

Memo to Harper: Bush Doesn't Have Your Back Anymore

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Monday, April 20, 2009

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Someone should really tell the prime minister that George w.Caesar doesn't have his back on angry imperialist rhetoric anymore.

It's one thing for Ignatieff to sit quietly, saying nothing, waiting for the economy to implode Harper's government, but for Harper to show that he still thinks the Bush Doctrine rules the world means his crash will be profound when the federal Liberals pull the plug on this version of their coalition with the Conservatives.

These tidy morsels from this great CP piece below are precious:

- "Harper took an alternate tack at the summit, waving the banner of free trade as often as possible." Forget about how neoliberal free trade is largely responsible for our current crisis in capitalism.
- Harper's goals: to "maximize the benefits of increased trade and investment"
- Harper's new bff, the president of the Dominican Republic: "Of course, with the financial and economic global crisis, that's the...main problem, the main concern, but this doesn't mean that free trade for some countries is not in their best interest." Yes, black is black and white is white, but that doesn't mean that black can't also be white.
- "Harper spoke of 'antagonists,' 'cold war socialism' and 'rogue nations' when referring to countries such as Venezuela and Cuba, declaring himself an 'anti-Communist conservative' in an interview with right-wing American TV channel Fox News at the summit." Charming how Harper's vision of Canada is filtered through Fox News.

[Leaders declare Americas summit a success thanks to Obama](#)

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Jennifer Ditchburn, THE CANADIAN PRESS

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad - The hemispheric summit that leaders feared would implode over Washington's chilly relations with Cuba and Venezuela was declared a success Sunday, with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and other key players tipping their hats to American President Barack Obama.

Leaders emerged from a retreat at the Summit of the Americas on Sunday unable to sign a wordy final declaration because of reservations by Venezuela and others who wanted stronger language on Cuba and the world financial crisis.

Still, they reached a consensus on adopting a shorter final statement, and more importantly nobody left slamming the door as happened at the last summit in 2005.

There were no confrontations between the Americans and some of their rivals. Instead, there were handshakes and Obama's photo-friendly smile. Venezuela's Hugo Chavez said he'd like to send an ambassador back to Washington.

The chemistry was key, as host Prime Minister Patrick Manning noted.

"We all came here I think believing that we would have quite a battle among the radically different perspectives that exist on certain subjects...that did not materialize, in fact we saw the opposite," Harper said a closing news conference. "We saw the replacement of confrontation by dialogue, a very good dialogue."

Harper joined several others in saluting Obama for his landmark speech Friday evening, in which he brought a message of partnership with the hemisphere based on mutual respect and dignity. Obama also acknowledged certain failures in American foreign policy, including its enforcement based drug policy.

Obama repeated his call for a new American policy in the hemisphere at a news conference Sunday. He noted how many countries are supportive of Cuba precisely because of its humanitarian efforts - it sends thousands of doctors to developing countries.

"That's why it's so important that in our interactions, not just here in the hemisphere but around the world, that we recognize that our military power is just one arm of our power, and we have to use our diplomatic and development aid in more intelligent ways so people can see more concrete improvements in the lives of their peoples as a consequence of U.S. foreign policy," Obama told reporters.

He said there had been promising signs in relations between his country and Cuba and Venezuela, but that the real test would come from the actions that followed after the summit.

The issue of Cuba's inclusion in the inter-American family and future summits was pushed off to the general assembly later this spring of the Organization of American States (OAS). The prime minister did not comment on how Canada would vote at the meeting.

Harper took an alternate tack at the summit, waving the banner of free trade as often as possible.

One of his final acts of the summit was to sweeten the pot for countries Canada is negotiating with, earmarking an extra \$18 million in aid over five years to help them "maximize the benefits of increased trade and investment."

His call for open markets found some allies.

The president of Dominican Republic said he was keen to advance negotiations with Canada for a free trade deal.

"We see trade as part of development, it's not just trade per se - it's trade related to development," Leonel Fernandez told a group of Canadian reporters.

"Of course, with the financial and economic global crisis, that's the...main problem, the main concern, but this doesn't mean that free trade for some countries is not in their best interest."

Harper also adopted strikingly different language than Obama.

Where Obama urged countries in his stirring speech Friday against focusing on ideological labels such as capitalist or socialist, Harper spoke of "antagonists," "cold war socialism" and "rogue nations" when referring to countries such as Venezuela and Cuba, declaring himself an "anti-Communist conservative" in an interview with right-wing American TV channel Fox News at the summit.

His spokesman continually referred to Latin America as Canada's "backyard" in a briefing to kick off the meeting.

Some Canadian observers said Harper seemed to misread the tone of the summit, where many countries - and not just the "rogue nations" such as Venezuela and Bolivia - have been feeling a strong domestic backlash against trade liberalization.

Opposition to a Free Trade Area of the Americas was the principal reason the last summit fell apart.

Carlo Dade, executive director of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas, gave Harper points for announcing a \$4 billion financial guarantee for the Inter-American Bank (IDB), a move that he said took leadership in the hemisphere.

The financial crisis was by far the main preoccupation of countries represented at the summit.

But Dade said focusing on trade was an ill-advised strategy at a moment when many are resentful of trade - part of the reason figures such as Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Bolivia's Evo Morales have emerged.

"There's a lot of blame going on for the financial crisis on trade liberalization," said Dade, who has been attending summit-related events. "Some countries have suffered in trade agreements with the United States and the European Union. They're not like Canadian agreements...but (the government) hasn't done the work to differentiate Canada from this."

The damage that organized drug crime has inflicted on the region would have been a good topic to raise, Dade added.

Canada is seeing this reticence clearly in its dealings with Caribbean leaders. The 15 members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have been dragging their heels on a free-trade deal with Canada because they would like the deal to include funding that would adjust for any economic losses to their people as a consequence of a pact - this despite the fact Canada is the largest donor to the Caribbean region.

Alex Neve, secretary general of Amnesty International Canada, said he and other rights organizations were disappointed that Harper did not couple his rhetoric on trade with a vision for social justice and better protection for human rights.

"It certainly does seem that's he's been a bit of a solitary voice around this vision of free trade being the answer to all of the woes in the Americas," Neve said.

"It seems pretty clear that a lot of the other leaders have either moved on from there, or while still interested feel there are other more pressing priorities that really need attention here."

Harper arrived in Jamaica Sunday evening for an official visit, where he is expected to address a joint session of Parliament.