While President Obama made headlines for downplaying the threat posed by Venezuela's Hugo Chavez to national security, such naive remarks should hardly come as a surprise given his track record. Though most of Mr. Obama's newsworthy foreign policy proclamations have pertained to the Middle East, Europe and Asia, his judgment calls on Latin America have been equally bad — albeit less frequent and generally underreported. Siding with the Chavez-led leftist alliance on the Honduras "coup" in 2009 comes to mind. People are paying attention. After visiting with scores of economic and political scholars from throughout the Western Hemisphere at the 25th anniversary conference of the Bogota-based Instituto Ciencia Politica think tank in late June, it's evident that Mr. Obama is losing Latin America. Here are five signs why:

- Mr. Obama doesn't think Hugo Chavez is a "serious" threat.

Mr. Obama is either blind to reality, or sees no problem with Venezuela's military buildup, its harboring FARC narcoterrorists and Hezbollah, the strategic partnership with Russia and Iran, and leadership of the eight-nation anti-U.S. Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA). Obama-Chavez meetings have been chummy, from their first photo-op with Mr. Chavez presenting Mr. Obama with an anti-colonialist book titled "Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent." Ironically, Mr. Obama's autobiography is titled, "Dreams From My Father." What were those dreams? As author Dinesh D'Souza points out, Barack Obama Sr.'s own published works show he was also anti-colonialist. Maybe this explains a lot. Even so, could we ever imagine President Kennedy saying Fidel Castro was not a "serious" threat? And Mr. Chavez is the new Castro. Speaking of the old Castro, while Mr. Obama touted his Cuba policy to Miami's "Americateve A Mano Limpia" news program anchor Oscar Haza, the Castro brothers are increasing their rate of jailing peaceful dissidents and continuing to undermine U.S. interests in the region.

- Iran and China are on the rise at our expense.

Iran is making military, economic and diplomatic inroads into Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Cuba and to a lesser extent, Brazil and Argentina. Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has visited Latin America six times since 2007, forging deeper personal ties and signing accords each time. According to a group of Bolivian senators visiting Washington this year, Iran has roughly 100 Revolutionary Guard soldiers training ALBA nations to crush any civil unrest like in Tehran during Iran's Green Revolution in 2009. If Iran gets nuclear weapons, it is entirely plausible they may show up within Shahab-3 missile-striking distance to the U.S. mainland. Meanwhile, China is making economic gains while we lose market share. China is now the

third-largest investor in the region with $22.7 billion in 2011, according to the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America, and has increased its appetite for regional exports five-fold since 2000. U.S. imports have dropped from over half to about one-third the total in recent years.

- Latin Americans have lost faith in Mr. Obama.

Roughly paralleling U.S. polls, a Gallup Poll shows that Mr. Obama went from 62 percent to 47 percent approval rating in the region from 2009 to 2011. The same poll shows 43 percent believed Mr. Obama would strengthen relations after his inauguration, however only 24 percent thought so just two years later. This was all before the Summit of the Americas "Secret Service-Gate" in Cartagena, Colombia, in April — a deeply embarrassing episode for Mr. Obama.

- U.S. investors have to fend for themselves.

With Mr. Obama's lack of forceful leadership, some governments have been emboldened to cheat investors out of hundreds of millions of dollars through nationalization of commodities, expropriation without compensation, and unfair trade practices. The World Bank's current arbitration for Pacific Rim Mining versus El Salvador comes to mind, where the company spent $77 million on a decade of exploration permits and related costs, only to be denied extraction permits once they actually discovered gold. Team Obama's reaction? Ignore it while continuing to grant El Salvador hundreds of millions in U.S. taxpayer dollars for aid programs.

- Mr. Obama's silence on press crackdowns in Venezuela and Ecuador.

Despite U.S. leadership shining as a beacon of freedom for more than two centuries, Mr. Obama is conspicuously silent as the free press remains under siege. Mr. Chavez relentlessly attacks media outlets that criticize him, like Globovision TV, shuttering their offices and issuing arrest warrants for their leadership. Ecuador's Rafael Correa jailed three publishers and an opinion columnist from El Universo newspaper for alleging his personal involvement in brutally halting a coup attempt. Though the journalists were later pardoned, Mr. Correa's message was clear: There is no free press in Ecuador. Where's Mr. Obama been on all of this? Nowhere. Though as bad as Mr. Obama has been for Latin America, it could be worse. At least his policies haven't resulted in the region being taken over by Islamists as they have throughout the Middle East, thanks in part to his siding with the strongest in the Arab Spring. Not yet, anyway. Give Iran time and they'll think of something. Read the original article here in the Washington Times