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## **NORTHCOM Focus: Perspectives on "Homeland Security" and "Homeland Defense"**

By Luis Bitencourt  
CHDS Interim Dean of Academics

From April 6 to May 1, 2009, CHDS gathered 33 scholars and practitioners from seven Latin American countries - Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Colombia, Mexico, Panama, Peru - and the United States in the course Perspectives on Homeland Security and Homeland Defense.



Interim Dean Luis Bitencourt makes a point in a homeland security and defense discussion whose other participants included CHDS professors Carlos Ospina-Ovalle, Michael Gold-Biss and Craig Deare. (From left to right)

The course used online and in-residence methodologies to allow participants, ranging from civilians from the executive, legislative and judicial branches to educators, academic researchers, and journalists, to analyze and compare different approaches to face terrorism and natural disasters.

During the first two weeks on-line, the participants engaged in animated discussions that offered a preliminary looks at different interpretations that countries develop to face a range of threats from terrorism or natural disasters.

The third week, which took place at CHDS in Washington, D.C., focused mostly on the U.S. Homeland Security perspective. The participants were able to have a better understanding of how the terrorist attacks against on U.S. soil had a tremendous impact on the country's approach towards homeland security.



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During this week, participants were exposed to an exercise aimed at giving them a perception of the pressure that threats looming from terrorism or natural disasters pose on decision-makers. In the words of one participant: "Only now could I understand the dimension of these attacks and of America's measures to overcome its perceived vulnerability to terrorism."

The final week was spent in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and was designed to allow the participants to understand the Homeland Defense perspective. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) Commander General Victor E. "Gene" Renuart welcomed the group and underscored the importance of the initiative for the entire region. "By knowing each other and understanding different perspectives on these threats and ways to face them, we are creating better opportunities of cooperation for when we need to cooperate," Renuart told the participants, emphasizing the importance of trust and personal contacts. "Moreover, the course offers a timely window for strengthening relationships; as we often repeat here, 'When a crisis happens is too late to exchange business cards.'"

Participants reported that they were very impressed by the instruments and control processes in place to increase the U.S. protection from natural and man-made disasters. A visit to the Cheyenne Mountain complex added an ingredient of quasi-science fiction and also offered a huge contrast between the moments of the Cold War and the current threats to the country.

During the Breakout Group discussions, participants underscored the globalized and highly interconnected nature of the current relationships in the region. For example, not only did the effects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the U.S. reverberate profoundly throughout the entire region, but also the security and defense requirements adopted by the U.S. echoed throughout the region in the form of pressure upon other countries to incorporate security measures—which entail the use of scarce resources—whose immediate utility was not necessarily obvious to those countries.

Another important reflection generated by the exposure to the complex U.S. Homeland Security and Homeland Defense structures was the issue of interagency coordination. It is clear that in the face of these types of threats, how the decision-making process—often taking place under stressful circumstances—is both essential and with consequences on the way decisions "travel" and have impact throughout the defense and security communities. Several animated discussions took place in the breakout groups (BOGs), when course participants, motivated by the fresh and detailed exposure to the circumstances faced by the United States analyzed the difficulties within the domestic structures of their respective countries.

In keeping with the purpose of the course, representatives from each country presented their own perspective on their nations' equivalents to Homeland Security and Homeland Defense. They presented the current state of the art of the countries' security and defense establishments, the historical circumstances influencing their respective approaches, the threats that concern each country, as well as respective solutions and limitations to face such threats.



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In this way the course allowed for the establishment of parallels among the different country experiences in dealing with problems that are often similar in nature. Also, the presentations of perspectives made clear the transnational nature of the current man-made or natural disasters that threaten the peace in these countries. For example, the representative of the U.S. showed how several countries were used in the planning and execution of the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States. Along the same lines,

a representative from Chile mentioned the compelling case of the eruption of the volcano Chaiten whose ashes spread not only on regions of Chile, but also on large portions of Argentina as well.

Finally, the course methodology accomplished an unexpected goal: thanks to the diversity of country representatives—representing a variety of distinct professional backgrounds—this exercise helped participants to look at their own realities through a more consistent and integrated framework.

A so-called "Table Top Exercise," Seismic Fury conducted by the Northern Command, challenged the course participants to use their new knowledge and perspectives to make decisions in simulated circumstances. Participants demonstrated high levels of motivation as well as expertise in responding to the different situations offered by the exercise and tested their own capacity to elaborate responses and make decisions during a crisis.

Participants said that they were truly grateful for the opportunity to attend the course and that they left with a better vision of capacities existing to face problems that are often common in both their nature and their impact. As many of them said, by knowing different approaches related to this topic, they could better understand other countries' perspectives. Moreover, they qualified the role of interagency cooperation within the respective domestic realms and cooperation within the international realm. Finally, they could also refine the perception on their own countries with regard to "Homeland Defense" and "Homeland Security."

At the graduation ceremony, conducted at the Northern Command Headquarters, the NORTHCOM and the

North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) Chief of Staff Major General John H. Bordelon lauded the course as an important initiative to help advance the goals of NORTHCOM related to Homeland Defense, particularly considering the need of regional cooperation to address the challenges posed by terrorism or natural disasters.