

Remarks on the Situation in the Soviet Union
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I would like to congratulate the Government of Argentina for calling this special session of the Permanent Council and Ambassador Hernan Patino for the care with which he has negotiated a text worthy of general support among the delegations.

The extraordinary rush of events in the Soviet Union is providing the grist for many lessons to future generations. Today, however, it is still early to know what they all are. Most of us -- in government and out, in the written press and media, professors and pundits alike -- are still hard-pressed just to keep up with events.

It is doubly important that we in the Permanent Council be cautious. The specific events we are discussing are for the most part as far from our daily professional concerns as they are far from our shores.

At the same time, it is clear that Soviet policies and practices have affected the Americas in many ways over the decades (indeed often in ways that stimulated tensions or actual strife). The role of the Soviet Union remains important today, regardless of any potential turning inward related to the current crisis, in part because of that past.

So as we address the text before us today, I have two observations about Soviet policies in the hemisphere, one about our possible role toward the Soviet Union, and one more general reflection.

First, the United States hopes and expects to continue to work with the Soviet Union for peace in Central America. On August 1, the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union issued a joint statement on the situation in Central America.

They noted the positive trends to settle regional disputes at the negotiating table and ease tensions through national reconciliation.

They welcomed the resolution of the conflict in Nicaragua, the important agreements reached in April between the Government of El Salvador and the FMLN and the beginning of dialogue between the Government of Guatemala and the URNG.

The Soviet and U.S. sides agreed that additional joint steps should be taken to promote the full agenda of the Esquipulas agreements including democraticization, a cease-fire and settlement of existing conflicts, national reconciliation, economic development, and regional disarmament.

They called on the United Nations and other international organizations, as well as countries outside Central America, including Cuba, to intensify their efforts to resolve the remaining political issues, secure a cease-fire and final peace settlement in El Salvador.

They voiced strong support for the efforts of the Secretary General of the United Nations to help negotiate an end to the conflict in El Salvador, urged his direct involvement in the negotiations, and expressed support for the active involvement of the Friends of the Secretary General -- Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, and Spain.

The joint statement aims high and expresses a clear, firm resolve. The importance of attaining peace in Central America is expressed in the final paragraph. I quote:

"The Soviet Union and the United States are convinced that an end to the conflict in El Salvador will contribute to economic development in Central America and help remove the remaining sources of tension in the Caribbean Basin region, thereby contributing to the further peaceful integration of Latin America."

These negotiations are as great a test of the realities of peace and international cooperation today as they were when this statement was issued earlier this month. There is still much to be done to help both sides in El Salvador to fulfill aspirations for an end to the bloodshed by reaching agreement on a cease-fire and the reintegration of all involved in the conflict into civilian political life.

Second, Soviet relations with Fidel Castro remain a major source of concern. Since 1961 Cuba has received enormous amounts of Soviet aid. Soviet economic subsidies have made it possible for Fidel Castro's inherently weak economic system to muddle along, disguising fatal productive and organizational flaws. Soviet military and economic subsidies have made possible Fidel Castro's continued support for armed conflict and destabilization in neighboring countries, members of this regional Organization.

The Soviet people have now moved to the center stage of human history, acting with conviction and determination to claim the promise of freedom and to take on its burdens. But

here in the Americas the government led by Fidel Castro remains fixed in time, paralyzed by ideology and isolated by its leader from the great currents of history. Why has the "President of the Revolution" greeted the defeat of reactionary forces in the Soviet Union with uncharacteristic silence? Unfortunately, so long as the people of Cuba are not allowed the freedom of expression they require to take control of their future, we will be left to guess at what they think about the earth-shaking events in the Soviet Union.

President Bush last May challenged President Castro to "put democracy to a test -- permit political parties to organize and a free press to thrive. Hold free and fair elections under international supervision."

The U.S. Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, Bernard Aronson, noted last July (July 11 statement to the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the Congress) that, "To an extent almost unique in world politics, the Cuban state is dominated by one person." "The United States," Mr. Aronson added, "hopes that the Cuban people can soon enjoy a peaceful transition to the free, democratic future they deserve."

Third, we of the Americas may be in a position to share with a democratic Soviet Union experiences that will increase its chances to improve the economic well-being of its citizens.

We sometimes speak as though it were merely a matter of the Soviet Union influencing the nations of this hemisphere. But our nations are part of the forces of global change. We need not be passive witnesses to events outside our region. We can do more than assess the effect of extra-regional developments on our immediate concerns.

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have gone through a sweeping and profound democratic revolution. More, many OAS member states have faced up to the cumulative damages imposed by the lack of competition that results from authoritarian politics and centralized economies. With singular resolve, they have begun to liberate their economies from the heavy hand of statist control.

Today, in another hemisphere of our shrinking planet, and on the heels of its difficult and still unfinished political transformation, the Soviet Union is searching for an economic transformation of equal breadth and depth. The Soviet leaders know that they must develop a free and competitive market.

In this hemisphere, Argentina, Chile, Jamaica, and Mexico -- to mention just a few because the list is long and growing every day -- are already moving well along this path to improve the well-being of their societies. They know what demands liberalization places on the energy and creativity of a people.

Those who have set out on this path have something real to contribute -- the most important asset in assisting other countries embarked on a similar course of action -- the wealth of their own experience.

There is no solidarity of wider embrace than that of free men and women united in the effort to make freedom work. The trail blazers along the path of economic reform in the Americas can provide practical support for the leaders of the Soviet Union.

Even with a doubling of its trade with the United States in the last five years, the Soviet Union accounts for less than one percent of U.S. trade. The Americas account for 13 times that much trade now -- and the prospect of still wider trade opened up by the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative could make this hemisphere a real-life model of how an open, outward-oriented economy works.

There is a political point here as well. The drive to integration in this Western Hemisphere offers food for thought as the members of the vast multinational state of the Soviet Union struggle to define the destiny of the many peoples of their constituent republics. The progress toward integration in North America, the Southern Cone, the Caribbean, Central America, and the Andes is being achieved freely and with full respect for the juridical equality and sovereignty of the partner-states.

There is no practical formula that can be applied from one area to another, but one might suggest that the principle of nonintervention, pioneered juridically in the Western Hemisphere and recognized in our draft resolution today, could serve as inspiration for a style of integration that respects the integrity of all concerned.

Finally, let me close with one attempt to formulate a lesson. I have long felt that the application of the rational intelligence to human events is necessarily disquieting, and, when applied to governments, potentially revolutionary. No government can match abstract notions of perfection or meet all the human needs of its people. No government is immune to the barbs of the unfettered intelligence of its press and people. Where there is a free press to spread accurate information intelligently, governments will always be criticized.

Governments can survive this inevitable criticism, but only if freedom of information and thought joins with constitutional precepts and the realization that citizens have the right to choose their leaders through the ballot -- if necessary replacing them on a regular basis.

Popular freedom and popular choice are the two most important forces shaping the modern world. When they come together, in constitutional, elected governments, they are the best guarantee of stability. When governments are not legitimated by election, or when there is, in the words of the historic resolution adopted by the OAS at the General Assembly in Santiago de Chile this past June, a "sudden or irregular interruption of the democratic political institutional process or of the legitimate exercise of power by the democratically elected government," stability is not possible.

The lesson of modern politics is that those who do not accept democratic constitutions -- which can and must be very different according to the history and culture of particular nations, but which have as a common foundation institutional procedures to respect the human, civic and political rights of individual citizens and reconcile them with the requirements of the state for order -- will not last.

As George Bush said in his inaugural address in 1989 -- with prescience despite what still seemed a different age, "In man's heart, if not (yet) in fact, the day of the dictator is over."

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