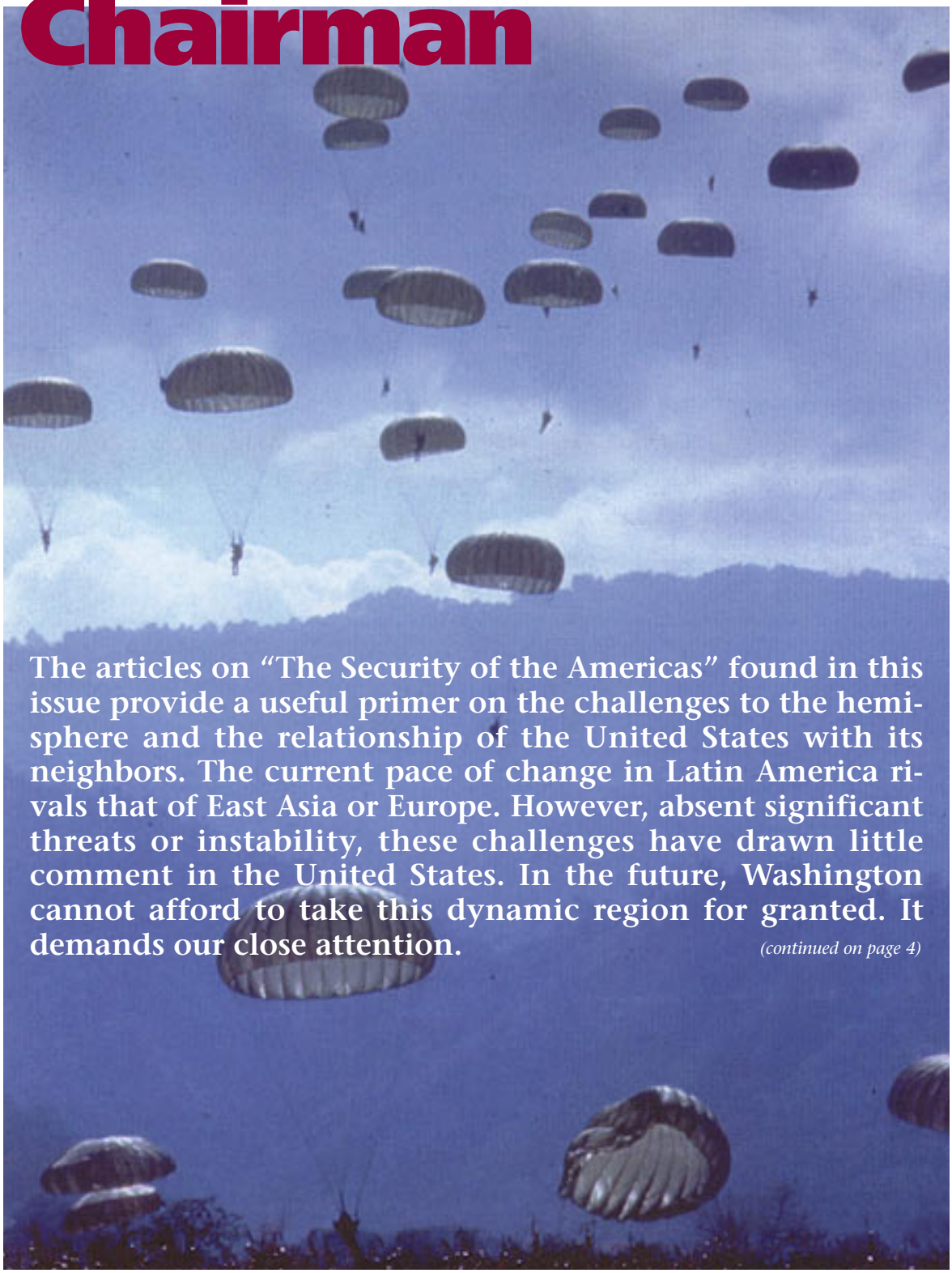
JFQ

A Word from the Chairman



The articles on "The Security of the Americas" found in this issue provide a useful primer on the challenges to the hemisphere and the relationship of the United States with its neighbors. The current pace of change in Latin America rivals that of East Asia or Europe. However, absent significant threats or instability, these challenges have drawn little comment in the United States. In the future, Washington cannot afford to take this dynamic region for granted. It demands our close attention.

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U.S.-Honduran airborne drop.

U.S. Air Force

Joint Force Quarterly

GEN John M. Shalikashvili, USA
Publisher

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A PROFESSIONAL MILITARY JOURNAL

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Latin America is a vast region with remarkable potential, a vibrant blend of New and Old World traditions, of modern societies and ancient cultures. It is a geographic term for an amalgam of 450 million people living in 33 diverse states, each with a unique history and sense of national purpose. To the United States, the countries of Latin America and insular nations of the Caribbean are partners in three distinct though interactive ways: in the development of democracy, in commerce, and in the creation of hemispheric security.

This region has undergone extensive political development. A decade ago Latin America was politically troubled, with half of its states ruled by authoritarian regimes which repressed their people and mismanaged their economies. Central America in particular was a hotbed of instability, much of which emanated from the influence of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and Manuel Noriega in Panama. Most of that instability has vanished from the scene. For the first time in history, every nation in Latin America is a democracy except Cuba. Each of these nations is determined to foster representative institutions, respect human rights, and incorporate itself into a wider world. Latin America today is striving to meet the ultimate goal enunciated by Simon Bolivar: "to be free under the auspices of liberal laws, emanating from the most sacred spring, which is the will of the people."

Latin America spends the least on defense and has the fewest military personnel per capita

While much economic reform is still needed, Latin America has jumped into the mainstream of international economic life. Many economies in the region are surging and several rank among the fastest growing in the world. This has enabled U.S. exports to Latin America to increase at an average annual rate of 21 percent in recent years, twice the rate of those to the European Union. By the end of the century, U.S. trade with Latin America will likely exceed trade with Europe.

Moreover, Latin America has achieved striking growth while avoiding ruinous arms races. Of all regions in the world, it spends the least on defense and has the fewest military personnel per capita. Gone also is the notion that resources must be redivided to attain prosperity in the

hemisphere. Latin American nations are working together to increase their prosperity, which will swell their economies to $2 trillion by the turn of the century.

U.S. cooperation in the search for hemispheric security has made admirable progress. As we have combined efforts to improve performance of our respective armed forces, we also have expanded our efforts to suppress narcotics traffic and conducted multilateral operations throughout the hemisphere. As old adversaries find new democratic partners, combined training is becoming commonplace. Ten Latin American nations are participating today in 13 peacekeeping operations around the world, including one on the border between Ecuador and Peru.

U.S. Coast Guard

Grenadian vessel on patrol.

Most notable among the recent peace operations has been Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti. There, under the banner of the United Nations, 24 states, including 12 from Latin America and the Caribbean, joined in a well planned operation that stabilized this beleaguered nation. The operation represents a high water mark in hemispheric security cooperation. As Secretary of Defense William Perry noted, "Peacekeeping in the Americas, in support of conflict resolution and democracy, is more than a principle—it is a reality."

In 1995, military cooperation in the hemisphere reached an all-time high when the defense ministers of 33 nations met to discuss further cooperation. They agreed to support openness and transparency to lower threat perceptions, subordinate militaries to democratically elected regimes, and resolve outstanding disputes through negotiations. Because of this conference, cooperation between our defense forces in support of legally constituted roles is at an unprecedented level.

While much has been accomplished, much remains to be done for hemispheric security. In particular, the United States, working with its neighbors, seeks to:

- increase cooperation and broaden regional success against drug traffic, a major threat to U.S. security and to the economic and social order in many Latin American countries
- improve controls over immigration within the region
- deepen military-to-military contacts and further multinational training opportunities
- restructure the U.S. command and control organization to accommodate conditions in the region, including the relocation of U.S. Southern Command headquarters to Miami in 1997.

While Latin America remains an active part of the world community, U.S. military activity there is inexpensive. Given the low level of the threat from extra-regional powers and the spread of democratic institutions, a high level of security has been achieved within the hemisphere with the United States contributing only a fraction of a percent of its defense budget and less than 5 percent of its worldwide security assistance outlays. Given these facts, as well as U.S. interests and commitments, a strategist might conclude that Latin America, though an important region, is an economy of force area. That is true, and with continued emphasis on democracy, the free market system, and collective security, it will remain so.

JOHN M. SHALIKASHVILI
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