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Latin America and the Caribbean in 2011 and Beyond: A conversation among Latin America and Caribbean Specialists.

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Latin America and the Caribbean in 2011 and Beyond

A Conversation among Latin America and Caribbean Specialists

Held in Miami, FL on November 19, 2010

Final Report
January 2011

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The views expressed in this research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Government, Department of Defense, US Southern Command or Florida International University.
PREFACE

This is the final report on the results of a conversation among a group of prestigious Latin American and Caribbean academics and practitioners who gathered in Miami, Florida in November 2010 to review current regional affairs and share their views on the main trends and challenges facing 2011 and beyond. The list of participants appears at the end of this report. Rather than determining set conclusions, participants offered a variety of appreciations and reflections on Latin America and the Caribbean for the immediate and medium-range future. Florida International University’s Applied Research Center coordinated the event and appreciates the contributions of all participants.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the first time in more than fifty years, the domestic and external conflicts prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are not primarily ideological in nature. Democracy continues to thrive and its promise still inspires hope. In contrast, the illegal production, consumption, and trading of drugs – and its links to criminal gangs and organizations – represent major challenges to the region, undermining several States’ already weak capacity to govern. While LAC macroeconomic stability has remained resilient, illegal economies fill the region, often offering what some States have not historically been able to provide – elements of human security, opportunities for social mobility, and basic survival.

Areas controlled by drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are now found in Central America, Mexico, and the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, reflecting their competition for land routes and production areas. Cartels such as La Familia, Los Zetas, and Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC-Brazil), among others, operate like trade and financial enterprises that manage millions of dollars and resources, demonstrating significant business skills in adapting to changing circumstances. They are also merciless in their application of violence to preserve their lucrative enterprises. The El Salvador-Guatemala-Honduras triangle in Central America is now the most violent region in the world, surpassing regions in Africa that have been torn by civil strife for years.

In Brazil’s favelas and Guatemala’s Petén region, the military is leaving the barracks again; not to rule, however, but to supplement and even replace the law enforcement capacity of weak and discredited police forces. This will challenge the military to apply lessons learned during the course of their experience in government, or from the civil
wars that plagued the region for nearly 50 years during the Cold War. Will they be able to conduct themselves according to the professional ethics that have been inculcated over the past 20 years without incurring violations of human rights? Belief in their potential to do good is high according to many polls as the Armed Forces still enjoy a favorable perception in most societies, despite frequent involvement in corruption. Calling them to fight DTOs, however, may bring them too close to the illegal activities they are being asked to resist, or even rekindle the view that only a “strong hand” can resolve national troubles.

The challenge of governance is occurring as contrasts within the region are becoming sharper. There is an increasing gap between nations positioned to surpass their “developing nation” status and those that are practically imploding as the judicial, political and enforcement institutions fall further into the quagmire of illicit activities. Several South American nations are advancing their political and economic development. Brazil in particular has realized macro-economic stability, made impressive gains in poverty reduction, and is on track to potentially become a significant oil producer. It is also an increasingly influential power, much closer to the heralded “emerging power” category that it aspired to for most of the 20th century. In contrast, several Central American States have become so structurally deficient, and have garnered such limited legitimacy, that their countries have devolved into patches of State controlled and non-State-controlled territory, becoming increasingly vulnerable to DTO entrenchment.

In the Caribbean, the drug and human trafficking business also thrives. Small and larger countries are experiencing the growing impact of illicit economies and accompanying crime and violence. Among these, Guyana and Suriname face greater uncertainty, as they juggle both their internal affairs and their relations with Brazil and Venezuela. Cuba also
faces new challenges as it continues focusing on internal rather than external affairs and attempts to ensure a stable leadership succession while simultaneously trying to reform its economy. Loosening the regime’s tight grip on the economy while continuing to curtail citizens’ civil rights will test the leadership’s ability to manage change and prevent a potential socio-economic crisis from turning into an existential threat. Cuba’s past ideological zest is now in the hands of Venezuela’s President Hugo Chavez, who continues his attempts to bring the region together under Venezuelan leadership ideologically based on a “Bolivarian” anti-U.S. banner, without much success.

The environment and natural disasters will merit more attention in the coming years. Natural events will produce increasing scales of destruction as the States in the region fail to maintain and expand existing infrastructure to withstand such calamities and respond to their effects. Prospects for earthquakes, tsunamis, and hurricanes are high, particularly in the Caribbean. In addition, there are growing rates of deforestation in nearly every country, along with a potential increase in cross-sector competition for resources. The losers might be small farmers, due to their inability to produce quantities commensurate to larger conglomerates. Regulations that could mitigate these types of situations are lacking or openly violated with near impunity.

Indigenous and other vulnerable populations, including African descendants, in several Andean countries, are particularly affected by the increasing extraction of natural resources taking place amongst their terrain. This has led to protests against extraction activities that negatively affect their livelihoods, and in the process, these historically underprivileged groups have transitioned from agenda-based organization to one that is bringing its claims and grievances to the national political agenda, becoming more politically engaged. Symptomatic of these social issues is the region’s
chronically poor quality of education that has consistently failed to reduce inequality and prepare new generations for jobs in the competitive global economy, particularly the more vulnerable populations. Simultaneously, the educational deficit is also exacerbated by the erosion of access to information and freedom of the press.

The international panorama is also in flux. New security entities are challenging the old establishment. The Union of South American Nations, The South American Defense Council, the socialist Bolivarian Alliance, and other entities seem to be defying the Organization of American States and its own defense mechanisms, and excluding the U.S. And the U.S.’s attention to areas in conflict, namely Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan – rather than to the more stable Latin America and Caribbean – has left ample room for other actors to elbow in. China is now the top trading partner for Brazil. Russian and Iran are also finding new partnerships in the region, yet their links appear more politically inclined than those of China.

Finally, the aforementioned increasing commercial ties by LAC States with China have accelerated a return to the preponderance of commodities as sources of income for their economies. The increased extraction of raw material for export will produce greater concern over the environmental impact that is created by the exploitation of natural resources. These expanded trade opportunities may prove counterproductive economically for countries in the region, particularly for Brazil and Chile, two countries whose economic policies have long sought diversification from dependence on commodities to the development of service and technology based industries.
Regional observers have noted with satisfaction recent economic indicators and public polling results, confirming that Latin America has avoided the worst effects of the global economic recession. The 2010 findings of the AmericasBarometer (LAPOP) shows that while the poor indeed were the most affected by the crisis, approximately three-fourths of the region’s population retained their jobs, and half reported no change in their household income. The United Nations’ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) places aggregate regional growth for 2010 at 6 percent while estimating that growth in the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Uruguay, and Paraguay has ranged from as high as 7 to 9.7 percent. LAPOP surveys show a majority of the LAC’s citizens to be increasingly satisfied with their governments’ economic performance, corresponding with the Santiago-based LatinoBarómetro’s findings that over half of the population in Brazil, Panama, and Chile believe their respective countries to be making socio-economic progress.

Although poverty remains at levels higher than 20 percent of the population in most Latin American countries, trends indicate that the region is indeed making economic progress, leading The Financial Times to declare that, “Poverty is no longer what defines it; instead, it is the rising middle class.” Even income inequality, long the bane of the region’s socio-economic development, and the source of much of its historic political instability, has seen some improvements –

1 Bárcena, Alicia; Prado, Antonio; Kacef, Osvaldo; Malchik, Susana; “Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean,” Pg. 9, The United Nations, December 2010.
particularly in Ecuador, Paraguay, and Brazil – although the region as a whole remains the most unequal in the world.4

This net economic progress has also led to positive implications for the region’s democracy, reports LAPOP. Macroeconomic stability may have prevented not only a more serious economic crisis, but also a region-wide decline in political legitimacy, and perhaps even threats to the consolidation of the democratic regime. More broadly speaking, surveys indicated that democratic attitudes, and the legitimacy of the political system itself, have turned out to be surprisingly resilient, with 69.8 per cent of the region in support of democracy.

Furthermore, Latin America has become more tolerant. When LAPOP asked citizens whether government critics – those criticizing either an incumbent government, its policies, or the political system as a whole – should be allowed to vote, conduct peaceful demonstrations, run for public office, and give speeches on television, approximately 55 percent of the region indicated approval.5 This trend towards tolerance and openness to new ideas have had a correlating effect on Latin American economics, translating into mixed approaches that include both State regulation and greater integration into the international global economy. This heterodox conception is expressed by former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva, who has spoken of the need for the State “to intervene when the market fails,” yet he too would be counted amongst the 71 percent of Latin Americans that believe “private enterprise is essential for [their] country’s development.”6

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5 Ibid., Slides 47 and 48.
Despite these positive political and economic trends, however, Latin America remains politically vulnerable. This is especially salient when analyzing the combination of political tolerance and system support as indications of “democracy at risk.” Haiti tops the list among 26 countries analyzed as having its democratic regime most at risk. It is followed, unexpectedly perhaps, by Peru and Paraguay. At the bottom of the list are Costa Rica and Uruguay, maintaining their historical positions as the region’s most stable democracies. As a whole, growing public insecurity – as seen in the proliferation of violence, gangs, corruption, and the States’ inability to provide protection – is diminishing support for democracy.

Also, the region’s economic success is largely based on mineral exports fueled by high commodity prices. Peru’s 8.6 percent growth rate can largely be attributed to the high prices for gold, silver, copper, and zinc sales in the international market. The source for these high prices has largely been China’s seemingly insatiable demand for agricultural products and minerals, which has made the Asian giant, rather than the U.S., Brazil’s number one trading partner. Both are emblematic of the larger, region-wide phenomenon that Latin America is still – as it has been throughout its history – dependent on raw material exports. The region’s lack of innovation and disregard for intellectual property rights only strengthen this claim. Finding an alternative path to this dependence is crucial to Latin America’s long-term political and socio-economic prospects, and can only be truly and fundamentally addressed through improvements in education.

7 Bárcena, Alicia; Prado, Antonio; Kacef, Osvaldo; Malchik, Susana; op.cit.; Oppenheimer, Andrés, “Peru May Be Region’s Next Success Story,” The Miami Herald, October 14th, 2010.
Education has become the Achilles’ heel of Latin American development. Aside from some occasional exceptions, schools from pre-school to graduate school levels provide low-quality education that fail to meet the needs of countries and students and prepare them for a competitive global economy. Students are finishing at the bottom in nearly all global student achievement tests, and when it comes to science in particular, students are receiving marks that lie at or below the lowest levels possible. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), these scores indicate that the societies in question will not be able to participate actively in science and technology industries or related industrial trends and events.

This negative economic assessment of the region’s education systems is surpassed only by the social implications, as LAC schools do little to reduce inequality. Poor children tend to begin school later in age, fail and repeat more grades, drop out sooner, and score lower on standardized tests than their more affluent peers, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, or area of residence. Children of the rich attend well-funded private schools of reasonable quality, while the poor receive third-rate education in underfunded and poorly managed public schools. University level education in the region also suffers from the paradox of having the most affluent attend State-funded institutions – because they meet the grade and exam based criteria for admittance and attend for free or reduced tuition – while poor students, whose economic situation the State system was designed for, cannot gain admittance because of their inability to fulfill the exam entrance requirements, perpetuating the regional educational crisis.

LAC government social spending also paradoxically tends to benefit the richest part of the population more than the

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9 Brazil has become a leader in tropical medicine, biofuel, and food crop PhD research.
poorest. In several countries, for example, 80 percent of social security benefits go to the wealthiest 40 percent of the population, and only 3 percent go to the poorest 10 percent. The size of informal economies – more than 40 percent in many Latin American countries – reduces both productivity growth and fiscal revenues, and is largely caused by government bureaucracy and an inability to effectively tax revenues. A lack of sensible fiscal policies means that tax burdens are increasingly placed on the middle class. Finally, the practice of taxing capital and land very lightly to promote investment, while taxing labor very heavily, leads to growth that fails to generate a significant amount of jobs – resulting in growing inequality and dependence on illegal and informal economies for many.

Vulnerable populations are usually the most affected by the inequalities in society. And because of where they often live, they are increasingly impacted by issues such as environmental degradation, land use and tenure issues, and the effects from the exploitation of natural resources. Indigenous and marginalized groups have responded with growing protests, particularly in the Andean countries, creating socially and ethnically-based organizations to gain political influence. Such groups have reached national power in Bolivia and the rights of indigenous people have indeed expanded under the presidency of Evo Morales, whose policies are contributing to Bolivians’ realization of the need for a more integrated society. Yet, most other countries still fail to even incorporate the rights of indigenous populations in their constitutions.

Repeated judicial and constitutional reforms have created many ambiguous laws and precedents subject to political influence and interpretation, often criticized for creating conditions of legal impunity for many individuals. The inability or unwillingness of the legal systems in most countries to eliminate or reduce impunity has contributed to
the growing distrust by citizens in their legal institutions. Corruption in the judicial systems often denies access to justice to large segments of populations – while in some countries the judicial systems are completely defunct. The exceedingly poor quality of corrections systems has essentially created universities for criminals to learn how to perfect their illegal practices and living nightmares for the innocent.

Finally, the region has seen a setback in press freedom. There is growing soft and hard censorship, including the intimidation and even assassination of journalists in several countries. Relations between the media and the State have deteriorated through the region, and there is a growing concentration of media ownership in few hands. A foreboding legal environment is emerging through laws designed to weaken freedom of information through the censorship of media outlets and the limitation of access to media sources. This has coincided with the perception that news coverage is failing to adequately address the challenges and issues (environment, health, and rural issues) faced by citizens in many countries. All of these are factors that affect the quality of democracy, as they leave the public uninformed and unable to address their grievances and claims in the public forum of ideas, ultimately reducing their faith in democratic systems of government.

**NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISK**

The bi-continental expanse of Latin America and the Caribbean contains areas highly susceptible to the effects of natural disasters. 2010 gave two examples of contrasting experiences with Haiti and Chile in the level of damage and the capacity to recover from their earthquakes. The ultimate lesson learned was that the least developed the country, the greater the impact of the destruction and scale of the disaster. Both cases also illustrated the need for the immediate
reestablishment of national authority and the continuity of government following a natural disaster.

Environmental risks that can lead to disasters are also present in the region. Continued deforestation of the Amazon would likely compound global warming, potentially leading to droughts across large portions of Latin America. This would have devastating effects on food production from Argentina to Brazil, as well as lead to the collapse of some of the most bio-diverse ecosystems in the world. Cross-sector competition for water resources exists between power, agriculture, industry, and drinking water. More than 100 dams are being built throughout the region, affecting local residential access to water resources, and often exacerbating existing border disputes. There are also concerns with the spread of communicable diseases, as migration increases to city slums that lack potable water and sanitation. Population pressures in cities are presenting higher risks of infrastructure deterioration, while insufficient attention to technical trades – such as training electricians and mechanics – also places at risk the ability of some nations to maintain electrical grids and water and sanitation infrastructures. The lack of appropriate infrastructures again reinforces citizens’ perception that governments cannot even provide basic services in exchange for their political support.

**ILLICIT ACTIVITIES TRANSFORM THE REGION**

Among the most prevailing challenges reshaping the security agenda in LAC is the rise of illicit activity, namely narcotics trafficking. This activity has historically resided in Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru. However, globalization has drastically enhanced illicit traffickers’ ability to adjust to pressures from international law enforcement agencies, moving people and goods across borders with relative ease. It has also enabled the creation of new markets in developing countries, increasing demand. For example, over the past
four years there has been a 30 percent decrease in cocaine reaching the U.S., but there has been an upsurge in drug-trafficking through South America. This is a result of an increase in alternative transshipment routes from Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru to Brazil and Argentina to final destinations in Africa and Europe. Portions of these shipments remain in South America during transit, particularly because Brazil and Argentina have become major drug-consuming markets.

Central America remains the major corridor for drugs reaching the U.S and Canada. From Panama to Guatemala the presence of DTOs has dramatically increased, many seeking to escape the pressures of Colombian and Mexican counter-drug initiatives. The States’ inability to address their persistent socio-political and economic challenges – and their lack of interest in and capacity to address criminality even unrelated to drug trafficking – makes their societies extremely vulnerable to the effects of these DTOs. For example, violence is on the rise in the northern triangle – Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras – a region that has already been dubbed by the UN Development Program as the most violent region in the world, in large part because of the region’s civil wars of the 1980’s, the corruption and abuse of law enforcement prominent within its countries, the resulting alienation of large segments of its societies, and the rise of large and violent gangs known as maras. The Caribbean now has the world’s second highest per capita murder rate. And nearly half of Latin Americans polled feel “very unsafe” (LAPOP), to the extent that concerns over crime have increasingly surpassed those of unemployment since 2008 (Latinobarómetro).^{10}

While powerful DTOs are indeed challenging the States’ ability to govern effectively, many such States have long

been governed ineffectively. Therefore, in some cases, the loyalty of local populations has shifted from governments to criminal organizations, often in localities where the latter is more able to provide basic services and security for the community, often leading to incidents where citizens are protecting drug-lords. This was made evident in Jamaica in 2010 – when citizens attempted to protect Christopher “Dudus” Coke from local law enforcement authorities that sought to extradite him to the U.S. – and has also been common in Colombia’s rural areas, Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, and across Haiti before and after the 2010 earthquake.

The growing crime and insecurity and the inability of LAC States to effectively resist it is leading to the privatization of traditional government security functions. Across Central America and the Caribbean, private security companies are being sought to step in and attempt to provide basic security services to fill the State’s capacity deficit. Such companies are often better equipped and trained than national and local police forces and employ current and former military and law enforcement officials. However, they also display the same problems that plague public institutions, sometimes moonlighting as paramilitaries and committing crimes while ostensibly combating other criminal groups. Rio de Janeiro and numerous cities in Colombia provide prime examples where ineffectively demobilized paramilitaries have rebranded themselves as private security companies, but remain as predatory, violent, and pernicious as ever. Ultimately, the trend towards criminal activity and the corresponding increase in the use of private security companies will likely continue to reduce the State’s monopoly on law enforcement.
LATIN AMERICAN MILITARIES: RETURNING FROM THE BARRACKS?

Neither military nor police can act as sole executor of citizen security

As comparisons are increasingly made between today’s Central American drug cartels and those of Colombia two decades prior, there might be more calls for the military, security, and law enforcement institutions to single-handedly “solve the problem.” However, Mexico’s experience alone shows the ineffectiveness of this approach. Approximately 45,000 troops and thousands of federal law enforcement officers have been deployed since 2006 to combat the nation’s DTOs – a dual-approach being taken because Mexico’s weak and corrupt police force had initially proved itself unfit for the task – yet these federal deployments have failed to significantly reduce drug-related violence, as more than 30,000 people died over the four years since the federal government began its anti-DTO campaign.11 In other countries, corruption within the military and police is so widespread that neither group can be relied upon to establish or reestablish citizen security. And additional calls for combining the two forces may simply garner military-police conflicts.

At the regional level, combined U.S.-Latin American counter-drug efforts must move beyond their focus on interdiction and punishment. Since the 1980’s, it has been demonstrated that these initiatives deal with only the effects of the problems, and in many cases exacerbate them. For example, prisons in the U.S and Central America have been known to serve as training and recruitment centers that actually enhance the ability of organized crime to maintain

11 “Mexico Bodies Found After Shoot Out with Police,” The Telegraph, August 26th, 2010; “Mexico’s Drug War: Number of Dead Passes 30,000,” BBC, December 16th, 2010.
its cohesion. Therefore, regional efforts must become more holistic in nature and address fundamental sources of instability, particularly by promoting legal, intelligence, and social welfare reform.

On the national and local levels, governments might do well to perform the following:

1. Commit to multi-dimensional police reform that includes continued education, a dignified wage, preparation for various police units and tactics, and a demand for principled conduct (i.e., no tolerance for corruption, extortion, or abuse of power).

2. Reassert State presence in “alternatively governed spaces” (AGS’s). While this is often achieved through military or militarized-police force, regard for human rights must be a governing principle within such operations.

3. Maintain the State’s subsequent presence (“seize and hold”) through the presence of regular law enforcement and security forces, or through topos / “ground hog” units. A topo unit consists of a 10-member squad that carries both revolvers and high-caliber rifles and patrols areas at frequent intervals.

4. Regain citizen trust through “community policing,” “rotational policing,” or a combination of the two. The idea of local, permanent police forces is appealing, because one can get to know his or her protector. However, local officers have also been known to make friends with the local criminals, provoking calls for rotational police units.

5. Expand citizens’ access to justice, support for the rule of law, and human rights to address LAC’s crisis of impunity.
6. Implement prison reform that provides additional building capacity, more secure facilities that effectively cut inmates’ ties to outside criminal groups, and holistic rehabilitation programs that re-integrate prisoners with society when it is deemed safe and responsible to do so.

7. Create opportunities for legal employment while simultaneously increasing the State’s capacity to render services such as water, electricity, health care, and improved education to affected communities.

8. Encourage community involvement to give citizens a new stake in a common future, and to create new spaces for social capital to emerge.

As a whole, information is crucial to fighting crime effectively. There is a need for reliable indicators, as well as public data on individuals, to help governments and companies conduct investigative work. Information sharing is also key and could perhaps be improved by bringing inter-agency models to Latin America. Characteristics of crime organizations also need to be better understood. While small gangs need to be dismantled, going after larger criminal organizations may continue to be a better strategy, particularly because larger organizations are the ones that are increasing utilizing these small gangs. Furthermore, not all organizations conduct the same types of activities, making it necessary to discriminate their functions for more effective responses.

PART OF THE PROBLEM RATHER THAN THE SOLUTION?

Large-scale revenue-driven military corruption is eroding the containment of illicit activities. Recent investigative news reports appear to indicate diverse scenarios where corrupt military actors have found new ways of securing consistent
illegal sources of income. While isolated incidents of bribery, illegal arms sales, kidnapping, drug-trafficking, money-laundering, and robbery can be found amongst various military personnel across the region, other scenarios appear to be offering steady sources of illegal revenue, and to therefore be more characteristic of large-scale, institutional corruption. Border guards within the Dominican Republic’s Specialized Border Security Corps, or CESFRONT, for example, are accused of regularly accepting bribes to overlook the trafficking of Haitian children into their country. In Venezuela, the recently captured drug-trafficker Walid Makled claims to have intermittently paid as many as fifteen Venezuelan generals to both protect him and usher drug shipments through the Caracas Maiquetía airport.12

More research is needed to see how corruption is organized within the ranks; whether it is the result of individual soldiers or officers acting on their own, or if it is limited to specific units or stratified hierarchically within the military structure. These elements would contribute to a better understanding of knowing when trust might be an issue when dealing with military institutions. It would also assist in identifying areas that need strengthened, such as offices of Inspector Generals, codes of ethics, procurement and contracting processes, forensic abilities, and more. As for U.S., it could do its part by making military assistance contingent upon greater transparency and accountability on how the institutions and their senior officials are funded.

A NEW ROLE FOR THE MILITARY?

The increased use of the military as a police force, growing expenditures, and new cases of large-scale revenue-driven

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corruption call for not only a reassessment of Latin American military powers, but perhaps also a new directive that could make better use of Armed Forces energies. For example, Brazilian, Colombian, and U.S. militaries all came to the aid of Haiti after the destructive 7.0-scale earthquake hit the country on January 12, 2010. One month later, approximately 10,000 Chilean troops acted as “first-responders” to their own country’s 8.8-magnitude earthquake, successfully restoring order to communities affected by panic and looting.

Such international and domestic military response skills could be promoted as a template for other Latin American militaries and perhaps even institutionalized. A regional multinational response force could even be created. Militaries often bear equipment, organizational structures, and rapid-response capacities that other domestic actors lack. Brought under the directive of natural disaster response, militaries could better serve their resource-strapped governments in moments of crisis and further reinforce their value and service to democratic governments. However, should such mandates ultimately be enacted, it will require that a certain percentage of traditional conventional arms purchases be re-directed towards disaster-response equipment, a move likely to garner various degrees of contestation and support.

**INFLUENCE IN FLUX**

Latin America and the Caribbean face transnational and multi-dimensional challenges that surpass the capacity of either the U.S. or any other single State. However, while over the past decade the U.S.’ attention has focused on areas outside of Latin America – with the exception of Colombia –

14 “Counting the Cost; Chile’s Earthquake,” The Economist, March 6th, 2010.
there has been an increasing consensus that it must reengage the region.

The state of the West remains critical to Latin America. The most significant threat to the stability, security, prosperity and welfare of the region for the next few years may be the prospect of deepening recession and eventual inflation in the U.S., Europe, and in the global economy in general. Furthermore, there is the possibility of growing tensions among the G-8 and G-20 nations on how to manage the world economy, which could lead to the outbreak of currency manipulations and protectionist policies. Latin America may not be so much a source of economic instability as it is a likely victim of it in the era of globalization.

New foreign powers – as other nations have done in the past – are securing natural resources in LAC. China, Iran, Russia, and perhaps soon India, covet the region’s oil, lithium, uranium, and other valuable resources. The nature of Chinese and Iranian relations can best be understood by their respective key partnerships in Latin America: China’s strong economic relations with Brazil and Iran’s ideological engagement with Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Bolivia. There is also a sense of competition with the U.S. in terms of who will have preferential access to these resources, from sources of alternative energy to sources critical to new technologies – particularly in the case of lithium.

Within the region, Brazil represents the most determined regional and international actor. Mexico’s internal drug violence has limited its ability to play a significant role in LAC. Cuba’s new leadership is more concerned with domestic rather than foreign issues and instead, it is relying on Venezuela to carry the anti-American banner. However, Venezuela’s capacity to maintain its own level of influence seems to have peaked, as it faces profound internal political
and economic crises. Simultaneously, other regional countries that could utilize sufficient political and economic leverage to increase their influence, like Chile, apparently have concluded that it is not in their interests to do so.

**BRAZIL: ARE WE THERE YET?**

As China did in 2008, Brazil is preparing to make an unprecedented statement to the world that it has finally entered the ranks of the global powers in the 21st century, hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and the Summer Olympics in 2016. Oil and gas discoveries from 2007 and 2008, if estimates are correct, will make Brazil a major energy producer, enhancing its regional and international influence. Brazil has steadily increased its role in both the hemisphere and the international community in pursuit of its aspirations, yet it seems uncertain on how to project its role as an emerging power. While the “Lula Model” of moderate left politics is more appealing than the strident policies of some of its neighbors, Brazil still has no real development model to offer. Nor has it completely defined its relationship with the U.S.

Brazil and the U.S. share a commitment to democracy, and a desire for regional stability, but may increasingly differ on other issues. Brazil desires a deeper bilateral relationship with the U.S. – similar to that which has been developed with India – yet there is no clear indication of what a Brazil-U.S. partnership would look like. Brazil is a key player in both the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the South American Defense Council, South America’s two newest multilateral security organizations. And its military has played major roles in the Haitian peacekeeping operations before and after the 2010 earthquake. It is in the U.S. interest to collaborate with Brazil and the new regional security entities and to avoid repeating its delay in recognizing MERCOSUR when it was created in the 1990s.
The Brazilian military has long resisted cooperation with the U.S. on counternarcotics efforts. However, now that Brazil is facing increased flows of drug traffic, new opportunities for collaboration may exist. For example, the U.S. could oversee technology transfers that would place new drug-interdiction radar systems into the Amazon. Similarly, Brazilian efforts in eradicating drug lords from the favelas in Rio de Janeiro and other main cities could provide additional lessons learned when it comes to community policy, fighting organized crime, combating drug and arms trafficking, and understanding the pernicious effects of local corruption and private security organizations. Brazil could even use such knowledge to support Mexico’s anti-DTO offensive, an initiative that could both assist a fellow LAC nation and enhance its regional leadership simultaneously.

**VENEZUELAN INFLUENCE UNRAVELING?**

Despite anticipation that President Hugo Chávez’s region-wide vision of 21st Century Socialism might strengthen and spread, it appears to be gaining no new followers in the region. The ousting of Honduras’ President Manuel Zelaya in 2009 seems to have tempered enthusiasm for Venezuelan anti-Americanism rhetoric in Latin America. Yet, the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA, Spanish acronym for Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas) has provided significant economic assistance to several member and observer States, particularly in the Caribbean. Because of its close link to the Venezuelan economy, the very success of ALBA is dependent on continued Venezuelan oil sales at stable prices, and the ability of Chavez to manage internal political challenges.
China continues to deepen its presence

Generally speaking, China-Latin American relations have largely been driven by economic considerations, primarily access to markets and resources. China’s trade with the region reached US$121.5 billion in 2009, and trade between China and Brazil increased 12-fold between 2001 and 2009, making it Brazil’s largest commercial partner. China will displace the European Union as the region's second-largest trading partner by the middle of 2011. Though slow to materialize, Chinese investments in Latin America are now in the billions, with several major deals having come about over the last few years, i.e. US$28 billion in loans to Venezuela, with another US$16 billion committed to oil exploration in the Orinoco; US$10 billion to Argentina to modernize its rail system, and US$3.1 billion to purchase the Argentine oil company BRIDAS; a US$1 billion advance payment to Ecuador in exchange for petroleum; US$4.4 billion committed to Peru; and almost US$20 billion to Brazil in exchange for oil and steel.15 Indeed, it is China’s economic engagement in Latin America that both offset the global economic crisis of 2008 and helped solidify its influence throughout the region.16

Iranian and Russian influences remain marginal

Latin America and the Caribbean has seen an increase in an Iranian foreign policy that engages populist, less democratic governments such as Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador and follows a more ideological, anti-American discourse as the only principle uniting this extraordinary coalition. Hugo Chavez, Iran’s biggest ally in the region, has

16 One important exception to China’s trade with the region is Mexico, which sees China as a competitor to U.S. markets access.
helped foster and/or strengthen these relationships. Iran has also engaged Brazil and Mexico, though with much less success. Iran seems to be seeking international alliances to overcome years of UN sanctions and international pressures that have countered its pursuit of nuclear power. Iran’s economic activities in the region have increased, particularly in Venezuela, where it has signed more than 20 cooperative agreements in recent years. Economic ties between Iran and Latin America are marginal and less viable than those of China and Russia, and many of Iran’s financial commitments have not been realized. More recently, there have been allegations that Iran is seeking uranium in Venezuela, though this has not been confirmed. To date, there are no known significant uranium deposits in Venezuela. However, such deposits do exist in neighboring Guyana. Nonetheless, in the context of influence, if Venezuelan influence is stagnating then Iran will find it difficult to maintain long-term relations in LAC.

In the past few years Russia has also increased its ties with Latin America, notably through an increase in arms sales that jumped 900 percent between the time periods of 1999-2003 and 2004-2008.17 Russia also signed nuclear-related memoranda with several Latin American countries in 2009, including Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Despite these activities, however, Russian influence remains relatively low when compared to that of the U.S. and China.

**DOES THE U.S. STILL LEAD?**

Despite the growing presence of China, and the fact that the U.S. has over time decreased its own engagement with LAC, the U.S. remains the most influential actor within the Western Hemisphere. Trade between the U.S. and LAC countries totaled just over US$500 billion in 2009, a

significant increase from the 2004 figure of US$427 billion.\textsuperscript{18} And although China has greatly increased its own regional trade, U.S. trade is still four times greater – affording the U.S. a much larger economic footprint, as well as the ability to wield greater influence. Culturally, LAC societies have greater linkages with the U.S. than any other country outside of the hemisphere. Politically, the U.S.’ commitment to the promotion of democracy and human rights remains relevant to the claims and aspirations of LAC societies. The U.S. also continues to enjoy positive popular perceptions within the region. In 2010, U.S. leadership approval ratings were as high as 62 percent in Chile and El Salvador, 58 percent in Colombia, and 50 percent in Peru. In countries where governments promote anti-American policies, perceptions were still relatively high: Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Venezuela featured approval ratings of 40 percent and Ecuador, 44 percent.\textsuperscript{19}

U.S.-LAC military-to-military relations remain strong, even if U.S. military policies are often viewed with suspicion, as demonstrated by the support for President Rafael Correa’s decision not to renew a U.S. military lease in Manta, Ecuador, and the region-wide controversy over a 2009 proposal to allow the U.S. to use Colombian military bases. In 2010, Brazil signed its first major military agreement with the U.S. since 1977, providing “for cooperation in research and development, information exchanges, and [a relationship that] allows for joint military exercises and training.”\textsuperscript{20} Later

\textsuperscript{18} Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars. “Latin America in 2010: Opportunities, Challenges and the Future of the U.S. Policy in the Hemisphere,” Cynthia Arnson testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere on December 1, 2010.


that year, the U.S. and Peru renewed a commitment to joint military engagement. 21

Opportunities and challenges still remain for the U.S. to deepen its relationship with LAC. Such engagement must be focused and sustained, with an emphasis on thinking preventively and in partnership with LAC. Strategic partnerships – particularly those with Brazil and Mexico – should be cultivated, and increased attention paid to the weak States and the illicit activities that plague the Central American region. In essence, the U.S. remains an appreciated conflict resolution resource for the region.

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Erich de la Fuente, “Cuba’s Role in Venezuela’s Control of the Internet and Online Social Networks.” October 2010.


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