

AMERICAS CAUCUS
Topic A: Deciding upon the Internationalization
of the Amazon Rainforest

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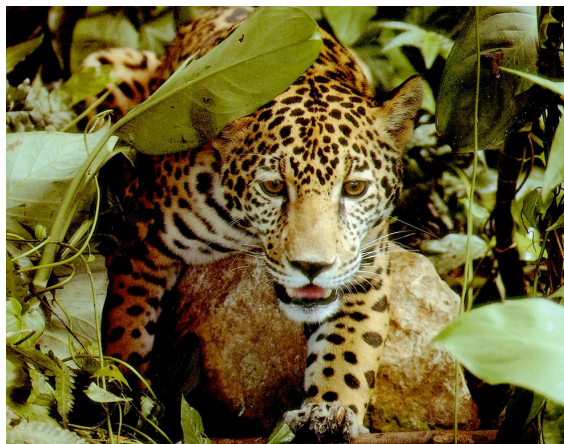
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Background Information

The Amazon

The Amazon River Basin is home to the largest rainforest on Earth. The basin covers 40% of the South American continent and includes parts of eight South American countries: Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela, as well as French Guiana, a department of France. The Amazon consists of a mosaic of ecosystems and vegetation types including rainforests, seasonal forests, flooded forests, deciduous forests and savannas. The Basin is drained by the Amazon River, the world's largest river in terms of discharge, and second longest river of the world after the Nile.

The Amazon's global importance is well established since it acts as a climate regulator that directly affects Brazil and Argentina's rainfall patterns and its winds may even affect European and North American patterns as well. According to the World Wildlife Fund, the decomposition and burning of trees cut down for developmental purposes makes Brazil's portion of the Amazon responsible for about half of the world's annual greenhouse-gas emissions from deforestation. As the world's focus swiftly heads towards the promise of renewable resources the Amazon more and more becomes an international pearl.



Deforestation of the Amazon

The annual rate of deforestation in the Amazon region is constantly increasing due to factors at local, national, and international levels. Internationally 70% of formerly



forested land and 91% of land deforested since 1970 in the Amazon, has been used for livestock pasture. However, Brazil is responsible for most of the Amazon's deforestation because of two major factors: the production of soybeans and the ongoing transportation projects. Brazil is

currently the second-largest global producer of soybeans, after the United States, mostly for export and biodiesel production. The Brazilian legislation states that clearing land for crops is considered an "effective use" of land, therefore as soybean prices rise, soy farmers push northward into forested areas of the Amazon. It becomes virtually impossible to punish such actions since they are protected by the country's own legislation. The increasing demand for soy farmers has also been used to validate many of the controversial transportation projects that are currently developing in the Amazon.

The first two highways: the Belém-Brasília (1958) and the Cuiabá-Porto Velho (1968) were the only federal highways in the Legal Amazon to be paved and passable year-round before the late 1990s. These two highways are said to be "at the heart of the 'arc of deforestation'", which at present is the focal point area of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon. The Belém-Brasília highway attracted nearly two million settlers in

the first twenty years. The success of the Belém-Brasília highway in opening up the forest was reenacted as paved roads continued to be developed, unleashing the irrepressible spread of settlement.

Amazon Cooperation Treaty

The Amazon Cooperation Treaty (ACT) was established in 1978 with the participation of eight South American countries. Its member states are: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela. The purpose of the ACT is to coordinate economic development and environmental protection across roughly 3 million square miles of the Amazon Basin. The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) is the body responsible for fulfilling the ACT's various objectives.

The Internationalization

The doctrine of "collective public goods," such as drinking water and forest resources, and their management by the "international community," rather than by the governments of the countries where they are situated, is becoming increasingly popular in international debating circles and may represent the germ of future foreign interference in the Amazon. There are divergent views on how the internationalization of the Amazon should be handled but two of the main ones come from Britain's Environmental Secretary, David Miliband, and Pascal Lamy the Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO). David Miliband's proposal, which has been endorsed by the former Prime Minister of Britain Tony Blair, plans to "privatize" the Amazon to allow it to be bought by individuals and groups. The scheme seeks to protect the region's

biodiversity while mitigating greenhouse gas emissions to fight global warming. The plan "involves the creation of an international body to buy the rainforest before setting up a trust to sell trees" hence the buyers would become "stake-holders" in the rainforest and invest towards its preservation.

Pascal Lamy on the other hand argues that the rainforest should be considered global public goods that the world could help to manage. The United States perspective on the issue is similar to Pascal's, as important investors and distinguished environmentalists feel like it's essential to internationalize the Amazon so it can be properly taken care of. The reality is that the forests of the Amazon are a strategic environmental asset not just for the countries belonging to the Amazon Treaty Organization but for the entire planet, and the international community doesn't trust those who are in charge of protecting the Amazon.

Maintaining Sovereignty

The countries that contain a part of the rainforest continuously reject any plans to turn the Amazon into an "international trust" and consider such ideas a threat to their national sovereignty. Following the internationalization of Antarctica, Brazil became concerned over its tenuous claim to the Amazon, and began taking steps to assert control over the region. To establish a "presence" in the Amazon, and therefore the right to keep it as part of the national territory, the Brazilian government established the Manaus Free Trade Zone -- a sort of tariff-free manufacturing zone -- and aggressively promoted settlement and development in the Amazon, resulting in widespread forest

loss. Since any Brazilians are still concerned about internationalization of the Amazon European and U.S. biotechnology companies are perceived by some as pirates, robbing Brazil of its genetic heritage, and environmental groups are viewed as usurpers. Latin American governments feel like nowadays, a physical presence is no longer required in order to enjoy the benefits of occupation and the main dilemma they are facing is how to enlist international help to protect this threatened natural heritage without forfeiting national sovereignty over an expanse of land that represent significant portions of their territory?

Timeline

1876- Seeds from Brazil's rubber-bearing trees were stolen by Sir Henry Alexander Wickham and sent to what is now Malaysia, as well as Africa and other tropical locations, dooming the Amazonian rubber boom. Hence, Brazilians aren't comfortable with foreigners in the Amazon region because of the threat of biopiracy.

1960-70s- Brazilian generals saw the colonization of the Brazilian Amazon as a national security priority. Incentives to conquer the land in the Amazon and transform it were given to the population and highways were built. The governments slogan at the time was "occupy it to avoid surrendering it".

2004- Was the worst year on record for the annual figure of forest loss in absolute terms. Roughly 27,000 sq km of forest was destroyed.

2006- At a summit in Mexico, David Miliband, Britain's Environment Secretary, proposed a plan to "privatize" the Amazon to allow the world's largest rainforest to be bought by individuals and groups.

2008- Satellite images started to be used to track the destruction and send environmental police into areas where deforestation was happening at its quickest pace.

2009- Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the president of Brazil at the time, said publically "I don't want any gringo asking us to let an Amazon resident die of hunger under a tree. We want to preserve, but they will have to pay the price for this preservation because we never destroyed our forest like they mowed theirs down a century ago" as he demanded funding from rich nations to cut deforestation.

2014- Representatives from Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela had a meeting in Brasilia to commemorate the Global Water Day and discuss the some pending issues from the water supply of the Amazon. Ramlakhan who represented Suriname voiced his concern about the climate change in the region and its effect on the rivers. Water preservation plans were scheduled for the following years.

Key Terms

Internationalize: to place (something) under international control : to make (something) involve or affect two or more countries.

Sovereignty: a country's independent authority and the right to govern itself.

Deforestation: the act or result of cutting down or burning all the trees in an area.

Sustainable Development: is a roadmap, the action plan, for achieving sustainability in any activity that uses resources and where immediate and intergenerational replication is demanded.

Agricultural lobby: The attempt to influence legislators on behalf of agricultural interests.

Conservation strategies: A plan of action or policy designed to achieve preservation.

Settlement: A place, typically one that has hitherto been uninhabited, where people establish a community.

Greenhouse gas: A gas that contributes to the greenhouse effect by absorbing infrared radiation, e.g., carbon dioxide and chlorofluorocarbons.

Biotechnology: The exploitation of biological processes for industrial and other purposes

Renewable resources: Any natural resource that can replenish itself naturally over time, as wood or solar energy.

Stake-holder: A person or group that has an investment, share, or interest in something, as a business or industry.

Guiding Questions

- What are the benefits and disadvantages of internationalizing the Amazon?
- How would the internationalization of the Amazon infringe the sovereignty of the countries the rainforest encompasses?
- Should scientists and environmentalists seeking to protect the rainforest be entitled to permanent access?
- What actions should be taken to prevent further destruction if the rainforest is not internationalized?
- To what extent should the nations that have a part of the Amazon be held accountable for the deforestation of the forest and the possible global impacts that such damage may cause?
- Why should the rest of the world pay the Amazonian countries to protect such treasured forests without setting terms of conditionality?
- How should the sovereignty dilemma be solved, while ensuring credible protection for the Amazon?
- How should the Amazonian nations protect such a vast area of land with scarce financial resources?

Further Research

Online Map of Forest Loss from 2000-2012

<http://earthenginepartners.appspot.com/science-2013-global-forest>

Preservation laws

<http://www.pachamama.org/blog/amazon-rainforest-preservation-law-a-work-in-progress>

Protection laws

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2013/10/09/Brazil-protects-Amazon-increasing-size-protected-areas>

<http://www.wrm.org.uy/oldsite/countries/Brazil/amazonia.html>

ACTO

http://www.un.org/esa/forests/pdf/publications/Intl_Forest_Policy_instruments_agreements.pdf

*use the index as a guide, and focus on the parts about the Amazon Cooperation Treaty and Organization

<http://otca.info/portal/apresentacao.php?p=agd>