

**DEMOCRATIC DEFICITS AND
HEMISPHERIC SECURITY**

by

Joseph S. Tulchin

Senior Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center

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INTRODUCTION

As is well known today, following 9/11 senior officials in the United States Government, principally Vice-President Richard Cheney, urged the president to use the armed forces of the U. S. to seize people suspected of plotting acts of terrorism within the United States. At the request of Mr. Cheney, lawyers in the Department of Justice were asked to formulate legal briefs to justify such use of the military for domestic criminal cases. Nothing came of the request. I mention this episode to indicate that confusion and disagreement exists or has existed over the appropriate role of the armed forces in countries such as the United States where the mission and role of the armed forces is a matter of long-standing tradition, of public policy making and a matter of public record.

Security today must be constructed within a political framework. In order for regional security or hemispheric security to function properly, security policy at the national level ought to be the product of a political process that involves all the institutions of democratic government as well as the multiple expressions of public opinion. Security at the sub-regional level, in turn, becomes the product of a political process in which nations identify shared interests with other nations, generally in geographic proximity to one another. Those shared interests can be historical, ideological, or strategic. The effort to collaborate can be purely defensive or an effort to project core values and basic interests. At the hemispheric level, security generally takes the form of alliances or treaties that recognize long term shared goals and, on occasion, a

shared vision of potential threats to the security of the region or of some member or members of the regional community. In other words, multi-national security can exist only where the governments of states are reliable partners (that is, accountable) and where their national defense policies are transparent.

Today, in Latin America, there is considerable fragmentation and serious disagreements among the nations in the region as to what constitutes a security threat and some disagreement or reluctance to move ahead to resolve differences to forge stronger collective ties in pursuit of common goals. Curiously, at a time of considerable dissonance in the discussion of strategic agendas, there is growing consensus within the existing political institutions of the region. This opens the possibility for the first time in the history of the Americas that collaboration within political institutions may create the grounds for further cooperation in matters of security, which historically, is the sequence followed in other regions of the world. This possibility exists despite the real disagreements that exist, especially in the Andean region.

In this note, I will make the case that the growing consensus on political, economic and social issues among the nations of the region has not had the result thus far of increasing the sense of community in the hemisphere as much for factors internal to many of the countries of the region – what I choose to call democratic deficits – as for reasons of objective differences in security policy among the nations that would or might form the community. In this argument, the three principal security challenges facing the nations of Latin America and their armed forces are the necessary prologue to any serious

effort to establish the basis for regional security collaboration. Until these preliminary challenges are met, hemispheric security cooperation will continue to be superficial or ephemeral, or to some degree imposed on the group by the will of the most powerful member.

The first challenge – or the first democratic deficit to be met - is to conduct a national discussion of defense and security policy in which all the constituents of democratic governance participate. Only a few countries in the region have embarked on this process. One has finished (Chile); another is virtually finished (Brazil); and a few others have begun the progress and then interrupted it (Argentina, Mexico). The second challenge is to define the mission of the armed forces in a democratic society. The greatest obstacle here is to clarify the distinctions between internal disturbances to the social order and international threats to national and regional security. The third challenge is to come to terms with the international roles each nation plays in the international community. In doing so, the nations of the region must learn how international institutions fit into the discussion of national defense and security policy and how they may be used in accomplishing the mission of the armed forces in each country.

Throughout this presentation, I shall focus on ways in which individual nations in the region can cooperate with other nations in order to maximize the security of each and of all nations in the region. I shall summarize briefly the history of community security efforts and their successes and failures. And, in conclusion, I shall propose an approach that might enhance cooperation in the region on matters of defense and security.

I, Formulating a National Security Doctrine

Historically, the nations of Latin America have not engaged in the process of formulating a national security doctrine. The major reasons for this are that, until relatively recently, few of the countries were governed by a democracy in which the institutions of government and the public were regular participants in the policy process. During most of the history of most the countries in the region, the armed forces were fairly autonomous to the point where, in more than a few cases, the armed forces actually arrogated to themselves the right to govern. In such circumstances, the armed forces limited themselves to fairly simple threat scenarios, almost always focused on neighboring countries or countries linked to neighbors who might threaten their territorial integrity.

Because the threat scenarios were so severely limited both in geographical and in temporal terms, there were very few moments in which Latin American nations took an active role in the international community outside the hemisphere. Even in those cases where nations would play an active role in the United Nations or the Organization of American States, those roles were almost exclusively diplomatic or political and rarely, if ever, took strategic considerations into account. Perhaps the most significant example of collective security action, TIAR, was, in reality, a response, sometimes reluctant and never active, to a strategic demand of the United States. During the Cold War, it was explicit security doctrine in the U.S. that the armed forces of Latin America would be

responsible for internal security and would be limited to tasks such as patrolling coastal waters in the interests of hemispheric security.

After the Cold War, at the first defense ministerial in Williamsburg (Virginia), in 1995, the United States and Canada urged the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean to begin the process of national discussion. As a way to legitimize its selection as host for the second ministerial, the Minister of Defense of Argentina committed his country to producing a White Paper which would serve as the first step in formulating a national security policy. And, in fact, the ministry submitted such a document to the congress in 1997. However, this beginning did not spread out into the larger society nor was it repeated with the participation of other democratic institutions, such as the congress. In an effort to contribute to the strengthening of this process, the United States founded the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, which has worked closely with the legislatures and the civil societies of many countries in the sub-region. Several private foundations in the United States, especially Ford and McArthur, supported efforts in the region to create civilian expertise so that the legislatures and NGOs could play effective roles in the debate on national security policy.

The government of Chile was the first in the hemisphere to go through the long and complicated process of producing a White Paper and continues to do so on a regular basis, producing a public document of considerable length available to all members of society who might be interested, as well as to students of the subject in other countries. The document is available on the internet. The government of Brazil has completed the

process and has published the first version of what will be the national White Paper. In other countries the process is advancing. In some, unhappily, the process has not even begun. One of the reasons for this delay is that in too many countries, the tradition of civilian control of the armed forces is still recent and public discussion of the role of the armed forces, not to mention the role of the nation itself in international affairs, is not widespread. That is the case even in Mexico where democratic governance is more entrenched than in many other nations.

The way to meet this challenge is clear and fairly simple. It requires leadership. The armed forces can play a constructive leadership role in this process through the ministry of defense. It also can facilitate the process by opening a dialogue with sectors of civil society that have an interest in the subject. The media and the centers of intellectual activity are the most obvious. There are NGOs in the U.S. and in Europe that would be happy to cooperate. And, the armed forces of the U.S. also could play a collegial role in this process.

II. Defining the Mission of the Armed Forces

Without a clear national debate over the mission of the armed forces, it is difficult to define national security and virtually impossible to formulate a strategic posture for the nation in the international community. That is the principal reason why in so many countries, where crime and violence are a serious problem, the debate over whether to use the armed forces in combating crime has not been resolved. Until there is a clear statement of the mission of the armed forces, it will be difficult to distinguish clearly between the role of the armed forces and the roles of the police and judiciary. It is clear that a vital component of this distinction is a national effort to strengthen the police force and the judiciary, so that creating citizen security can be accomplished within the framework of democratic institutions and the rule of law.

The absence of a clear mission statement for the armed forces has two serious consequences for national security. First, it undermines the institutions of democratic governance which are crucial in providing citizen security and public safety. Second, it makes it more difficult for the nations of the region to collaborate with other nations, including those outside the region, in dealing with organized international crime. The asymmetry in missions and in security agendas between countries is a major obstacle to international cooperation.

A clear example of how this asymmetry functions is the effort to deal with international terrorism. While there is no reason to expect nations in Latin America to have the same concern for terrorism as does the United States or as do the nations of Western Europe, there is great value in forging a collaborative approach to terrorism, just as there would be great value in creating a collaborative approach to international crime. Both require better coordination between foreign policy and national security policy.

Here, the principal obstacle is history. The nations of Latin America are accustomed to following the lead of the U.S. in setting a security agenda. However, as the U.S. has learned, dealing with terrorism or organized international crime, such as the traffic in illegal drugs is much less efficient when approached in a bilateral manner than it is when there is some form of sub-regional collaboration. When the security agenda of the region is fragmented, as it is today, the U.S. operates bilaterally with some measure of success while it continues to seek modes of collaboration or cooperation that will involve several nations. To date, the most significant success in this struggle has come in the Caribbean, in the form of ship rider agreements, where a growing consensus among the states of the Caribbean Basin has led to agreement with the U.S. for collective action against crime and other threats to the security of all of the states in the area.

Here, again, the way to meet the challenge is to begin modestly, to focus on subjects or issues where the level of mutual confidence is high and where the level of shared threat perception is high. Efforts can begin between two nations or between small groups of nations. Existing institutions might serve as the framework for collaboration,

such as MERCOSUR or UNASUR. The beginnings have been modest, the pace is slow; but the goal is clear.

III. National and Regional Roles in the International Community

The most significant deficit in national security policy in the sub-region is the powerful reluctance on the part of many countries to consider and discuss publicly realistic roles in the international community. Again, several countries have made dramatic advances in this area, notably Chile and Brazil. Others have made major contributions during one political administration, only to pull back completely in subsequent administrations. Some have not advanced very far at all in a serious, public discussion of what their country might do to participate in an effective manner in a regional, hemispheric, or global community of nations. It is not that countries do not participate – all are members of the UN, all are represented at the World Bank and the IDB, all are members of the OAS – it is that in many countries the concept of linking national security to roles played at the regional or hemispheric or global levels has not been made part of the political discussion.

Again, there are many reasons for this, most historical and most having to do with the dominance of the United States, at least in the past century. The fact remains that the world has changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War and each nation in the hemisphere has the space and the capacity to participate in the international community. No country is without power. The solution is to understand how soft power is tied to hard power and how roles in the international community are related to national security policy.

IV. Conclusion

Some might argue that Latin America is too divided even to discuss cooperation in security issues. I would disagree. If we were to take a long view of the history of the region, and remind ourselves of the nature of national security perceptions and threat scenarios up to the end of the Cold War, it is clear that the region is more peaceful today than at any time in its history. Further, if we add the fact that for the first time nearly all of the countries are governed by elected democratic regimes, we see that we have made a great deal of progress in the past twenty years, even when we take existing disagreements into account. But, there is more to be done.

As I have indicated, the focus of the most of the effort in the future must be at the national level, to create a public forum for national security policy and for a discussion of the mission of the armed forces. In a democracy, there is no reason why the armed forces themselves cannot take the initiative and reach out to the congress or to NGOs to engage in discussion of common interests.

In meeting these challenges I see three issues that must be resolved. First, the distinction between public or citizen security and the international dimensions of organized crime. Second, where territorial or jurisdictional disputes still exist between states, as they do, other nations in the region should seek ways to reduce the tensions and to bring the disputes to peaceful resolution.

Finally, there is the issue of asymmetry of security agendas. These can only be resolved through mutual accommodation. To achieve common ground, it is necessary for all of the countries in the region to understand how security exists on different levels and how the levels of security are linked. In this way, the asymmetries can be addressed and accommodated.