The Security of the Americas

By HANS BINNENDIJK *and* JOHN A. COPE

Caracas. DOD (R.D. Ward)

While ethnic strife and regional conflict continue to erupt around the world, the geopolitical situation has markedly become more peaceful in the Americas. This transformation is obvious in the discourse used to describe the area. Gone are terms that once distorted North American images of Latin America and the Caribbean—communist subversion, military dictatorships, death squads, nuclear proliferation, hyperinflation, and U.S. imperialism. These terms have been replaced over the last decade by constructive images replete with a fresh vocabulary—democratic reform, market economy, peace operations, confidence building, transnationalism, and cooperative security. Such expressions are evidence of a revolution that has quietly awakened the hemisphere, offering greater hope for solidarity and security than at any time in history. New economic, political, and cultural rhythms that are gaining strength in many nations are not random or unrelated developments, nor are they cyclical in nature. These are unique responses to profound local experiences and a transformed international environment.

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This largely unfamiliar and undervalued area to the south of the United States encompasses 33 Latin American and insular Caribbean states, ranging from Brazil, the fifth largest country in the world (with a land mass greater than that of the continental United States), to Barbados, one of the smallest. There are some 451 million people in the region, a third of them in Brazil and a quarter in Mexico. The population is expected to exceed 750 million by 2010, as São Paulo and Mexico City become two of the largest cities in the world.

The emerging market democracies of Latin America have replaced the traditional means of protectionism and statism with private initiative, foreign investment, and export-oriented growth. Additionally, the region has

experienced the ascendancy of subregional cooperative regimes such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Southern Cone Common Market as well as an end to internationalized conflict in Central America. Overlaying the slow processes of economic reform and realignment is a shift from authoritarian government to constitutional democracy.

In 1979, the democratic community included only Costa Rica, Colombia, Venezuela, and the Caribbean members of the British Commonwealth, and stability in the region was deteriorating. Today, however, 32 of 33 Latin American and Caribbean states have representative governments. Only Cuba retains an authoritarian system. This "quiet revolution" has stimulated substantial Asian and European trade with and investment in American markets. Of greater potential consequence, this transformation has promoted an unprecedented awareness of hemispheric community based on common values, interests, and concern about the future. Domestic developments have led nations in Latin America and the Caribbean to reconsider their attitudes toward Washington, resulting in more harmonious relations despite longstanding asymmetries in North-South power and episodic U.S. engagement. The possible outcome of the shift toward political and economic homogeneity, while still indeterminate, suggests the emergence of Brazil as a power and, as well, the concept of South America as a distinct region with its own strategic perspectives.

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The Stakes

The overreaching U.S. security objectives in Latin America and the Caribbean are to ensure the area remains stable, democratic, and friendly to commerce and trade, and to maintain a regional military presence. Since the enunciation of the Monroe Doctrine, this goal has entailed diplomacy and, occasionally, the use of force to prevent rivals from undermining the influence of the United States and its ability to keep regional events from getting out of control. Except for the Cuban missile crisis, no country in the hemisphere has posed a direct threat to the United States.

During the Cold War, Washington focused on the Caribbean Basin and was less attentive to South America. U.S. strategic priorities stressed protecting access to and movement within the region (including unrestricted use of the Panama Canal), maintaining presence through its military bases in and around the Caribbean, and assuring access to fuel and nonfuel minerals. Neighbors regarded the U.S. approach as fixed exclusively on its own goals, with little regard for the interests or priorities of other states. Their leaders sensed a tendency to look southward only through North American eyes and rely on U.S. solutions to local problems. Actions often were taken unilaterally and without consultation, resulting in diplomatic confrontations and mutual distrust.

During the 1980s Washington found that security was not the only regional policy issue. There were core democratic values to be upheld in the Americas. The United States perceived that it had an obligation to back moderate forces which advocated a commitment to human rights, social justice, and representative government, and championed democratization. Support for this political transition took many forms, ranging from public manifestations and technical assistance for newly elected governments to relatively significant amounts of military aid for the Salvadoran state during its civil war and U.S. military action to restore democracy in Grenada and Panama, and more recently in Haiti.

North-South relations are more positive and cooperative in the current transformed context. In December 1994, for example, leaders of the hemisphere's 34 democracies gathered in Miami for the Summit of the Americas. Then, in July 1995, senior defense officials from these nations convened in Williamsburg for the Defense Ministerial of the Americas. Moreover, there was a rapid effective response in early 1995 to fighting between Ecuador and Peru over a contested part of their frontier in the Amazon. Close partnership among the guarantors of the 1942 Rio protocol, which includes the United States, facilitated a cessation of hostilities and separation of forces, creating the basis for a diplomatic solution. The recent case of Haiti also demonstrated effective and extensive regional cooperation during maritime interdiction of arms and oil prior to September 1994 as well as during Operation Uphold Democracy and the follow-on phase under the United Nations.

The United States is beginning to realize that it has a substantial stake in peaceful, stable, and prosperous Latin American and Caribbean nations and that Washington's traditional one-sided strategic approach is no longer useful in assuring its security interests. By collaborating with allies and friends in the region, the United States will benefit from trade and investment opportunities, some relief in immigration and other spillover effects of instability outside its borders, and long-sought after advancements in core values. Working together is a function of necessity in order to be free of traditional and non-traditional threats and apprehensions in the region, such as territorial claims, drug-trafficking, organized crime, and terrorism.

The Core Issues

Although the Caribbean basin still commands public attention, often narrowing the scope of U.S. interests and blurring distinctions between domestic and foreign policy, Washington is trying to interact on a wide range of issues across the hemisphere. Opportunities and vulnerabilities are increasingly transnational in nature. Thus the need is greater than ever for the United States and its neighbors to successfully address regional core issues: trade and development; political, economic, and social reform in fragile democracies; and stemming drug traffic.

Latin America is once again the fastest growing market for U.S. exports and investment. The average annual

rate of growth in exports was 21 percent from 1987 to 1993, twice the rate of the European Union. Oil is another economic factor. Venezuela is the largest supplier of refined petroleum to the United States. Mexico, Trinidad, and increasingly Colombia are major suppliers, reducing U.S. dependence on the oil fields of the Middle East. World commerce continues to pass through Panama, where the issue of reduced U.S. military presence after final implementation of the Panama Canal treaty is still open to exploratory discussion. The possible retention of a small military infrastructure after the year 2000 has strategic significance, signaling that the United States has both a commitment to the region and a desire to cooperate in facing transnational threats.

The sustained appeal and credibility of democratic governance and free markets are vital to the United States. Of immediate concern is the outcome of political, economic, and social reforms that affect commerce and trade and, perhaps most significant, drive decisions to emigrate. Sixty percent of over a million legal immigrants annually to the United States in recent years come from the Americas, mainly Mexico. But this picture is incomplete. The region also generates well over half of the estimated two to four million undocumented arrivals and an additional 1.1 million who are apprehended and turned back. Control of illegal migration and refugees can only begin abroad.

The region is also the source of all the cocaine, most of the marijuana, and a growing share of the heroin entering the United States. This amounts to an estimated 300 metric tons of cocaine, two-thirds of which enters via Mexico, roughly 2,000 metric tons of marijuana, chiefly Mexican, and 37 metric tons of heroin from Colombia and Mexico. The inter-American response to the illicit traffic in drugs involves attempts to cut the U.S. demand, coordinate the interdiction of the flow, and cooperate in the curtailing of money laundering. There also is deep U.S. interest in reinforcing justice and democracy by helping neighbors defeat internal threats from illegal narcotics activities to core institutions—political parties, legislatures, courts, and law enforcement.

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As the United States draws closer to its neighbors, there are opportunities for cooperation, but there is also the danger of adverse consequences from setbacks and disturbances in the region. It will take time for most Latin American and Caribbean states to strengthen fragile governments, create accountable institutions, counter corruption, right injustice, and meet the needs of minorities. Elected leaders still fear social conflict within their borders. The most serious threats to national stability are caused by domestic crime and violence which is increasingly linked to poverty, drug traffic, and unresponsive public policy. Fortunately, political and economic reforms over the last decade and a secure intra-American environment have eased tensions over territorial disputes. But old enmities and suspicions persist and conflicts are still possible. The difference is a commitment which exists now to use legal frameworks and diplomacy to find equitable, lasting solutions.

Rangers securing drop zone during Fuertes Defensas '95.

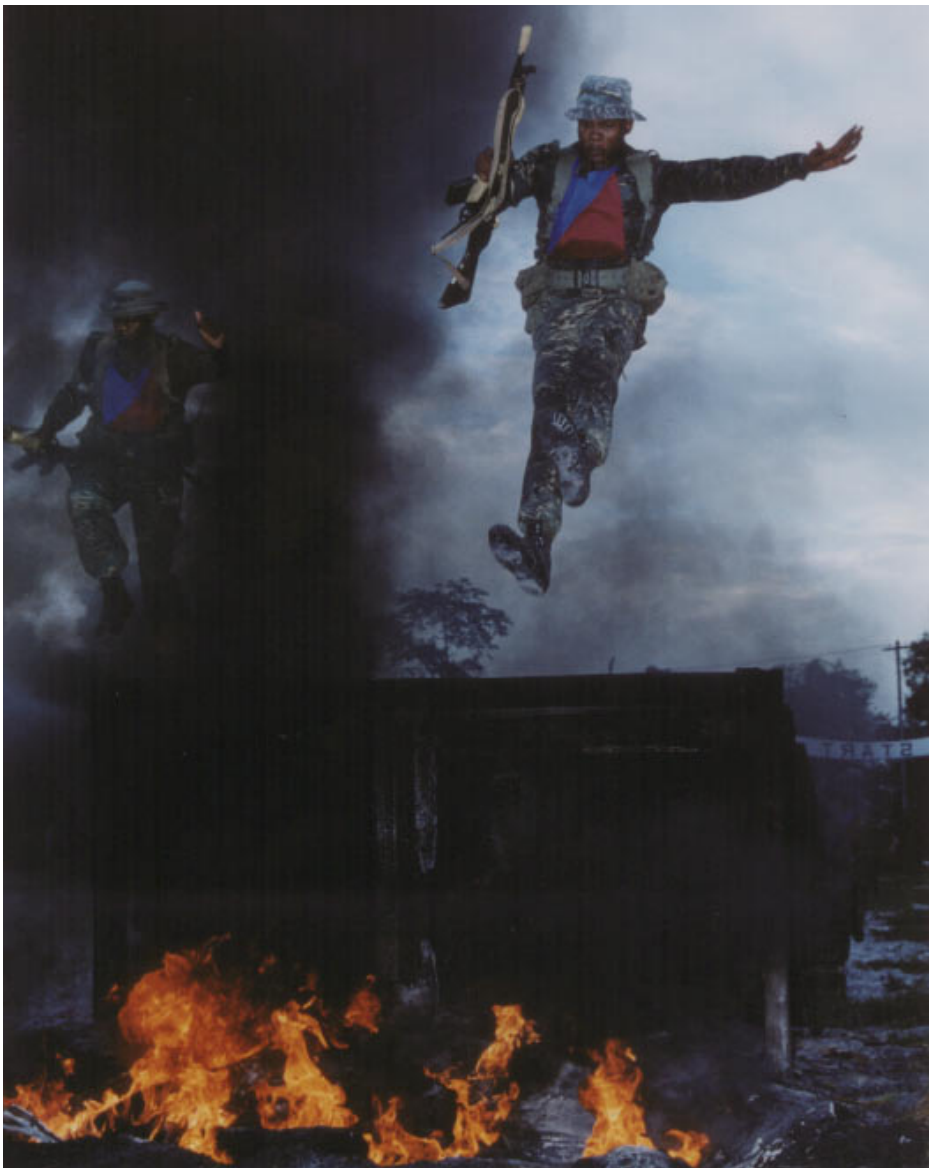
Joint Combat Camera (Bredan F. Kavanaugh)

Chilean vessel *Almirante Williams* during Unitas 32–91.

U.S. Navy (John Bivera)

Defense Engagement

The Department of Defense has long exercised an important role in Latin America and the Caribbean by encouraging military cooperation on shared professional interests. However, the nature of U.S. security interests today, the emergence of common concerns, and a steady reduction in military resources have caused engagement in the region to become more diverse and innovative. As articulated in *U.S. Security Strategy for the Americas,* issued in 1995 by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, this defense engagement encompasses providing intelligence, operational, and logistical support for counterdrug efforts; encouraging the peaceful resolution of



U.S. Southern Command (Tad A. Browning)

Guyanese troops negotiating obstacle course.

disputes, adopting confidence and security building measures, and achieving nonproliferation and conventional arms control goals; promoting democratic norms in civil-military relations; and deepening professional contact among military counterparts. Traditional and non-traditional U.S. policy objectives place a high premium on leveraging defense assets to expand security contacts and strengthen professional collaboration. The focus is no longer solely on forces deployed in the region, but rather on military and civilian defense contacts and programs in the United States and overseas. Examples include meetings of defense ministers and their staffs, bilateral working groups, academic activities which facilitate political-military dialogue, combined planning and information sharing, military deployments that bolster U.S. diplomatic efforts (such as restoring democracy in Haiti or deploying peace observers and logistic support along the Ecuador-Peru border), multinational military exercises, humanitarian relief, and innovative human rights initiatives.

Defense strategy today in the Americas reflects the influence of unprecedented political and economic transformations in the hemisphere. Emphasis is on developing low-profile multilateral cooperation to address shared security concerns, expanding professional contact, and encouraging development of a military ethos suitable for democratic society. For the foreseeable future, engagement will be successful to the extent it meets U.S. core interests, continues to demonstrate commitment to the region with a rapid-response capability for natural or diplomatic emergencies, and lowers the odds of intra-regional conflict and need to deploy forces in a crisis.

Partnership

Is the United States ready for inter-American partnerships? Does it recognize that security now and for the foreseeable future will be more closely tied to its American neighbors than before? Secretary of State George C. Marshall, a distinguished statesman not usually associated with the Americas, replied affirmatively to these questions in 1947 while testifying before Congress on the Inter-American Military Cooperation Act: ". . . with the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Pacific Ocean on the other, between us and the great disturbances in the world of other peoples, it is all the more important that the Western Hemisphere be maintained on as unified a basis as possible. That is to our interest and to the interests of every country in the Western Hemisphere, and therefore I think in the best interests of the world."

As in Marshall's day, the United States is drawn to the East and West outside its immediate neighborhood in pursuit of its global interests. In the past, attention to inter-American affairs has tended to wane and the focus on solidarity and security has vanished from the national view, often to our mutual detriment. Secretary of Defense Perry, General McCaffrey, and other distinguished American authors from North and South who contributed to this JFQ Forum put the hemisphere in proper perspective and underscore the complexity of regional defense issues. They introduce a scene that is rich in fresh possibilities for greater mutual understanding and partnerships as well as more flexible and positive professional thinking. **JFQ**