jorge Bardosa. This appointment outraged the OAS Staff Association, which represents professionals serving with the inter-American organization, and which had not been consulted about the vacancy and was incensed that a better-prepared professional, and not a political gun-slinger, was being appointed to the position. But what particularly troubled the staff organization was the arrogant and contemptuous manner in which Noriega, a man purportedly of exceedingly

modest capabilities, routinely had treated OAS personnel while serving as a member of the U.S. mission.

Regarding Noriega's department, shortly before the vote took place on the OAS secretary-general position, Foreign Minister Niehaus, now in Washington, took advantage of the routine procedure of using the OAS' public information studio to videotape an interview. In spite of this perfectly proper transaction, and in an incident that would seem more redolent of Pinochet's Chile than Washington under the Clinton Administration, one of the technicians involved in the incident was immediately and menacingly warned by two Bush holdover members of the U.S. OAS mission, that there could be repercussions regarding his job if this were to again happen.

When the Atwood-Schneider meetings were taking place with the West Indian delegations, the question is whether the conversations were about the nearly extinct St. Lucia parrot, or the possible range of enhanced CBI benefits that might flow from U.S. projects being funded by AID, or each of the islands' places in the line waiting to gain NAFTA benefits, after, of course, due consideration was given to Washington's predilections on the upcoming OAS vote? Get the implications clear! Surely no threats were tendered; merely hearty urging by the U.S. officials that Washington's preferences should be given a fair hearing. But, let us not be naive: when lions purr, gerbils tend to listen. For example, one of those waiting to speak with Messrs. Atwood and Schneider was the foreign minister of Surinam. The latter's ebullience on meeting the two high AID officials was greeted with chagrin by his dour ambassador, who ruefully told a listener afterwards that his boss had just lost out on maybe \$5 million in Washington assistance by prematurely announcing to the U.S. team that his country would be supporting Gaviria, even before the American officials had time to trot out any inducements.

Unravelling alliances

Many months ago, most of the West Indian countries entered into a loose pact with the Central American nations to pledge their support towards Niehaus on the condition that the next time around, they would all back a candidate from one of the CARICOM nations. The Central Americans also guaranteed their collective backing to next year's re-election bid by the present assistant secretary-general of the organization, Trinidad and Tobago's Chris Thomas. St. Lucia's Ambassador Joseph Edmunds, who, as much as any other Caribbean figure appears to have played the Judas role in this sorry affair, helped sway at least some of the five other defecting CARICOM diplomatic missions away from the Niehaus camp to join the Gaviria bandwagon. In doing this he had to be well aware that the arrangement between the Central Americans and the Caribbeans over their commitment to jointly sponsor Thomas next year now would be sundered, leaving an opportunity for Edmunds himself to run for the assistant secretary-general position, if he was so minded. His actions inexorably have helped set in motion a process in which Costa Rica will likely now repudiate its consent to GATT's special allowances for duty-free shipments of West Indian bananas into the EC, while Central American "dollar" bananas would continue to be a surcharge, one of the main reasons originally behind the Caribbean basin compact to support Niehaus.

In fact, if politics make strange bedfellows, it also could allow for unqualified moments of merriment. Right before the OAS vote occurred, the Colombian OAS delegation reserved a table at Washington's Cafe Atlantico. Among Bogota's guests in the small party were Grenada's Ambassador Modeste and OAS Assistant Secretary-General Chris Thomas.

Needless to say, today Edmunds is a somewhat controversial figure among a number of the CARICOM delegations that supported Niehaus. As a result, any political elevation for him seems bleak. Looking back, perhaps the most reprehensive of his dirty tricks took place after 11 pm on the Friday before Sunday's OAS balloting, when, at a reception held at the Guatemalan Embassy, Edmunds raised the concern of the banana-growing members of CARICOM that they had to be convinced that Costa Rica's position on the all-important issue of the free entry of bananas into the EC was congruent with the satisfactory one staked out by Colombia. It was agreed that Niehaus and his colleague would bring the needed paper work that night to the St. Lucian Embassy, which included a copy of a letter which had been sent shortly before to St. Vincent's Prime Minister Mitchell. Even though this was done, and in spite of Edmunds' pledge that he would share the documentation with his CARICOM colleagues, the material was never distributed. This act of sabotage by Edmunds allowed the defecting CARICOM nations to later self-righteously insist that it was the lack of reassurances by Costa Rica on the banana issue helped convinced them to break ranks and vote for Gaviria.

Shifting tides

There is yet possibly another candidate for the assistant secretary-general's chair if he is foolish enough to make the run and is able to win the support of the Administration. Former U.S. ambassador to the OAS Luigi Einaudi, long a political survivor, be it in Democratic or Republican presidencies, has managed to once again insinuate himself with a new Administration, even though he served the Reagan-Bush presidencies as a political appointee. He also was able to maneuver himself into now playing the role of eminence grise to his ingenuer successor, Ambassador Babbitt, after he returned to his old post in the State Department inter-American bureau's policy planning staff.

Ambassador Babbitt, Washington's under-prepared representative to the OAS, who has just finished a stint of chairing the organization's permanent council which devolved on her as a result of rotation, still fails to see the illogic of her argument that the process of rotation which brought her that position, should play no part when it comes to who should be awarded the secretary-generalship.

What kind of OAS are we seeking?

Secretary of State Warren Christopher and his aides have argued the line that the OAS has to be made more dynamic and that the new secretary-general must have sufficient executive energy to give the office thrust, something they presumably believe that Gaviria could do and Niehaus couldn't. But looking back on the long line of cynics, incompetents, junked politicians, and governors' wives who have occupied the position of head of the U.S. mission to the OAS, no Administration has accorded very much attention to that body, with

all due deference to Mrs. Babbitt, who, actually has proven to be something of a quick learner. But aside from whom she was married to, did she really have the compelling qualities that would indicate that by appointing her, the Clinton Administration meant to emphasize the importance of the OAS? Certainly Roger Noriega doesn't represent the kind of high-quality staff appointees that the U.S. should be urging upon the OAS bureaucracy. Inside operators do not make for a new Jerusalem, nor does using the organization for political hacks to hang their hat create a high quality regional organization.

One cannot exaggerate the damage that has been done to the inter-American fabric by Washington's ill-calculated initiative behind Gaviria. To begin, in spite of Secretary of State for Latin America Christine Stewart's and U.S. Secretary of State Christopher's rhetoric that Gaviria is the man for the job, the fact is that neither Gaviria nor Niehaus were irresistibly compelling personalities for a position that rarely, if ever, has had a giant at its helm. Surely Niehaus was the match of the present incumbent, who had been only a respected senior Brazilian career foreign service officer before being elected to the Secretary General's position not once, but twice. But, at the same time, neither candidate had such negatives that should have automatically ruled them out as bona fide contenders between which the U.S. was compelled to make such a dramatic choice. It is important to emphasize here that this isn't a matter of personalities. In fact, Niehaus' position regarding Cuba was far more akin to that of Washington's than Gaviria's, or, for that matter, the rest of Latin America, and he was far from admired by many of his colleagues. But it was the process that was flawed far more than the man.

Does Washington really want a strong OAS?

One of Washington's supposed justifications for backing Gaviria over Niehaus was that the OAS position was being given a new series of job descriptions which would now have to be met. It was informally stated that the post should require a former president of a large country as a basic qualification. But it should be recalled that none of the U.N.'s secretary-generals have ever come from a large country, although almost all of them were active in their nations' political life. Regarding executive energy—the pretext so often stressed by the U.S. and other backers of Gaviria—it should be recalled that in those instances where Secretary-General Joao Clemente Baena Soares showed some independence of mind—like pressing for an active OAS role in the 1990 Nicaraguan elections or playing a significant part in the early stages of formulating the 1992 El Salvador peace agreement, the White House was quick to display its coolness. This was occurring just at a time that the OAS was beginning to reflect some interesting institutional growth and was making some interesting staff appointments.

When Washington suggests that Gaviria will bring energy to the OAS, is this not really a euphemism that with him in office, the organization will become a more effective vehicle for U.S. policy? Surely the Colombian president as well as all of the members of the OAS realize that his campaign was largely an invention of the Clinton Administration and that he would never have made it to the finish line without the direct intervention of scores of U.S. diplomatic personnel who worked tirelessly for him to win. In a very real sense, the Niehaus-

Gaviria struggle—a David and Goliath encounter in which David would have won if the process hadn't been tinkered with—fundamentally has taken the OAS back to the period immediately after its founding in 1948, when it was basically a vehicle for State Department regional policy, and the secretary-general, scarcely more than a concierge for the Assistant Secretary of State for inter-American affairs. Perhaps the first chapter in this replay already is being exhibited, as Gaviria received, shortly after his victory, the Cuban American National Foundation's Jorge Mas Canosa, the right-wing leader of Miami's Cuban exiles and arbiter of Washington's Havana policy.

The post mortem recriminations swilling around this controversial contest will continue to metabolize, even though various delegations are coming forth with declarations of the need to put the matter behind them, including incoming Costa Rican President Jose Maria Figueres. Without question, the fight once again has highlighted the OAS' many warts. Surely it's no secret that the organization has been up to now a sinkhole of internecine warfare, petty vendettas, lack of accountability and the probability of at least one gross malfeasance in office, personal intrigues, inter-office bureaucratic strife, and politicized staffing. The Noriega appointment, a symbol of the Clinton Administration's own loose standards when it comes to the OAS, reflects all that is wrong about the status quo at the regional organization. If anything, the situation has worsened there since Baena Soares had a serious operation last October and the day-to-day administration of the organization fell into the uncertain hands of his Chief of Staff, Hugo de Zela. Unfortunately, there is little in either Gaviria's or Niehaus' background that suggests that the OAS' profound institutional and personnel shortcomings would have been better addressed if one or the other were elected. But certainly the Colombian leader had more opportunity to affect change in his own government from his presidential office, than did Niehaus as foreign minister. But such administrative improvements were not to be found in Bogota during his tenure.

One can only speculate over the true nature of Washington's unusual decision to wage an all-out struggle on Gaviria's behalf. Even if one is prepared to take the long step and assume that Gaviria (given the circumstances of how he won the OAS post, and his own often-displayed dependence upon his military while president) is capable of giving the organization strong leadership, the question remains, is that what Washington really wants?

In recent years, the OAS has witnessed a continuous eclipse of its self-defined jurisdiction under terms of the U.N. charter. Even before this process began, the most important regional events were occurring off the organization's agenda. Most recently, the OAS played only a marginal role in all of the various aspects of the Central American wars of the 1980s while they were raging, as well as in the Contadora peace process. Only at the end, did the OAS' competence widen in these matters, but not necessarily to the avid applause of Washington policy makers. The Bush Administration was far from enthusiastic when the OAS announced it was sending monitors to Nicaragua to observe the 1990 elections in that country. This may have been because the Sandinistas were seen at the time as being the likely victors in the race, and if the OAS had certified the ballot as free and fair, it would have restricted Washington's ability to discredit the ballot as was the case in 1984. Similarly, Bernard

Aronson, the Bush Administration's hardline Assistant Secretary of State for inter-American Affairs, was not particularly enthusiastic over the U.N./OAS role in facilitating a peace-keeping agreement with Salvadoran leftists in 1992 in El Salvador.

Changed U.S. perceptions regarding OAS and U.N.

Added to the tendency for such important regional issues as the bitter dispute between the Reagan/Bush Administrations and Noriega's Panama, as well as U.S. policy towards Grenada under leftist rule, to be handled on a bilateral level rather than through the OAS, was the rapidly evolving pattern for important regional security issues to be transferred to the United Nations from the OAS. In previous eras, Washington policy makers considered it an article of faith that the U.N.'s provenance in inter-American affairs must be limited (the restricted role of the U.N. in Washington's 1965 intervention in the Dominican Republic was an example of this) because of the Administration's much greater influence in the regional organization than at the U.N. But in recent years, locking in an issue on the OAS agenda no longer has been a guiding principle of White House Latin American policy. This became even more evident with the end of the Cold War and the evaporation of militant Third World influence within the U.N. General Assembly, where Washington's voice inevitably had previously been in a minority.

If an energetic OAS secretary-general has never seemed to be a pressing desiderata of U.S. regional foreign policy making, the same would seem to be the case regarding the international body in New York. Taking just the present head of the U.N., Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and examining only the recent issues of Bosnia and Somalia, one could establish that the Clinton Administration developed an adversarial relationship with the U.N. head because it saw the secretary-general as being too independent-minded in his policy initiatives and too given to promote initiatives which could and did produce politically costly U.S. involvements in military peace-keeping operations which embarrassed it domestically. Also, Boutros-Ghali often articulated a point of approach (as in Cambodia), that did not comport with contemporaneous U.S. national security orientations or reflect domestic political realities. The case could be made that at this point in the evolution of the Clinton Administration's foreign policy, there is no evidence that it is attempting to breed a new spirit of independence in either the regional or international organizations.

Summary

Rather than sustain a predictable foreign policy involving a broadening U.S. readiness (as indicated would be the case in the early months of the Clinton Administration) to vest independent decision-making authority in international bodies in the area of peace-keeping and the resolution of disputes, a rapid retrenchment in the U.S. position, due to domestic political realities (e.g., loss of 18 U.S. soldiers last October in Somalia) has taken place. For this reason, the tenacity displayed by the Clinton Administration in seeking a victory in the OAS secretary-general campaign remains mystifying, and cannot be explained by its envisaging a larger role for Gaviria. Rather, the entire escapade can be more likely described as a costly policy-making aberration .