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New Security Relations in the Americas

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Conclusions

Radically new international and domestic conditions require Western Hemisphere security establishments to consider serious adjustments in planning, doctrine, and resource allocation.

The interplay between the neo-liberal political-economic model and traditional security needs confronts Latin American defense planners with uncomfortable, major challenges:

Today's political and economic climate has created uncertainty within and among the region's tradition-bound military establishments

In an increasingly interdependent world, a state's own territory is no longer the sole reference point for its own security arrangements

Hemispheric security partners, like dancing partners confronting unexpected music with a different rhythm, must confirm shared perceptions and review their complementary roles and agreements before trying out new dance steps.

New Security Considerations

The business of national defense once was simple, with a unilateral focus and emphasis on military strength. Today a complex mix of contemporary and traditional forces act in concert on emerging multinational security relationships in Latin America. A recent conference highlighted three forces at work:

1. New, freewheeling influences which cross the Americas' boundaries via the Internet, electronic fund transfers, mass media, illegal transit, and non-governmental organizations.
2. The December 1994 Miami Summit of the Americas' ringing endorsement of democracy, free markets and trade integration, which together have fundamentally altered the frame of reference for defining national interests and promoting cooperation in the Hemisphere.
3. States struggling under essential neo-liberal reforms while abject poverty, skewed income distribution,

rapid population growth, massive illegal migration, and growing criminality continue to depress daily life for large sectors of society and increase pressures for government activism.

Keeping Regional Change in Perspective

The 1994 Miami Summit of the Americas' priorities for action did not address security relationships, but the following "Partners in Hemispheric Peace and Security" symposium took this step, challenging participants to think creatively about today's altered strategic environment and its significance for defense establishments and security policies. Early in the meeting several senior academic analysts emphasized the importance of keeping regional change in historical perspective. Institutional heritage and traditions are powerful pressures contributing to the uncertainty about the future within and among the hemisphere's armed forces. Strong European influences have endowed many Latin American militaries with a corporatist world view and a sense of "nationalistic Darwinism" in their approach to territorial issues. The U.S. experience too, in the Caribbean early in this century, often led to the creation of constabularies with internal missions rather than to establishment of defense forces under elected civilian control. Neither of these historical traditions adapts easily to today's emphasis on democratic societies, so change is difficult to accept.

The military's traditional role has become ambiguous for the first time. A Central American public security expert explained, for example, that Latin America's military elites have been moved aside by civilian leaders who challenge the institution's long-standing monopoly on patriotism. In some countries, a senior North American analyst noted, the armed forces now feel unwanted and unjustly attacked for national problems not exclusively of their own making. Most perceive they are being "talked at" about modernization, professionalism and democratization, another agenda they believe is driven by Washington's policy priorities.

The U.S. military's traditional role in hemispheric relations, heavily influenced by the Cold War and Washington's bureaucratic politics in shaping its Latin American agenda, is also changing. A U.S. civilian defense expert pointed out that decades of anti-communist engagement have left the U.S. military with a more global perspective and little contact with the region's younger generation of officers. The United States has lost many opportunities in this regard. Port visits, for example, have emphasized recreational events over professional exchanges, the preparation of U.S. officers to serve in the region has lacked intensive training programs and "after-action" reports are seldom well prepared or read. Today, meaningful interactions are returning between U.S. and Latin American counterparts through a variety of innovative programs, exercises and small unit deployments, but the prejudiced and paternalistic attitudes of the past have not been silenced.

In an operational sense, the U.S. military is trying to break with the past and widen the focus of defense policy beyond its current regional engagement in support of the National Drug Control Strategy. Senior U.S. Southern Command officers explained in detail how the Command expends \$153 million annually and deploys hundreds of troops to support Washington's counter-narcotics efforts. Extensive interaction has taken place with national security forces on anti-trafficking operations. The Southern Command now seeks to broaden this cooperation from bilateral to multilateral (regional) operations in order to capitalize on local successes and encourage interoperability. In addition, the Command has worked with 12 American countries that have sent military contingents to UN peace operations worldwide. (Nine Latin American militaries, for example, currently participate in the multinational force in Haiti.) Recognizing the central role of human rights in security operations, the Command engages advocacy groups in a dialogue on human rights training, now a key component of its exercise program.

Addressing Contemporary Security Challenges

The "new spirit" of political and economic reform carried over from the December Presidential Summit complicates efforts to redefine national and regional security. Democracy has triumphed thus far as the region's chosen political philosophy, but its failure to resolve grating social inequities has led to persistent questions about whether democracy is credible, whether the nature of national security has changed, and how the role of armed forces in its protection can be explained. While economic reforms have successfully pushed Latin America toward free market and export-oriented growth, the effects on security forces, as analysis by defense economists suggests, have been largely unexplored.

The neo-liberal model poses major challenges for defense planners. Structural economic adjustments are ending state support for domestic defense industries, resulting in a new sense of insecurity associated with their disappearance or internationalization. Cuts in government spending are forcing defense establishments to reexamine the size of armed forces and their rationale for national defense, and to provide more convincing justifications for their budgets. Such trends have led to concerns that expanding reforms may be weakening the state, which then is less able to address destabilizing socio-economic conditions and domestic political tensions, and may lead ultimately to the military's reinsertion into public order, a role it does not seek.

The uncertain relationship between the armed forces and the newly democratized state challenges both groups to find consensus on security issues. A South American defense analyst underscored that, while democratization has not eliminated the state's security functions, agreement on its security responsibilities has been difficult to achieve. The military's Praetorian education, its lack of experience in working with legislative bodies, and a pronounced shortage of civilians with expertise in military and security matters produce little common ground for debate. A vagueness about what constitutes valid national security interests, as opposed to those of the military institution, and about how, if at all, the armed forces should be engaged in protecting or promoting them continues to hamper efforts to advance cooperative security initiatives. Narrow definitions of national security mask enduring weaknesses within Latin American societies, while expansive doctrines risk diluting the concept of security down to meaninglessness, or militarizing solutions to the problems of developing states.

The security dimension of the region's aggressive agenda for trade integration presents other difficult questions and challenges: for example, will the United States be reliable? An international trade expert noted that American leaders have pledged to create a hemispheric free trade area by 2005 with a combined market of 850 million people and a gross domestic product of \$13 trillion. While entrepreneurs throughout the hemisphere are eager to achieve free trade and subregional arrangements, such as the recent Central American alliance for sustainable development, he underscored that U.S. domestic politics may undermine Washington's support for a vision it helped to foster. The fallout from the Mexican financial crisis and bilateral and internal divisions hemisphere-wide may create further barriers to effective security cooperation.

Subregional economic integration in the face of traditional rivalries highlights Latin America's ability to harmonize economic and security cooperation. Southern Cone countries have overcome major obstacles to integration: the Falklands/ Malvinas conflict, Chilean-Argentine border disputes, and issues related to hydro-electric power generation. Brazilian-Argentine economic cooperation under the Southern Common Market umbrella appears to be developing positively along a "dual-track" consisting of separate security and economic paths. The Andean Pact continues to function despite a bitter confrontation between Peru and Ecuador.

Security- and confidence-building measures clearly strengthen efforts to realize economic integration and reduce the chances of severe intraregional tensions. Steps underway to increase confidence between Chilean and Argentine armed forces, for example, provide a useful model for the entire hemisphere. But many Latin American military institutions still view the defense of sovereignty as their primary mission. The recent conflict along the Peru-Ecuador border revealed the understated value reserved for territory within national policy circles. While the root causes of this dispute remain unresolved, today's cooperative atmosphere has helped avert escalation and stimulated diplomatic negotiations to find a final solution. Senior Ecuadorian and Peruvian officers attending the symposium warmly embraced after expressing commitments to peace.

Building upon Security Opportunities

Agreement on a common security agenda will require high levels of initiative, pragmatism, and diplomacy. The Summit of the Americas established a cooperative mind set among the region's leaders--an essential step for discussing difficult security issues. But the Summit did not suggest how to achieve consensus among the region's military and civilian defense leaders. "Each country has a different list [of security goals], and we have to see what are the linkages and common areas," one senior Latin American officer noted.

Recommendations

Develop a workable program for regional, or subregional cooperation which needs regular communication and many solid reference points such as regular meetings of defense ministers and periodic conferences to discuss cooperation and security-building measures.

Draw upon experiences with multilateral security from outside the Western Hemisphere, particularly in a European or NATO context, to identify ideas which can be adapted to inter-American relationships.

Identify focal points of security interest and commitment on a regional or subregional level and adopt an incremental and transparent course to achieve consensus among the region's military and civilian defense leaders on how security should be defined.

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About the Conference

More than 150 military and civilian defense experts from 18 American countries met recently in Miami to explore Western Hemisphere security relationships in the post-Cold War era. Hosted by the U.S. Southern Command and the National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies, under the theme of "Partners in Hemispheric Peace and Security," the symposium helped shape the agenda for the first Defense Ministerial of the Americas meeting held in Williamsburg, VA in late July.

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