



COLLEAGUES FOR THE AMERICAS SEMINAR SERIES
"Review of the OAS Special Conference on Security"

November 21, 2003

Featured Guest: **Ambassador Miguel Ruiz-Cabañas**, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the Organization of the American States (OAS) and Chairman of the OAS Committee on Hemispheric Security

On November 21, INSS hosted the ninth 2003 "Colleagues for the Americas" seminar. The seminar titled "Review of the OAS Special Conference on Security" offered Ambassador Ruiz-Cabañas the opportunity to discuss the events and concepts that led to the signing of the "Declaration on Security in the Americas" in Mexico City on October 28. The document addresses political, economic, social, health and environmental threats, concerns and other challenges along with terrorism, international organized crime, money laundering, the "global drug problem" and corruption.

A summary of the Ambassador's remarks follow:

Before discussing the Special Conference and the resulting declaration, it's important to keep in mind that the conference is a step in a long process that started in Chile with the 1991 "Commitment to Democracy and the Inter-American System", in which all OAS member states agreed to work together to create an integral, updated plan for security in the hemisphere. With the end of the Cold War, the Western Hemisphere countries saw an opportunity to deal with new security threats. There was the shared concept of the "Peace Dividend"; that is, there was an optimistic view that the end of the Cold War would lead to reduced defense spending and in relocation of monies to development projects. Unfortunately, reality has not conformed to this notion. Nevertheless, over the course of the last 10 years, the countries of the hemisphere under the tutelage of the OAS continued to work towards a new vision of security in the hemisphere.



AMB Miguel Ruiz-Cabañas, Chairman of the OAS Hemispheric Security Committee, addresses the seminar.

The establishment of the Commission on Hemispheric Security took place in 1995. This was the first time that the OAS created a political body to deal with security issues. The 1990s were a time of optimism; most Latin American countries were experiencing economic growth, and there were few security threats. Still the countries agreed to hold a future conference to develop a contemporary view of security. There was no precedence for such a calling other than the Conference of Chapultepec in Mexico, but that meeting took place in 1945 before the establishment of the United Nations and the OAS. In 1998, the Heads of State and Government instructed the OAS to follow up on and expand topics relating to confidence and security building measures and to analyze the meaning, scope, and implications of international security concepts in the Hemisphere, including disarmament and arms control. It was also instructed to pinpoint ways to revitalize and strengthen the institutions of the inter-American system related to the various aspects of Hemispheric Security. Both the lack of precedence and the broadness of the mandate led to a slow start in planning. The mandate for the conference was reiterated at the 2001 Presidential Summit in Quebec City, and it was announced that the meeting would take place sometime in 2004. Then the terrible events of September 11th focused attention to the preparations. At the XXIII Meeting of Consultation of OAS Foreign Ministers it was agreed to have the Special Conference in 2003. Mexico offered to host it.

The Special Conference on Security adopted the Declaration on Security in the Americas, a document that was drafted and negotiated throughout eleven arduous months here in Washington, D.C., at the OAS Committee on Hemispheric Security. It was a process that demanded commitment from all OAS member states.

Taking into consideration the diversity among these states, a commitment emerged to defend a new concept of security for the hemisphere that recognized each country's particular circumstance. Security in the Americas is multidimensional in scope, includes traditional and new threats, concerns, and other challenges to the security of the states of the Hemisphere, incorporates the priorities of each state, contributes to the consolidation of peace, integral development, and social justice, and is based on democratic values, respect for and promotion and defense of human rights, solidarity, cooperation, and respect for national sovereignty.

One of the key elements of this new concept is the introduction of a multidimensional approach to security that the OAS adopted at the XXXII General Assembly held in Barbados in 2002. The Bridgetown Declaration states that the security threats, concerns, and other challenges in the hemisphere are of diverse nature and multidimensional scope. Consequently, the traditional concept and approach must be expanded to encompass new and nontraditional threats, which include political, economic, social, health, and environmental aspects. This is a very important innovation in dealing with security. After extensive debate, the Declaration on Security in the Americas identifies threats, concerns and other challenges affecting the security of the states of the hemisphere: terrorism, transnational organized crime, the global drug problem, corruption, asset laundering, illicit trafficking in weapons, extreme poverty and social exclusion of broad sectors of the population, natural and man-made disasters, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, other health risks, environmental degradation, trafficking in persons; attacks to cyber security, etc.



Carlos Barrachina, CHDS, Jose Casteneda, OAS, and Gerardo Monroy, USAF, engage in an informal conversation during one of the breaks.

The other main ingredients in the new definition, such as peace, integral development, social justice, democracy, human rights and national sovereignty represent either urgent demands or cornerstone principles for security and stability in our region. That is why it was so important to make them part of our new conception.

The Declaration also recognizes the sovereign right of each State to identify its own national security priorities and define strategies, plans and actions for addressing threats in accordance with its legal system and with full respect for international law and the norms and principles of the Charter of the OAS and the Charter of the United Nations. In this respect, the declaration is very clear when it affirms, "The states of the Hemisphere recognize different perspectives regarding security threats and priorities. The security architecture in our Hemisphere should be flexible and provide for the particular circumstances of each sub-region and each state".

Furthermore, it is important to stress that security in the Hemisphere has, as a fundamental basis, the respect of the principles of international law. Hence, whatever ways we chose to combat the different threats to security, we will always do it in accordance and with full respect to international law.

Another feature of the Declaration is the introduction of a human-centered approach to security, meaning that human beings are at the core of our new conception. In this regard, we reaffirm that the basis and purpose of security is the protection of human beings, and we assert that the respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and good governance are essential for the stability, peace, and political, economic and social development of the states of the hemisphere.

We succeeded in providing the Declaration with the appropriate balance between the new and traditional threats to security with neither taking priority over the other. When addressing the traditional threats, we agreed on a number of issues ranging from the peaceful settlement of disputes to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Also included are topics like: limits to military spending, elimination of anti-personal land mines, and fostering confidence and security building measures.

At the conference, member countries agreed to work with existing OAS security mechanism to deal with threats, concerns and other challenges. That means working with entities like the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE); The Inter-American Commission for Drug Abuse Control (CICAD); The Inter-American Committee on Reduction of Natural Disasters (CIRDN); the Consultative Committee of CIFTA, which deals with illicit manufacturing and trafficking of firearms; the Unity for Promotion of Democracy; the Meetings of Ministers of Justice or Ministers or Attorneys General of the Americas (REMJA), and much older institutions like the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

The existence of an institutional network is an important asset for dealing with security matters that have emerged as real or potential threats to our states. The next step is to strengthen these institutions and mechanisms and ensure proper coordination among them through the OAS Committee on Hemispheric Security. Such institutional reforms will present challenges. For example, the relationship between the OAS and the Inter-American Defense Board requires much attention and has been a contentious issue for years. This issue will be addressed further at the upcoming general assembly meeting in Ecuador.

Moreover, the Declaration recognizes the importance and usefulness of the inter-American instruments and agreements, such as the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty), which Mexico withdrew from in 2001. President Fox claimed the treaty was archaic and unhelpful to Mexico in dealing with new security threats. It was at this time that Mexico offered to host the Special Conference on Security. (It's important to note that Mexico has not tried to impose its view of the treaty on any other country. Most other countries, in fact, do not wish to withdraw from the treaty; rather, they want to revise it as is suggested in the Declaration.) The Declaration also recommends that the Permanent Council, through the Committee on Hemispheric Security, continue the process of study and assessment of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty) and other hemispheric instruments related to collective security.

It is important to point out that, at the request of the Central American Group and Colombia, respectively, the Conference adopted a declaration on the Central American democratic security model, which underscores the substantial contributions of the Central American Integration System to the structure of hemispheric security and the progress achieved in the integral development of its democratic security model, and a declaration on the situation in Colombia, which expresses solidarity with the people and the Government of Colombia in their fight against terrorism and other destabilizing threats in defense of their democratic institutions. The statement supports the Colombian Government in its quest for negotiated peaceful solutions following a cessation of hostilities.

Some have argued that the new concept of hemispheric security is too broad to the point of being devoid of useful meaning. While it is broad, the document is a direct result of the will of the member states; each country wanted their very real security concerns acknowledged. Inputs from Defense, Foreign, and Health ministers were taken into consideration, as was feedback from human rights group (in devising this innovative declaration). Broad participation lends legitimacy to the declaration.

In sum, the Declaration on Security in the Americas manifests the political will and commitment of our governments to work together under certain principles, shared values and common approaches in building conditions for a safer, more stable, and more secure region. This is an important achievement. Contained within the declaration is a new definition of security in which for the first time democracy and human rights are seen as a corner stone. Twenty-six approaches to national, regional and international security are outlined. It is more of an action plan than a declaration. There are thirty-six actions to which countries committed themselves to do. Finally, the conference in Mexico City should not be viewed in isolation as one single event but rather as part of larger process that began in 1991 and that will be put to the test and perfected in the coming years.

The INSS Colleagues for the Americas Seminar Series is a program of monthly meetings that commenced in 1994 to further research on hemispheric security and defense issues and to contribute to the professional education of United States and foreign practitioners.

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The next meeting in the INSS Colleagues for the America Seminar Series will be held in 2004. 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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