



The Mexican-Central American Frontier Region: The Southern Mexico-Belize-Guatemala Triangle: Caesar Sereseres, Ph.D. at INSS Round Tables

Senior Fellow Jay Cope hosted two round table discussions with Caesar Sereseres, Ph.D., Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies and Professor of Political Science, University of California, Irvine, at INSS on 11 May. The first engaged civilian and military representatives from Central America; the second, U.S. government analysts and academics. Dr. Sereseres explained that he believes resilient criminal networks pose complex challenges that call into question the entire structure of U.S. cooperation in this region.

Caesar Sereseres is one of the foremost experts on security conditions along the geostrategic corridor from Colombia through the Caribbean Basin and Mexico to the United States. He has almost fifty years of practical experience in the entire range of military sociology and civil-military relations, including insurgency and counterinsurgency, criminal networks, youth gangs; and more recently U.S.-Mexico border and security cooperation. He is very concerned about the problems weak governments face in trying to regain control of ungoverned space.

Professor Sereseres reminds audiences that smuggling across international frontiers in northern Central America and southern Mexico has long been a problem for national authorities, especially in the difficult terrain of their common borders. Today, well-organized Mexican and, to a lesser degree, Colombian criminal networks are sinking roots in this vulnerable region. The threat they pose has intensified over the last ten years as debilitated Central American governments lack the national consensus, regional cooperation, and resources to grapple with these dangerous challenge. Sereseres explains the attraction to the cartels of the Belize-Guatemala-Mexico tri-border zone with its distinct cultural traditions, poverty, weak economic infrastructure, the limited presence of security forces, and undeveloped regional cooperation. It also is likely President Calderón's military pressure is forcing Mexican cartels to push south into Central America so they can receive and transship cocaine from South America in areas they control.

Strategic lessons from the 1980s, when Central American insurgent groups ignored borders and controlled territory in their efforts to overthrow governments, can be adapted to help address current security problems. Sereseres observes, for example, that the current trend toward individual country plans to counter the cartel's borderless approach lacks the impact of the regional strategy that guided U.S. efforts thirty years ago. He argues for integrating national intelligence networks and creating a shared detection, communication, and response infrastructure in Central America -- all initiatives the United States supported in the 1980s. Sereseres is concerned by the general lack of vision, weak intelligence systems, and a general

unpreparedness to integrate demoralized police and military institutions into a cooperative regional strategy.

Sereseres believes success in the new era of security along the isthmus will require a network of security cooperation to match the network of criminal organizations. As of today, in both the region and in the United States, fears and angers (many from the past) create openings for the gangs and block official countermeasures. Will neighboring states share information and work to build trust? Can the United States do more to help others defend themselves?

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The Center for Strategic Research Western Hemisphere team includes Senior Fellow Jay Cope, Adjunct Fellow Ambassador Luigi Einaudi, Research Assistant Eva Silkwood, and Interns Karina Van der Plas and Luis Contreras. The views expressed are their own and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.