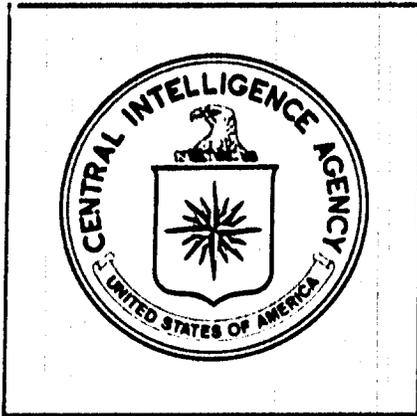


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# STAFF NOTES:

## Latin American Trends

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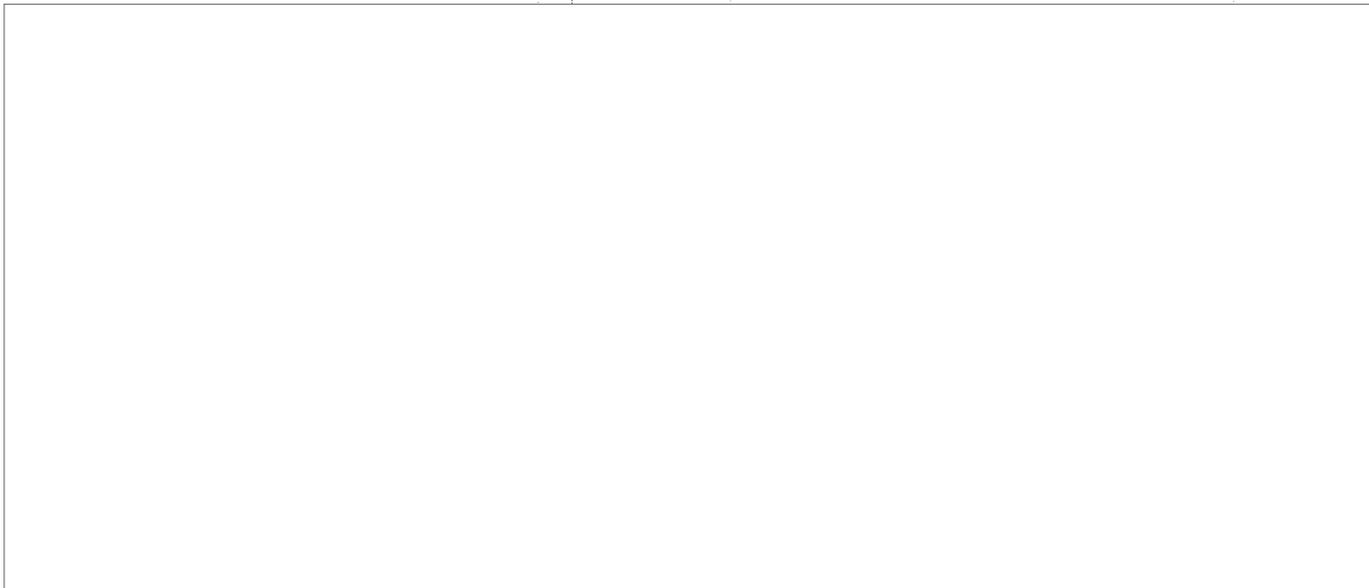
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Regionalism: With and Without the US

Increasing involvement in international conferences has given the Latin American governments a broader context in which to examine and sharpen the focus of their own special interests.

The Latin's' experiences in various UN activities and especially their connection with the Group of 77 and the nonaligned movement have convinced them of the value of solidarity with other blocs with similar problems and aspirations. At the same time, the Latins have become more conscious of themselves as a region and have a clearer sense of how they can meet certain needs on a regional basis. Despite the poor results of most regional and subregional experiments of the past, the Latin Americans are taking a new look at the potential benefits of the OAS and the proposed Latin American Economic System (SELA), the former with and the latter without the US.

At broad, global forums, the Latins have seen their interests diluted in the flood of grievances from less developed areas and they have also seen the intensity of the Latin cases fade alongside the bitter determination of the participants in the Middle East and other politically divided areas. While the Latins value the concept of a new international order and other third-world principles and agree with the tactic of mass lobbying, they are also aware of specific economic and political goals that might be better served by efforts within the regional community.

Playing on this theme, the new and energetic secretary general of the OAS, Argentina's Alejandro Orfila, is winning converts to his conviction that the pan-American forum can be a key court for the presentation of Latin American positions, propositions, and complaints to

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Washington. Orfila strongly advocates a de-Latinization of the OAS procedures, which after years of juridical disputation have become mired in minutiae.

Orfila evidently has sold his practical approach to Mexican President Echeverria, one of the OAS' strongest critics. Echeverria has instructed his delegates to back Orfila fully in the effort to revitalize the OAS and take the lead in bringing greater decisiveness and rationality into the organization. Echeverria has also contacted his rival for Latin leadership, Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez, to ask for Venezuela's cooperation with Orfila. Both Mexico and Venezuela seem ready to increase their financial support of the OAS as well.

Working committees have begun assembling in Panama to labor over the statutes and principles of SELA, which will be the subject of a full Latin and Caribbean conference there beginning October 15. SELA--a brainchild of Echeverria and Perez--is slowly developing acceptability in the rest of the hemisphere as a forum in which the Latins can marshal their assets in practical business schemes. In SELA, they can cope with differences in size and development among the countries by means of special privileges for the poor. Gradually, SELA is emerging as the vehicle by which the Latins can find the consensus with which they hope to challenge the US at the OAS.

The many Latin American barriers of cultural division, regional rivalries, and differing political and economic systems will remain as formidable as they have been in the past. But Latin advocates of regional cooperation are increasingly confident that the lessons of old failures and the new momentum for altering international relationships will lift them over these hurdles.

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