

The Americas in the World
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I intend to make four points to set the stage for discussing how U.S. security and defense policies need to be adjusted to meet changing regional and global circumstances.

1. *The world is unsettled and fragmenting*

The Cold War organized the world into blocs. Two blocs, often referred to as "East" and "West," so dominated the international scene that some countries created a "non-aligned movement" in an attempt to promote their interests independently of the Cold War. After the fall of the Berlin wall the President of the United States articulated the hopes of many when he called for the emergence of a new international order.

But the quarter century since then has brought little if any progress in that direction. There are now several power centers outside the United States and the former Soviet Union. Europe and China are in flux and inwardly focused – and while Japan continues to be stable, and while Brazil, India and some of "the rest" are certainly rising, all have their limits.

Multilateral institutions continue to be associated more with inefficiency than with order. International law has been weakened by both war and failures to ratify treaties or abide by their obligations. Economic globalization now evokes uncertainty and fears of instability more than hopes for sustained development. The European Union, once the world's model for regional integration to end the risk of war, has generated centrifugal forces that threaten to tear it apart.

Important socio-political factors -- the expression of previously suppressed grievances and the rise of non-governmental actors, the organizational and informational impact of new technologies, the decline of traditional programmatic political parties, the challenges posed by terrorism after 9/11 -- have all added to the difficulties encountered by governments as they try to adjust to these new stresses.

The title of a recent book makes the basic point well: traditional assumptions of super-power dominance and legal order are out: we are living in *No One's World*.

2. *The USA is weakened but still very powerful though inward-looking.*

Looking at the Americas makes clear that any supposed decline of the United States is mainly relative to the rise of others. And even then the change is more limited than often thought. A friend commented the other day that a few years ago, Brazil's economy was one tenth that of the United States. Today, Brazil is hailed everywhere as one of the new emerging powers. Its economy is now one seventh that of the United States.

Assertions about the decline of the United States and accusations about who is responsible have become part of the controversy and polarization that mark U.S. domestic politics today. But I suspect Robert Kagan has it right in his 2012 essay in the *New Republic* “Not Fade Away: Against the Myth of American Decline”.

Touching a different but similar vein, Micah Zenko and Michael Cohen argued earlier this year in *Foreign Affairs* on “Clear and Present Safety: [that] The United States is more secure than Washington thinks.”

Expressing uncertainties about national strategic objectives, a 2011 Woodrow Wilson Center essay prefaced by the current Administration’s first chair of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, and written by someone with the purposely evocative pseudonym of “Mr. Y,” calls for a New Strategic Narrative for the United States now that the Soviet Union is no longer there to be contained.

From the standpoint of the Americas, there is an additional problem: In the United States, the media and national security discussion focuses on the Middle East/North Africa and the Asia Pacific. *New York Times* Columnist James Reston once famously said, “The U.S. will do anything for Latin America, except read about it.” Now that coups are mainly a thing of the past, what is available to read is mostly about natural disasters and drug violence. Natural disasters are splashy but boring; drugs are becoming a critical problem, but everything associated with drugs is so unhappy and controversial that people would rather not read about it. At the same time, drug policy is becoming a new and paralyzing third rail in US politics. This is not the first time US domestic politics has dominated an issue important to the neighborhood – consider the impact of domestic politics on policies affecting gun trafficking, Cuba, or immigration.

In short, seen from Latin America, the United States seems a necessary but uncertain partner. In contrast, even as Americans of Hispanic origin are increasingly prominent in its own life, the United States is largely unaware that the rest of the hemisphere has outgrown the past.

3. *The Other Americas are developing economically and dividing geopolitically*

Friendly neighbors are a key foundation of national power. During the Cold War, Canada and Mexico, what in Spanish would be called the *países limítrofes* of the United States, were friendly and did not require much attention. For years, the votes of Canada, Latin America and, after independence, the Commonwealth Caribbean were generally supportive of the United States in the United Nations.

This greatly facilitated the global projection of US power. But it did not particularly facilitate US understanding of its neighbors. Except for the Alliance for Progress period and the superimposition of the Cold War onto local conflicts to our South, Washington did not assign a high priority to hemispheric affairs. Today, South America in particular is largely unseen here. Its countries are not drought-ridden or impoverished. They have no interest in war on each other or on us. With a few notable exceptions, they harbor no enemies of the United States.

Democratization has proved resilient enough to push the debate toward democracy's quality rather than its desirability. Economic and social progress, still uneven, is increasingly real and broadly distributed. In fact, growth over the past decade has shifted the focus of voter demands from jobs and income to health, education, public services and crime.

These generalizations are broadly valid, but our neighbors remain very diverse. In addition, it is now necessary to discuss sub regions as well as individual countries. Sub regional organizations reflect the ties and the problems developing among immediate neighbors. The importance of sub regions also reflects the almost tectonic drifting apart of Central and North America and the Caribbean from South America.

The small countries of Central America and the Caribbean are sometimes referred to as the third border of the United States. This is an apt description, for they are for the most part as closely linked to the United States as Mexico and Canada, and even more dependent on us than those two larger countries. An additional characteristic sets these Caribbean Basin neighbors apart from Canada or Mexico or, for that matter, Colombia to their immediate south: their relative smallness makes them particularly vulnerable to the pressures of transnational organized crime and the illegal drug trade.

South America, meanwhile, remains extremely diverse, yet its countries are all becoming economically and psychologically more distant from North America. South Americans are gradually integrating within their sub-continent and carving out global roles for themselves from the South Atlantic to the Pacific and from Africa to China and the Middle East.

4. The hemisphere cannot be insulated from global events

International ties hostile to the United States are an important part of Venezuela's controversial course over the past decade. But Venezuela is not alone in seeking political ties outside the hemisphere. Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and other countries are diversifying not only their production and trade but their political relationships outside the hemisphere. We sometimes forget that Canada and the English speaking Caribbean were all members of the British Commonwealth before they joined the Inter-American System.

In 2003, Mexico and Chile were both non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Their vote against military action against Iraq made clear our neighbors were no longer part of a privileged preserve or subordinate back yard for the United States. Brazil's poorly handled 2010 attempt with Turkey to redirect Iran's nuclear program also showed that countries of the Americas are prepared to act autonomously on critical global issues.

So, a question: As Latin American and Caribbean countries expand the range of their diplomatic and commercial interests, do they create opportunities or concerns for the United States?

There is one clear advantage for the United States. The expanded presence of other powers can reduce asymmetry in the hemisphere -- or, in less academic language, take pressure off accusations that the United States is always to blame. On a more practical

level, there can be no doubt that China's hunger for commodities has helped fuel the prosperity of many South American countries over the past decade.

There are also concerns. A key one is the rise in opportunities for mischief by powers and groups unfriendly to the United States. No one of my generation will ever forget the Cuban missile crisis. There are some who fear Iran could create a similar threat. Then there is economic competition. Canada and Mexico account for nearly a third of US imports and exports. In absolute terms, the rest of the Americas have been the fastest-growing US trading partner this past decade. But the relative place of the United States in their exports and imports has been decreasing.

The long term risks for the United States of Latin America's globalization include reduced opportunities for cooperation, both regionally and on the world stage. Brazil has sought to replace U.S. influence in South America. The Alba [Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas] countries led by Venezuela have consciously sought to create tension with the United States. These developments have reduced the effectiveness of inter-American cooperation at the OAS and put the regional focus on organizations that exclude the United States and Canada. We are a long way from the days at Yalta when Joe Stalin asked that all 15 republics making up the Soviet Union be admitted to the UN to balance the expected automatic pro-US votes from Latin America.

Yet this is not a zero-sum game. This is no one's world. And because no one country dominates, many can contribute.

5. Some Implications for Strategy

What adjustments in strategic thinking do these four trends call for?

Let me start with the United States.

During my service on the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff during both Republican and Democratic Administrations, the assumption that the United States is essential to the peace and prosperity of every world region was an often explicit constant. That has not changed.

The United States is a global power. The 2012 policy document "Priorities for 21st Century Defense" explicitly leads with "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership." Despite obvious budget pressures, the United States does not believe it is reduced to choosing.

What may need to change in the future is that our strategy will have to be more explicitly linked to concrete U.S. needs. In the past and still today, we tend to formulate strategy globally and as a function of others. First the containment of the Soviet Union. Now the containment of China in Asia, or Iran in the Middle East. An updated Strategic Narrative will need to give greater emphasis to the U.S. position in the world economy, a posture that will require greater positive engagement with both Europe and the Americas.

A new Strategic Narrative will also need to temper the global with the geopolitical. An article in Foreign Policy magazine earlier this year commented that "the United States is applying its counter-terrorism policy in Yemen. It does not have a policy for Yemen."

Yemen is far from the Americas. But the comment is worth pausing over. Is it enough to have a global policy, or is it necessary to know how to apply it in specific situations, cultures, regions, and countries?

It is a classic mistake, even for a global power like the United States, to ignore geography and not take neighbors seriously. More on this later.

The other Americas.

If the United States would do well to think a bit more about its neighbors, the opposite is true for the other countries of the Americas. Except perhaps for Brazil, they need to think less about the United States. And more about themselves.

The Caribbean Basin countries, however, need to do more than think more about each other. They need to work more closely together. CARICOM needs to match its hallowed integrationist theory with renewed practice. And the Central American countries in particular need to muster their own resources. Nothing has been more debilitating to the ability of the United States to cooperate in Central America than our sense that they are not helping themselves. The U.S. National Bi-Partisan Commission on Central America chaired by Henry Kissinger, concluded almost thirty years ago that *“The United States has a strong interest in encouraging the nations of Central America to assume greater responsibility for regional arrangements. Our involvement will be more acceptable if it reflects a regional consensus.”* [Report, p. 119.] Today SICA [the Central American Integration Organization] needs U.S. support for precisely these reasons. By sharing the burdens and rules of cooperation against the criminal cartels that always look for the weakest link, Central America can facilitate US support.

The South Americans, meanwhile, are thinking about themselves a great deal more than most Americans realize. A year ago, I wrote that the United States and Brazil needed to improve their strategic engagement, and that that would require “the United States to welcome Brazil’s emergence as a global power that is culturally and politically close to the United States; and for Brazil, in turn, to realize that the United States accepts its rise and that more can be achieved working with Washington than against it.” But while Brazil’s reach is now truly global, it is not alone: the Pacific coast countries of South America belong to APEC. Like the United States, Canada and Mexico they have a major stake in Pacific Basin prosperity.

A question often heard in Latin America is, “OK, but does Washington want to work with us?” Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta gave his answer last week [the Miami Herald May 13] after his trip to South America: “the attitude of the United States was that it would have to act alone to guarantee the security of the hemisphere. That is no longer the case, nor is it our preference, because we are stronger when we work with other nations to advance peace and security.”

A cynic might say the United States may be feeling overstretched; my own view is that openness to the contributions of others is always welcome, regardless of the cause.

6. Hemispheric Defense and Security are Controversial

The decade since the OAS Mexico Conference was called to modernize the regional security system could be described as a flight from the obligations of the Rio Treaty into a view of security so multidimensional it is difficult to make it operational.

The emergence of non-traditional security matters has fueled a debate over what is security and what is defense. What is the threat? Who are you fighting? Is there an "enemy"? Are terrorists foreign or domestic? Military forces are trained to defend national sovereignty against external attack by a foreign enemy. They are not trained to deal with their fellow citizens. That is police work. In some countries, turning to the military for internal security evokes terrible memories of Cold War conflicts when repression sometimes became identified with military forces allied with the United States.

These conceptual, ideological and historical associations make military involvement in internal security matters very controversial in both Latin America and the United States. Police forces in Central America may, as Caesar Sereseres argues, be several reforms away from fully effective performance. But the introduction of military units to fight drugs or domestic crime is automatically controversial. Each country will have to make its own choices. The United States will need to be particularly mindful of the need to ensure respect for lawful civilian authorities in any cooperation it offers.

Fortunately, Latin America has been moving away from both militarism and war for a generation or more. Despite Argentina's unrequited aspirations over the Malvinas/Falklands, major territorial conflicts on the South American mainland have been resolved. Peace between Peru and Ecuador removed the arms race contagion. Latin America is the world's foremost nuclear free zone. Argentina and Chile joined Brazil some years ago in forswearing WMDs. Demining (under the auspices of the OAS) in Central America, Colombia, and on the Chile-Peru-Ecuador borders has progressed to the point that Latin America is virtually free of anti-personnel mines.

In testifying earlier this year on "Defense in Today's Assistance to Latin America," my colleague Jay Cope identified three different strategic logics for United States defense policy in the hemisphere. The demands each logic places on defense cooperation are quite different.

In North America, the strategic logic must of necessity center on conventional defense of the U.S. homeland against nuclear, aerospace, and sea-based threats as well as military support to law enforcement agencies facing non-traditional threats.

Meso-America and the Caribbean, still according to Cope, present a unique and complex strategic logic shaped in part by difficult past relations with Washington; today's US anti-narcotics and anti-crime programs; the weakness of government institutions in small states with unstable pasts; the desire by some in the region and in the United States to keep the armed forces in psychological exile. U.S. policy in Central America in particular will need to respond positively to local government requests for engagement with their armed forces on public security matters while simultaneously ensuring that any U.S. cooperation is part of an integral whole that supports democracy and avoids the militarization of law enforcement.

South America presents a far different situation. The initiative there clearly belongs to its several countries. Their sub regional organization, UNASUR, deserves U.S. support. But the main priority for the U. S. government is to learn that traditional assistance-based relations no longer work, and that cooperation with Brazil, Chile, Colombia or Peru will no longer be automatic, but will require us to develop more institutionally-based consultations and exchanges of information, technology and know-how.

7. Conclusions: restoring regional ties and legitimacy is imperative

1. *The hemisphere cannot be insulated from global events.* Future relations "will take place in a global, not a hemispheric, context" as Sergio Bitar has put it. The challenge for the United States will be to obtain the support of our neighbors for our global interests and to develop strategies that channel the inevitable extra-hemispheric influences in the hemisphere toward activities more rather than less compatible with our interests.
2. *But the hemisphere still matters.* The adage associated with one of our most famous politicians still holds: "All politics is local." Geopolitics counts for more than most persons in this globalized internet age realize. Effective U.S. policies will have to harmonize global concerns with local ones, and take into account sub regions and individual nations as well as multilateral and bilateral concerns. We will have to get used to increased policy complexity and longer timelines.
3. *Security cooperation is an imperative, given the transnational and multinational nature of the problems the region faces.* Like global consensus, collective action on hemispheric security has been out for some time. Unilateral intervention by the United States is increasingly counterproductive. But U.S. support for regional and sub regional organizations will facilitate bilateral cooperation and give it legitimacy through multilateral frameworks.
4. *International law and institutions are critical to effective cooperation, including bilateral cooperation.* There can be no question, for example, that both Brazil and the United States should develop and sustain bilateral relations with individual countries in accordance with their respective interests. But both Brazil and the United States should actively support Inter-American institutions like the OAS that bring both of them together with other countries of the hemisphere. Most Latin American and Caribbean countries want good relations with both the United States and Brazil, and multilateral forums provide an ideal neutral ground to develop common rules. Multilateral formats are also useful to offset the asymmetries of power that have long hampered the United States in dealings with its neighbors, and which are now beginning to bedevil Brazil as it grows more rapidly than most countries around it.
5. *Any use of force must be legitimized by the rule of law.* Military cooperation cannot be excluded from any "whole of government" strategy. But politics and history dictate that military force is difficult to apply and control. The Council on Foreign Relations has just published a report on the drug war in Central America by Michael Shifter that recommends that "The United States should minimize the

- role of foreign military assistance.” International law and respect for sovereignty suggest that there are “red lines” that should not be crossed by foreigners – even if they think they have the permission of local authorities. My own preference would be that the United States clearly enforce self-imposed standards in the rules of engagement for its personnel.
6. *U.S. domestic policies are important to our security abroad.* The Council on Foreign Relations report also recommends that “The United States should temper domestic policies that aggravate criminal violence in Central America.” It mentions reductions in demand for drugs, arms sales, and criminal deportations. I would include money laundering and tax policies. But the more important difficulty is that asking the United States to *do something* inevitably raises our psychological hackles. Are we being asked to solve problems when the Central Americans are not doing anything? This is a destructive dynamic linked to national pride, asymmetric power and lack of cultural self-awareness on both sides. Co-responsibility means all parties must learn to work and act together.
 7. *The United States can no longer manage security problems without the help of others.* Colombia’s struggle for citizen security illustrates the importance of mutual support. The United States deserves much credit for supporting Colombia for more than a decade with both military and economic assistance, including ultimately a free trade pact. But even this unusual and balanced support was less important to the progress achieved than the leadership provided by Colombians. It is difficult for outsiders to contribute positively unless local leaders are showing the way and defining the terms of cooperation.