



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on February 27, 2012

Will Cuba Join OAS?

The Organization of American States (OAS) calls itself the “world’s oldest regional organization, dating back to the First International Conference of American States, held in Washington, D.C., from October 1889 to 1890.” There were several interim organizations like the “International Union of American Republics” and then the “Pan American Union” before the current OAS organization was formed on April 30, 1948, with the signing of the Charter of the Organization of American States in Bogotá, Columbia, with the organization coming into force in December 1951. There have been subsequent amendments to the protocols of the organization a number of times since then. The membership of the organization has grown as well and currently there are 35 members.



In the “Who We Are” section of the organization’s website it lists a “four-pronged approach” to reaching the organization’s purposes which are “democracy, human rights, security, and development.” Cuba was one of the original members of the OAS, and it continued to be a member after Castro ousted Batista in 1959. President Kennedy supported isolating Castro’s Cuba in the hemisphere, and in 1961, Colombia and Venezuela both severed diplomatic relations with Cuba. One year later, on January 21, 1962, by a vote of 14 to 1 (Cuba), with six nations abstaining, a resolution was passed stating that Marxism-Leninism was incompatible with the purposes of the organization, that Cuba had declared itself a Marxist-Leninist government, and so the current government of Cuba should be excluded from participation in the OAS.

Although there have been attempts in the last 50 years to return Cuba to the OAS, the Cuban government refers to the OAS as the “Ministry of Colonies” of the United States. On June 3, 2009, the 39th General Assembly of the OAS voted to lift Cuba’s suspension of participation in the OAS, following weeks of U.S. pressure on behalf of Cuba’s readmission to the continental group based on Cuba’s expressed commitment to democratic principles and human rights. Ecuador’s Foreign Minister Fander Falconí commented: “What we have done here is to fix an historic error.”

Cuban leader Raúl Castro announced that the general assembly vote would be “recalled by future generations” as rebellious, but he further said that “Cuba will not return to the OAS.” After the 2010 midterm elections in the United States, those Americans who favor a softer line against the Castro regime faced a Congresswoman, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who was born in Havana and whose family was forced to leave Cuba when she was eight. In the next Congress, she began as Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. She quickly made it clear that her position on Cuba had not changed: “Rogue regimes never respond to anything less than hardball. Isolate and hold accountable our enemies.”



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On February 22, the Congresswoman back up that rhetoric by calling on the OAS not to invite Cuba to participate in the “Summit of the Americas” in mid-April at Cartagena, Columbia. Ros-Lehtinen said: “The campaign for Cuba’s inclusion in the Summit of the Americas is being led by regional tyrants who want to shift the Summit’s focus away from their own human rights abuses and repression of democracy, and turn it into a platform to bash the United States.” She also noted: “Cuba has no right to participate in this summit because it is not a member of the OAS and does not meet the minimum criteria to become one.” [Ros-Lehtinen](#) also noted that if Cuba is invited that the Obama administration must boycott the summit, because Cuba’s inclusion would violate the OAS charter.

Although Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen cannot force the hand of the Obama State Department, she does have considerable influence on how our government spends tax dollars when it comes to international organizations like the OAS. U.S. taxpayers currently pay about 60 percent of the budget of the OAS. Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza stated on November 1, 2011 that the OAS was “facing a crisis situation” because of budgetary problems and that “there is an excess of mandates which countries demand from the OAS, but contributions are not coming in.” The U.S. taxpayer, already paying the lion’s share of the organization’s budget, may be asked to pay more.

Regardless of whether Cuba attends the Summit of the Americas or not, and regardless of whether the Obama State Department respects the wishes of Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen, many people may ask, rhetorically: Why shouldn’t we support an organization that promotes “democracy, human rights, security, and development” in our hemisphere?

However, in return, those concerned about wasteful federal spending and loss of our national sovereignty will ask: Why does the United States belong to an organization like the OAS, which is a drain on our beleaguered economy and diminishes our right to act unilaterally in our own best interests?

Absent U.S. participation, Cuba’s inclusion is a moot point.

Photo: José Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the OAS



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