

Arms Control and Limitation in Latin America: An Elusive Goal

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In the decade following the end of the cold war, the international security system was drastically modified. Now, after September 11, we must ask if the terrorist attacks in the United States will mark a new turning point for international security. Answers will differ depending on the region, but it is clear that national and global policies will be influenced by these events. One of these policies will be arms control. In this paper I analyze the main variables that affect the control of armaments in Latin America. Even though there have been significant advances in this field, traditional tendencies which reaffirm the classical dilemma of security, still remain. Nevertheless, there is the opportunity for the creation of a security regime that can establish a Plural Community of Defense of the Americas.

AN INTERNATIONAL DE FACTO REGIME: THE WEST

In the post cold war decade, the most important change in the global system was the emergence of new international actors. Not only did the number of states increase but there was also an increase in the number of non-governmental international organizations and companies. Some of these acquired great relevance and, in some cases, even more than states themselves.

Within this new scenario, an international regime has been formed. It includes many countries but centers around the United States and the European Union. It is not only a North Atlantic grouping, however, but a de facto association of countries in the Western Hemisphere, Europe, and Asia with democracy, free market ideals, economic integration, and respect for human rights as its essential values. In terms of international security, the result has been the promotion of the non-use of force in the resolution of disputes among members, the

non-proliferation of weapons, and international security cooperation.

Economically, the new international regime manifests itself in increasing forms of association and the opening of trade. Politically, the main expression in the hemisphere has

been the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic charter. Respect for human rights had been in the forefront of the global security agenda during the past decade, but after September 11 its importance appears to have taken a back seat to other issues. Finally, the process of globalization must be noted as the single most significant and potent force in the creation of a new international security matrix.

NEW FORMAL SUB-REGIONAL SECURITY REGIMES

The security regimes that have been consolidated in the Americas in the last decade are the Democratic Treaty of Central-American Security; the Regional System of Security of the Caribbean; the Treaty over the Neutrality of the Panama Canal; and, MERCOSUR as a Peace Zone. They were created with the goal of establishing norms to regulate behaviors, resolve differences, promote cooperation, generate predictability, and assure the non-use of force in the resolution of disputes. They also aim to provide security to their members. In addition to these regimes, there also exist in the region bilateral agreements and treaties that share the same goals.



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MULTILATERAL ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT REGIMES

Advances in international law have resulted in the control of the use of force, especially when it affects civilian victims or produces significant damages through the use of weapons of mass destruction. Latin America is part of treaties on atomic issues: five on weapons of mass destruction; four on space and the environment; and, one on controlling light weapons production.

Together with the multilateral agreements on armament control, the region has established new multilateral, bilateral, and regional forums for dialogue. These forums include the Summits of the Americas; the presidential summits of the Rio Group; the presidential meetings of MERCOSUR, the Caribbean, and the Andean countries; and, the multilateral meetings of defense ministers. In the formal multilateral setting, we find the Committee on Hemispheric Security of the Organization of American States.

THE NEED FOR NEW COGNITIVE MAPS: CONCEPTUAL WEAKNESSES

In the Americas, reaching an agreement on a conceptual frame for security issues has not been easy. The established deadlines for creating such a framework have been postponed several times since the middle of the 1990s and will only be specified at the Americas Summit of 2004. The lack of this consensus has inhibited the improvement of coordination between various regional institutions.

The new concept of security in the Americas must be the product of a renovated cognitive map which will incorporate the changes and new ele-

ments that are part of the international system, as well as some of the current ones. Among them, the most important are:

- 1) The end of the bipolar conflict.
- 2) The impact of globalization on diverse areas.
- 3) The changes in sovereignty and in the reduction of state capacities.
- 4) The emergence of new international actors.
- 5) The blurring of the line between external and domestic concerns and threats.
- 6) A marginal positioning in strategic global matters and a low degree of inter-state conflict.
- 7) A region with consolidated disarmament policies, free of weapons of mass destruction.
- 8) A region with low military expenses and without strategic weapons.
- 9) A weak and unarticulated institutionalization of international security matters.
- 10) A declared will to construct a new system of norms to tackle security and defense matters.

With new challenges and threats, thought processes must be developed to create a new security that can connect effectively the components of international, state, and human security. They must be based on a perspective that looks not only at the basic dimensions of security but also at the new aspects derived from global interconnection. Therefore, we must change the approach and stop looking at the region as though it is isolated. The interpretative maps of international relations and security must be modified to ones that have a comprehensive and global perspective, which consider political, economic, military, cultural, and religious aspects. In addition, it is important to simultaneously consider the regional and sub-regional aspects in order to understand local phenomena, which are continuously forgotten.

To construct a view that considers globalization, we must understand the changes it brings. The space in which we act has become planetary with an increasing number of dimensions to consider. Time has also changed. Demands now manifest themselves in an immediate form even if they are occurring thousands of miles away. What happens in one part of the world is increasingly affecting states and organizations in other parts. These relationships are what influence and even determine arms limitation and control policies.

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.

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Arms Control and Limitation: More Than a Defense Topic

Decisions over arms control and acquisitions are much more than simple technical decisions. They respond to state policies or to policies that have ample national support. Latin America has a tendency to be among the areas with the lowest level of strategic weapons in the world. Furthermore, disarmament and limitation agreements have been formalized in the region. However, even though the process leading to armament control in Latin America started at the beginning of the twentieth century, transparency in terms of defense has yet to be achieved. Without transparency, arms control efforts will never succeed.

Initiatives to standardize military spending have been created, but aside from some isolated achievements, they have been unsuccessful due to the differences in military accounting between countries. These constitute a major step toward achieving the necessary levels of transparency that would allow for the control and limitation of armaments.

The following are the main factors that influence the level of transparency. The first three are related to traditional security issues and the other three to new, “non-traditional” concerns.

Persistence of the Dilemma of Security: Armament renewal and acquisitions continue to be the main dilemma for security. A country’s move toward buying or renewing its arsenal is commonly seen by its neighbors as an act of aggression. Lack of trust and low levels of communication perpetuate the dilemma.

Demobilization as a Threat Factor: Demilitarizing countries are seen as vulnerable and are thus perceived to be a threat to the security of neighboring countries. The unilateral reduction or abolition of armed forces, as well as the reduction of the military capacity necessary to protect one’s national territory, is paradoxically, viewed as a weakness.

A Lack of Domestic Control over National Territory: Some states are perceived as institutionally incapable of controlling, protecting, or ruling over their national territory. This creates a situation in which non-state actors, often which are dangerous, are able to use that territory to destabilize the area and provoke civil, or even inter-state conflict, posing a great risk to regional security.

The Role of New Transnational Actors in International Conflicts: Non-state actors have increased their importance and influence over domestic and inter-state conflicts. For example, organized criminal groups have become important players. The huge sums of money linked to the narcotics trade and money laundering, provide the opportunity for non-state actors to purchase large amounts of weapons and even create well-equipped armies.

The Weaknesses of the State and the Rule of Law: A state that is unable to uphold the rule of law in its own territory loses credibility in the national and international arenas. This creates an incentive for other state and non-state actors to act violently against them in a conflict situation.

Post-conflict or Post-transition Situations: In post-conflict situations, the failure to address key elements that contributed to the conflict will prolong instability. During periods of fighting, there is an opportunity to create clandestine economies and to more easily engage in corrupt practices, which if they are not stopped, can threaten to continue during periods of peace.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARMS CONTROL: A POSITIVE CONCLUSION?

Latin America has not achieved the goal of creating a sound institutional architecture for security, nor has it succeeded at creating modern mechanisms for conflict prevention or for joint action against foreign attacks. However, there is a window of opportunity for the development of arms control and lim-

itation mechanisms. Three main elements explain this opportunity: the existing agreements between countries; the low level of inter-state conflict in the region; and, the declared will to reduce military spending. The definition of new professional roles and missions for the armed forces is also very important. The United States plays a primary role as the main supplier of weapons to the region and has



much influence in terms of modernization processes. Finally, being part of the western regime increases the possibilities for limitation and control.

In order to develop these opportunities, we must begin by generating transparency that results in high levels of trust. Once this process is completed, spaces for coordination and dialogue will be institutionalized. This will allow for the creation and design of control mechanisms for the production and transfer of arms. It will then be possible to establish limits and ratify institutionally the proscription of certain types of weapons.

The global context and the circumstances of the region, present a renewed opportunity to establish a Pluralist Community of Defense of the Americas. This community would be created as a form of protection, as well as an alternative of insertion in the global defense system. It would entail the establishment of shared actions in terms of security and defense without affecting nations' sovereignty.

Formally, the conditions for its establishment are as follows:

- i) The countries share common values in essential matters, which produce harmony between the decision-makers.
- ii) The development of democratic systems has attributed to the predictability of the behavior of the community's leaders.
- iii) A mutual and shared will to not use force in disputes between members of the community and to act together against external menaces.

Establishing a Pluralist Community of Defense of the Americas will generate not only greater regional stability but will also assure Latin America a new position in the emerging world order. Neglecting to participate will only condemn the region to exclusion, at a moment in which global trends for development and peace rely increasingly upon integration and cooperation.

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