

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## Top 7 Issues Vice President Pence Must Emphasize at the Summit of the Americas

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Vice President Mike Pence is scheduled to attend the Eighth Summit of the Americas in Lima, Peru, on April 13 and 14.<sup>1</sup> This will be his second visit as Vice President to Latin America. After the summit, he will visit Colombia. At the summit, he will be accompanied by senior Administration officials. At the summit, the Vice President will lay out the Administration's regional agenda to Latin American heads of state as well as to civil society groups.

Since the first Summit of the Americas in 1994, the periodic meetings have served as gatherings for regional leaders to discuss hemispheric issues. The first few summits were largely focused on promoting the now-defunct Free Trade Area of the Americas as an expansion of the 1994 implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Yet the summits have descended largely into unproductive gatherings without meaningful deliverables.

Vice President Pence has an opportunity to change that. This summit's theme of "Democratic Governance Against Corruption"<sup>2</sup> overlaps with the Administration's policy of addressing the region's dictatorships, advancing hemispheric economic prosperity, and rooting out corruption, as well as condemning hostile foreign adversaries, such as

China and Russia. These issues correspond to the challenges facing Latin America.

At the summit, Vice President Pence should focus on the following seven issues:

- 1. Strengthening regional cooperation on Venezuela.** Venezuela's economic, humanitarian, and political crisis has engulfed the country. Economic indicators are continuing on a rapid downward trend, with inflation in 2018 expected to hit *13,000 percent*.<sup>3</sup> Lack of food and medicine has forced Venezuelans to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Venezuela's downward spiral is not only a U.S. national security concern but a hemispheric threat. Regional leaders have a shared responsibility with the U.S. to find a solution to the destabilizing crisis. Vice President Pence must vow to continue the Administration's muscular Venezuela policy and support other countries' reciprocal efforts.
- 2. Leading a regional effort on producing a statement of cooperation on Venezuela.** Like-minded countries in Latin America should use the summit's theme of "Democratic Governance Against Corruption" to maintain their commitment to regional efforts against the regime of Nicolas Maduro. Shortly after the summit, Venezuela is set to hold fraudulent presidential elections. Latin America's democracies should issue a declaration condemning the stated conditions leading into the elections, as well as the Venezuelan government's ongoing corruption. Should the crisis continue to deteriorate, countries can use the statement as a basis for targeted sanctions against corrupt regime officials.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4837>

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**3. Condemning Cuba's illegitimate leadership succession and advocating for U.S. diplomats victimized in Cuba.** Cuba is expected to announce its successor to Raul Castro shortly after the Summit of the Americas in order to avoid scrutiny about its fraudulent leadership transition. For over half a century, the Castro regime has refused to hold free and fair elections. That must not go unaddressed. During sideline meetings, Vice President Pence must also raise Cuba's culpability in the health attacks against U.S. diplomats. Cuba's collective failure to protect U.S. diplomats is a violation of its obligations under the Vienna Convention.<sup>4</sup> While the region will not rally behind him, the Trump Administration should remain steadfast in its support for Cuban freedom.<sup>5</sup> Vice President Pence and senior members of his Administration should publicly meet with Cuba's human rights activists and civil society leaders.

**4. Emphasizing the strategic value of free trade, open market, and economic freedom.** Out of the 20 free trade agreements the U.S. is party to, eleven are with countries in Latin America. The Trump Administration should capitalize on the rules-based systems these agreements provide as the groundwork for deeper economic integration. He should also explain how economies tied with the U.S. undermine the regional expansion of adversaries like China and Russia.

**5. Making the case for why the U.S. should remain the partner of choice for Latin America.** Unlike other regions of the world, the Western Hemisphere remains largely united in the shared

belief of democratic governance, human rights, and free trade. These shared principles are under attack from regional authoritarians in Cuba and Venezuela, and abroad by aggressive economic powers. Vice President Pence should highlight why it is in the region's long-term interest to maintain economic partnerships with the U.S.

**6. Focusing bilateral meetings on key partners and recently elected leaders.** Vice President Pence should take the opportunity to reaffirm the U.S.'s commitment to key leaders in the region. Meetings with standout leaders from Argentina, Chile, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, and Peru should be on the agenda. Unlike President Obama, Vice President Pence should not meet with any leaders who do not hold free and fair elections. Nor should he meet with their allies or hand-picked civil society groups.

**7. Developing a strong relationship with Peru's recently appointed president.** Just three weeks before the summit, Peru's president, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, resigned to avoid an impeachment vote for alleged vote buying.<sup>6</sup> Kuczynski was a strong partner of the Trump Administration and a leader in the Lima Group, a regional coalition co-led by Peru and Mexico, working to address the crisis in Venezuela. While the fallout from Kuczynski's resignation will loom over the gathering, Vice President Pence should maintain the tempo of cooperation on Venezuela.

## Success at the Summit

Through numerous policy initiatives and key personnel appointments, the Trump Administration

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1. Voice of America, "White House: Trump Will Attend the Summit of the Americas," March 9, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/white-house-trump-will-attend-summit-americas/4288401.html> (accessed April 9, 2018).
  2. News release, "Democratic Governance Against Corruption to Be the Theme of Peru Summit of the Americas in 2018," Organization of American States, June 20, 2017, [http://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-048/17](http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-048/17) (accessed April 9, 2018).
  3. David Biller, "IMF Projects Venezuela Inflation Will Soar to 13,000 Percent in 2018," Bloomberg, January 25, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-01-25/imf-sees-venezuela-inflation-soaring-to-13-000-percent-in-2018> (accessed April 9, 2018).
  4. Ana Quintana, "The Obama Rapprochement with the Castro Regime: The Anatomy of a Policy Failure," testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, January 16, 2018, [https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Quintana\\_Testimony\\_Cuba-Policy-field-briefing\\_01162018.pdf](https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Quintana_Testimony_Cuba-Policy-field-briefing_01162018.pdf) (accessed April 9, 2018).
  5. Ana Quintana, "Trump Should Condemn Cuba's Illegitimate Transfer of Power," The Daily Signal, March 20, 2018, <https://www.dailysignal.com/2018/03/20/trump-condemn-cubas-illegitimate-transfer-power-summit-americas/>.
  6. Robert Valencia, "Peruvian President Kuczynski Resigns After Videos Show His Allies Buy Votes to Avoid Impeachment," *Newsweek*, March 21, 2018, <http://www.newsweek.com/peruvian-president-kuczynski-resigns-after-videos-show-his-allies-buy-votes-855986> (accessed April 9, 2018).
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has designated Latin America as a priority region. The summit's theme of "Democratic Governance Against Corruption" coincides with the Administration's policy of addressing the region's destabilizing dictatorships, advancing hemispheric economic prosperity, and rooting out corruption, as well as condemning hostile foreign adversaries, such as China and Russia.

There is an unprecedented consensus throughout the region on the Venezuela crisis in particular that bodes well for regional cooperation. By focusing on these key elements, Vice President Pence's visit to Latin America should be a success.

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