



National Defense University

Institute for National Strategic Studies

COLLEAGUES FOR THE AMERICAS SEMINAR SERIES
"Managing or Shaping U.S.- Latin American Relations"

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Featured Guests: Ambassador Cresencio "Cris" Arcos, President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board
Caesar Sereseres, Ph.D., University of California, Irvine (UCI)

On March 28, INSS hosted the third 2003 "Colleagues for the Americas" seminar. The seminar, titled "Managing or Shaping U.S.- Latin American Relations" focused on the current state of U.S.-Latin American relationship and the issues influencing this relationship. The featured guests were Ambassador Cresencio Arcos of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board and Dr. Caesar Sereseres from the University of California. The following report summarizes the key points presented by the featured guests.

Ambassador Arcos:

Latin America rarely perceives that it receives sufficient attention from the U.S. Unlike other regions of the world with greater security implications for the U.S., Latin America does not have an effective 'constituency' in Washington to lobby for it. Most Latin Americans come to Washington and feel satisfied by merely seeking support among the 'Washington Consensus': the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the OAS. Scant U.S. grass-roots support is hardly ever cultivated. Increasingly some observers opine that the growing U.S. Hispanic population will suffice in sustaining and moving U.S. regional policy forward. However, this constituency is proving to be most elusive on foreign policy issues other than the narrowly focused issues like immigration and sustaining the Cuban embargo.

In reviewing U.S. Cold War involvement in Latin America the three most all-encompassing policies engendered during this period include: Guatemala in 1954 and the resulting U.S. Military Assistance program; Cuba from 1959 through 1968 with the Alliance for Progress; and Central America, 1979-1992 beginning with Carter's Human Rights policy and expanded significantly with Reagan's 'roll-back' policy. These three policy initiatives derived from U.S. security concerns. They equated to protecting the region from Soviet Communist aggression or subversion. Other almost episodic involvements were Dominican Republic in 1965, Chile, 1973, Grenada, 1983, and Panama and the Noriega crisis, 1989. Colombia is now a preoccupation but it is unclear if illicit narcotics production or the growing destabilizing guerrilla insurgency is the impetus for U.S. engagement.

Starting with the Carter and Reagan Administration over twenty-five years ago, the U.S. vigorously promoted human rights and democracy (no more military juntas or communist insurgencies) as a tool to strengthen stability and to contain Soviet/Cuban Communist influence. Initially these policies were perceived alternatively as 'appeasement' or 'interventionist' by the political right and the leftists in Latin America. With the consolidation of the region's democratic governments and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's, the U.S. began to emphasize free-trade arrangements (NAFTA and FTAA) and liberalizing market economies as well as continuing to promote a 'one man, one vote' democratic process. Democracy, economic trade and development, rule of law, transparency and good governance (anti-corruption) all became ingredients in the U.S. policy approach toward the region. Summitry with its grandiose pronouncements became the favorite 'instrument' in promoting these goals. Most recently, the FTAA has become the policy of choice to deal with the region. The expectation of this policy goal is to achieve a hemisphere-wide trade agreement that will enable all the countries in the region to have access

to the vast U.S. market and become economically viable and sufficiently competitive. One probable risk is that the FTAA may merely become a metric to measure who are the 'winners' and the 'losers' in the arrangement.

Washington now faces an emerging conundrum. In successfully promoting civilian rule, democracy and now economic liberalization, the U.S. has unwittingly displaced the region's old order of elites who were our reliable and faithful Cold War allies. The region's military institutions have been weakened and have become less relevant to nation-building. 'One man, one vote' democracy has severely undermined the political status quo. The previously disenfranchised poor and indigenous groups coupled with the fragile middle classes have been empowered. Economic liberalization along with competition, transparency and rule of law is now challenging the economic elite's monopolistic, protectionist and mercantilist positions. The result is economic 'push-back' by the economic mandarins and widening income gaps. Hence, the election of populist leaders, growing political turmoil and economic uncertainty have all become a new challenge. Plainly, the U.S. has attained a degree of success in policy terms: it got what it sought. Washington must recognize this new phenomenon and seek to manage the consequence. In other words its policy of Glasnost (political opening) has surged ahead of its Perestroika (economic restructuring). The results are increasingly clear. In response to the excesses and incompetence the recently politically empowered are insisting on new leadership to address the complex economic challenges, especially economic growth and income equity.

How should the U.S. manage this new situation in Latin America? One essential approach is insisting on the rule of law. It is a formidable task to tackle. The region's stated legal systems (constitutions) are a manifestation of the peoples' mores and values. The soul of a society. Implementation of law is enmeshed in cultural traditions and attitudes of the concept of justice. Beyond 'jawboning' the U.S. has few direct incentives to achieve a quick fix on this score.

In sum, Latin America is not now at the U.S. foreign policy's strategic center of gravity. The war on terrorism, Iraq and the Middle East along with nuclear proliferation in Asia have seized the U.S. policy-makers' attention. Nonetheless, the U.S. continues to be committed to a serious policy discussion and implementation in the region. It must first have a better understanding of emerging events before it can begin to successfully manage its policy objectives. Likewise, the countries of the region must readily comprehend the limitations and focus of U.S. policy. They must begin to become more proactive in defining strategies and policies to assure themselves a viable role in an increasingly 'globalized' world.

Dr. Sereseres:

Latin America must confront the need for strategic vision to manage three major trends. The first trend encompasses the debilitating forces related to state weakness, porous borders, and societal problems tied to urbanization, demographic growth, drug trafficking, youth gangs, and insurgencies. These ground truths emanate in part from economic globalization. Globalization, the second trend, emphasizes information and economic systems, takes place with and without official treaties and agreements, and affects Latin American sovereignty, governmental institutions, and the power base of its political elite. The third trend is the proliferation of multilateral summits, treaties, conventions and conferences that bring together key actors in the region and hemisphere. These summits and agreements are important, but their declarations calling for change often do not translate into any constructive action on the ground. The multilateral promise does not satisfy the requirements of "ground truth". For example, the OAS recently achieved a 'small arms treaty' to limit illegal arms smuggling. Given the weakness of Latin American states and their public security forces, however, individual citizens feel compelled to protect themselves against increased violence and insecurity on the streets, creating a demand for small arms. One way to reduce the number of arms carried by citizens is to improve the police forces throughout the region so that they can better protect civilians. This requires serious reform including, but not limited to, improved pay for police personnel, reduction in corruption and increased transparency within the public security organization.

The weakness of Latin American states is worsening. In financial terms, some states must rely on other nations to stay afloat. Remittances by immigrants residing in other countries are critical to this process. Remittances, often the most important U.S. export to many Latin American states, have become one of the largest sources of funds for Latin American and Caribbean societies.

Is "summitry" the starting point for progress in tackling the debilitating trends of weakened states and civil unrest tied to

globalization's impact on free market economies? Unfortunately, we haven't seen many concrete results from these gatherings. They have, however, made apparent the absence of regional leadership and strategic vision. The Latin American countries cannot solve their problems by forming groups and coalitions--as the case of Colombia seeking support for its internal conflict makes clear. Real institutional reform needs to take place at state-level and requires strategic thinking.

Despite the growing role of non-governmental and civic organizations, the state is still the most important actor in Latin America. The state protects the nation's security and facilitates international cooperation. Are the Latin American states (institutions and leaders) prepared to provide a guiding vision? Are there enough civilian and military thinkers working to solve national security challenges? The answer is most likely "no." Still, national leaders in weak and mature states need to formulate coherent strategic visions to meet unfolding domestic and international demands and opportunities. A national security statement is not sufficient. A broader vision incorporating a view of the nation's place in the world is imperative. Latin American leaders should 'shape' not 'manage' international relations and, most importantly given U.S. preoccupation elsewhere, initiate relations with the United States.

Washington should work together with counterparts toward shaping a relationship of mutual respect based on common political principles and social interests. This is no small task considering the changed Latin America we see today. The United States has to understand this new society (a big challenge considering we never really understood the old society). Societies in the Americas are better informed. The lives of individuals do not revolve today around what the United States does and does not do. Achieving a shared vision between Latin America and the United States is increasingly difficult. Unlike the Cold War era, Washington does not have a central unifying focus by which to define its relationship with the hemisphere.

Sooner, rather than later, a mutually shared strategic vision must emerge among the states of the Americas.

The June meeting in the INSS Colleagues for the America Seminar Series will feature Mr. Dan Fisk, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central American Affairs and take place on Monday, 23 June 2003. For more information, please contact Minas Khodagolian, NDU-INSS, (202) 685-3849, email: khodagolian@ndu.edu.

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For more information about this report or the "Colleagues for the Americas" program, please contact Mr. John Cope, tel.: 202-685-2373, e-mail: copej@ndu.edu .

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