

**HEMISPHERIC SECURITY AND THE OAS: TOWARDS A NEW
REGIONAL APPROACH**

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Introduction

Today the Americas face complex international and national security scenarios that have urged the members of the Organization of American States (OAS) to rethink previous approaches to security and reexamine hemispheric security-related organs, institutions and mechanisms. The regional debate on security has sparked questions of how, and to what extent, the Inter-American community should redefine the concept of security and how it should adapt its institutional framework to respond to new concerns and realities. The broadness of the recent *Declaration of Security in the Americas* (Mexico, October 2003) reflects the diversity of visions on security and the differences in power, geography and historical experience among the 34 OAS member states, and the difficulties that lie ahead in the process of building a strong regional consensus on a feasible security strategy for the Americas.

In the early 1990s the end of the Cold War added new, non-traditional, concerns to the traditional set of security threats to the Hemisphere such as interstate conflicts and weapons of mass destruction. Some of these non-traditional threats come from non-state actors and include: international organized crime; illegal traffic of drug, arms and persons; money laundering; corruption and terrorism, the latter being of significant importance after the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. Other non-traditional threats are structural in nature, and include: extreme poverty and social exclusion, natural and man-made disasters, and environmental degradation, among others. These new dilemmas weaken the nations' ability to manage internal conflicts and face transnational threats that have the potential to grow and ultimately compromise hemispheric peace and stability.

In order to move toward greater agreement on how to combat this array of challenges, important questions must first be answered. For example, are traditional threats still relevant to hemispheric security? How should the new threats be defined? Furthermore, who will determine which task takes priority over another? And, how can the OAS most adequately approach these tasks? Given the permanently mutable nature of the new threats, including the growing involvement of new and unpredictable actors in the security dynamic, no region enjoys the luxury of complacency in deciding upon this matter. Indeed, these new challenges pose larger risks to the stability of regional and international peace. Notwithstanding a decided plan of action, the implementation and fine-tuning of mechanisms for assuring peace and security in the Americas will have an important impact on the international level.

The process of revising hemispheric security institutions, mechanisms, and approaches currently being debated by government, military, and civil society actors within the Inter-American community is two-fold. The first calls for a re-examination of the terms by which security is defined. This requires a discussion of new threats and the relation to various levels of hemispheric stability. The second necessitates an exploration of the role of existing institutions that have participated in conflict resolution and security endeavors throughout the past decade. It is with this aim that this article will discuss the shift in regional approaches to security in the Americas, highlighting the role of the Organization of American States (OAS) in the

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development of structural and practical modes of combating threats to peace and justice within the Hemisphere, focusing on the importance of democratic governance and conflict resolution mechanisms.

Evolution of Security in the Americas

The global dynamics of the aftermath of the II World War shaped an hemispheric concept of security that was characterized by the real or perceived threat of aggression among states, and especially, by extra-regional states. Responding to the Cold War logic the OAS established, through the Rio Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance –TIAR- (1947) and the Pact of Bogotá (1948), the foundation for military-cooperation against external aggression and a commitment for the practice of nonviolent conflict resolution and conflict prevention to resolve regional interstate disputes, respectively.

The end of the Cold War changed the regional security context giving way to new security dilemmas to member states, exceeding the reach of the traditional hemispheric security instruments. For instance, the traditional concern of interstate conflict between American states seems less urgent today. With the exception of a handful of territorial and border disputes, the Americas are considered to be one of the most secure and peaceful regions in the world. In fact, since the early 1990s, from the 12 existing interstate disputes within the Americas, only one escalated into some sort of armed struggle (Peru – Ecuador, 1995). The few remaining territorial disputes are currently being resolved through negotiation and other peaceful conflict resolution processes.

Still, why so little violent interstate conflict in the Americas? Among other reasons, the nations of the Hemisphere have enjoyed a widespread democratization process, economic interdependence, effective regional institutions and procedures to consolidate interstate peace and peace-building mechanisms (including international mediation), strongly shared identity among states, and a high level of confidence between neighbors. Furthermore, the majority of American states have declared the Hemisphere a nuclear-free zone, and boasts significantly lower levels of military expenditure when compared to other regions.¹

Figure 1 shows that this regional reality reflects a broader global trend. In general, major armed conflict has decreased sharply in the post-Cold War era both in general magnitude and number of states affected by major armed conflicts. This figure also shows that intrastate conflicts are far more common than interstate conflicts, representing almost 90% of the total number of world conflicts. Internal tensions and conflicts have been a recurrent phenomenon in Latin America. Between 1990 and 2003, there have been some attempts of coups d'état; presidential destitutions/resignations; frequent cases of internal military

¹ See Jorge DOMINGUEZ, (et.al), *Boundary Disputes in Latin America, Peaceworks* No. 5, Washington D.C., UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE, September (2003).

tension; and one ongoing internal conflict (Colombia),² not to mention multiple strikes, roadblocks, and social mobilizations.

Figure 1. Global Trends in Violent Conflict, 1946-2002



Source: Marshall, M y Gurr, T. *Peace and Conflict 2003*. Center for International Development and Conflict Management, U. of Maryland. 2003

The Declaration of Bridgetown and the Multidimensional Approach to Security

The shift from focusing on combating traditional threats to introducing new transnational and internal security issues has configured a renewed determination of member states to consider a more holistic approach that takes into account the interdependence of international, state, and local levels.³ After a long process of discussion this new approach was recognized by OAS member states in the *Declaration of Bridgetown* in June of 2002 (AG/DEC. 27 (XXXII-O/02)). This document recognizes that:

“Security threats, concerns, and other challenges in the hemispheric context are of diverse nature and multidimensional scope, and that the traditional concept and approach must be expanded to encompass new and non-traditional threats, which include political economic, social, health, and environmental aspects” and (...) “these new threats, concerns, and other challenges are cross-cutting problems that require multifaceted responses by different national organizations, all acting

² Flacso-Chile, “Amenazas a la Gobernabilidad Democrática en América Latina”, (2003), FLACSO, Santiago de Chile.

³ See Francisco ROJAS-ARAVENA, *Human Security: Emerging Concept of Security in the Twenty-first Century*, Disarmament Forum (2002).

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appropriately in accordance with democratic norms and principles.”

The multidimensional approach described above calls on member states to work cooperatively toward redefining the institutional structure of existing mechanisms and encourages relevant strategies, methodologies, and approaches to internal threats under the auspices of democracy. Throughout the past decade, new theoretical concepts have emerged to comprehensively assist in this process. Concepts such as “democratic security” (Central America, Colombia),⁴ and “human security” (Canada)⁵ have been especially significant. Shared aspects of the multidimensional approach and human security include the concentration on internal conflict, illegal drugs and arms trafficking; terrorism; economic inequality; environment degradation; and emphasis on economic and social stability.

The Hemispheric Security System

As discussed before, the “old” hemispheric system relied on legal frameworks that deal with reference to traditional threats and some of the main elements were the Rio Treaty –TIAR- (1947), Bogotá Pact (1948), and the Treaty of Tlatelolco for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Americas (1967). The current institutional framework includes a diverse range of hemispheric legal instruments, treaties, *ad hoc* mechanisms for the resolution of conflict, and confidence-building measures that deal with traditional and non-traditional concerns.

Some of the instruments of this current framework include the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacture and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and other Related Materials (1995) and; the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption (1996). Additionally, the OAS has implemented regional mechanisms institutions to promote security and cooperation in the Hemisphere, including: the Committee on Hemispheric Security, created in (1995); the process of confidence-building measures –CBMs-; the Inter-American Defense Board –IADB- and its Inter-American Defense College, the process of Meetings of Ministers of Defense; the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission –CICAD-; and the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism –CICTE- (1999).

⁴ Democratic security is a related concept that encourages respect and support of human rights to secure states and their inhabitants through the creation of conditions that allow for peaceful personal and social development, liberty and democracy. This notion is sustained upon the strengthening of civil society, political participation and pluralism, and economic freedoms among others.

⁵ Canada’s concept of human security is one they have developed into a policy framework for foreign policy initiatives, the operational components of which include: the protection of civilians, peace support operations, conflict prevention, governance and accountability, and public safety.

Ad Hoc Mechanisms

Hemispheric *ad hoc* mechanisms to deal with interstate rivalries including facilitation, fact-finding, and other conflict resolution activities are undertaken by the Office of the Assistant Secretary General. Through the late 1990s, missions such as those dealing with the Belize-Guatemala and Honduras-Nicaragua border disputes have proven adaptable and accommodating to both the unique characteristics of each process, as well as the requests of parties to the conflict. Other *ad hoc* responses in the Inter-American system have been made through the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History that included the observance of a border demarcation between Honduras and El Salvador after the failed adjudication of the International Court of Justice in 1992.

Another use of *ad hoc* mechanisms came in the form of an investigation solicited by the governments of Colombia, Nicaragua, and Panama over a suspected illegal arms deal that diverted Nicaraguan weapons to the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). The investigation was realized through the help of an external expert with ample knowledge of the type of situation.

Confidence Building Measures

Furthermore, member states of the OAS, through the Declaration of Santiago (1995) and the Declaration of San Salvador (1998), adopted to foment various measures of confidence building through the fomentation of military, political, diplomatic, educational, and cultural interaction and activities. These Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) are considered “bilateral or multilateral actions to prevent conflict and crisis situations. CBMs seek to strengthen international peace and security, contribute to the communication among actors, and create a favorable atmosphere for the establishment of a realm of understanding that can act to mitigate the perception of immediate threat, while simultaneously prevent possible elements of surprise.”⁶ Among these measures the annual Meeting of the Ministers of Defense of the region, has promoted a dialogue that has encouraged greater transparency and reduction of threat perception.

Sub-Regional Mechanisms within the Hemisphere

Complementing the hemispheric tools for preventing regional security threats, many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have developed sub-regional instruments in response to the specific necessities identified within that region.

⁶ F. ROJAS-ARAVENA, *Confidence Building Measures and Strategic Balance, A Step Toward Expansion and Stability*, in Joseph S. TULCHIN and Francisco ROJAS ARAVENA, with Ralph H. ESPACH, eds., *Strategic Balance and Confidence Building Measures in the Americas*, Washington, WOODROW WILSON CENTER PRESS (1998).

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In Central America, the Treaty Framework for Democratic Security was established in 1995. Specifically, this document calls for signatory nations to work toward the following objectives: supremacy of civilian rule, reasonable balance of power, security of person and property, elimination of poverty, sustainable development, and the eradication of violence and arms trafficking. In 1996, the nations of the Caribbean implemented the Regional Security System of the Caribbean, demonstrating their priority for preventing the illicit trafficking of drugs, rescue assistance in cases of national emergency, immigration control, protection of fishing resources, customs and tariff controls, maritime police, natural disasters, pollution, and contraband.

In South America, various sub-regional collectives have developed in contribution to greater cooperation and reduction of collective threat within different sectors of the continent. On the 24th of August, 1997, Member States of the Rio Group signed the “Declaration of Asunción,” in which they promised to defend democracy, including the coordination of efforts in the fight against drug trafficking, corruption and terrorism, and the promotion of measures to build confidence and security within the Hemisphere.

In June of 1999, the economic trade cooperative MERCOSUR welcomed the declaration of observer nations Bolivia and Chile into a Zone of Peace, free of weapons of mass destruction and anti-personnel landmines. Similarly, these Countries agreed to strengthen cooperative mechanisms around the themes of security and the exclusively safe and peaceful use of nuclear energy including spatial technology and science. Likewise, by June 17th, 2002, the Andean nations signed onto the “Andean Charter for Peace and Security,” which establishes, *inter alia*, the principles of a communal policy toward security based on cooperation, reduction of military spending, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and the declaration of a peace zone.

Extra Regional Mechanisms

Responding to the same international security context, and taking into account their own regional needs, other international regional organizations are also working to revise and modernize their security-related mechanisms. In Europe, the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) boasts the Center for the Prevention of Conflicts, and a forum providing support for the fomentation of trust and security, including information exchange among militaries. The EU also has implemented the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) to prevent and manage ethnic conflict.

In Asia, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) deals with the development of steps towards prevention and resolution of conflict. This forum publishes documents, promotes the exchange of defense information and training, participates in arms control activities and organizes seminars and other educational activities. Perhaps the most notable mechanism of the ARF is the “register of experts” through which a

selected team takes on the work of study and assessment in confidence building measures, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution.

In Africa, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1993 and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1999, both established mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict. In August of 2001, the South African Development Community (SADC) adopted a new Protocol of Politics, Defense and Security that seeks to manage and resolve conflicts of both inter and intrastate nature through pacific means including preventative diplomacy, negotiations, conciliation, mediation, good offices, arbitration and international tribunal adjudication.

The work of these and other organizations provide valuable lessons to be learned through experience in this field. Under the auspices of the Committee on Hemispheric Security, the Inter-American community has had some exchanges of this type with the OSCE. In addition, for the past 5 or 6 years, the UN has been responsible for augmenting the exchange of information of regional organizations throughout the world on the theme of the changing nature of security and ways to deal with new threats in hopes of strengthening cooperation and mutual support in the realm of conflict prevention and democratic dialogue. Through the office of the Secretary General, the OAS has actively participated in these meetings.

Dialogue and Intrastate Conflict Resolution: Key Elements of Hemispheric Security

Fortifying Democracy and Strengthening Governance

The historical task of maintaining and ensuring the security, peace, and good relations among member states of the OAS has been complimented with equal importance given to the promotion, defense, and consolidation of democracy. The capacity of democracy in the Inter-American system boasts significant and perhaps irreversible advances over the past decade. With the exception of one, all nations of the Americas are now governed by democratically elected regimes. Now more than ever, countries enjoy a greater respect for human rights than in any other previous decade, with few indicators of systematic, political and deliberate state oppression. Still, the Inter-American System continues to face the difficult challenges of arriving at a more consolidated form of security and democracy.

Speaking to the limitations of what some call electoral, partial, or low intensity-democracies,⁷ countries continue to work against growing mistrust, a notion frequently generated by a lack of institutional legitimacy of basic components including political parties, legislative bodies, and judicial powers. These feelings are compounded by the State's inability to resolve basic economic, social, and citizen-

⁷ See T. AROTHERS, *The End of the Transition Paradigm*, Vol.13, No.1 JOURNAL OF DEMOCRACY, p. 1-21 (2002).

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security needs for the most needy and traditionally marginalized populations within their borders. Furthermore, a lack of adequate transparency in public sector activity along with perceived state corruption work to undermine any state legitimacy.

The Inter-American Democratic Charter

The goal of promoting democracy and strengthening governance motivated the Member States of the OAS to adopt what has become the *Magna Carta* of the OAS; the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IADC), signed on September 11th, 2001 in Lima, Peru. This document works to expand, organize, and strengthen existing legal instruments, furthering the development, consolidation, promotion, and defense of democracy in the region. Furthermore, the IADC widens the scope of OAS activity for defending against the growing crisis of democracy member states currently face. Specifically, the Charter facilitates the possibility of early, rapid and preventative response to crisis situations.

This is made possible through an expanded definition of democracy and an emphasis on long-term initiatives for the development of democracy. Among these concepts includes the strengthening of democratic institutions and the fostering a stronghold for a democratic political culture within countries of the Hemisphere. Lastly, the IADC makes explicit the linkage between the consolidation of democracy and other critical issues central to the advance of American states and their citizens, including the challenges related to themes economic, environmental, and of social justice. This final point serves as the foundation for the continued debate and critical analysis of methods to strengthen democratic governance within member states of the OAS.

Another step towards combating new threats to democracy and internal stability is to improve the efficacy of the State's capacity to peacefully and constructively resolve internal conflict at any level of intensity. It has been accepted that the prevention and resolution of conflict and democratic governance are mutually reinforcing in the combined capacity to promote and fortify conditions of peace and security for their citizens.

The 2003 "Santiago Declaration on Democracy and Public Trust: A New Commitment for Good Governance in the Americas" calls for the promotion of national consensus as a fundamental element for progress, stability, and peace among the nations of the Americas; an essential step toward strengthening democratic governance. One instrument frequently utilized within nations to advance constructive intrastate resolution of conflict are processes of political dialogue and national consensus. The inclusive nature of these processes retain the capacity to support various aspects of democratic governance within a given country, including, *inter alia*, the creation of a legitimate and constructive space for discussion within the realm of public politics.

Role of the OAS in Prevention and Resolution of Intrastate Conflicts

Over the past few years, the OAS through the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD) has worked toward the development of actions and institutional capacity for dealing with internal problems of member states. This support comes through new agreements, direct support for dialogue processes (including special *ad hoc* missions), and local capacity building measures, which focus on indirect support to assist member states constructively manage conflict and consensus building.

The OAS has played a fundamental role in supporting direct facilitation, conciliation, and/or negotiation processes for conflicts within the region. Among these include processes in Peru, Haiti, Guatemala, and more recently, in Venezuela. Similar to OAS participation and involvement in interstate conflict, these types of dialogue initiatives also come at the request of the governments and parties involved.

The current challenge posed to the OAS is how to consolidate these types of mechanisms and institutional forms of support toward the completion of these important tasks. Of crucial importance is a developed evaluation system and collection of lessons learned from which the expertise of the experiences of the OAS would be enriched. The Secretary General of the OAS, Cesar Gaviria, has proposed the creation of a small office within the Secretariat with the task of coordinating and dispatching these types of missions through the Offices of the Secretary and Assistant Secretary General.

The UPD and the Special Program for the Promotion of Dialogue and Conflict Resolution

The second form of support to member states comes through the UPD's Special Program for the Promotion of Dialogue and Conflict Resolution. Formally established in 2001, the Program provides support and technical assistance to create and strengthen the national institutional capacity of member states to efficiently and successfully manage internal conflicts. This work reflects the UPD's work as it reinforces institutional democracy within countries of the Hemisphere.

The task currently undertaken by the UPD and the Special Program has been to provide the means by which societies can reach at least a minimal level of consensus necessary within public political debate in order to preserve democratic institutions and principles, while simultaneously fostering an environment to prevent the violent eruption of crisis or latent conflict, as well as peacefully resolve national disputes.

This assistance is provided to Member States for individual, regional, or sub-regional levels, and includes:

- Support the sustained process of exchange of experiences and best practices between member states;

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- Assistance to member states in the design and integration into practice of integral systems for the promotion of dialogue, prevention, and resolution of conflicts;
- Specialized capacity building;
- Indirect facilitation in support of dialogue processes and/or negotiation, with emphasis on process-oriented assistance (technical assistance for negotiations, conciliation, or the establishment of a “pre-dialogue” environment”). This last point stresses the “process” orientation of assistance, and not thematic and substantive advice.

One of the most successful experiences in this field has been the Program “Culture of Dialogue: Development of Resources for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, OAS/PROPAZ”. Recently, the UPD and the Special Program transferred the mandates, vision and methodologies of the PROPAZ Program to the Guatemalan society with the establishment of the ProPaz Foundation. With this, the UPD has accomplished one of the Program’s main objectives: to leave installed capacity in Guatemala to continue supporting the country’s peace process, processes of political dialogue and the strengthening of democracy.

At the national level, the Special Program is developing a project for the design and implementation of a conflict prevention and resolution system in Bolivia. Other initiatives include technical assistance to the Government of Honduras in their efforts to bring closure to the process of national dialogue known as “Gran Diálogo Nacional.”

At the sub-regional level the Special Program is working on the implementation of the Central American Program for the Strengthening of Democratic Dialogue (PCA). This initiative strives for the promotion of multi-sectoral dialogue at the sub-regional level on critical issues of common interest, (e.g. crime prevention, land reform), among Central American nations. Over a three-year period, this Program aims to develop a sub-regional infrastructure for facilitating processes and establishing conflict management mechanisms between national, regional and hemispheric counterparts working in the area of consensus-building, dialogue and governance in Central America. Moreover, this initiative attempts to strengthen institutional capacity of government agencies and civil society organizations engaged in socio-political dialogue.

Conclusion

Though the definition of security included in the *Declaration of Security in the Americas* is broad, it was the only way member states were able to comprehensively reflect the vast range of security interests of the entire Hemisphere. The road to a concrete and common vision of security in the face of new threats within the Americas is going to be bumpy and plagued with difficult decisions. The challenge which lies ahead for OAS member states will be to define priorities and build consensus on a definition of hemispheric security that sets a clear guidance for a

regional strategy that allows the OAS to be more responsive to the concerns of its member states.

It is clear that the Inter-American system has the instruments to deal with hemispheric security challenges, and the creation of new bureaucracy is unlikely. The task would be more likely to strengthen cooperation among the existing agencies (i.e. CICAD, CICTE, etc) and avoid duplications and delayed reaction time. Likewise, as internal strife continues to threaten both the countries involved and their most proximate neighbors, increased cooperation and consolidation of resources through the direction of new security agenda will be imperative to maintain peace and stability within the region.

In the meantime, efforts to foster and develop new relationships within extra-regional organizations will prove beneficial as the OAS continues to manage the arduous task of combating new transnational and regional threats to security. Both extra-regional and internal information sharing among the various agencies and organizations involved in framing a new security approach can contribute to gathering and recording a set of best practices to combat non-traditional threats. The exchange of such experience will prove valuable as the inter-American system continues to foster stronger civil-military relations. Similarly, the contribution of academic and defense circles involved in debate surrounding themes such as human trafficking, terrorism, and poverty reduction will be in high demand as the members of the Inter-American system come together for a consensus on fortifying a new security framework.

Finally, even though there is not a general consensus on the concept of security, all member states recognize that there is a strong relationship between democratic governance and security. Therefore, OAS's efforts in strengthening electoral systems, political parties and mechanisms for political dialogue and conflict resolution in the Hemisphere are important contributions to regional peace and stability.

