

# Hemispheric Security After the Towers Went Down

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The smoke has not yet cleared where the impact on the Americas of the terrorist attacks of the 11th September is concerned. Aghast, the hemisphere watched those events unfold and its states quickly moved to commiserate with, and promise assistance to, the United States in their wake.

The Organisation of American States denounced the attacks and reassured Washington that it could count on its members to assist the U.S. in the present circumstances and in the future in the drive to defeat terrorism. Individual countries across the region rushed to do the same on a bilateral basis.

The Inter-American security “system” also leapt into action. The signatories of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance declared in force that long-forgotten instrument of nearly hemisphere-wide defence cooperation and promised a joint reaction under its shared commitments.

This paper explains the background to the inter-American security system and why and how it has reacted to events. It cautions that an excessively rapid and ill-thought out reaction to the attacks may herald difficult days for the often fledgling democracies of the region, especially for those which can as yet ill afford clarion calls to action that give priority to their armed and police forces in the fight against terrorism. Balancing this reaction to make for an effective hemispheric response to the crisis while restraining efforts enough to ensure that hard-won gains in the consolidation of democracy and correct civil-military relations will be the region’s and the system’s challenge.

## RÉSUMÉ

La poussière de l’impact des attaques terroristes du 11 septembre sur les Amériques n’est pas encore retombée. Ces événements se sont déroulés sous le regard horrifié des États de l’hémisphère qui, partageant la douleur des États-Unis, ont promptement offert leur aide.

L’Organisation des États américains a dénoncé ces attaques et affirmé à Washington que les États-Unis pouvaient compter sur l’aide de ses membres pour lutter contre le terrorisme, maintenant et dans l’avenir. Les pays de toute la région se sont ensuite empressés de faire de même sur une base bilatérale.

Le « système » interaméricain de sécurité s’est lui aussi mis en marche. Les signataires du Traité interaméricain d’aide réciproque (*Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance*) ont invoqué cet instrument quasi oublié de coopération pour une défense unie, signé par presque tous les États de l’hémisphère, et promis une riposte concertée en vertu de leurs engagements communs.



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Ce document explique le contexte historique ainsi que les antécédents du système interaméricain de sécurité, à savoir pourquoi et comment il a fait face à certains événements par le passé. Cette analyse met en garde contre une réaction trop rapide et mal préparée aux attaques, réaction qui pourrait mettre en péril les démocraties souvent fragiles de la région et en particulier celles qui ne peuvent se permettre de prendre des mesures donnant la priorité aux forces armées et policières pour combattre le terrorisme. Équilibrer cette réaction pour que l'hémisphère puisse répondre efficacement à cette crise tout en s'assurant que les acquis en matière de démocratie, obtenus de haute lutte, sont maintenus et que les relations entre militaires et civiles demeurent adéquates, sera le défi que devront relever la région et le système interaméricain de sécurité.

## RESUMEN

La nube de humo de las acciones terroristas del 11 de septiembre aún no se ha disipado en lo que respecta al impacto que tuvieron estos hechos en las Américas. Los países del hemisferio contemplaron horrorizados el desenvolvimiento de los acontecimientos y enseguida se solidarizaron y ofrecieron su ayuda a los Estados Unidos.

La Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA) denunció el hecho y le aseguró a Washington que podría contar con el apoyo de sus miembros tanto en las circunstancias actuales como futuras por derrotar el terrorismo. Algunos países de manera individual también se apresuraron en ofrecer su apoyo a nivel bilateral.

El 'sistema' interamericano de seguridad también se puso en acción. Los estados firmantes del Tratado Interamericano de Asistencia Recíproca (TIAR) decidieron poner en vigencia este instrumento de cooperación sobre defensa que desde hacía mucho estaba en el olvido y que tiene un alcance en casi todo el hemisferio, y se comprometieron a actuar de conjunto conforme a las obligaciones contraídas bajo el mismo.

El presente documento analiza los antecedentes del sistema interamericano de seguridad, y por qué y de qué manera ha respondido a los acontecimientos. Además, se advierte que una reacción apresurada y desatinada podría presagiar días difíciles para las democracias en ciernes de la región, especialmente para aquellas que aún no se pueden dar el lujo de hacer un llamado a la acción que otorgue a sus fuerzas armadas y policiales un papel protagónico en la lucha contra el terrorismo. La región y el sistema interamericano de seguridad tienen ante sí el reto de concertar una respuesta hemisférica equilibrada y efectiva sin sacrificar los logros alcanzados con tantos esfuerzos en la consolidación de la democracia y en el establecimiento de relaciones civiles-militares adecuadas.

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## The Inter-American Security System in Historical Context

Attempts to provide security on an inter-American basis go back, in one form or another, to Bolivarian days. It was only in the Second World War and after the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 that political collaboration among the hemisphere's states became significant enough to permit real defence cooperation from the Arctic to the Southern Cone. It should perhaps not surprise us then, that events so often likened to Pearl Harbour such as the terrorist attacks of September in the United States should also occasion calls for reinforced hemispheric efforts to face external threats.

In the aftermath of Pearl Harbour, an Inter-American Defence Board (IADB) was set up in 1942 and charged with coordinating a United States and Latin American response to Axis aggression. In 2001 most of the major members of the Organisation of American States (OAS) invoked the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, usually referred to as the Rio Pact, to respond collectively to international terrorism directed against a member state and the OAS (including several states not party to the Treaty) called for increased cooperation in order to fight the new scourge.

Little is known outside those dealing directly with hemispheric security about the supposed "system" of security and defence that the Americas have had since World War II. Thus, the public understands little about what is involved in hemispheric responses to threats to the region. Even though the OAS reacted with uncommon energy to the terrorist attacks, the greater relative importance of South Asia and the Middle East for the United States naturally shifted public attention away from inter-American responses.

Nonetheless the impact of the events of 11th September, and their aftermath, has already deeply marked the hemisphere and inter-American security relations. And there is little sign of this trend being reversed.

The "system" set up by the United States and Latin American countries in the wake of Pearl Harbour was a loose one. It allowed countries to more or less decide for themselves on the nature of their contribution to the joint war effort. However, the IADB did manage to coordinate quite a number of activities on the military defence side. In addition, the Board provided a framework for a wide range of bilateral agreements between Latin American states and the United States. They allowed for the latter to build air and naval bases,

recruit workers or even military personnel, purchase on a guaranteed and special price basis raw materials and foodstuffs, and a host of other matters. In return, cooperative Latin American countries had access to increased amounts of U.S. training, equipment and weapons.

With the end of the war, Latin American countries and the U.S. expressed an interest in continuing defence cooperation and in 1947 the Rio Pact was signed. It became the first pillar of what was to frequently be called, although perhaps not entirely logically, the inter-American security “system.” The next year the Charter of the OAS was signed and it repeated the mutual defence agreements of the Pact. Much more important were again, as in World War II, the bilateral arrangements, taking these two pillars as their framework, which were signed as Mutual Assistance Pacts between the U.S. and most Latin American states during and immediately after the Korean War of 1950–53.

A third wave of institutional arrangements followed the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and Havana’s attempt to ‘export’ revolution from 1962 to 1968. The inter-American system suspended Cuba from all of its institutions of the time and proceeded to establish new ones in the light of the Cuban challenge. These included the Inter-American Defence College, the conferences of commanders of the armies, navies and air forces of the Americas, and a further number of training and liaison arrangements. U.S. military missions in the region grew dramatically in number and size.

With the death of Ché Guevara in 1967 and the rapid defeat of most insurrections in South America quickly thereafter, the system became less active. The perceived failure to assist Argentina in the Falklands War of 1982, the shared inability with the rest of the traditional inter-American system to do much about civil wars in Central America in the 1970s and eighties, and the lack of unity in the Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989) crises subsequently brought it, along with the OAS, under increasing criticism as irrelevant.

The cold war both stimulated its formal reinforcement and reduced the likelihood that it could do very much in real terms. The contradictions in the inter-American system at the highest level, combined with fears of U.S. domination, ensured that the system laboured away at the military level but rarely crossed the line into the political domain.

The end of the cold war changed this arrangement. The decision by the United States to cease active intervention in Latin American domestic affairs, since such was no longer necessary in the struggle against communism, meant that a growing convergence of Latin American

and United States views on security matters began to be visible. A new security agenda began to be perceived as cold war structures and definitions lost relevance. It included the settlement of outstanding territorial and jurisdictional disputes among Latin American states; improved democratic civil-military relations in those same countries; the anchoring of democracy and its defence in the region; counter-terrorism; counter-narcotics; and, a variety of other non-traditional areas of interest in the ever wider definition given to security in those years.

Canada joined the OAS in 1990, but at first firmly eschewed uncomfortable security issues and refused to sign the Rio Pact. Neither did it accept the defence elements of the Charter, nor join the other security apparatus of the system. However, Ottawa slowly was drawn in through its keenness on peace in the hemisphere, its desire to see confidence-building

measures applied as a result, the perceived vital need to defend democracy in the region, and finally by its recognition, generally, of the centrality of security issues to almost all Canadian wider objectives in the region.

The widespread convergence of interests in the security field, combined with this importance of the specific issues of the new agenda, as well as the desire to see progress on economic integration regionally and

hemispherically, meant that new life was breathed into the “system.” Enormous progress was made with landmines clearance, peaceful settlement of disputes, the anchoring of democracy, confidence-building measures, admittedly limited force reductions, civilian control over armed forces, and a host of other matters. The institutions of the security system seemed reinforced and a significant new one, the meetings of defence ministers of the Americas every two years, came to reinforce the sense of common approaches to security in all of the hemisphere save Cuba.

### **The 11th September Terrorist Attack and Its Impact**

The terrorist attacks of the 11th September shocked Latin America as they did the rest of the world. Despite many insurrections and civil wars in the region since the 1960s, many of which had their fair share of terrorism, for most of the region terrorism was not high on the security agenda prior to that date. The defeat of the terrorist Shinning Path (SL) and Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) of Peru in the early to mid-1990s had left only Colombia in the throws of a civil war with terrorist overtones.

Latin Americans were glued to their televisions as the horrors of that September day unfolded. Country after

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country, including Cuba, sent expressions of sympathy to the United States. The OAS passed resolutions condemning the attacks and calling for the closest hemispheric cooperation in defeating terrorism. The signatories of the Rio Pact (not all OAS members have signed the treaty) called it into play as a framework for their joint response to the challenge. Mexico and Canada in particular assisted the U.S. in all manner of ways in the early days after the attacks in everything, from beefed up border patrols, to the housing and feeding of U.S. citizens on flights diverted to their airports as a result of the crisis.

In the aftermath of those extraordinary days, however, realpolitik seems to have kicked in again. Many countries within and without the hemisphere have chosen to use the crisis as a means of furthering their own agendas, often ones little connected with the defeat of international terrorism. While this has of course occurred from Russia (in Chechnya) to Sri Lanka, countries in Latin America have had to confront their own security questions in the context of changed international realities.

Defence and security establishments almost everywhere in the Americas could now have another reason for suggesting that the recent reduction in the priority of security concerns had been ill-placed and that this needed now to be corrected. Police and armed forces, intelligence services of all kinds, as well as the burgeoning and much worrying private security services, are prepared to see their budgets increased, and began quickly to make the arguments publicly for why this should happen sooner rather than later.

### ***Civil–Military Relations***

The main concern is of course, democracy. Armed forces in Latin America have not played the central role that they have in most of the countries of the region since Independence simply because they wanted that role. Instead, in weak societies with weak states, the armed forces tended to be the only institution that could get things done. This was especially true in the vital security area. Thus, in the absence of other strong actors within society and the state, the military saw its role grow well beyond that of traditional national defence. It went much further and reached out into areas normally seen in a democracy as belonging to the police, civilian intelligence services, border patrol agencies, counter-terrorist or counter-narcotics forces, forestry protection and many other fields. The absence or weakness of what is usually seen as the 'normal' state or civil agencies working in these fields left open spaces for the military to move, able as they were to provide, even if not perfectly, these services.

The strength, prestige, budgets, and political clout that this situation produced in many Latin American countries over the years meant that armed forces came to dominate the politics of the nation as a whole. On many occasions, direct control of the state was maintained by the armed forces for a long time. But even where it was not the norm, civil structures had to adjust to an excessive position of influence of the military within the state as a whole.

Trends tending to reverse this situation were of course seen in the wave of democratization from the late 1970s on. In country after country, military regimes gave way to civilians. And while the military still often retained perhaps more importance than in European or North American democracies, they realized that times had changed and that neither direct nor indirect control of political power was acceptable any longer, either

internationally or domestically. Democratic elements around the world were delighted with this evolution. Many officers of the Latin American armed forces saw their role as having been distorted by the demands caused by the past weaknesses of civil society and the state. Such officers yearned for a return to their traditional and sacred responsibility for the defence of the nation against its external enemies.

It must be said, however, that these highly favourable trends did not dominate for long. Instead, even the most democratic governments often

turned, in the turbulent years of the 1990s, to their armed forces to undertake tasks that more properly belonged to other elements of the state and society. Throughout the Hemisphere, the armed forces frequently were asked to take on roles of police reinforcement or even training, penitentiary control, crop protection, anti-kidnapping, counter-narcotics, anti-contraband and customs, border patrol, ecology protection, and a host of other duties. In the absence of other agencies able to take on the job, and often fully cognisant of the risks to democracy, Latin American presidents frequently felt they had no choice but to bend before the inevitable, and called the only possible force available into action in the face of the urgency of the moment. Little wonder then that military prestige gained ground and the actual functioning of democracy, as opposed to democracy as an ideal, came in for a hammering.

Little wonder either that the process of democratization or redemocratization became messier than had been hoped. In some countries one saw little of this problem. Argentina shook off its military control with little difficulty, thanks to the plummeting in military prestige as a result of defeat in the Falklands and its actions, the 'dirty war' of the 1970s. The Central American states,

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with the exception of Guatemala, made much more rapid progress in bringing their forces under civilian control than was thought likely. Colombia, despite all its ills, remained a formal democracy with its military well under civilian control. The Brazilian, Uruguayan, and Bolivian transitions from military to civil rule were deemed successful. Panama and Haiti actually joined Costa Rica as countries without armies after U.S. forces invaded each of those countries.

Guatemala, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru; however, gave more pause, as to some extent, did Chile. But even in those countries progress was evident if hardly a source of delight. With time, the patchwork became even more confusing where constitutional use of the military was concerned. El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua used steadily and more frequently their forces in police and other non-military roles. Brazil was forced to deploy its armed forces into Rio de Janeiro in the fight against urban crime. Even Mexico, with its fine tradition of civilian control of the military, was forced to broaden their influence and other law enforcement activities. Venezuela followed suit in a number of ways by appointing retired and active military officers into influential positions in government.

Thus in a number of Latin American countries, democratic stability, and especially democratic civil-military relations, were already under pressure before the events of mid-September 2001. In a number of countries the situation in this regard and others began to be played out in not always favourable ways.

### **Colombia**

The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington forced Colombia, already the subject of high concern in U.S. security circles, to look again at its own desperate internal security scene. Washington soon came out with a list of organizations it considered 'terrorist,' never the easiest term to nail down in specific cases or in theory. Bogotá discovered that for the United States all major Colombian armed bodies outside the armed forces and the police fell under that term. Thus the two major insurgent groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), were now officially branded as terrorist and not as guerrillas or insurgents. Even the extreme right United Self Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), especially well known for its use of terrorist methods but generally pro-American, found itself so tagged.

There is a difficulty here that is worth considering with care when using terms such as 'terrorist.' The Colombian government was until February 2002 involved in major

peace negotiations with the FARC and had hoped to initiate a similar process with the ELN. Generally speaking, at least the declaratory policy of the majority of today's governments is that they will not, for moral reasons, negotiate with terrorists. This follows the last forty years of the evolution of terrorism, especially skyjacking in all its forms.

There are good reasons for this perspective on negotiating with terrorists. However, if the label is then applied to insurgents, it needless to say, also precludes negotiating with them as well. Unfortunately, that is not a stance the Colombian government can take over the long term. If it hopes to bring peace to the country it must achieve a negotiated settlement with the FARC and

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to some extent with the ELN. It may even, in time, be in a similar situation with the AUC. Its forty years and more of attempts to defeat the insurgents have not brought any decisive results. Thus peace negotiations have the overwhelming backing of public opinion in the country. There are serious repercussions when negotiating with terrorists, and the United States, Colombia's biggest source of aid, has labelled the groups in question 'terrorist.'

### **Cuba**

The Cuban context in the face of 11th September is potentially even more threatening. Fidel Castro believes

firmly that his country is a victim of terrorism, not an agent of it. He points to the many attempts on his life directed from outside, the sabotage of Cuban facilities over the years with the intention of overthrowing his government, and dramatic events such as the blowing up of ships and aircraft carrying Cuban goods and people, as proof of the island's status as a victim.

The United States considers the Cuban state as being in the business of harbouring or even supporting terrorists. This stance by Washington is an old one and goes back to the rural and then urban insurgencies backed by Castro in the 1960s and early 1970s throughout much of Latin America. Domestic political pressures in the U.S. make it extremely difficult for a U.S. government to change this official position however positive Cuba's role in many elements of today's security picture has been over the last ten to twenty years. Thus calls to take Cuba 'off the list' were rejected by the U.S. government. Washington insisted that Cuba was still a haven for terrorists, a 'Club Med' as it was referred to by the U.S. spokesman, despite Cuba's immediate denunciation of the 11th September attacks, its offers of aid to the U.S. in its search for the terrorists, and its continuing and highly useful assistance as a 'friend' of the Colombian peace process.

Castro has declared himself against terrorism, pointing out that opposition is against terrorism in all its forms and sources. In addition, he says he will support the international effort to defeat it. He has shown much less keenness on the war in Afghanistan which he sees as likely to stimulate in the long run the very terrorism one is trying to stamp out.

Keeping Cuba on the list of terrorist supporting countries serves to keep Fidel off balance and could even provide a future justification for still harsher action against the Cuban government. For the time being it is too early to say where all this will lead. One can say, however, that the terrorism issue has complicated still further the numerous vexing issues of Cuban-American relations.

### ***North America***

Mexico and Canada were, as one might expect, among the countries most closely touched by the impact of the attacks. Both immediately did what they could to bring succour to their neighbours. The U.S. governmental reaction has generally been positive in this regard, feeling that both countries have done a good job in supporting Washington. But the mood changes when the future is discussed.

The United States is making no secret of the fact that it wants a major improvement in cooperation with its neighbours on the issue of the interception of terrorism. Long before September 2001, there were accusations on the part of the U.S. that the Canadian border was 'soft' as a result of a lack of will on the part of Canadian authorities to beef it up. Ottawa denied this, and certainly nothing in what has come out so far would suggest that Canadian immigration controls were slacker than those of the United States itself where the perpetrators of the recent attacks were concerned.

In any event, the U.S. insists on further and greater cooperation. And Canada has wished to show itself as bending over backwards on the matter. Despite grave concerns, Ottawa has begun to talk about a number of joint and common measures to deal with the threat of terrorism to the U.S. Several Canadian vessels were quickly dispatched to South Asian waters as preparations for an attack on the Taliban-controlled regime in Afghanistan gained steam. Canada has also contributed Special Forces in the form of the ultra-Secretive Joint Task Force 2, which was followed by the deployment of a Battle Group (750 strong) under U.S. command rather than under United Nations auspices. Since then, there has been clear acceptance of the U.S. lead on matters of the prisoners, where they would be interned and decisions on their fate. Thus far, this has been taken by

the U.S. as no more than their due from Canada. It remains to be seen to what extent the U.S. desire for a North American 'homeland defence', in contrast to one centred exclusively on the United States, emerges.

The Mexicans have been less affected than the Canadians by the events, but they too have felt the growth of complications. The border with Mexico was temporarily closed and is even now a much harder place to pass through than in the past. U.S.-Mexican defence and police cooperation, relatively flourishing in recent years after decades of mutual distrust and suspicion dating back to 1848 and before, has been reinforced. Talks between the two countries on shared approaches are now happening on a regular basis.

All of this is interesting. On the weekend before the 11th September, speaking in Washington, Mexico's President Vicente Fox called for a major revisiting of the Rio Pact and a restructuring of hemispheric security relations. This caused a considerable commotion in security sectors in the United States and elsewhere in the hemisphere where Mexican policy on this issue had for long been very much one of letting sleeping dogs lie.

With the attacks, however, Mexico quickly changed its tune. It backed the calling into play of the Rio Pact in line with the attack on the United States. And since then it has made no further calls for the abandonment of such

hemispheric security arrangements. Instead, it has been more active than ever on hemispheric security matters, even joining the long-avoided Conference of Commanders of Armies of the Americas in November 2001.

### ***Elsewhere in Latin America***

The repercussions are powerful in many places and in line with matters discussed above. Even in solidly democratic (if quickly thereafter unstable) Argentina, there were calls to place national intelligence back in the hands of the military. This attempt was defeated but the scare it produced was real. In the light of end of year events in that country, security issues are now once again solidly to the fore.

In Guatemala and some other countries, anti-terrorism 'czars' have either been appointed or are being considered. The fact that nominations tend to come from the ranks of the military or retired officers underscores the concerns of many that democratic governments should be wary on these matters.

Throughout the region, there is a new if not necessarily vibrant concern that the attacks bode ill for the region.

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Despite apparent Hezbollah links with some persons in Ciudad del Este in Paraguay and in the Tri-border region as a whole, and past attacks on synagogues in Argentina, it does not seem that Islamic terrorism worries many in the region. This could of course change, but for the moment all seems calm. Concerns are much more often voiced about how U.S. policy on the subject of terrorism, perhaps in tandem with unpopular and militarized reactions to the international narcotics situation, may spark off nationalist reactions or at least further damage relations between Washington and Latin American countries.

**About the System as a Whole:  
Some Conclusions**

It is much too early to say what the full impact of the events of 11th September will be on hemispheric defence relations and the inter-American security system as a whole. The system is reacting to what happened. But little concrete policy has as yet been proposed, much less adopted, to answer the challenge.

The Defence Ministerial, scheduled for 2002 in Chile, will doubtless deal with some new initiatives in this

area. Likewise, one can expect ad hoc accords and discussions on how to best deal with the situation at both bilateral and multilateral levels. Terrorism and the fight against terrorism are in the air, even in Latin America, if to a lesser extent than in the North. What will come of all this is far from sure. The inter-American security system was not originally designed to deal with non-conventional problems. For example, the system did not foresee: Communist inspired internal subversion; the illegal international drug trade; and, terrorist events such as last September.

That having been said, the “system” has already been called formally into play in order to address the issue. It will have to do so. The impact of this may

be greater than anyone imagines in terms of wider U.S.–Latin American relations, democracy, human rights and civil–military relations, and peace. Much must be done to deal with the problem of terrorism, but it will be essential that these elements not be forgotten in the rush to deal with the threat.

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