



LATIN AMERICAN PROGRAM

## **TRANSCRIPT:**

# **TRUMP OR BIDEN: WHAT WOULD IT MEAN FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN?**

**SEPTEMBER 21, 2020**

## **WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS**

**(0:06) Cindy Arnson:** Good morning, and welcome to our speakers Juan Cruz and Juan González, as well as to all of you who are joining us from around the hemisphere. I'm Cindy Arnson, the director of the Latin American Program, and I'm delighted to welcome you to this discussion of the very consequential US election that will take place in November and what that will mean for US relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. If you'd like to ask a question of either of our speakers please send a tweet to our Twitter account @LatAmProg and we'll take as many questions from the audience as we can.

Juan Cruz and Juan González are both top authorities on US relations in the hemisphere and each has a distinguished record of US government service. Juan Cruz is currently a senior advisor and consultant to multilateral organizations as well as to private firms and consultancies working in the region. He retired from the US government in 2019 after almost 35 years of service, most of it in the region, with postings in Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. His last assignment was in the Trump White House, where he served as special assistant to the president and senior director for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the National Security Council. Among other things Juan is a native of Puerto Rico.

Juan González has held several positions in the Obama administration. His last appointment was as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, where he had responsibility for policy in Central America and the Caribbean. He also served in the White House for four and a half years, first as National Security Council director for the Western Hemisphere, and then as special advisor to Vice President Joe Biden, during which he played a central role in the Vice President's engagement in the region. Juan was a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala, and is a native of Cartagena, Colombia.

## **COVID-19 CRISIS IN LATAM**

We're going to jump right in because there's a lot of ground to cover. The first question has to do with COVID-19, which has been devastating for Latin American economies. Growth on average

is expected to decline over 9 percent this year, in some countries even more, and it has sent back 20 years of progress in reducing poverty. So the first question is for Juan Cruz: How has the Trump administration responded to the pandemic, and what do you think still needs to be done in the future to help the region recover?

**(3:09) Juan Cruz:** Good morning Cindy, thanks for having me and including me in what will no doubt be an interesting conversation with my friend Juan González, as we go back and forth between the differences between two administrations and two potential points of view. You know that the region has gone through a lot, and I'd say on the issue of COVID, it has been devastating. Some countries have tried to get it right, with mixed results, and some probably wish they had mixed results. As far as the United States, up until now I think there's been a bit of a paucity in terms of coming up with a region-wide strategy to address the issues of COVID and the ramifications of COVID on the economies of our region. What we've seen up until now, however, has been a very magnanimous gesture by the United States in providing respirators and PPE equipment, often times for embassies and the USAID and the US military, the kind of thing that's very signature in United States; but beyond that I'm not privy to sort of the direction that will be taken. I think obviously that we need to assist somewhere in the economic realm to buttress and reverse some of the 9-10 months of economic downfall in the region. But quite honestly I don't think we have a strategy or we have developed the strategy domestically to address the issue of COVID, so I don't know that that there's been a tremendous amount of thought extending that to the region.

**(4:44) Cindy Arnson:** For Juan González, this is a time of ballooning deficits in the United States. Traditionally, we have responded to these kinds of crises with infusions of foreign aid. What do you think a Biden administration would do in response to the pandemic to help economies recover?

**(5:10) Juan González:** Cindy, thanks again for the invitation and just for everything you've been doing. As long as I've been in Washington, the Woodrow Wilson Center has really been the space to really have these conversations on Latin America, and particularly your leadership is something I've looked up to for a very long time. So thank you for pulling this together. And obviously a pleasure to be here with [Juan Cruz], with whom I've also had the honor to work through the years. I've got to say here at the outset here, is that I'm speaking in my personal capacity. I don't represent the views of the Biden campaign or Joe Biden, but I can talk a little bit about my experience with him.

On just the deficits that you mentioned here, I want to build very briefly on what Juan said, is to give a wake-up call on COVID-19 to the listeners here and to the region. I think that those who say we can just wait this out really don't understand what we're undergoing. Particularly if you look at the United States, the challenges, if you look at what is going to be likely a two-stage

vaccine that has to be transported at minus 70 degrees celsius, that will have to be re-administered most likely every two years, you think about the ability to deliver something like that, the challenges that the United States and more developed countries are facing, and then you think about Latin America, and where frankly we have to talk about Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua and Venezuela, [who] have tried to ignore this issue, and there have been way more deaths than have been reported publicly.

The large level of informality that exists in Latin America, the lack of social safety nets, and as you, Juan, and Cindy so clearly stated, you had this middle class that was holding very tenuous ground during the years of prosperity for the region are just falling right back into poverty, you have to ask yourself—is this something where the governments of the region are going to take very seriously the failures in their development model to create those protections for their populations, to make sure that they're investing in reducing poverty in a sustainable way, and actually making sure that they're not just letting people die on their own, but actually try to address that—then I think we'll have a very clear impact on the future of the region and those countries that I think do take this very seriously and organize a serious response are going to recover. The other ones, I think and I fear, are going to be stuck in a cycle of contagion, outbreaks, and restrictions. They will open up again, and again there will be major contagions. This is something we're going to be dealing with in the United States for roughly two and a half years when it comes to actual delivery of the vaccine, and the implications in Latin America are not ones that are going to be over in the next six or so months.

So very briefly to answer your question, Cindy, this is also, I think, an opportunity for the United States, whereas you have countries like China that are issuing loans for vaccines. They're not capable of organizing a coordinated response to make sure the countries are able to build the health systems and delivery systems for the vaccine. They're not capable of coordinating regional hemispheric action to make sure that we're rebuilding our economies. A lot of that is going to be the major debt overhang that the region is facing and will continue to face. The impacts on vulnerable subregions like the Caribbean, but also Central America, and the migratory impact that's going to have directly on US security and prosperity, but also, of course, using this opportunity to make sure that we're defending the democratic tradition of the hemisphere and making sure that we're bolstering the democratic institutions that have characterized Latin America and the Caribbean for over a hundred years.

## [THE RELEVANCE OF THE MONROE DOCTRINE](#)

**(9:10) Cindy Arnson:** Thanks to you both for that. The next question is about the Monroe Doctrine. For Juan Cruz, first: at various points over the last three and a half-plus years, high-level US officials from both the State Department and the NSC have invoked the early-19th century Monroe Doctrine as an important principle in US policy towards the hemisphere. Juan

Cruz, what does the reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine mean, and how do you think that message has been received in the region?

**(9:46) Juan Cruz:** Naturally, Cindy, the issue of the Monroe Doctrine has become very controversial, especially since the renunciation of the doctrine in the previous administration. But I think at the heart of the matter for the administration is not to give up something you don't have to give up, in terms of keeping those powers from outside of the region exercising an undue influence in the region. I think, particularly, those malign actors such as Russia and China, but also we need to think of Iran and others, and the willingness of the United States to enforce that if it has to through an extremist or forceful means. The idea isn't to invoke this piece of [ . . . ] [inaudible] its birth that comes from a colonial or anti-colonial act and a quid pro quo between the United States and Europe at the time. And I think that this has nothing to do with that piece of the doctrine. It's basically what takes place in Europe or outside the region should stay outside of the region, and in the region it's not that we're the "big brother" in the administration, but in fact, if we have to protect the region from actors outside the region, we will. I know it has a much more negative connotation, and a sort of "the big brother" and enforcing or bullying, I don't know that that's necessarily what the administration is invoking in this.

**(11:16) Cindy Arnson:** For Juan González—during the Obama years, Secretary of State John Kerry explicitly repudiated the Monroe Doctrine. What principles do you think a Biden administration would put in its place?

**(11:35) Juan González:** That's a great question. I mean Joe Biden has never, really never, talked about the Monroe Doctrine. I think from his perspective, and frankly I share this view, that's a better subject of conversation for faculty lounges, but really doesn't mean much for the people of the Americas or for US policy. The Monroe Doctrine was 1823, so really what we need to think about are what the challenges we are facing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And the record that the Vice President has had—and I think, in contrast, the Trump administration's approach, and I saw this during in my travels, I heard it from many a minister, where they would basically say that Rex Tillerson and now Secretary Pompeo come to the region and wag their finger and give speeches, trying to intimidate but really have nothing of substance to offer as an alternative to countries like China or to push back on Russia, or even the presence of Hezbollah in certain parts of the region. So this has to be less of an academic conversation, and really about where the United States is competitive diplomatically and economically with Latin America and the Caribbean.

Joe Biden's record is one where he has traveled to Latin America and the Caribbean 16 times, including two of those to Colombia, two to Guatemala, three to Mexico. He's a guy who in my experience rolls up his sleeves and gets very, very involved in the weeds, is somebody who feels deeply that the security, prosperity, and democratic tradition of the region is something that is in the national security interest of the United States. So what you do, then, is that is you don't give

speeches saying either you go to China or you go with us, but you provide an alternative; and what that means is a US that focuses less on what does Trump Administration has done, which is been a return to Cold War era-ism by talking about Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua strategy at the expense of everything else.

When it comes to US policy, we should be building less walls and investing much more in the economic prosperity of our neighbors, starting with Mexico, which is a very important partner—and Canada, when we're thinking about North America, we're talking about number one and number three trading partners with the United States. Those need to be central to our foreign policy and economic engagement agenda. But also equal to that is going to be the climate change agenda.

Something that the Vice President has talked about publicly is that all of his international economic engagement is going to be something that is going to be where climate change is going to be equal to that. Because the answer to the crisis that we're undergoing—and let's not forget what everybody on this call remembers well—is that even before the pandemic, we were having massive protests in the region against inequality, against insecurity, against corruption. We have to make sure that when we are investing in the recovery of the region, we're investing in the technology of the future. It's not enough to go back to being commodity-dependent. When you have a global energy transition underway, a Colombia that is 20 percent dependent on fossil fuels, a Mexico, Brazil, that are dependent on fossil fuels, you need to help prepare these governments for the future of economic competition in the world.

I think also we're making sure that we're standing with democratic society, with civil society, recognizing that a sanctions-only approach is really just theater; and it's really not something that is actually strengthening or supporting civil society or combating corruption in the region. So to the extent that the United States is investing, putting skin in the game, making sure that we're helping the region with the tools necessary to come back from this crisis stronger than before, is really where the United States has the most influence relative to outside actors.

Last point I'll mention, Cindy, is that when you have countries from the other parts of the hemisphere, if they're investing in the prosperity, security, and democratic wellbeing of Latin America and the Caribbean, that is actually something that is aligned with U.S. interests, and we should welcome that. But clearly there has to be a “rules of the road” by which foreign actors come in here. And that's something, that is not something the US is prescribing; it's something the people of the Americas are demanding, which is transparency, accountability—they want a firm commitment to combating corruption. And frankly, I'm sorry, when I think about the role of China in the region, I think that they actually exhibit everything that is wrong right now with Latin America.

## VENEZUELA, CUBA, AND NICARAGUA

**(16:00) Cindy Arnson:** Juan, thanks for that. I'd like to pick up on a couple of the threads that you mentioned. First to Juan Cruz: you were one of the architects early on of the Trump administration policy toward Venezuela and Cuba. Together with Nicaragua, those three countries constituted what John Bolton coined as the “troika of tyranny.” What was the administration trying to achieve in Venezuela and Cuba and Nicaragua, and has reality conformed to your expectations? That's for Juan Cruz.

**(16:39) Juan Cruz:** Thank you, Cindy. I mean those are the three vexing problems of the region. The three problems that we had, and three of examples, as Juan González points out, of the opposite trend in the region, the lack of democracy. The administration set out to do a few things and I think it would place three all three countries, controversially, all three countries in the win column. First of all, and something like Cuba, the administration, the president early on, as a campaign promise, said that it would reverse the normalization, so-called normalization policy with Cuba. And he did that, and he did that in the first 6 months. And so you know, whether you agree with it or not, it was a stated policy, a policy that he followed through with, a policy that they would cite in the administration as a success.

Also ultimately putting the hurt on Cuba. Right now Cuba is suffering tremendously economically, and we have seen some reverberations of that in Cuba. What it signifies, again, I think, the administration would cite that as among some of the successes, to be able to put the regime back on its heels. On an issue like Venezuela, a little more complex in that the administration faced, quite honestly, was 18, almost 20, years of failed or weak or anemic policy on Venezuela. For numerous reasons, the US under Republican and Democratic administrations had failed to hit the right rhythm on Venezuela. And what we witnessed as a result was an ever-deteriorating situation where we were victimized. We were part of those elements that were put in the crosshairs by Chavéz, *chavismo*, and then *madurismo*. So we tried virtually everything for those 18 years. If you look at it—benign neglect, ignorance—but we didn't try giving it back to them. I think the administration wanted to break out and make sure—this is something very genuine from the president—that we were going to push back on the Venezuelans and push them hard.

If you wanted to define the Venezuela policy as a lack of success—what's a lack of success is that we have yet to achieve those goals. But what's not a lack of success in being able to muster determination, bring multilateralism to the forefront, work with allies, push back on a regime hard, make them pay for the mistakes and the violations of human rights and everything else that they've done, and ultimately make your objectives clear—the restoration of full democracy in Venezuela, even if the path to that is a little hazy and hasn't yet been accomplished. What I would add to that is, gone are the days of appeasement and mixed messages and confusion, and I

think Venezuela has been one where you don't have to doubt where the US lies on the issue of Venezuela. It's come out hard and I think that the administration will be looking for a second administration to bring the football across the line.

I would also add on the issue of Nicaragua—it's tough, for too many years, for a lot of reasons, and we've known that the Ortega's were able to perpetuate themselves in power through a lot of machinations and electoral trickery and the subjugation of the formal opposition parties. But what we have done subsequently is to draw a line, create hardship, isolate the Nicaraguan regime, and eliminate the business-as-usual of tolerating bad behavior. I think this is, while again, is not something that you can claim victory, because we're not there yet, it's there on the right path, and that's I think what I'll say to cover those three countries.

**(20:32) Cindy Arnson:** Thanks Juan. For Juan González, the Obama administration, as Juan Cruz was mentioning, moved to normalize the relationship with Cuba, and also began a policy of individual sanctions against corrupt and abusive officials in Venezuela. How do you think a Biden administration approach would differ, if it all, from the Trump administration's approach to Cuba and Venezuela, and also with respect to policy towards Nicaragua, which holds presidential elections next year?

**(21:11) Juan González:** Thanks Cindy, and I've got to say the only decision by the Trump administration that I think is redeemable is the appointment of Juan Cruz as the senior director, because he's actually somebody who brought knowledge and experience and a thoughtful approach to foreign policy. Not sure he was always listened to, but I think Republicans and Democrats breathed a sigh of relief when they saw that Juan Cruz was going to be in the job to start out. And look, there are things I agree with Juan here, is that anybody who thinks that we can just rewind to the world before January 2017 does not understand the current context—that you're going to have a president of the United States that is going to be very much focused on getting the US economy back on track, combating the pandemic, and trying to repair the damage around the world caused by the Trump administration. The idea that we're going to—and again, this is my personal view—that we're going to invest the two most precious commodities—time and political capital—that a president has to just go back to the way things were with Cuba does not understand our current context. And same thing with Venezuela.

But here's the critique: When it comes to sanctions policy, first, it was actually the individual sanctions started under the Obama administration, something that Vice President Biden pushed for. He actually strengthened the sanctions the Treasury had, more so than the 2014 Venezuela legislation, pushed by Senator Menendez, asked for. But when you try to develop sanctions policy, you've got to recognize one thing. Number one is, nowhere have sanctions led to regime change. There is not one example that anybody can offer where that happened. Two, when you're developing a sanctions regime, you have to think about what is the desired outcome?

What do you want to get to? If regime change is definitely not what's going to be achieved, how do you use sanctions as a part of a broader strategy, one tool, part of a broader strategy? Number three is, can the regime adapt to the sanctions pressure, as countries like North Korea have adapted over time? And then, lastly, you have to make sure that sanctions are not unilateral the way that this administration has executed them, but rather, a multilateral approach.

And when you do that, you have to figure out what mix of sanctions, or what sanctions regime is one that can build common cause with the countries of Europe and Latin America who support using sanctions to pressure for progress on human rights and to combat corruption. Unfortunately, this administration's approach to sanctions and to Venezuela specifically has been a lot more about South Florida than it really has been about helping the Venezuelan people. And what I mean by that is despite numerous calls by Republicans and Democrats for temporary protected status for Venezuelans, this administration has continued to deport Venezuelans. Last week Democratic senators called for unanimous consent on TPS legislation for Venezuelans. Republicans blocked it, and it was to protect the president and shows clearly that those that manage the immigration policy trump those that really manage the Latin America policy. And the continued deportation of, also, Nicaraguans back to get tortured, I think people have read the articles on this.

But when you look at the subject of Venezuela and Cuba briefly—I know I'm talking for a while—again, sanctions as a tool, not as a strategy itself. Thinking about how you build a broader multilateral coalition. TPS for Venezuela has to be done immediately. You have to take the humanitarian situation seriously. Compared to Syria, where the Obama-Biden administration leveraged \$6.5 billion, something to 650 million dollars of this administration—is chump change when you compare the enormity of the crisis that Venezuela and its neighbors are facing. And then, exactly as Juan said, is pushing toward free and fair elections in the country. But that pressure has to continue.

And then on Cuba, I think Secretary Kerry when he talked to [Andrés] Oppenheimer a couple weeks ago, hit the nail on the head...there was disappointment that the Cubans missed an opportunity, particularly when it comes to human rights. But I think we have to recognize here that the Obama policy toward Cuba at its core threatened the hardline on both Cuba and in the United States to make this a polarizing issue. So, engagement is not something we were doing for Cuba but it was something we were doing to Cuba. Diplomatic engagement is not a gift, it's actually a tool for the United States to advance its interests. Will Biden go back to the Obama-era policy? Senator Harris has said no, he will not, because today's context is very different. So, there are certain things that are in unilateral interests of the United States, particularly on travel and remittances, that we need to do, making sure those remittances don't end up in the pocket of the regime. And then beyond that, it's about having a conversation. But I don't think we can flip a switch back, especially since the Cuban people are suffering the worst crackdown, under the

Trump administration, since Bush, which is probably one of the worst periods that they have suffered. Thank you.

## MEXICO

**(26:19) Cindy Arnson:** Thanks. Let's move a little bit closer to home: Mexico. For Juan Cruz, the Trump administration successfully renegotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement, ratifying the USMCA. Mexican President López Obrador, AMLO, came to Washington recently, his first trip outside of Mexico, and praised President Trump as a friend of Mexico. So, for Juan Cruz, what do you think is the unfinished business in the US-Mexican relationship, and what kinds of issues do you think might come to the fore in a second term?

**(27:02) Juan Cruz:** Cindy, interestingly enough, I think that the relationship between the administration and two different administrations in Mexico has surprised everybody. The administration—again, we've placed Mexico in the win column. As a student of Mexico, if you look back in our sometimes-uneven relationship with our closest neighbor, what we find is that probably, arguably for the first time in our history, we've had a different kind of relationship with Mexico. If you go back to maybe Miguel de la Madrid and President Ronald Reagan, you had a great personal relationship and they clicked; but it didn't transfer to their teams or to the two nations. Or if you look, probably the warmest part in our history since the Mexican Revolution was under Bush 43, where the highly impressive Bush team and the very impressive Fox team were very close and we reached heights in the relationship never before seen. Probably a product of the fact that Fox was a tremendous historical anomaly, the first time a non-PRI person had reached the presidency in post-Revolutionary Mexico. So, you have until that time, probably the best relationship possible.

And then we had one that defies all the rough rhetoric, the narrative that was uncomfortable and everything between the two countries where the Peña Nieto administration and the current Trump administration became so intertwined, and the relationship and the bilateral relationship so close, that I would challenge anyone, I counted that in less than two years of the Peña Nieto administration we had the foreign secretary of Mexico be in the Oval office well over a hundred times. I would beg to say that that kind of access, that kind of liberty, that kind of interaction, has never existed previously between the two countries, and it did influence the way the US thought and the decisions that were made. I want to highlight that because that's something now that has in some ways translated the AMLO administration, where we have an affinity between the two leaders and an environment between the two countries that, quite honestly, defies a lot of prognosticators. This is a situation none of us could have fully imagined. So, the environment is set. The Mexicans in two different administrations are prepared to work with this administration. We've seen, if they come together, what that can produce, something like the USMCA.

So to your point about what's next, I think that for the Trump administration, it'll still be seized on two issues: the issue of immigration, particularly coming from Central America; and secondly, law and order and issues of combating narco-trafficking, and the ravages of the failure of the drug war and what it means for the US population. So, I think in a second term you're going to see a lot more focus on that. I think as they've looked at accomplishments and setting the groundwork and a firm foundation, the administration is going to look for a way to capitalize on that and bring to fore precisely the two issues that they're probably most interested in on Mexico.

**(30:30) Cindy Arnson:** Thanks. For Juan González, what do you think has been ignored by the Trump administration and how might that shape a US approach to Mexico under a Biden administration?

**(30:48) Juan González:** That's a tough question to answer, Cindy. I do have to take issue with Juan's characterization of the bilateral relationship. I think what you have here is a relationship of convenience where Mexico has been cracking down on immigration. There are tens of thousands of people that are in Mexico on the US-Mexico border, on the Mexico side, as part of the "Remain in Mexico" program, in shantytowns, many victims of criminal armed groups. And at the same time the United States, which under this administration cares very little about matters of corruption, human rights, press freedom, really ignores some of the problematic trends that are taking place in Mexico. And I think the calculus, perhaps, on the part of the Mexicans and then my personal opinion, is that they have to avoid pissing off the president of the United States, because he has shown his willingness to just close down the border to trade and the flow of people. And in doing that, recognizing that if Joe Biden is elected that he's going to be the adult in the room and be much more responsible about managing the bilateral relationship. They're not wrong. I don't think you're going to see Joe Biden threatening to close down the border on a whim.

The USMCA, let's remember that President Trump, as many people have called him, has been an arsonist firefighter, where he's created the crisis along the border and then created the USMCA as a way to resolve a crisis that he himself created. You look at the ITC analysis [of the contribution to US GDP of the USMCA], it really is not [a large contribution]. Zero point three five (0.35) percent of US GDP, it's not dramatic. And there weren't major changes in the agreement other than adding a technology chapter, and then what Democrats fought for, which was stronger labor protections to make sure that US workers were protected, and that when it comes to prescription drugs and the environment, there were serious commitments. And the agreement is where it is because of Democrats and Speaker Pelosi.

When you step back at the bilateral relationship under a Biden administration, as many folks know, Vice President Biden led the high-level economic dialogue with Mexico. It's something where he saw that US-Mexico economic cooperation had to be central and a priority for the United States. That's not just a trade issue. It's looking along our communities along the US-

Mexico border to make sure we're planning not just on cross-border infrastructure, but also on security. Making sure that at the same time we're prioritizing US national security, making sure that cross-border commerce is something that's facilitated. Fostering educational exchanges—at this point there's a statistic that there are more Mexican PhDs living in the United States than there are in Mexico. That is because we benefit from having those educational exchanges. But I think we've got to treat Mexico like the strategic partner that it is. Treat them with respect. We're always going to have differences with Mexico, but we address those in an adult manner. And beyond just the trade agenda is looking at what we can do regionally and globally with Mexico, when we treat them as partners and address migration in a responsible way, by focusing on good policies. That is how I think Vice President Biden as president will manage the Mexico relationship.

## BRAZIL

**(34:21) Cindy Arnson:** Let's talk for a moment about Brazil. President Trump and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro have had a close personal relationship and they share a very similar approach to handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Juan Cruz, aside from the personal affinity that exists between these two presidents, do you think there's been any content in the US-Brazil relationship in the Trump years?

**(34:52) Juan Cruz:** Cindy, I would say there's a general predisposition, and I wouldn't just discard the affinity that exists between these two presidents. As a student of Brazil, it's tough to see the two largest countries in the region, Mexico and Brazil, have often represented a challenge for the US historically in these bilateral relationships. In the case of Brazil, both sides wanted to see eye to eye, but they kept missing each other. There are multiple examples, and it's in the history of two ships passing in the night. And I think that this is for the first time, a real deep and marked difference in the approach. The Brazilians have been exceedingly acquiescent, friendly, flexible, and trying to match policies with this administration. It does matter that the two presidents get along and have a positive viewing of each other; it extends to their teams and the makeup of the Brazilian team and the preparedness of the US team to find avenues of commonality with Brazil.

And I think that a perfect example of that is—Juan talks about the travel of Vice President Biden to the region. Look at the multiple travel to Brazil by this administration, including by Vice President Pence himself, and of course, Mike Pompeo on more than one occasion, and the fact that he just traveled there within this past week with an objective of comparing notes with the Brazilians over the issue of Venezuela, and a lot of the Venezuelan migrants there, and everything from drug policy and so forth. So, I think the situation's ripe for really important decisions and to move forward between two countries. I don't think that's been totally exploited, but I do know that the Brazilians themselves have been working on an agenda that might prove

absolutely compatible to the administrations in terms of everything from issues of defense and military cooperation, and logistics and space, and so on and so forth. So, I think that the conditions are right and it's just for both sides to exploit. And I would venture to say that I hope this a change for the better, for long term, and regardless of who is president in Brazil. But nonetheless we should take advantage of the circumstances that we have and the positive environment created by both countries for the bilateral relationship.

**(37:37) Cindy Arnson:** Thanks. I'd like to remind everybody, if you have a question please send it to our Twitter account @LATAMProg. Okay, Juan González, for you on Brazil. You mentioned in your comments earlier the importance that Vice President Biden attaches to the issue of climate change. This is a time of fires of unprecedented destruction of the Amazon rainforest. Do you anticipate that that would be a central focus of a Biden administration policy vis-a-vis Brazil?

**(38:11) Juan González:** Absolutely. To coincide with a lot of what Juan said, countries like Mexico and Brazil matter globally for US interests—it's not just a regional issue. These are countries that, whether or not we agree with them, share the same ideological perspective, or maybe if we have a lot of issues that we have to work through, we have to recognize that these are the countries that when you look beyond the G7, they're incredibly relevant. And I would say on Brazil, which is the largest exporter of food, it is a country that is not just relevant from a bilateral perspective—but whether you're talking non-proliferation, whether you're talking food security, kind of multilateral cooperation of the United Nations, and then climate change. There is no better bridge between the G7 countries and the G77 countries and obviously the G20 countries than countries like Brazil, that are economies that right now are suffering for various reasons, but that in the medium to long term, are going to be increasingly relevant on global issues. We need to start treating them as such, the same way we treat countries like India, or that we negotiate countries like China. Brazil has to be on that same level.

Now, when it comes to climate change, as I mentioned, climate change is going to be something that's going to go hand-in-hand with the Vice President's economic agenda. And so for those countries, regardless of whether it's Brazil, Mexico, or others that are ready to really show leadership on this issue to listen to science, to work in unison, to make sure that our economies are competitive and prepared for the impacts of climate change—those countries are going to find common cause with the United States. And they're going to be ones that are going to be welcomed to the table; they're going to be our partners in everything from developing better climate finance tools, making sure that those countries that are impacted from the pandemic are ones that are investing in 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies to help prepare for the changes that we're going to be facing over the next couple decades. There's no better partner than Brazil on this. The question really is putting it back to the Brazilian leadership, whether they're up for the challenge. And that really is a question that I can't answer.

Even though November 3<sup>rd</sup> is really the only poll that matters here in the United States, Joe Biden is going to win this election. He is leading the polls by an amazing stretch, he is looking to defeat Donald Trump in the same way that Carter was defeated after his first term, if trends continue the way they are. So the countries of the region have to start thinking about, how do we actually advance our own national security and economic interests with partners like the United States? It's something I think people need to start brainstorming about, because when a Biden administration hits the ground in January, they're going to hit the ground running. And they're going to be really moving aggressively on addressing many of the wrongs, including on climate change, perpetrated by the Trump administration.

**(41:19) Cindy Arnson:** I'm going to take a question, since we're talking about climate change, from the senior correspondent at S&P Global Platts Sheky Espejo. This is for you, Juan González: If climate change and the environment are going to be a central focus in the future, how can that coexist with Mexico's current energy policy that focuses exclusively on hydrocarbons? And after your question we're going to come back to Central America and Colombia, so let's leave time.

**(41:53) Juan González:** Great, so this is a challenge that we faced during the second term of the Obama administration, when we were working on the Caribbean Energy Security Initiative. I'm coming back to the answer, but in a roundabout way. We were debating whether the focus on energy security in the Caribbean should be a renewables-only approach, or whether we should actually think about natural gases as a transition fuel for the Caribbean. And the approach that we ultimately took was an "all of the above" approach. So those that were investing in geothermal, those that were investing in solar, those that were investing in wind, we helped them prepare for those investments and have the governance and the financing tools to do that. There are countries like the Dominican Republic and Jamaica that use natural gas still, and they are going to need to use that as a transition energy. I know that a lot of climate activists may not see it that way as a binary issue. But we have to recognize the development challenges that a lot of the countries of the region are facing. Mexico, at least at the beginning of the AMLO administration, was investing in highly efficient natural gas capacity as a way to prepare for renewables, given that the cost of renewables was still very high for them.

When it comes to the US. tools and US support, number one is, the negotiations have happened. We have a COP agreement. We have to come back to the Paris emission targets and really focus on meeting them. I think that's got to be number one. Number two, for a region that is going to be facing a massive debt overhang, high borrowing costs that are going to limit or restrict their ability to invest in these technologies, well, the United States is going to lead, and I think the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, the Paris Club, and the broader international community have to help create these tools; and it has to be ambitious, to make sure

that we're creating that environment for countries like Mexico and Brazil. And I think just as important are Central America and the Caribbean, which are going to be facing adaptation issues, that they have the tools to be able to prepare for the changes that we are already facing. So that's the main answer, creating those tools to allow for those countries to begin investing in renewable technology and preparing to implement ambitious emissions targets that, for many countries, have fallen back since the United States started dropping out of the COP.

I think that you are on mute, Cindy.

## CENTRAL AMERICA

**(44:44) Cindy Arnson:** Thank you, my goodness. Let's move to Central America. The focus of the Trump Administration in the US relationship with Central America has been almost exclusively focused on migration. And it's true that migration from the so-called Northern Triangle—El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala—has been much reduced since the spike in 2019, a lot of that obviously due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The question is really for both of you, the same question, is this enforcement-focused approach sustainable in the long-term? Juan Cruz, why don't you go...

**(45:26) Juan Cruz:** Thank you, Cindy. It all begins with the relationships that we have with all three countries. The administration currently enjoys a rather positive, extremely positive, relationship with all three of these countries and an understanding, and with that all three countries have come to a real energetic and creative way to try to align with the administration's objectives, and I think eliminate all the rough spots that can exist in an issue like this and which existed early on in the administration's pushing back on this on this issue. With each one of these presidents in the region, we have an exceptional relationship, we are aligned, we can have discussions, our embassies have done a phenomenal job, and we can discuss issues that in the past may have been unilaterally dictated. I think that gives us an opportunity to have a more mature conversation, and no longer impose from the North, but rather suggest, maneuver, and work towards the objectives that the US would like from all 3 countries. Yes, I think it is going to be driven primarily on these issues, rather than others, and I think if there's another issue out there that might surface it would be, of course, issues of security, likely issues of China, and, much less so for this administration, issues of corruption.

**(47:03) Juan González:** Can I say something briefly Cindy? Look, I think enforcement is necessary. I think the United States needs to enforce immigration laws, people that don't have a credible claim on asylum or refugee status, they need to be repatriated. But I think what we need to recognize here is that the Trump administration has created a false choice between enforcing US law and upholding our international humanitarian obligations. They've been systematically

attacking our legal migration system by breaking down the asylum system, and, it is a function of that, there is a certain demographic in the United States that fears the increasing diversity as a threat against their way of life. That's called xenophobia. Some people have called it worse but I am not going to say what they've said. The reality is that migration has been one of the reasons the United States has been able to reinvent itself economically and innovate, where countries like Europe that have a negative growth rate are economically on the decline. Immigration has been a tool of our survival, resilience, creativity, and cultural richness. We are a nation of immigrants. Enforcement is necessary but its insufficient. When you look at all the experience we've had, from Plan Colombia forward, high intensity law enforcement operations get you the numbers and the quick wins. But strategically, you need to invest in education, you need to invest economic opportunity. A kid is going to join a gang if he doesn't have an alternative. You have to invest in Boys and Girls Clubs, community policing, the place-based strategies that the Obama/Biden administration advanced that this administration has completely cut. Until then, migration is going to be just a symptom of a broader problem. And I hope we talked about this a little bit, too, Cindy, is that corruption and impunity as a system of government, which has been something that has characterized many of the countries in Central America, is something that has been one of the causes of migration. And so whether we're trying to advance democracy, or defend democracy, or trying to combat criminal armed groups, or whether we are trying to advance human rights, at the center is corruption, which has allowed a lot of these things to grow and blossom under the Trump administration, which does not care about combating corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**49:35 Cindy Arnson:** What about Nayib Bukele in El Salvador? To what extent are the various authoritarian tendencies that he has exhibited over the last months going to be an area of friction in the US relationship with El Salvador?

**49:53 Juan González:** Biden's record on Central America has been that he single-handedly pushed this nearly \$1 billion package through the US bureaucracy. He is somebody that is going to meet the political will that the leaders of the region invest in addressing these issues. But for him, combating corruption is central. So we're going to want to have conversations with all three governments, to make sure that that is something that is a priority. And where we find common cause, the Biden administration is going to work together with the governments of the region. But we can do more than just work with governments. The three things to combat corruption and criminality are, we have to make sure that we are defending the *fiscales*, the prosecutors, that are essentially going out there, as courageous as they are, almost as martyrs in the face of what has become institutional corruption in these countries. We need to defend them. Number two, we need to invest and engage with civil society, because at the end of the day, civil society is the best defense mechanism and the best way to promote democratic governance and transparency. So civil society should be a key element, it is something that Biden prioritized as Vice President. And then, last but not least, is rule of law and institutions. And I don't mean just transparency

and vetted police, for example, but making sure that you have judicial institutions that are transparent and that are functioning, and that give everybody equal access to justice. You want to have accounting systems, tax systems, that are transparent and are not subject to corruption, you want to have customs agencies, you want the government to work for the people that elected it. And that requires a renewed and reaffirmed approach to the matter of combating corruption.

**51:49 Cindy Arnson:** Juan Cruz, do you have anything to add? Specifically about El Salvador or anything in response?

**51:51 Juan Cruz:** I just have one comment on El Salvador. I would like to raise a word of caution with Bukele. He's been placed in a really tough circumstance. And I think he had the support of the people in a great election; and what that represents in a country like El Salvador, we can't take for granted. But also, he's decided that he's a law and order guy and he's really tough, but he's got to be very careful. A couple of these things have raised an eyebrow and concern; he doesn't want to ruin what he has. He's already—he's got chalk on the cleat, he's stepped up on the line...I applaud all the tough things he has had to do, but he will absolutely get this wrong and run crosswise with the United States, no matter what administration, if our worst fears were to come true. I get the inclinations that he has, and in Central America those things are not uncommon, but the fact is you have got to be a good president to everybody and the burden of carrying the vote that put him into office. But I see a tendency to run right up against the line, and if he steps over that line... I really wish he would take caution. I would also recommend to him to widen and broaden his circle of advisors. I think he would benefit from, you know, multiple optics and people whispering in his ear—or maybe saying it out loud—in a venue that would give him a wide assortment of decisions to choose from, so that he doesn't have to rely on himself and hasn't really thought of the repercussions of some of these measures that may seem a bit much.

## COLOMBIA

**(53:46) Cindy Arnson:** Thanks. A question about Colombia and then we're going to take a question that's come in on Venezuela. The US-Colombian relationship is one that is long described by Republicans and Democrats as the result of a bipartisan consensus. President Duque has been very outspoken and in support, for example, of the candidacy of Mauricio Claver-Carone to the IDB presidency and now Claver-Carone has been elected. Do you expect that the emphasis of US-Colombia relations would differ in a second term for Trump or in a Biden administration, or will the traditional issues of counter-narcotics, fighting organized crime, implementing the peace process, spurring US investment, will those kinds of things change?

**(54:54) Juan Cruz:** Cindy, I think you said it there. I think that also the administration is happy that it sees an opportunity for Colombia to get back on track on the issue of eradication,

something that separated the administration from Colombia for quite a while. The issues of drugs and fighting drugs are very close to the president's heart; it's an authentic view of his and so he's not going to drop it, and the fact that the Colombians are back on track and we're in agreement, helps those friends and supporters in both countries relax a little bit. But the fact is that the devil is in the details on this eradication business, when we get back on track and we have a way forward, but it's not going to be back to the future. Also, the long list of challenges that the Colombian government faces, now exacerbated by the response to COVID and trying to help the country recover from the impact, the economic and social impacts of COVID, and of course, Juan discussed earlier the issue about a few countries in the region having seen a resurgence of its population protesting inequality, Colombia was one of those countries. That whole situation caught all of us by surprise, not to mention the leadership of those countries, but we just saw a recent demonstration that might reignite this, with an issue of police treatment of a man and death of a man in police custody. So it's a long list of challenges that Colombia has, it's not the first time Colombia has had to confront these sorts of things. I have great confidence in Colombia, the Colombians, law enforcement, and of course their ability to solve their own problems. But, of course, we've been great partners irrespective of ideology and we need to continue to do that in a way that the Colombians feel that they're supported, and we continue to help them provide the right and left parameters to do things the right way, and abide by everything that we would expect from them.

**(57:12) Cindy Arnson:** Juan González, specifically do you think that there would be a greater emphasis on the peace process, as there was during the Obama years, and do you think that there will be ongoing pressure on the issue of fumigation?

**(57:29) Juan González:** When it comes to the peace accords, I think we need to recognize that the peace accord is an agreement that was negotiated by the Colombians, and it is not up to the United States to tell the Colombians whether or not we like the agreement. Those sorts of conversations, when I was in the White House, we communicated our concerns on counter-narcotics in private, it's not something that we were going to do publicly. Because our rationale was that, whether or not this agreement fails or succeeds, a) the U.S. should not be the reason why it fails or succeeds, and b) the United States should stand there in support of Colombia and the Colombian people, a country that Vice President Biden has called the “keystone to the region.” As an early supporter of Plan Colombia, he sees U.S. support for Colombia as something that has to be a central part of his policy toward the region, he's talked about it publicly. So it's nuanced, my response, because the debate that is currently underway inside Colombia, the balance between peace, justice, reconciliation, and truth, is one that the people of the United States cannot impose on Colombia. Only the Colombians can find that balance. We can obviously be demanding, as we are of all of our bilateral relationships, but we do have to stand with Colombia, given everything that Juan Cruz has noted, but also its willingness to welcome over 1.5 million Venezuelans into the country is something that is having an economic

impact on Colombia. It's in our strategic interest to make sure that we're helping Colombia addresses this. But, of course, you know finding peace is something that all Colombians want, as a Colombian-American, it is something that is an exciting prospect for country that has been in conflict over 50 years. But, again, it's the role of the United States to support the Colombian government and the Colombian people advance that debate and get to a point where they are securing a durable peace. We can't tell them what that balance is.

## VENEZUELA

**(59:35) Cindy Arnson:** Thanks. We have a question from Geoff Ramsey of the Washington Office on Latin America, for both of you, with respect to Venezuela. The question is whether a second Trump administration or Biden administration would re-calibrate the existing sanctions policy; for example—consider offering sanctions relief for something other than regime change, in other words, to achieve the right conditions for an electoral process? After this, after both of your answers, I'm afraid we're going to have to end because we're out of time, but let's take your answer to that question. First, Juan Cruz.

**(1:00:18) Juan Cruz:** Cindy I apologize, but I was having a few technical difficulties, so I am going to ask you if you could repeat your question briefly?

**(1:00:27) Cindy Arnson:** Sure, from Geoff Ramsey at WOLA, about whether in a second Trump administration there might be a recalibration of the sanctions policy toward Venezuela so that sanctions theoretically could be partially lifted in exchange for electoral conditions?

**(1:00:46) Juan Cruz:** Interesting. I will start with something that Juan said earlier, which is that I agree with him on the issue of sanctions. We've sanctioned everything except Venezuela's oxygen and the sun, but if we could figure out how to do that, we would sanction that, too. I do agree that what we need to do is, we need to use all the tools that the US government has at its disposal. And I see a lot of good movement there, but we have been sort of heavy-handed on the sanctions regime and I think there's room to reassess that. My own particular view is that whatever you do to reassess, it is an opportunity to engage the regime in a quid pro quo. I wouldn't signal any kind of sanction in particular, but if you were inclined to review your sanctions tool box, you engage the regime eye-to-eye and offer it an exchange for something that's important to you. The regime is very short on the long list of confidence-building measures that it needs to offer to restore any sort of sense of confidence that the regime is a serious interlocutor; this could be an opportunity. My own view is that there isn't that much more to sanction, and that there's probably some room to release the tension on the reins a little bit, but I don't know if the administration would do it unless there was something in it for them.

**(102:17) Juan González:** So Cindy, what I would say to that, is that it is a bit premature to speculate on what a Biden administration would do on sanctions, given that we have a National Assembly election that is still scheduled for December. I can say, and people from the campaign have been on record on this, that the way things are headed, the December National Assembly elections will not be free and fair. So a Biden administration would not recognize the results of that election. I would also say that in the Democratic primary, I think that Joe Biden was the first candidate to recognize Juan Guaidó as the leader of the only democratically-elected institution in the country, the National Assembly. And I agree with Juan that the goal here has to be free and fair elections. Again, sanctions, unilateral sanctions, have never in their history worked at regime change. So I think what we need to do is find a way to pressure the regime back to the negotiating table, with the opposition, as equals; and getting there, like what are the minimum conditions required for the opposition to trust that the regime is negotiating in earnest? We have ideas on that, reconstitute the electoral council, release political prisoners, there's a list of things, but we're not the ones that are going to be sitting down with the regime, it is going to be the opposition and so they're the ones that have to make that call; and ultimately, we have to work toward a situation where there are free and fair elections in the country. [Henrique] Capriles has called for an international verification mission that is credible and can administer the elections. Those are things that, I think, the opposition needs to lay out, for us to get back to in the negotiating table, which will be key toward getting out of this crisis. They're going to be the ones that have to set those conditions, and then they need to negotiate in earnest, as partners, to see the way forward. Because the current situation is one that, number one, is only going to aggravate the suffering of the Venezuelan people, and b) is not going to achieve regime change. I'll finish with this; Joe Biden has a saying where he says, "you never back a person into a corner where their only way is over you." And so creating this expectation where the United States under the Trump administration is basically telling the opposition what to do, is not how this works. It's the opposition and the Venezuelan people are the ones that really should be determining their future. And the United States is, then, there to support them in their efforts, the protagonists of their own future through free and fair elections.