



From the Red Menace to Radical Populism

U.S. Insecurity in Latin America

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Not since angry Venezuelans stoned Vice President Richard M. Nixon in 1958 has a senior U.S. official been so ill received in Latin America as President George W. Bush was last November at the Fourth Summit of the Americas in Argentina. Inspired and incited by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and Bolivian presidential candidate Evo Morales, tens of thousands of protesters denounced U.S. imperialism and the stalled Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Bush's reception was not entirely unexpected. On the eve of his trip, polls found 53 percent of South Americans had a negative opinion of the U.S. president, as did 87 percent of Latin opinion leaders, making him the most unpopular U.S. president ever. Since 2000, negative opinion of the United States in Latin America has more than doubled, rising from 14 percent to 31 percent. It is even higher in the key countries of Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile.¹ Last year, for the first time, the candidate backed by Washington for secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS) was defeated. With skepticism about free trade growing even among Latin American leaders, the November summit ended inconclusively.

Before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President Bush declared that the Western Hemisphere would be a foreign policy priority. After the attacks, all other issues took second place to the war on terrorism, centered on Islamic fundamentalism. Peripheral to this conflict, Latin America

slid to the bottom of Washington's foreign policy agenda. Relations with key Latin allies like Mexico and Chile blew hot and cold depending upon their willingness to back U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq.² This sudden shift in priorities left Latin America with a marginal role in U.S. global strategy and created the impression that President Bush had no coherent foreign policy toward the region.

The absence of an Islamic terrorist threat emanating from Latin America does not mean that things in the region are trouble free. On the contrary, complex problems of drug trafficking, crime, social violence, political ineptitude, persistent poverty, and deepening inequality pose a growing threat to Latin American democracy. But just as Washington too often saw Latin America's social and economic problems through the distorting prism of the Cold War, it now runs the risk of seeing them through the prism of the war on terrorism.

The Disappearance of Traditional Security Threats

Contemporary threats to U.S. interests in the Western Hemisphere and those likely to emerge in the foreseeable future are far different from the traditional threats the United States faced during the Cold War or in the decades prior to it. Since the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, Washington's principal concern in Latin America has been to prevent other powers from projecting military force into the hemisphere,

thereby acquiring the ability to threaten the U.S. homeland.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was the principal rival to the United States, but it had little capability to project its conventional military power into Latin America. Its only means of gaining a foothold was through the invitation of ideologically sympathetic governments. Consequently, Washington's security concerns in the region centered on preventing leftist governments from coming to power, lest they provide the Soviet Union an opening. Cuba epitomized the potential problem: after the 1959 revolution, Cuba turned to Moscow and became a persistent antagonist of the United States, posing a direct threat at the time of the 1962 missile crisis. For the remainder of the Cold War, Washington's policy toward Latin America could best be described as "no more Cubas."

With the end of the Cold War, this traditional security threat disappeared. There is no major power that has the motivation or the capability to project hostile military force into Latin America. China in recent years has expanded its commercial ties with Latin America, seeking sources of raw materials to fuel its rapid economic growth. China's imports from Latin America rose from just \$1.5 billion in 1990 to nearly \$22 billion in 2004 (though exports to China still account for only 4 percent of all Latin American exports), and in 2004 alone China invested \$889 million in Latin American infrastructure, energy, and mining development.³ Expanding economic relations have been accompanied by expanded state-to-state relations, but there has been no hint of any challenge to U.S. security interests in these developing ties.⁴

No Latin American country by itself poses a tangible challenge to U.S. security. Although U.S.-Cuban relations are as hostile as ever, the threat posed by Cuba has diminished close to the vanishing point. The loss of Soviet bloc economic and military assistance forced Cuba to downsize its armed

forces, minimizing its ability to project military power off the island. The Cuban military, although still large and formidable, is a homeland defense force. Significantly, in his 2005 posture statement before the House Armed Services Committee, Gen. Bantz J. Craddock of the U.S. Southern Command mentioned Cuba only in connection with management of the U.S. detention facility at Guantánamo Bay.⁵

Classical insurgency, prevalent in Latin America during the 1960s and in Central America during the 1980s, has become rare. Only Colombia has significant guerrilla movements attempting the forcible overthrow of the state. Latin America's transition to democracy during the 1980s and 1990s marginalized insurgency as a political strategy. When dissidents have democratic avenues for expressing discontent and organizing their followers, armed violence is rarely an attractive alternative. Indeed, most of the major insurgencies in Latin America in past decades were abetted by the unwillingness of authoritarian governments to allow free advocacy of social and economic reform. War weariness among victims of major internal conflicts has proved a powerful obstacle to winning popular support for armed struggle.

"Nontraditional" Security Threats

The waning of its traditional Cold War mission caused something of an identity crisis for the Latin American military as well as for the U.S. Southern Command. Absent a communist threat, what was their *raison d'être*?⁶ The evident answer has been to reconceptualize security and specify a new set of "nontraditional" threats: the war on drugs, the war on terrorism, and most recently the "threat" of "radical populism."

These nontraditional threats include transnational issues that are not primarily matters of armed conflict, though many have a security component. In 2003, at its Special Conference on Security, the OAS adopted a declaration outlining the princi-

pal nontraditional threats to hemispheric security: criminal activity and the resulting lack of public safety; narcotics trafficking; terrorism; health and environmental risks; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and poverty and social exclusion.⁷

By shifting the strategic focus to crime, environmental degradation, and poverty, the OAS redefined as “security threats” issues that have historically been deemed political, social, and economic problems. This broader concept recognizes that the overall well-being of ordinary citizens is at risk from sources more diverse than military attack. As the OAS declaration points out, these nontraditional threats are multidimensional and require multidimensional responses that draw on all instruments of national power: economic, political, and social, as well as military.

Although this is a more humanistic way of viewing security, it poses dangers. Framing these diverse problems as security threats creates exaggerated expectations as to how amenable they may be to traditional military instruments of power. Reconceptualizing these issues as threats is meant to underscore their importance to national well-being, thereby justifying priority attention and the investment of resources historically assigned to traditional security threats. Reconceptualization was not meant to suggest that as “security threats” these issues can be alleviated with the same instruments as were traditional threats. However, the potential for misunderstanding is real and already visible in U.S. policy.

The Pentagon’s conception of “security threats” in the hemisphere parallels the OAS redefinition, although Washington’s primary focus has remained on narcotics trafficking (especially in Colombia), terrorism, and criminal violence.⁸ “Drug traffickers, smugglers, hostage-takers, terrorists, violent gangs—these are the threats that are serious,” Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld informed Central American defense ministers in October, a refrain he has sounded for

over a year.⁹ While U.S. officials acknowledge the social and economic roots of these problems, the remedies they prescribe focus on symptoms more than causes. Since 2001, U.S. military assistance to Latin America has more than doubled, jumping from \$23 million annually to \$54 million. Military and police training has increased 52 percent. Funding for anti-narcotics programs has doubled, from nearly \$461 million to over \$1 billion. But economic and development assistance has hardly changed.¹⁰

A second danger is the inclination to rely on Latin America’s armed forces to respond to these problems. This risks eroding the boundaries between civilian and military roles, especially in the area of public safety.¹¹ During the 1980s and 1990s, Latin American civilians worked hard to establish democratic governments, replacing the military regimes that had proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s. U.S. officials, including Rumsfeld, too blithely discount the danger of military intervention as a thing of the past. The pendulum has swung between democracy and military rule more than once. As the former head of the U.S. Southern Command, Gen. Fred F. Woerner, reminded colleagues during a discussion of the expanding mission of Latin armed forces, “What for a mature democracy is...a refining of the role of the military may represent for emergent democracies a renewed justification for military involvement in politics and a threat of a return to militarism.”¹²

Indeed, democracy is by no means consolidated in Latin America. Many countries are plagued by corruption, unresponsiveness to popular needs, and failing economic policies. The legitimacy of the democratic system has been eroded, and opinion polls across the region record little public confidence in government. In a 2004 Latino-barómetro poll, only 24 percent of Latin Americans expressed trust in their legislatures, 32 percent in their judiciaries, 37 percent in their police, and 18 percent in their political parties. Only 29 percent were “sat-

isfied” with democracy, and 55 percent said they would choose an authoritarian government over a democratic one if it were able to solve their country’s economic problems.¹³

Historically, when civilian government has proved ineffectual, giving rise to popular movements demanding sweeping change, Latin American militaries have been tempted to seize power. When the armed forces are routinely involved in civilian affairs due to the blurring of civil-military roles, an important bulwark against military intervention is eroded. The U.S. Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, which prohibits the use of armed forces for policing except in moments of extreme national emergency, draws a bright line between military and police functions. The logic of that tradition applies even more urgently in Latin America, given its history. The militarization of public safety poses a greater danger to Latin American democracy than any of the ills it is intended to alleviate.

The War on Drugs

Of all nontraditional security threats, narcotics trafficking has the most significant direct impact on North Americans. Ninety percent of the cocaine and over half the heroin that enters the United States comes from Latin America.¹⁴ The economic cost of illegal drug use exceeds an estimated \$160 billion annually, of which \$65 billion is spent on the drugs themselves. Illegal drug use contributes massively to criminal activities. In a 2001 survey, nearly two-thirds of the persons arrested for crimes in the United States tested positive for illegal narcotics.¹⁵

In the 1990s, as both Latin American militaries and the U.S. Southern Command searched for a new mission, the war on drugs became a logical candidate. Although President Nixon first declared a “war on drugs” in 1968, it was President Ronald Reagan who escalated this war dramatically in 1986, designating illegal drugs a national security threat and proposing a variety of tough new measures, including increased

funding for foreign eradication and interdiction programs. President George H. W. Bush tasked the U.S. Southern Command with major new anti-narcotics responsibilities in 1989, and U.S. military assistance, which for a decade had been channeled to counterinsurgency programs in Central America, shifted to counternarcotics programs in the Andes.¹⁶

In 1999, President Bill Clinton’s administration declared a “drug emergency” in Colombia and proposed a \$1.7 billion aid package. “Plan Colombia” was intended to upgrade sharply the Colombian military’s ability to combat not only drug traffickers but also the guerrilla insurgency that had been smoldering in the countryside for more than 40 years. The guerrillas, whose arms purchases were financed with revenue from taxing drug production in their areas of control, were thus dubbed “narcoterrorists.” With the Cold War over, financing another Latin American counterinsurgency would have been politically unpopular in Congress; financing a war on drugs was more palatable.

Since the 1960s, the United States has spent \$45 billion fighting the drug war.¹⁷ The war has always been fought on two fronts: on the supply side (preventing drugs from entering the United States) and on the demand side (reducing U.S. demand for illegal drugs). Supply-side efforts, including crop eradication and shipment interdiction, have been focused particularly in the Andean region, where production is concentrated.

The huge profits involved in the drug industry have led to corruption in these countries at the highest levels of government, diminishing their resolve to pursue traffickers aggressively. Even honest politicians are affected by the political power of traffickers and growers. In Colombia, traffickers have backed the political campaigns of candidates for Congress, and local politicians in areas of coca production have opposed crop eradication policies that deprive

constituents of their livelihoods.¹⁸ In Bolivia, Evo Morales has organized peasant growers into a formidable mass movement, carrying him to the presidency.

Drug cartels have also been able to raise private armies and contest the state's monopoly of coercive force in parts of several countries. The weaknesses of the police makes them unequal adversaries of the traffickers. Police forces are not well trained, equipped, or paid. Poor training leaves them ignorant of effective policing procedures. Poor equipment often leaves them less well-armed than their adversaries. Poor pay leaves them vulnerable to corruption. The power of traffickers to neutralize police forces has led to the use of the armed forces against traffickers, which risks militarizing police functions. Colombia's shift in the late 1990s from relying primarily on the police to relying on the armed forces is a case in point. Although drug trafficking is not a military threat in the traditional sense, it appears amenable to military response because smugglers, like armies, have an identifiable logistics system. And at the point of production in Latin America, the traffickers also have well-provisioned private armies to defend their enterprises.

Yet despite appearances, the problem of narcotics trafficking is not one that can be resolved militarily. The principal cause of narcotics trafficking in Latin America is the unremitting demand for illegal drugs from U.S. consumers—demand that makes the trade extraordinarily lucrative. The U.S. market for illegal drugs has proven highly resistant to government efforts to reduce it, and so long as the market persists, criminal entrepreneurs will find ways to supply it. The profits available from the drug trade are so large and the cost of entry into the business so low in relative terms, that supply-side efforts at eradication and interdiction have proven ineffective. Successful crop eradication in one region simply pushes production elsewhere: U.S.

fumigation programs in Bolivia and Peru in the 1990s caused traffickers to finance new cultivation in Colombia. Fumigation in Colombia has led to a resurgence of cultivation in Bolivia and Peru.

Even for poor peasant producers, who receive only a small fraction of the profits, growing coca or poppies pays far more than growing traditional crops. Many such producers live in remote areas where the soil is poor and basic infrastructure is lacking, making it hard to grow traditional crops or get them to market. The land, air, and sea smuggling routes into the United States are so numerous that interdiction efforts simply push traffickers from one avenue to another. Interdiction never reduces supply sufficiently to alter drug prices on the U.S. market. In fact, since 1981 the wholesale price in the United States of a pure gram of cocaine has fallen from \$201 to less than \$38, and the wholesale price of a pure gram of heroin has fallen from \$1,007 to \$139. During the same period, U.S. expenditures on international drug control programs have risen almost tenfold, from \$375 million annually to \$3.6 billion.¹⁹ Every year, more acres are fumigated and more drug shipments seized, but these statistics, like the body counts in Vietnam, are a false indicator that the war is being won.

The drug problem is a perfect example of the multidimensional nature of nontraditional security problems. It requires both a strategy for reducing supply and, more importantly, a strategy for reducing demand. On the supply side, it requires not just security assets to fumigate crops, destroy labs, and interdict shipments, but political and economic resources to provide small growers with economically viable alternatives and to blunt the political power of traffickers. On the demand side, it requires not just increased policing and tougher jail sentences for addicts, but better treatment and prevention, not to mention investment in the social and economic infrastructure of the

poor U.S. neighborhoods that are breeding grounds of addiction.

International Terrorism

U.S. policy toward Latin America has been eclipsed by the post-September 11 war on terrorism because there is virtually no threat of Islamic terrorism in the region. As General Craddock testified in March 2005, there are no known Islamic terrorist cells operating in Latin America, though there are some supporters willing to provide financial and logistical assistance.²⁰ The dearth of a real terrorist threat and the consequent tendency of senior policymakers to focus on the Islamic East has allowed mid-level policymakers to gain attention for their favorite policy initiatives in Latin America by recasting them as ancillary to the war on terrorism. Thus, the war in Colombia, which before September 11, was justified as a war on drugs, has been reframed as a new front in the war on terrorism, with the main guerrilla movements and paramilitaries—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the United Self Defense Forces (AUC)—added to the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations. Congressional restrictions that prevented U.S. military aid from being used to fight the guerrillas were lifted and aid to the Colombian military increased.²¹

This linguistic legerdemain constitutes a serious confusion of threats. No doubt the Colombian groups have all engaged in acts of terrorism, including kidnappings, extrajudicial executions, massacres, and planting bombs in public places. However, they are not “international terrorists” in the sense that members of al-Qaeda are. The aim of the Colombian groups is to achieve political ends inside Colombia, and the targets of their violence are Colombian. Unlike al-Qaeda, they have no intention of attacking the United States, and their aims are not international. Their threat to U.S. interests is

therefore fundamentally different. Guerrillas and paramilitaries in Colombia pose a threat to Colombians and their state. They may pose a threat to neighboring states as a result of the internal conflict “spilling over” borders. But they do not pose a physical threat to the United States as do Islamic terrorist groups. Ignoring this distinction by lumping all violent actors under the label “terrorist” is simply an attempt to transfer the legitimacy enjoyed by the real war on terrorism to less popular policies.

Similarly, hardliners in the Bush administration also seized on the terrorism threat as a rationale for their confrontational policy toward Cuba. Cuba remains on the State Department’s list of state sponsors of international terrorism, despite a dearth of evidence that the Cubans have actually done anything recently to actively support foreign revolutionaries, let alone terrorists.²²

This is not to say that there are no international terrorists in the Western Hemisphere. The most persistent campaign of international terrorism in the Americas has been the series of paramilitary attacks against Cuba conducted by a small number of Cuban exiles. These attacks date to the early 1960s, when they were organized by the U.S. government, acting through the Central Intelligence Agency. The end of U.S. support for such activities did not end the attacks, however. The most notorious was the bombing of a Cuban civilian airliner off Barbados in 1976, which killed 73 people. In 1997, a series of bombs were detonated in Cuban tourist hotels and nightspots, injuring dozens and killing an Italian tourist—bombings for which the Cuban exile Luis Posada Carriles took responsibility.²³ Posada Carriles is currently in the United States fighting deportation. In 2000, Panamanian authorities thwarted an assassination plot against Fidel Castro (also involving Posada Carriles), and the U.S. Coast Guard foiled another apparent exile plot to assassinate Castro in Venezuela in 1997.²⁴

Historically, these attacks have been planned and organized from several countries in the hemisphere, including Venezuela, Panama, El Salvador, and the United States. Vigorous enforcement of U.S. laws against terrorism is essential in these cases, lest the international community conclude that the United States is tolerating paramilitary attacks against Cuba because of our distaste for the Cuban government. Such an impression would seriously undermine U.S. credibility as Washington seeks global support for the fight against Islamic terrorist groups.

Crime and Gang Violence

The growth of violent crime and gang activity has become a severe public policy problem in Latin America. If the maintenance of public order and safety is the first task of government, many governments in the region are deficient. Latin America has the highest level of violent crime in the world.²⁵ Victimization rates in most countries are between 30 percent and 40 percent, and the vast majority of citizens perceive a significant increase in personal insecurity. The direct economic losses from violent crime are estimated at \$15 billion annually, 2 percent of the region's gross domestic product. Not only does spiraling violent crime cause immediate economic and physical harm, it deters foreign investment and tourism, erodes faith in government, and stimulates vigilantism.²⁶ The inability of governments to provide basic security for their citizens puts democratic institutions at risk. At the extreme, failed states result, as in the recent collapse of President Jean Bertrand Aristide's government in Haiti.

The long-term structural causes of violent crime are the same in Latin America as elsewhere: poverty, inadequate investment in human capital (health and education), and inadequate employment opportunities, especially in urban areas. The weak economic growth experienced by Latin America over the past decade and the inability of

governments to ameliorate poverty have made these underlying problems worse. The rapid growth of Central American gangs has its roots in the migration to the United States during the civil conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s. This has resulted in young Central Americans being drawn into the gang culture of U.S. cities. Arrested for gang-related crimes, thousands of youths have been deported, carrying the gang culture back to the region with them, where it has flourished in poor urban barrios. There are an estimated 70,000–100,000 gang members in Central America.²⁷

Popular yearning for basic security has led to demands for the armed forces to take a more direct role in policing—even in El Salvador, where the military's history of human rights abuse caused it to be restricted to external defense. Even though militarizing public safety poses risks for democracy, the Bush administration has been pressing for Latin American armed forces to become more directly involved in fighting criminal violence. At a November 2004 meeting between Donald Rumsfeld and Latin American defense ministers, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile resisted U.S. pressure to redeploy their armed forces for internal security tasks. Meeting with Central American defense ministers in October, Rumsfeld supported the creation of a special regional military rapid response force to fight drug trafficking and gangs.²⁸ A recent study by the U.S. Army War College, which concludes that “gangs are a mutated form of urban insurgency,” recommends a revitalized counterinsurgency doctrine. Latin American civilians need to set aside their concerns about the military's past “excesses,” according to the study, and “broaden the role of the military to a controversial internal protection mission.”²⁹

Violent crime and gang activity can be ameliorated in the medium term by improving public safety services. In the long run, however, these problems cannot be minimized so long as the structural problems

plaguing the urban poor persist. Effective police can capture criminals quickly and efficiently, but a wretched urban environment offering no hope to poor youths will constantly generate new criminals.³⁰

“Radical Populism”

Over the past decade, Latin America has experienced the rise of populist and leftist political movements, ranging from the radicalism of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela to the sedate socialism of Ricardo Lagos in Chile. What these movements have in common is a political appeal to poor and working-class Latin Americans whose lives have not been improved by the transition to democracy and the adoption of neoliberal economic policies.

From 1996 to 2004, Latin America's GDP rose at an average annual rate of just 2.6 percent (1 percent per capita). The urban unemployment rate rose from 9.4 percent to 10 percent, leaving 43 percent of the region's population in poverty, and nearly a fifth of the poor in extreme poverty. These numbers have declined only marginally since 1990 and not at all since 1997. Moreover, the total number of poor and extremely poor Latin Americans has risen by 10 percent since 1990. Income inequality is worse in Latin America than in any other region and is increasing.³¹

In opinion polls and at the ballot box, Latin Americans have been registering their disgust with corrupt and incompetent government, notably with a political class that seems most interested in self-enrichment. The 2004 Latinobarómetro poll found that 71 percent of Latin Americans agreed with statement, “The country is governed for the benefit of powerful interests,” with majorities in every country agreeing.³²

These disgruntled citizens have been electing left-populist politicians who fault neoliberal economic policies for slow growth, no improvement in poverty rates, and sparse investment in human capital through health and education. The more

moderate of these critics have called simply for new policies within the framework of existing institutions. The more radical have called for the transformation of those institutions. Beginning with the election of Abdalá Bucaram in Ecuador in 1996, six populists or socialists have won presidencies in Latin America: Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998; Ricardo Lagos in Chile in 2000; Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil in 2002; Nestor Kirchner in Argentina in 2003; and Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay in 2004. At this writing, populist leader Evo Morales is president-elect of Bolivia, Socialist Michelle Bachelet is the leading contender in Chile's January runoff election, and leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador leads in the polls as the 2006 Mexican electoral campaign gets underway.

Populism is also in the streets. The weakness of democratic institutions in many Latin American countries—corruption, lack of transparency, poor responsiveness—has damaged their legitimacy. This mix has given rise to radical movements that channel their frustration into massive, sometimes violent, street demonstrations demanding changes in government. This tactic of presidential recall-by-riot has led to the resignation or congressional removal of six Latin American presidents since 1997: Abdalá Bucaram (a populist himself, albeit an unpopular one) and Lucio Gutiérrez in Ecuador; Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada and Carlos Mesa in Bolivia; Fernando de la Rúa and Adolfo Rodríguez Saa in Argentina.

Does this new left-populist political trajectory in Latin America represent a threat to the United States? In his 2004 posture statement, Gen. James T. Hill, head of the U.S. Southern Command, defined the growth of “radical populism” as an emerging security threat because of the anti-American appeals of populist leaders.³³ During a trip to Latin America last August, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld also focused on the danger that populism, especially Hugo Chávez's version, poses for hemispher-

ic democracy. “A guy who seemed like a comic figure a year ago is turning into a real strategic menace,” said a senior Defense Department official traveling with Rumsfeld.³⁴ At the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, a recent monograph on radical populism takes as a given that populists are antidemocratic, anti-American, and a threat to U.S. security interests. It recommends that Washington work to preempt their coming to power, and be prepared to deal militarily with any “burst of populist turbulence.”³⁵

Populists may or may not pose a threat to domestic democratic institutions, and they may or may not be hostile to the United States. While Hugo Chávez’s actions might call into question his commitment to democratic norms, he and all the other left-populist leaders who have come to power in Latin America in the past decade have done so through democratic elections. The most serious threat to constitutional democracy in Venezuela was mounted not by Chávez, but by his opponents who orchestrated a short-lived military coup in 2002—a coup Washington welcomed.

Populists in power may not please the United States, especially because of their skepticism concerning the value of unfettered markets and free trade. Their rhetoric will sometimes offend U.S. policymakers, especially when they blame all their nation’s problems on U.S. imperialism. But they are a product of democratic contestation. They are expressing and responding to the views of their constituents, who increasingly form a majority. For Washington, tolerating governments and political movements in Latin America with whom it disagrees is the price of democracy.

The antidote to radical populism is honest, responsive government and economic policies that improve living standards and provide opportunity to all social classes. Whereas the United States has tended to see populist movements as a threat, Latin Americans identify poverty and social exclu-

sion as the real threat. The suppression of populist demands, now being articulated for the most part nonviolently through existing political institutions, runs the risk of sparking armed conflicts. That was the lesson in Central America during the 1970s: if non-violent avenues are closed to protest, violent ones will open.

Bringing about reforms that would make Latin American governments relatively immune to radical or revolutionary challenge has been an aim of U.S. policy, with ups and downs, since the Alliance for Progress in the early 1960s. But it has also been an elusive goal. Historically, U.S. policymakers have found it easier to provide military assistance to suppress radical social movements than to address the underlying social, economic, and political problems that give rise to them. In the 1960s and 1970s, military aid programs created large, resource-rich military institutions in countries where civilian institutions were weak, thus facilitating the establishment of military authoritarian regimes.

Nontraditional “threats” like drug trafficking, crime, and radical populism arise from the same social, economic, and political failings that plagued Latin America half a century ago. Yet Washington is once again seeking a quick cure by deploying military hardware and advisers to ameliorate the symptoms of social and political dysfunction. Not only will this reprise of mistaken priorities fail to address these problems, militarizing the response once again puts Latin American democracy at risk. Historically, far more democratic governments in the hemisphere have been overthrown by their own armed forces than by insurgents, drug traffickers, and radical populists combined. ●

Notes

1. Reuters, “Bush Unpopular in South America, Poll Shows,” *Boston Globe*, September 12, 2005; Larry Rohter and Elisabeth Bumiller, “Protesters Riot as Bush Attends 34-Nation Talks,” *New York Times*,

November 5, 2005; Andres Oppenheimer, "New Latin American Poll Spells Trouble For U.S.," *Miami Herald*, November 9, 2003.

2. Ginger Thompson, with Clifford Krauss, "Antiwar Fever Puts Mexico in Quandary on Iraq Vote," *New York Times*, February 28, 2003; Larry Rohter, "Chile Feels the Weight of Its Security Council Seat," *New York Times*, March 11, 2003.

3. United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Latin America and the Caribbean in the World Economy, 2004, Trends 2005* (New York: UN ECLAC, 2005), chap. 6.

4. "Posture Statement of General Bantz J. Craddock, United States Army, Commander, United States Southern Command, Before the 109th Congress, House Armed Services Committee, March 9, 2005"; Riordan Roett, "Relations between China and Latin America/the Western Hemisphere," testimony before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, House International Relations Committee, 109th Congress, 1st session, April 6, 2005.

5. "Posture Statement of General Bantz J. Craddock, March 9, 2005." Cuba is also absent as a threat in the 2003 and 2004 posture statements of Craddock's predecessor, Gen. James T. Hill.

6. For an inside view of the debate over mission, see the report of a 1997 conference that brought together military officers from around the hemisphere: Donald E. Schulz, ed., *The Role of the Armed Forces in the Americas: Civil-Military Relations for the 21st Century: Conference Report* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 1998). See also Carina Perelli and Juan Rial, "Changing Military World Views: The Armed Forces of South America in the 1990s," in *Beyond Praetorianism: The Latin American Military in Transition*, ed. Richard L. Millett and Michael Gold-Biss (Coral Gables, FL: North-South Center Press, 1996), pp. 59–82.

7. Declaration on Security in the Americas, October 28, 2003, Thirty-Fourth Regular Session, OEA/Ser.L/XIV.2.34, November 17–20, 2003, CICAD/doc.1269/03.

8. William M. LeoGrande and Kenneth E. Sharpe, "Two Wars or One? Drugs, Guerrillas, and Colombia's New *Violencia*," *World Policy Journal*, vol. 17 (fall 2000), pp. 1–11. See also, "Posture Statement of General James T. Hill, United States

Army Commander, United States Southern Command, Before the 108th Congress, Senate Armed Services Committee, April 1, 2004"; "Posture Statement of General Bantz J. Craddock, March 9, 2005."

9. Charles Aldinger, "U.S., Central America Discuss Security Cooperation," Reuters, October 12, 2005.

10. U.S. Agency for International Development, *U.S. Overseas Grants and Loans, "Latin America and the Caribbean"* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2004), <http://quesdb.cdie.org/gbk>; Bruce Finley, "U.S. Casts a Wary Eye South: A Pentagon Led Initiative Puts New Anti-Terrorism Focus on Latin America," *Denver Post*, November 12, 2004.

11. This issue and others relevant to the discussion of security threats in Latin America is analyzed in detail in Gaston Chillier and Laurie Freeman, *Potential Threat: The New OAS Concept of Hemispheric Security* (Washington, DC: Washington Office on Latin America, 2005).

12. General Fred F. Woerner, "Civil-Military Relations in Latin America: Pitfalls and Prospects," in Schulz, ed., *Role of the Armed Forces in the Americas*, pp. 71–76.

13. *Latinobarómetro 2004: A Decade of Measurements* (Santiago, Chile: Corporación Latinobarómetro, August 13, 2004), pp. 19–20, 22–23, 33–34, 37.

14. "Posture Statement of General Bantz J. Craddock, March 9, 2005."

15. "Drug Data Summary," Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse, Office of National Drug Control Policy, March 2003.

16. "Congress Clears Massive Anti-Drug Measure," *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, vol. 42 (1987), p. 92; Michael Isikoff, "Drug Plan Allows Use of Military," *Washington Post*, September 10, 1989; idem., "Drug Funds Also Meant to Deter Rebels," *Washington Post*, October 19, 1989.

17. John M. Walsh, "Are We There Yet? Measuring Progress in the U.S. War on Drugs in Latin America," *Drug War Monitor* (Washington, DC: Washington Office on Latin America, December 2004).

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