



Background

Executive Summary

No. 1489

October 9, 2001

U.S. COALITION AGAINST TERRORISM SHOULD INCLUDE LATIN AMERICA

STEPHEN JOHNSON

The September 11 terrorist strikes on New York and Washington have focused America's attention on the Middle East, but a potential source of danger lurks closer to home. Ten of 30 terrorist organizations operating worldwide, including one linked to Osama bin Laden, are located or operate in Latin America. So far, most of their violence has been directed within the region, but it could easily migrate to the United States.

Accordingly, Washington needs a Latin America policy that strengthens U.S. intelligence collection in the region, develops a cooperative defense strategy among regional allies, revitalizes weak economies to sustain counterterrorism programs, promotes the rule of law, and denies support to governments that help terrorists.

Nature of the Threat. Despite the fact that democracy has largely replaced dictatorships in 21 out of 23 neighboring nations, strong democratic institutions and truly free markets have hardly had time to take root. Terrorists can take advantage of this to expand, especially where law enforcement is weak. Three types of terrorist activity are currently manifested in the following countries.

- **Cuba** is a totalitarian dictatorship that actively assists international terrorists and is categorized as a "state sponsor" of terrorism by the

U.S. Department of State. From the 1960s to the 1980s, it trained and armed Latin American insurgents. Today, it has relations with other state sponsors and has its own potential offensive capabilities in electronic and biological warfare.

- **Colombia** is a target country that has been plagued by a domestic insurgency for nearly 40 years. Since 1995, the number of rebels has doubled in size and has expanded into half the national territory. Making an estimated \$1 billion a year from extortion, kidnapping, and drug trafficking, they are better financed than Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden and are linked to international drug traffickers and terrorists, including the Irish Republican Army and Basque separatists.

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Kathryn and Shelby
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- **Paraguay** is an involuntary host. Its poorly controlled borders with Argentina and Brazil have attracted drug and arms traffickers as well as suspected terrorists. Groups linked to the Egyptian Islamic Group, the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, and the pro-Palestinian HAMAS organizations circulate within a large immigrant community. Hezbollah cells may have played a role in the bomb attacks on Argentina's Jewish community in 1992 and 1994.

Elsewhere, support for terrorism may take the form of tolerance of fugitives hiding within immigrant communities or lax anti-money-laundering laws that prevent tracking the movement of large amounts of questionable cash to help protect terrorist resources. Eighteen Latin American countries have legal sanctions on the laundering of narcotics profits, but only half of them have expanded their statutes to apply them to terrorism.

What the United States Must Do. The Bush Administration has sent FBI agents to the region to investigate leads related to the September 11 bombings. It also has embraced the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty), to obtain support for rooting out accomplices in the attack. While these are moves in the right direction, terrorism, like crime, is a long-term problem. The United States must also:

- **Strengthen U.S. intelligence capabilities in the region.** President Bush should increase intelligence collection anywhere terrorist groups operate—including Latin America. The United States should make more effective use of such tools as the Financial Crime Enforcement Network (FinCEN) and the Drug Kingpin Act to trace and halt movements of terrorist assets.
- **Build a hemispheric coalition against international crime.** The Bush Administration should help U.S. neighbors tighten loose migratory controls, improve police investigative capabilities, and professionalize military intelligence. Further, Washington should regear its Latin American military strategy—cast adrift after the end of the Cold War—to develop protocols to enhance coordination

between armed forces and civilians and between allies at the international level.

- **Reinforce fragile economies with free trade.** Congress and the White House should extend the Andean Trade Preferences Act, due to expire in December, to bolster the precarious economies of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. Next, Congress should give President Bush trade promotion authority (TPA) to support his goal of advancing free markets in Latin America.
- **Support democratic institutions.** U.S. advice and scarce assistance dollars should be concentrated on expertise, training, and exchange opportunities to professionalize police, immigration personnel, prosecutors, and judiciaries. Ongoing U.S. Administration of Justice programs that provide such training should be continued and expanded.
- **Deny support to state sponsors of terrorism.** The United States should not assist any state sponsor of terrorism or country that maintains friendly ties with terrorist organizations. Because Cuba is still considered a state sponsor, this is not the time to change America's relationship with the island.

Conclusion. Countries with sagging economies and weak governing institutions are not only potential targets of terrorism, but likely harbors for perpetrators. Overall, the United States should strengthen its intelligence collection in the region. Then it should help develop a framework for Latin American cooperation on regional security, help reform and revitalize weak economies, and support democratic institutions—particularly the rule of law. If the United States fails to act, it will give the green light to terrorists and outlaws to strike stronger alliances. The United States should not allow the focus on the Middle East to divert its attention from such threats on its own doorstep.

—Stephen Johnson is Policy Analyst for Latin America in the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.



Background

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U.S. COALITION AGAINST TERRORISM SHOULD INCLUDE LATIN AMERICA

STEPHEN JOHNSON

The hunt for the authors of the September 11 terrorist strikes on New York and Washington has focused America's attention on Afghanistan and fugitive Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden, but a potential source of danger also exists closer to home. As Secretary of State Colin Powell hinted when he proposed a "global assault against terrorism" the day after the tragedy, bin Laden is only the tip of the terrorist iceberg. According to the U.S. Department of State, there are more than 30 terrorist organizations operating worldwide. At least 10 of them, including one linked to bin Laden, operate in Latin America.¹

So far, most of the violence perpetrated by these terrorists has been confined within the region, but it could easily spread to the United States. Drug traffickers have constructed a criminal pipeline between North and South America, and two of Latin America's remaining authoritarian leaders openly express their dislike of the United States. Moreover, the region's fragile democracies and market economies are hardly able to contain

threats against themselves, much less keep them from spilling across their borders.

To prevent the spread of terrorism throughout the Western Hemisphere, Washington needs a Latin America policy that goes beyond simply reacting to events to one that:

- **Strengthens** U.S. intelligence capabilities in the region;
- **Develops** a regional cooperative strategy to defeat security threats;
- **Re-energizes** weak economies to sustain counterterrorist efforts;

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1. Groups listed by the State Department include Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA); Egypt's Islamic Group (al Gama'at al Islamiyya—affiliated with Osama bin Laden); HAMAS (Islamic Resistance Movement); Hezbollah (Party of God); Irish Republican Army (IRA); National Liberation Army (ELN); Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path of Peru); Tupac Amaru (Peru); and United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). Although former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori largely defeated the Sendero Luminoso and Tupac Amaru in the early 1990s, their activities have begun to increase. See U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2000*, April 2001, at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2000> (September 17, 2001), and "Antiterroristas impulsan 'alerta máxima' en Ciudad del Este," *ABC Color*, September 12, 2001, at <http://www.una.py/sitios/abc/pol04.htm> (September 12, 2001).

- **Bolsters** law enforcement and judicial institutions to be able to cope with criminal activities; and
- **Denies** support to governments that sponsor terrorism.

NATURE OF THE THREAT

For decades, the combination of corrupt government, poor infrastructure, and spotty public security in many Latin American countries has made it easy for foreign and domestic terrorists to gain a foothold. Despite the fact that democracy has largely replaced dictatorships in 21 out of 23 neighboring nations throughout the past 20 years, strong democratic institutions have hardly had time to develop beyond holding elections and basic lawmaking.

Nearly two-thirds of Latin America's governments are perceived by citizens and investors as corrupt, according to Transparency International's recent Perceptions of Corruption Indexes. Half of them have overregulated, monopolistic economies and limited infrastructure beyond major cities. Poverty rates in as many countries approach 50 percent. Moreover, as an antidote to the civil conflicts that gave birth to these democracies throughout the past 20 years, the United States encouraged Latin American armies to reduce forces and transfer public security functions to largely unprepared police units. Together, these factors make it difficult for many of these countries to control criminals and terrorists within their national territory.

Three types of terrorist activity are currently manifested in the following countries.

- **Cuba** is a totalitarian dictatorship that actively assists international terrorists and is categorized as a "state sponsor" of terrorism by the U.S. Department of State. It has helped the

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia since the 1960s² and trained and armed Nicaraguan and El Salvadoran insurgents in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, it has relations with other state sponsors such as Iraq and Libya and maintains ties with Spain's Basque separatists (ETA) and the Irish Republican Army.

Even more worrisome, Cuban leader Fidel Castro reportedly has developed the capability to manufacture biological warfare agents.³ A country unable to supply aspirin to state-run pharmacies reportedly has 11 biochemical plants, half of them dedicated to military use.⁴ Castro also hosts substantial electronic eavesdropping and electronic warfare facilities, manned by Russian and Chinese technicians, aimed at the United States. As recently as May 2001, he visited Iran and declared that "Iran and Cuba, in cooperation with each other, can bring America to its knees."⁵

- **Colombia** is a target country plagued by domestic insurgents who have killed hundreds of citizens each year and have blown up such critical infrastructure as oil pipelines and electricity transmission towers. This nearly 40-year-old conflict has now spilled into neighboring Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela.

Since their appearance in the mid-1960s, the Marxist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) have tried to bring down Colombia's weak centralized government and fragile democratic order. The FARC, in particular, was able to double its cadres from 7,000 in 1995 to about 16,000 in 2001 and expand its activities into more than half of the national territory,

- Colombian Senator Germán Vargas Lleras has charged that some 30 Cuban and 10 Venezuelans are assisting the FARC inside their safe haven south of Bogotá. He claims that Nicaraguan military officials have also been frequent visitors to the headquarters at San Vicente del Caguán. See "Hay cubanos y venezolanos con las FARC, denuncia senador Vargas Lleras," *El Tiempo*, September 26, 2001, at <http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/26-09-2001/poli106267.html> (September 26, 2001).
- See Defense Intelligence Agency, *The Cuban Threat to U.S. National Security*, May 6, 1998.
- Martin Arostegui, "Fidel Castro's Deadly Secret, Five BioChem Warfare Labs," *Insight*, Vol. 14, No. 26 (July 20, 1998), at <http://www.rense.com/political/castrobiochem.htm> (September 28, 2001).
- Agence France-Presse, May 10, 2001.

thanks to an alliance with cocaine traffickers. Today, their estimated income of between \$50 million and \$100 million per month may easily exceed the resources of Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden.

Since 1998, the United States has backed the Colombian government's fruitless peace dialogue with the rebels. Yielding to human rights concerns, U.S. lawmakers have limited security assistance to combating narcotics traffickers. In response, illegal self-defense groups have flourished to repel the guerrillas in the absence of sufficient public security forces. The United States has now labeled these paramilitary organizations—known as the United Self-Defenses of Colombia (AUC)—as terrorist.

Although they have directed most of their violence against the Colombian people,⁶ the rebels are linked to international drug and arms traffickers that are spread throughout the hemisphere and across the Atlantic.⁷ Moreover, some isolated discoveries suggest the potential for violence on a sophisticated scale. In September 1999, Colombian police broke into a warehouse in a Bogotá suburb and found a partly completed submarine built by the FARC using Russian plans.⁸ In April 2001, the police seized one and one-half pounds of enriched uranium (of the type used in Soviet submarines) that was found in the possession of a self-described amateur scientist who claimed he “stumbled across” it.⁹ Whether this is an isolated incident or evidence of a supply line to make a crude atomic weapon, it is disturbing.

- **Paraguay** tolerates smuggling and as a result has become an involuntary host. It boasts a market in contraband that rivals or exceeds the size of its formal economy.¹⁰ Since the late 1980s, the existence of an informal duty-free zone near Ciudad del Este and Iguazú Falls, a major tourist attraction, has attracted drug and arms traffickers as well as suspected terrorists to this strategic location where the borders of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil come together. According to Paraguayan police, groups linked to the Egyptian Islamic Group (Al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya—affiliated with Osama bin Laden), the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, and the pro-Palestinian HAMAS organizations operate within a large immigrant community that includes Muslim Arabs and mainland Chinese, many of them believed to be undocumented. Police think Hezbollah cells from here played a role in coordinating the bomb attacks on the Israeli embassy in 1992 and an Israeli cultural center in 1994 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Meanwhile, drug traffickers export part of Colombia's cocaine production to Europe and the United States while funneling arms back to the rebels, particularly the FARC. U.S. Special Forces and an expanded U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration office have been training Paraguayan troops in counternarcotics operations since January. However, they face an uphill battle in a country where democratic practice is fragile, corruption is still problematic,¹¹ and elected officials fear the return of General Lino Oviedo—the former army chief (now under arrest in Brazil) who tried to overthrow President Juan Carlos Wasmosy in 1996.

6. Nonetheless, in January 1999, the FARC kidnapped and murdered three U.S. human rights activists working with Colombia's U'wa Indians. In October 2000, suspected FARC cadres hijacked an Ecuadoran helicopter transporting oil workers and took 10 hostages, including five Americans.
7. On August 11, 2001, three explosives experts identified as members of the Irish Republican Army were apprehended as they left the FARC's Switzerland-sized safe haven south of Bogotá. The Cuban government identified one of them—Niall Connolly—as the IRA's Latin America liaison based in Havana.
8. Andrew Selsky, “Makers of Smuggling Ship Lauded for Sheer Audacity,” *The Seattle Times*, October 8, 2000, p. A22.
9. Matthew Campbell, “Bogota Police Foil ‘Atom Bomb’ Sale,” *The Sunday Times* (London), April, 29, 2001, p. 22.
10. Contraband generates \$4 billion to \$14 billion in trade annually, compared to Paraguay's \$9 billion gross domestic product.

OTHER TARGETS OF TERRORISM

Mexico and Argentina have related problems with terrorists. Like Colombia, Mexico has domestic insurgencies that use terrorism to pursue their leftist political goals, but on a much smaller scale. Although not identified as terrorist by the U.S. Department of State, the Popular Liberation Army (EPR) is the most radical, dangerous group and has attacked towns in Oaxaca and Guerrero states since 1996. An offshoot, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of the People (FARP), bombed three branch offices of the Banamex bank in Mexico City on August 8, 2001. There are numerous smaller groups as well.

More troubling is an alleged alliance between the Colombian FARC rebels and Mexico's Arellano-Felix drug cartel based in Tijuana. Mexican authorities have uncovered evidence suggesting that the FARC is supplying the cartel with cocaine in exchange for weapons and money—a charge the FARC denies.¹²

Terrorists have entered Argentina, taking advantage of corrupt officials and weak border controls. Seven years after a bomb attack on the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association in Buenos Aires, the courts have finally mounted a case—but not against alleged main perpetrator Imad Mughniyah, who is believed to be hiding in either Lebanon or Iran. Instead, they have indicted 22 alleged accomplices, including four Argentine police officers who provided the van loaded with explosives and a number of immigration officials who allowed the terrorist agents to come and go with false passports.¹³

Elsewhere, sympathy and support for terrorism are evident but hard to evaluate. Although Latin America has a significant Arab population, few

members of that population are radical fundamentalists. Where visible, sympathy for terrorist activities could be nothing more than a portrait of Saddam Hussein hung in a vendor's stall in Chuy—a dusty market village on the border between Brazil and Uruguay—or could take the form of indifference to fugitives circulating within immigrant communities.¹⁴

On a broader scale, lax anti-money-laundering laws that prevent tracking the movement of large amounts of questionable cash help protect terrorist resources. Eighteen Latin American countries have laws that include legal sanctions on the laundering of narcotics profits, but only half of them have expanded their statutes to apply them to terrorism and international crime. In Panama, for instance, difficult evidentiary standards and excessive bureaucratic procedures have prevented successful prosecution of money launderers, even though money laundering in connection to a range of illegal activities has been penalized.

Potential sources of support for terrorist activity include politicians and political parties as well as underground networks. Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who criticizes the United States with harangues against “savage capitalism,” has established fraternal relations with Colombia's FARC guerrillas and met last year with Bolivian dissident Felipe Quispe of the radical coca growers movement just days before an outbreak of violence that left 11 dead and 120 wounded.¹⁵ On cordial terms with Saddam Hussein and Fidel Castro, Chávez recently called on Venezuela and Cuba to offer “the revolutionary option” to other nations.¹⁶

In Nicaragua, if former Sandinista *comandante* Daniel Ortega wins this November's presidential election, some radicals among his core supporters might urge him to revive long-standing party ties

11. Paraguayan authorities are now investigating the sale of passports and visas, part of which was allegedly conducted by the country's former consul in Miami. See Larry Rohter, “Terrorists Are Sought in Smugglers' Haven,” *The New York Times*, September 27, 2001, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/27/international/americas/27PARA.html> (September 27, 2001).

12. Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., “Mexico's Evolving Security Posture,” *Military Review*, Vol. 81, Issue 3 (May 1, 2001).

13. Anthony Faiola, “Justice Delayed in Argentine Attack,” *The Washington Post*, September 25, 2001, p. A19.

14. El Said Hassan Mokhles, wanted by the Egyptian government in connection with the killing of 58 tourists in Luxor in 1997, was captured in Chuy in 1999. See Rohter, “Terrorists Are Sought in Smugglers' Haven.”

15. Andrés Oppenheimer, “Neighbors Say Chávez Aids Violent Groups,” *The Miami Herald*, December 5, 2000.

16. “Chávez Says Ties Make Venezuela, Cuba ‘One Team,’” Reuters, September 6, 2001.

with Libya, Iraq, and the ETA. In 1993, an arms cache that included 19 surface-to-air missiles exploded in a residential Managua neighborhood. Investigators on the scene found blank passports from 21 countries, including Nicaraguan documents similar to those uncovered at the home of a suspect in the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. A former Salvadoran guerrilla commander subsequently admitted that the weapons belonged to the Farabundo Martí National Liberation movement—a Sandinista ally in the 1980s that was still engaged in arms trafficking despite recently concluded peace negotiations in both Nicaragua and El Salvador.¹⁷

Overall, few of Latin America's struggling democracies and flagging economies are safe from spreading terrorism. Particularly in the northern Andean and Central American states, centralized governments invest greater powers in the presidency and lack checks and balances that could help reduce corruption at the official level. Inadequate judiciaries rely on written, juryless trials and require the judge to serve also in the role of prosecutor, making justice a less certain outcome. In addition, economies still plagued by over-regulation and still dominated to a significant degree by state and family monopolies reduce opportunities for the creation of new business. The downturn in the U.S. economy—the biggest market for Latin American products—has exacerbated disillusionment with the hope that democracy and free trade would produce instant prosperity.

Such conditions weaken a nation's ability to fight terrorism. Meanwhile, criminal groups can take advantage of the situation to expand where law enforcement is lax and bribing local officials easy. Answering to no one but themselves, such groups could join forces to form a powerful, coordinated hemispheric threat.

LACKING FORESIGHT

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the United States successfully assisted many Latin American countries in adopting a democratic form of government and market economies. By 1993, however, that encouragement became largely symbolic when Washington's focus turned to Central Europe after the breakup of the Soviet bloc.

But while the threat of a Soviet-backed insurgency within Latin America had receded, there was an upsurge in drug trafficking in the Andean region. In response, the United States provided counternarcotics training for police and for limited numbers of military personnel in Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia. Meanwhile, the bulk of military exercises and training was geared toward disaster preparedness and peace-keeping exercises—thought to be the missions of the future.

Today, it is clear that the defeat of communism has not removed the threat of insurgency. Nor has the effort to address drug trafficking helped to reduce related dangers. The guerrilla war in Colombia has taken on a terrorist face while foreign groups from Europe and the Middle East move freely throughout the region. Cuba continues in its role as a state sponsor of terrorist activity, and Venezuela's populist President Hugo Chávez and radical elements of former communist movements such as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the FMLN in El Salvador could offer logistical support.

WHAT THE UNITED STATES MUST DO

The Bush Administration has sent agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation to the region to investigate leads related to the September 11 bombings. It also has embraced the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty), which the members of the Organization of American States (OAS) invoked by acclamation to express support for rooting out conspirators connected to what is now considered to be an attack on the whole region.

These are moves in the right direction, but they should be considered only as first steps. In the long run, the United States must:

- **Strengthen U.S. intelligence capabilities in the region.** President Bush should increase intelligence collection not only in the Middle East, but also anywhere else terrorist groups operate—including Latin America. He should seek the cooperation of all U.S. agencies that engage in foreign operations (Departments of Defense, State, Justice, and Transportation) and ensure that information is shared among policymakers in a coordinated manner and

17. See Douglas Farah, "Managua Blasts Expose Arms Nest," *The Dallas Morning News*, July 14, 1993, p. A1.

disseminated to appropriate offices in the field. The United States should expand the network of legal assistance treaties to ensure timely cooperation against related crimes like money laundering and make more effective use of the Financial Crime Enforcement Network (FinCEN) to trace and halt movements of terrorist assets. The President's efforts to freeze terrorist assets is a positive step, but they should be backed up by legislation to expand the Drug Kingpin Act to target the assets of terrorists as well as drug traffickers.

- **Build a hemispheric coalition against international crime.** Beyond the Rio Treaty, the President should help U.S. neighbors in the hemisphere tighten loose migratory controls, install or repair air surveillance radars, improve police investigative capabilities, and professionalize military intelligence. Further, Washington should regear its Latin American military strategy—cast adrift after the end of the Cold War—to focus on developing protocols to enhance coordination between armed forces and civilians at the subnational level and, internationally, between regional allies that require both police and military action. These protocols should address jurisdiction, intelligence-sharing, and responsibilities related to interdiction operations.

Congressional appropriations to support Plan Colombia and President Bush's Andean Regional Initiative should require better coordination among U.S. and host country military, police, and judicial authorities to combat threats that have both military and civilian dimensions. Throughout the Andes, the Administration should no longer allow a hodgepodge of agencies to pick up "missions of opportunity" as they have in the counternarcotics fight. The United States should establish a clear chain of command through which the U.S. and foreign counterparts relate and coordinate on a military-to-military, police-to-police, and judiciary-to-judiciary basis.

Clinton-era words of support for Colombia's unproductive peace dialogue, which has yielded concessions of land and immunity to domestic terrorists with no cessation of violence in return, should be dropped. Instead,

U.S. policy should back the desire of the Colombian people to maintain their democratic order and establish the rule of law. Past U.S. encouragement of Colombian leaders to bargain with known terrorists (and drug traffickers) violates the first element of U.S. counterterrorism policy: "make no concessions to terrorists and strike no deals."

- **Reinforce fragile economies with free trade.** Enhancing trade opportunities with hemispheric allies is a better way to help them bear the cost of a regional fight against terrorism than a huge increase in financial assistance. Free trade encourages partner countries to open their markets, engendering the prosperity needed to support stronger institutions. Conversely, foreign assistance tends to get lost in the bureaucracies of countries with weak institutions. At the very least, Congress and the White House should extend the Andean Trade Preferences Act, which is due to expire in December this year. Failure to do so would reimpose a number of trade barriers against Andean nations whose economies are in a precarious state in part because of their cooperation in U.S.-led counternarcotics efforts.

Next, Congress should give President Bush trade promotion authority (TPA) to support his goal of advancing free markets. At the same time, the Administration should conclude the pending free trade agreement with Chile and accelerate negotiations with MERCOSUR (the Southern Cone Common Market—Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) and other Latin American allies. These economies already were taking a beating as a result of the U.S. downturn before the attack on New York and Washington. As a result of the tragedy, Latin American finances are even more at risk.

- **Support democratic institutions.** Although foreign assistance is not the best means of promoting economic development, it can advance U.S. security objectives. But instead of supporting high-dollar projects such as population-control and environmental programs, U.S. advice and assistance dollars should be rechanneled to provide expertise, training, and exchange opportunities to professionalize

police, immigration and customs personnel, prosecutors, and judiciaries. Ongoing U.S. Administration of Justice programs, such as the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) and Overseas Prosecutorial Development Assistance and Training (OPDAT), that provide such training should be continued and expanded.

Other actions such as U.S. support for the establishment of “neighborhood justice centers”¹⁸ in poor neighborhoods and rural municipalities merit increased funding and adaptation beyond Colombia, where they are already proving useful. On a larger scale, the United States should support homegrown efforts to decentralize power from over-reaching national authorities to states and municipalities. In general, more effective and responsive local government will help such nations weather terrorist attacks as well as crises that might affect national institutions.

- **Deny support to state sponsors of terrorism.** The United States should not assist any state sponsor of terrorism or country that maintains friendly ties with terrorist organizations. Because Cuba is still considered a state sponsor,¹⁹ this is not the time to change America’s relationship with the island. Each year, several bills before Congress seek to lift the 40-year-old embargo on U.S.–Cuba trade. Since the Castro regime has little hard currency to spend on U.S. products, nothing to barter that is not produced by the equivalent of slave labor, and no willing private banking partner to finance such sales, the U.S. taxpayer would have to pick up the tab if trade were opened with Cuba. Considering Castro’s history of antagonism—urging a nuclear attack on the United States in 1962 and sponsoring bloody insurrections in Latin America and Africa—and his potential for engaging in biological and electronic warfare, normal commercial relations

should not be an option until more accountable, democratic leadership comes to power.

In addition, the United States should rally allied nations to apply sanctions of their own to deny bilateral aid and vote against allowing multilateral financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to provide credit to countries that are designated as state sponsors of terrorism.

CONCLUSION

Osama bin Laden is not the only terrorist in the world, and the September 11 attack on the United States may well embolden others. To date, 30 terrorist groups have been identified by the U.S. Department of State, and a third of them operate in neighboring Latin America. Two European groups and three known Middle Eastern terrorist organizations have cells there, and domestic terrorist organizations exist in Colombia and Mexico. The Castro regime in Cuba is considered a state sponsor of terrorism, and President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and militant Sandinistas in Nicaragua are also potential sources for moral and logistical support for terrorist agents.

If the United States is going to undertake a serious global assault on terrorism, it will have to look at its immediate neighborhood. Countries with sagging economies and corrupt or weak governing institutions are not only potential targets of terrorism, but also likely to harbor groups intent on attacking other countries. The policy needed to address this threat successfully is twofold: First, strengthen U.S. intelligence collection in the region. Second, define and implement a comprehensive, focused policy toward Latin America to encourage cooperation on regional security, help reform and revitalize weak economies, and support democratic institutions—particularly the development of an effective judiciary and the rule of law. This second set of points should have been implemented eight years ago, regardless of any outstanding menace.

18. For more on neighborhood justice centers, or *casas de justicia*, see Stephen Johnson, “A New U.S. Policy for Latin America: Reopening the Window of Opportunity,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1409, February 15, 2001, p. 17.

19. Along with Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, North Korea, and Sudan. See U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2000*.

If the United States does not strengthen its efforts to help address terrorism in Latin America, it will send a signal to our democratic neighbors that they stand alone in their fight for survival. Worse, it will give terrorists and outlaw mafias the green light to strike strategic alliances. Already, lucrative drug trafficking fuels terrorism in Colombia, and an alliance appears to have been established between Colombian guerrillas and Mexican traffickers operating on the U.S. border. Such collusion could easily occur elsewhere in the hemisphere and across the Atlantic.

The lesson is clear: In the aftermath of the horrendous acts in New York and Washington, the White House and Congress should not allow an exclusive focus on the Middle East to divert its attention from threats closer to home and permit terrorism to run roughshod over our Western Hemispheric neighbors.

—*Stephen Johnson is Policy Analyst for Latin America in the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.*