

*The View from Europe*  
*By David Jessop*

## Reshaping the future of the Americas

In little over a week's time the second summit of CELAC, The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños) will take place in Havana.

Although this could be regarded as just another regional event at which politicians and diplomats continue their existential dance, it is of unusual strategic importance as its subject matter and timing juxtaposes key political developments in the Americas about which the Caribbean has, so far, not sought to draw together.

Put another way, the meeting, while specific in its short term intent, references issues that will shape politically the future of Americas.

By way of background CELAC was established in 2010 out of the Rio Group, and reflects a desire to reduce the overwhelming influence of the United States on the politics and economics of Latin America and to lessen the influence of institutions such as the Organisation of American States, (OAS) that became constructs of the Cold War.

Unlike the OAS, which includes the US and Canada but in which Cuba does not participate; CELAC consists of all 33 nations in the Americas other than Canada, the US and the territories of European nations.

Although the new grouping has been championed by left leaning Latin nations, it represents a broader desire to establish a political framework based on the similarities in thinking between member nations and a desire to authentically represent the views of the southern two thirds of the hemisphere to a world in which the location of power has changed significantly over the last decade.

This meeting in Havana – Cuba presently holds the chair, which will pass to Costa Rica – takes place from January 25 to 29 against a background of developments that taken together will affect directly all of the nations of the Caribbean.

On December 17 in Caracas members of the Bolivarian Alliance (ALBA) to which a number of Caribbean nations belong, and members of PetroCaribe, which includes many Latin nations and all of the Caribbean other than Trinidad, agreed at a summit to a declaration that involves the creation of a new complementary economic zone between the countries of the two alliances with a view to tackling poverty.

The signatories, including Caribbean Heads, declared that it was their intention to link this complementary zone with other regional organisations such as Mercosur and CARICOM, and that Jamaica, Dominica, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Venezuela would oversee the process of its establishment. It was suggested that this development along with planned new financial and social initiatives could lead to a deeper integration process between the Caribbean and Latin America.

It followed other potentially important strategic announcements and developments.

In November 2013 the US Secretary of State declared the Monroe Doctrine dead. Speaking at the OAS in Washington he said that the United States will no longer seek to intervene in the affairs of

other American states. The US was moving on and was making a different choice... "It's about all of our countries viewing one another as equals, sharing responsibilities, cooperating on security issues, and adhering not to doctrine, but to the decisions that we make as partners to advance the values and the interests that we share," he said.

At the same time he and President Obama made clear in this context that the time for new thinking on Cuba had arrived.

Since then a more respectful dialogue between Havana and Washington has begun on functional co-operation and the pace and breadth of such exchanges is slowly accelerating; so much so that if with the Vatican's intervention a way of resolving the linked issues of imprisoned Cuban intelligence officers in the US and an American citizen found guilty of allegedly subversive activity in Cuba, US Cuba relations may perhaps slowly normalise.

It is also far from certain whether the OAS will in future have long-term significance unless the US and Cuba can find a basis that will enable it to again take its seat. This would probably mean the US lifting its designation of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism and some form of new hemispheric balance emerging that the US accepts within the context of its new thinking on the Americas and the alternate political construct of CELAC.

All this is happening when other significant changes are occurring.

The US, under the leadership of Vice President Biden, is working on a Caribbean Basin approach that is likely to go beyond security and energy and is intended to refocus thinking in Washington on the Caribbean in a practical way that supports a return to prosperity.

The UK, Canada, the European Union and the US are exploring how they might co-operate better, and find ways in which newer partners in the region including China and Brazil might be drawn into this process.

And there is a growing awareness beyond the region that in future, economic power and influence in the Caribbean Basin may begin to relocate, based less on politics and more on economic growth, offshore oil and gas, minerals and economic dynamism.

While the impact of these developments are over the horizon, taken together they imply a very different hemisphere two decades from now.

They suggest the possibility of an Americas as a region without significant conflict, new and complementary economic relationships, an accommodation with Cuba that quite literally redraws the mental and physical boundaries within which the hemisphere operates, and opportunities for a new pragmatic relationship between the Caribbean and Latin America.

These are developments that potentially offer the Caribbean opportunity to think fresh thoughts, enabling it to escape from arid post colonial responses, and to forge relations with non-traditional partners through CARICOM or bilaterally.

Although it is easy to dismiss the CELAC summit as a stage on which some will expound an alternative social view of the way the Americas might be better organised, this would be to miss the central strategic significance of the long term trends the event speaks to.

The CELAC summit offers one of a number of opportunities to politically reposition the region, and consider, in Latin America and the Caribbean's own terms, how it wishes to respond to long-term changes in relationships that are now occurring.

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