

Harper casts Canada as firmly distinct from the U.S.

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SANTIGO - Prime Minister Stephen Harper says Canada is proof that the nations of the Americas can pursue economic and political freedom while also standing apart, and in contrast, to the United States.

In a major foreign policy speech here explaining the aims of his government's new focus on Latin America, Harper cast Canada as firmly distinct from the U.S. - which has years of political baggage in this region - and said the emerging democracies of the hemisphere should follow the Canadian example instead.

He said the Americas "stand at a crossroads," facing a choice between democracy and free markets, or a return to "regressive economic policy, dangerous political conflict and insecurity" - a veiled reference to the anti-Western regime of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela.

He said Canada offers a third way.

"Too often some in the hemisphere are led to believe that their only choices- if I can be so bold to say - are to return to the syndrome of economic nationalism, political authoritarianism and class warfare, or to become just like the United States.'

"This is, of course, utter nonsense. Canada's very existence demonstrates that the choice is a false one.

"Canada's political structures differ substantially from those in the United States. Our cultural values and social models have also been shaped by unique forces and we've made our own policy choices to meet our own needs.

"We want our role in the hemisphere to reflect these differences while emphasizing the economic and political fundamentals necessary for progress," he said in a speech to the Canada-Chile Chamber of Commerce.

"We want a role that reflects our commitment to open markets and free trade ... but also to our national identity and our traditions of order and community



CREDIT: DAVID LILLO/AFP/Getty Images

Stephen Harper listens to Chilean President Michelle Bachelet at the presidential palace La Moneda in Santiago, Tuesday. Harper is on a Latin American and Caribbean tour.

values."

Harper is seeking a bigger, long-term leadership role in the Americas.

"Canada's new government has made clear that re-engagement in its hemisphere is a critical international priority for our country."

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