

## Challenges to Creating Community in the Americas

HEATHER A. GOLDING  
Latin American Program

One of the most disquieting features of the post-cold war global community has been the confusion surrounding discussions of security — national security and international security. There is confusion on some of the most basic issues, such as: what constitutes an external threat; what is the role of the armed forces; under what circumstances should security be a question for multilateral agencies or responses; and, what is the appropriate response to threats from non-state actors.

Members of the Latin American Program's working group on *Creating Community in the Americas* convened in Washington, D.C. on September 5, 2001, to examine the sources of insecurity in the hemisphere and how they lead to conflict, together with the responses to insecurity and how they might lead to collective action or community. The Latin American Program's project on Creating Community in the Americas is an effort to continue work begun by the project Peace and Security in the Americas (PSA). PSA originally focused on the post-Cold War traditional security agenda, but quickly evolved to include non-traditional security issues, such as drug trafficking and environmental degradation.

Creating Community in the Americas focuses primarily on four dimensions of security: the continuing validity of the traditional national security agenda and the evolving non-traditional agenda; the peace processes in countries beset by internal conflict and how the transition to a post-conflict society influences the definition of security; the circumstances and ways in which issues of citizen security spill across national frontiers; and, the mission of the armed forces and establishment of true civilian control over



Raúl Benítez, Associate National Security Advisor to the President of Mexico

the armed forces and their missions. In all four dimensions, the role of the United States is an important part of the analysis. The working group consists of top scholars, policymakers, and policy analysts from Latin America, Europe, and the United States.

### CREATING A REGIONAL AND HEMISPHERIC SECURITY COMMUNITY

*Luis Bitencourt*, Director of Brazil at the Wilson Center, began the discussion by suggesting that the absence of a regional security strategy in Latin America is one of the region's greatest weaknesses. One of the central explanations for the absence of a comprehensive security strategy is that realities in the various subregions and nations vary greatly, creating divergent views over what constitute the top security threats and, consequently, how they should be addressed. Bitencourt argued that regional priorities should be determined before countries begin the arduous task of restructuring and rebuilding hemispheric institutions.

In his view, due to its size and strategic location, Brazil should naturally assume a leadership

*Heather A. Golding is a Program Associate in the Latin American Program of the Woodrow Wilson Center*



role in this process. That Brazil has not done so — a controversial issue in Brazil but one shared by the working group — is because its primary focus has been to reach internal consensus on divisive issues, such as poverty alleviation and internal security matters. Bitencourt suggested that while the U.S. may now be eager to devise a cooperative hemispheric security strategy, such a strategy is not the top priority in many Latin American nations, currently more concerned with domestic issues.

*Thomas Guedes da Costa*, of the National Defense University, suggested that the greatest challenge to creating a security community may, in fact, be conceptual. Overwhelmed by macro issues of hemispheric security, scholars and policymakers focus on the state as the primary unit of analysis. The state-centric view, however, fails to take into account the significance of non-state actors. Guedes da Costa indicated that perhaps a better unit of analysis is the subregion. The key to creating community, he said, is shared commitments, experiences, and expectations. These commitments and expectations vary greatly from nation to nation; but, it is within the subregion that the greatest similarities are found.

### THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY

At the end of the Cold War, the military assumed roles traditionally occupied by civilian authorities. *Raúl Benítez*, Associate National Security Advisor to the President of Mexico, explained that this was due to the collapse of civilian institutions throughout Latin America. Faced with immediate security threats and inadequate civilian institutions, many

nations relied increasingly upon the military in key areas, such as fighting corruption and drug trafficking. As a result, explained Benítez, the role of the military has focused increasingly on addressing internal problems, instead of protecting the country from external threats.

Whatever their mission, Benítez insisted that Latin American governments need to invest greater resources to increase the technological capacity of police and security forces, because most Latin American nations lack the technological capability to engage successfully in intelligence-gathering or to carry out extensive campaigns against drug trafficking and other criminal activities, precisely the missions they are asked to assume. To illustrate his point, Benítez offered the following example. The Mexican military needs radars to track the shipment of illegal drugs to and from Mexico. The Mexican government, however, is unwilling to pay for such radars, so the military turns to the United States for support. The United States is willing to provide the radars, but for a price — U.S.-control of the information — thus reinforcing the notion of U.S. hegemony in the region.

### ARMS TRAFFICKING

Guedes da Costa explained that throughout most of Latin America's history, the acquisition of weapons has been driven by the desire to protect nations from external threats, both real and perceived. At a certain moment, he argued, nations must move from a threat-based military to a capability-based military, as Benítez had implied for the Mexican case. *Francisco Rojas*, of FLACSO-Chile, agreed, citing as one of the region's primary weaknesses an inadequate level of technology to facilitate interoperability in anti-corruption and counter-terrorism operations. Rojas said that the absence of cooperation will greatly impair the ability of the region to counter such threats, even if a consensus is reached regarding hemispheric security priorities.

Rojas also discussed the effects of democratization on arms control. He said that transparency in military spending and weapons acquisition is vital to fostering confidence between nations. He spoke specifically about the increased levels of transparency and confidence between Argentina and Chile, and praised the pledges made by these two nations to coordinate military spending in three areas: mod-

The **Latin American Program** serves as a bridge between the United States and Latin America, encouraging a free flow of information and dialogue between the two regions. The Program also provides a nonpartisan forum for discussing Latin American and Caribbean issues in Washington, D.C., and for bringing these issues to the attention of opinion leaders and policy makers throughout the Western hemisphere. The Program sponsors major initiatives on Decentralization, Citizen Security, Comparative Peace Processes, Creating Community in the Americas, U.S.-Brazilian relations and U.S.-Mexican relations.

The Woodrow Wilson Center's "Creating Community" project is supported by a generous grant from the Ford Foundation.

Latin American Program Director: Joseph S. Tulchin  
Creating Community Project Coordinator: Heather A. Golding



Francisco Rojas of FLACSO-Chile

ernization, salaries, and the acquisition of new weapons. Rojas acknowledged, however, that such an agreement is sure to elicit varied reactions from other nations, particularly Peru and Ecuador, that are concerned about the regional balance of power.

### POPULATION MOVEMENTS AS A CAUSE OF INSECURITY

Regional security is linked to the movements of populations, suggested *Anthony Maingot*, Professor of Sociology at Florida International University. Rapid shifts in nations' economies led to what is referred to as the "dual economy model," in which the modern industrial sector attracts workers from the rural areas. In addition to the movement of people from rural to urban areas, many countries, particularly in the Caribbean, have experienced a significant flow of migrant workers from neighboring countries where there are fewer job opportunities. The security threat to the "receiving" nations, according to Maingot, lies in the inability of the state to provide for the large number of migrants. Maingot referred to four case-studies linking population movements with insecurity in the following countries: Haitian laborers in the Dominican Republic; Nicaraguan laborers in Costa Rica; Haitian immigrants in the Bahamas; and, criminals recently sent back to Jamaica after serving prison sentences in the United States.

Maingot said that there are currently between 600,000 and 1,000,000 Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic. Haiti is currently grappling with an epidemic HIV/AIDS problem, and is perceived by many of its Caribbean neighbors to be a "lawless" state, in the hands of drug traffickers. The problems this creates in the Dominican Republic

are two-fold; Dominican health services are unable to deal with the rising spread of AIDS in the country; and, security officials are concerned that Haitian migrants will transform the Dominican Republic into a new center for drug smuggling. At the same time, Maingot contended that the Dominican economy could not function without Haitian laborers, leaving many policymakers in a quandary over how to deal with this large group of people and the challenges they present.

Costa Rican officials face a similar dilemma. Without Nicaraguan migrant workers, the Costa Rican coffee industry would suffer. However, Costa Rican officials are concerned with the threats to security posed by the migrant population. Similarly, according to Maingot, Jamaican security is threatened by the U.S. policy of sending Jamaican criminals back to Jamaica after serving prison sentences in the U.S. The Jamaican economy is weak, and unemployment is high. Sending criminals back to the island only exacerbates the already perilous state of citizen insecurity in Jamaica.

The discussion then turned to another source of insecurity related to the movement of people: how to deal with de-militarized combatants in post-conflict situations. *Rúben Zamora*, of FLACSO-El Salvador, and a Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, explained that many people automatically assume that peace brings security. In El Salvador, for example, this was not the case. In fact, Zamora said, aspects of the peace accords actually heightened citizen insecurity in the Central American country. Demilitarization only shifted the sources of insecurity; there are currently fewer cases of state-sponsored torture and arbitrary arrests, but theft and crime rates have risen. At the end of the civil war, fifteen to twenty thousand members of security forces were rapidly de-militarized, and according to Zamora, the lack of a social system to support the ex-combatants left most without work, which caused a surge in theft and violent crime. While the situation prior to the peace agreement was clearly unsustainable, it is important to learn from the Salvadoran experience that burdening weak institutions with a sudden flood of unemployed citizens with military training, is unsustainable as well.



## CONCLUSIONS: BY WAY OF AN EPILOGUE, BY JOSEPH S. TULCHIN

The September 11th terrorist attacks just after this meeting have given subsequent discussions of security a new intensity. It is clear that in the aftermath of the attacks, U.S. priorities have shifted, focusing tightly on the war on terrorism. What is not yet clear is what the implications of the war on terrorism will be for the region. Latin American officials were among the first to offer their support to the U.S. and since September have been actively working to rid their banks of illegal money laundering and to keep closer tabs on activities within their borders, particularly in areas where citizens are suspected of having ties to terrorist groups, as in Colombia, where the U.S. government included the FARC on its list of international terrorist organizations, and the Triple Frontier, where there is mounting evidence of activity by people with close ties to Hezbollah.<sup>1</sup>

It is ironic that the vehicle chosen to declare Latin American solidarity with the U.S. after September 11 was the Inter American Defense Treaty, or TIAR as it is known in Spanish. Many in the region had considered the treaty obsolete and moribund — a painful reminder of everything that was bad about the Cold War. On his state visit to Washington, DC just prior to September 11, Mexican president Vicente Fox had indicated that Mexico intended to take the lead in formally declaring the treaty null and beginning the process of creating a more appropriate framework for cooperation among members of the hemispheric community. Grasping at the only existing hemispheric institu-

tion that appeared even remotely appropriate to the occasion, the U.S. called on its friends in the hemisphere to invoke the treaty, much as the Europeans had invoked the NATO treaty, to indicate that an attack on one was an attack on all of them.

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, it appeared as if the U.S. would adopt a multilateral approach to the war on terrorism. In such an approach, the TIAR would be revived, the OAS would become vital and the members of the hemispheric community would collaborate with the U.S. in the UN as well as within the framework of hemispheric security. The problem is that since then, the U.S. has come to take such a narrow focus in its thinking on community and security that it has appeared to most Latin Americans as if the hemisphere suddenly had been transported back into the Cold War. The region today feels irrelevant in the global scheme of things and shunted aside or taken for granted by the U.S. The U.S. security agenda has become tightly focused on terrorism and drug trafficking, with an occasional reference to defending democracy (often an attack on Castro and Cuba) and free trade (although actions such as the tariff on steel appear to contradict the public discourse). Everything else is of secondary concern. Creating community in the hemisphere has been left to the nations of Latin America. In the months ahead, we shall see what they do.

### NOTE

1. The triple frontier is the subject of a forthcoming policy bulletin in this series.

#### THE WOODROW WILSON INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOLARS

Lee H. Hamilton, Director

#### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Joseph A. Cari, Jr., Chair; Steven Alan Bennett, Vice Chair. Public Members: James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress; John W. Carlin, Archivist of the United States; Bruce Cole, Chair, National Endowment for the Humanities; Roderick R. Paige, Secretary, U.S. Department of Education; Colin L. Powell, Secretary, U.S. Department of State; Lawrence M. Small, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution; Tommy G. Thompson, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Private Citizen Members: Carol Cartwright, John H. Foster, Jean L. Hennessey, Daniel L. Lamaute, Doris O. Matsui, Thomas R. Reedy, Nancy M. Zirkin.

#### WILSON COUNCIL

Steven Kotler, President. Diane Aboulafia-D'Jaen, Charles S. Ackerman, B.B. Andersen, Cyrus A. Ansary, Charles F. Barber, Lawrence E. Bathgate II, Joseph C. Bell, Richard E. Berkowitz, A. Oakley Brooks, Charles W. Burson, Conrad Cafritz, Nicola L. Caiola, Raoul L. Carroll, Scott Carter, Albert V. Casey, Peter B. Clark, William T. Coleman, Jr., Michael D. DiGiacomo, Sheldon Drobny, F. Samuel Eberts III, J. David Eller, Sim Farar, Susan Farber, Charles Fox, Barbara Hackman Franklin, Morton FUNGER, Chris G. Gardiner, Eric Garfinkel, Bruce S. Gelb, Steven J. Gilbert, Alma Gildenhorn, Joseph B. Gildenhorn, David F. Girard-diCarlo, Michael B. Goldberg, William E. Grayson, Raymond

A. Guenter, Gerald T. Halpin, Edward L. Hardin, Jr., Carla A. Hills, Eric Hotung, Frances Humphrey Howard, John L. Howard, Darrell E. Issa, Jerry Jasinowski, Brenda LaGrange Johnson, Shelly Kamins, Edward W. Kelley, Jr., Anastasia D. Kelly, Christopher J. Kennan, Michael V. Kostiw, William H. Kremer, Dennis LeVett, Harold O. Levy, David Link, David S. Mandel, John P. Manning, Edwin S. Marks, Jay Mazur, Robert McCarthy, Stephen G. McConahey, Donald F. McLellan, J. Kenneth Menges, Jr., Phillip Merrill, Jeremiah L. Murphy, Martha T. Muse, Della Newman, John E. Osborn, Paul Hae Park, Gerald L. Parsky, Michael J. Polenske, Donald Robert Quartel, Jr., J. John L. Richardson, Margaret Milner Richardson, Larry D. Richman, Edwin Robbins, Robert G. Rogers, Otto Ruesch, B. Francis Saul, III, Alan Schwartz, Timothy R. Scully, J. Michael Shepherd, George P. Shultz, Raja W. Sidawi, Debbie Siebert, Thomas L. Siebert, Kenneth Siegel, Ron Silver, William A. Slaughter, Thomas F. Stephenson, Wilmer Thomas, Norma Kline Tiefel, Mark C. Treanor, Christine M. Warnke, Ruth Westheimer, Pete Wilson, Deborah Wince-Smith, Herbert S. Winokur, Jr., Paul Martin Wolff, Joseph Zappala, Richard S. Ziman



One Woodrow Wilson Plaza  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004-3027  
[www.wilsoncenter.org](http://www.wilsoncenter.org)