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The Road to Hemispheric Security

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Avoiding danger is a survival skill that enables people to move forward in their lives. The need for security is what spurs people to change their habits and environment whenever it becomes necessary. It is what pushes people to seek stable salaries, to buy houses, and to raise families.

Societies also seek security so that their people can live in peace, do business, and realize their individual dreams. Yet they cannot do this unless they are able to adapt to changes. There is an old saying that a 1,000-mile detour begins when your car has a leaky radiator and a flat tire. A reluctance to respond to changing conditions was partly responsible for what happened to the United States on September 11, 2001.

Today, we are more conscious of threats in the world around us. However, there is a long road before us in preparing to confront them. The Chief of the United Nations' Counterterrorism Commission, Ambassador Inocencio Arias of Spain, said—after the attacks on the commuter rail lines in Madrid this year—that you could repel terrorist acts 49 times, but the 50th time, the terrorists would succeed.¹ Of course, terrorism is one kind of threat: There are others of different types and intensities.

In a Special Conference on Security that took place last year in Mexico, representatives from the Organization of American States (OAS) identified eight categories of threats, some direct, others indirect. Besides terrorism, they include conflicts between states, weapons build-ups, transnational crime, arms trafficking, natural disasters, attacks on

Talking Points

- No country—not even the United States—has been sufficiently equipped to confront emerging threats, such as illicit drug traffic, terrorism, or weapons of mass destruction that have fallen into the wrong hands.
- Fortunately, countries of this hemisphere have made slow and steady progress against terrorism, drug trafficking, transnational crime, and even gangs.
- While taking advantage of the age of globalization, we need to increase efforts to protect ourselves from the troubles that come with it.

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public health, and poverty. Natural disasters occur fairly constantly, but even as wars between states are disappearing somewhat, terrorism and crime are becoming more prevalent.

No country—not even the United States—has been sufficiently equipped to confront emerging threats, such as illicit drug traffic, terrorism, or weapons of mass destruction that have fallen into the wrong hands. The United States has had to reorganize its security policies because its strategy of blocking external aggression with nuclear arms during the Cold War mainly offered a defense against state-sponsored threats—without much internal protection.

Laws that were enacted after the U.S. Civil War, approximately 130 years ago, prohibit collaboration between the Army and local police forces. At the same time, the specialized functions of national agencies responsible for law enforcement did not facilitate information sharing with local police forces under the control of mayors and city councils.

Since 9/11, the U.S. government has established the Department of Homeland Security to help coordinate intelligence exchanges and centralize control over such law enforcement agencies as the U.S. Border Patrol, Coast Guard, and the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Yet, even though our government is trying to reorganize and strengthen internal security mechanisms, we as citizens see the need to balance them with our tradition of civil liberties as guaranteed by the Constitution.

Internal reforms are one thing, but we North Americans also realize that we live in a neighborhood. We know that the road to a more secure America is one that is reached by helping our neighbors to be more secure as well. Unfortunately,

Latin America is more vulnerable to both direct and indirect threats.

The Regional Puzzle

Latin America's population continues to grow rapidly. In fact, the number of its inhabitants has tripled in the last 40 years. Young people looking for work are abandoning rural areas for cities—where there are still not enough jobs. Family and state monopolies still pervade many countries and restrict the creation of new businesses and, as a consequence, the creation of new jobs.

With less education and professional training than citizens of industrialized nations, nearly half of the region's inhabitants live on less than \$2 per day. In Mexico, one million persons join the work force every year—to find approximately 200,000 new jobs waiting for them.²

Street gangs have appeared and expanded among populations of youths who abandoned their countries and families during the conflicts of the 1980s, and also among children who have grown up in broken (or informal) homes. These individuals have found identity, culture, and socialization in lives of crime. Now the problem affects all of North America—particularly the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Weak justice systems in some of these countries are barely able to cope with the situation.

Today, press reports tell us that there are 14,000 gang members in Guatemala; 10,000 in El Salvador; 36,000 in Honduras; and—according to figures from 1997—800,000 (from 30,000 different gangs) in the United States.³ The bigger gangs communicate with each other across borders and, if they were better organized, would constitute a formidable stateless army.

1. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "UN, OSCE Agree to Expand Joint Counter-Terrorism Activities," OSCE News, March 12, 2004, at www.osce.org/news/show_news.php?id=3929 (December 1, 2004).
2. Operadora de Fondos Lloyd, S.A., "Mexican Economic Report," March 2001, at www.mexconnect.com/MEX/lloyds/llydeco0301.html#cheap_jobs_ (December 2, 2003); and EFE News Service, "Mexico Has Created Over 100,000 Jobs, Fox Says," April 6, 2003.
3. National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Foreword, "Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention," at www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/summary_2000_8/foreword.html (December 1, 2004).

Lucrative drug trafficking persists in South America's Andean ridge, despite efforts to reduce demand and eradicate primary drug crops. Local terrorist groups like the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), ELN (National Liberation Army), and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia support themselves by moving drugs in order to control territory as well as production areas. FARC deserters have indicated that their group has largely abandoned its political ideals: Its reason for existing has gradually changed from promoting revolution to enriching individual leaders through narcotics sales.

These groups are naturally opposed to advances in establishing state authority and the rule of law—especially in the countryside where they operate. As a result, they have deployed some of their units across borders into Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela. In Central America, they exchange drugs for arms left over from 1980s conflicts. In the background, human trafficking has increased substantially between Mexico and the United States, China and Ecuador, and from Brazil through Venezuela to Europe.

Finally, geopolitics is beginning to affect the interests of each country in the hemisphere. For many decades, Cuba and the Soviet Union were the only hostile protagonists. However, that ended with the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Even so, a new menace supported by petroleum wealth is emerging in Venezuela—a populist, nationalist president who dreams of reviving Fidel Castro's plans of propagating Cuba-style governments throughout the region.

Venezuela's New "Citizens"

Venezuela's Hugo Chávez has become the new leader of the Latin American left. He is the driving force behind the Foro de São Paulo—a group of leftist parties and insurgent organizations from all over the world. Last year, he also introduced the

Bolivarian Congress, a similar organization, but with members exclusively from South America. Their objectives include reducing North American influence in the hemisphere and halting the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas.

Venezuela also may be the source of another problem—identity laundering. Evidence can be found in recent campaigns offering citizenship to some 500,000 foreigners ("Misión Identidad") ostensibly to pack voter lists with persons favorable to President Chávez in light of the August 15 referendum on his rule. Besides Colombians and Brazilians, there have been numerous Arab and Chinese names among those reported as new citizens in Venezuela's *Gaceta Oficial*.⁴

Undocumented migrants from the Middle East and China—among others—had been living in the Tri-Border region between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay; that is, until the police from these countries began to pursue smugglers and organizations with suspected links to Middle Eastern terror groups like Hezbollah and Gamaa al-Islamiyya. Some of these people could have been among those who emigrated to Venezuela.

Two years ago, when General Marcos Ferreira resigned his position as chief of Venezuela's Border Patrol, he told the press that his government had laundered the identities of hundreds of Colombians and Middle-Easterners described as "Syrians."⁵

Progress Through Cooperation

By and large, countries of this hemisphere have made slow and steady progress against terrorism, drug trafficking, transnational crime, and even gangs. After the terrorist attack of 9/11, OAS member states invoked the Rio Treaty of Mutual Assistance (1947) and went on to establish the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism of 2002. Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay formed the Counterterrorism Dialogue 3+1, which promoted intelligence exchanges, as well as coordination among

4. *Gaceta Oficial de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela*, No. 5.699 Extraordinario, Caracas, March 29, 2004, at http://www.tsj.gov.ve/gaceta_ext/Marzo/290304/290304-5699-01.html (December 1, 2004) is an example.

5. See Martin Arostegui, "The World: Venezuela, Chavez Plans for Terrorist Regime," *Insight on the News*, January 7, 2003, at <http://www.insightmag.com/news/2003/01/07/World/The-World.Venezuelachavez.Plans.For.Terrorist.Regime-342429.shtml> (December 1, 2004).

border police forces to control crime and smuggling in the Tri-Border region.

The Financial Working Groups of the Caribbean and of South America are multinational efforts to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. In Central America, countries like El Salvador and Honduras have promoted *mano dura* (firm hand) laws to control growing gang activity.

However, more needs to be done. Despite the “Smart Borders” initiatives involving Canada, the United States, and Mexico, airports, seaports, and entry points are generally vulnerable in Latin America and the Caribbean. We need to help each other create similar smart borders between other countries, strengthen inspection of cargo containers, help protect each nation’s principal infrastructure, improve responses to natural disasters, and strengthen cooperation in law enforcement at the international level.

None of this is cheap. The United States has invested millions of dollars in the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. Even today, we have only enough inspectors to check 1 percent to 2 percent of all of the 20,000 cargo containers that arrive in our ports today. Through pre-inspection procedures in countries of origin and other methods, we are trying to improve that rate substantially.

Each year, the United States receives 600 million travelers, students, and legal workers. In 50 ports of entry we use biometric technology such as digital fingerprinting and facial recognition to verify identities in seconds. Yet some 1.2 million people enter the United States annually without passing through these established entryways.

Costa Rica’s Critical Role

Thanks to its venerable democratic institutions and concern for the welfare of its citizens, Costa Rica has been an oasis of tranquility in the hemisphere. However, drug trafficking routes from

South America to North America pass right through this beautiful country. The prosperity that Costa Rica enjoys in comparison to the rest of Central America makes it a prime target for organized crime. Its tranquility also makes it a desirable destination for migrants seeking sanctuary to escape instability and unemployment in their own countries.

Costa Rica has a population of about 4 million people and a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$15 billion. Even a country the size of Peru, with a \$61 billion GDP, does not have the resources necessary to adequately protect its population. Obviously, they need to choose affordable options and learn to work together to multiply our relative strengths. Policymakers in the United States are also aware that they cannot adequately protect their own citizens without contributing to the security of the hemisphere in a cooperative way.

Conclusion

Besides death and taxes, change is inevitable. From that perspective, we should realize that the world we knew during the Cold War is now much different. Bipolar threats have retreated, to be replaced by more fragmented cancers. As one of my colleagues Cresencio Arcos, the Director of International Affairs for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, likes to say, “the viper bites those who don’t wear boots.” While taking advantage of the age of globalization, we need to invest some effort in protecting ourselves from the troubles that come with it.

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