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Securing the Future by Looking South: Strategic Opportunities for the United States in Latin America

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ABSTRACT: This article uses three lenses from core international relations schools of thought to identify insights that should drive U.S. security policy in the Western Hemisphere. Although the region is undervalued in U.S. strategic prioritization, all three major international relations frameworks point to its importance. Effective engagement in the hemisphere presents an opportunity for the U.S. to increase its comparative strength to rising and revisionist powers, broaden the western democratic family of nations, and provide a powerful example to the developing world.

As U.S. policymakers struggle to triage their time and resources among challenges like ISIS, the rise of China, and an adventurous Russia, Latin America is often relegated to a secondary priority. As a consequence, the United States often misses opportunities to greatly increase its strength and that of its allies. The essential questions when analyzing a region are “How does this region fit into our strategies? How does this region

support U.S. policy?” Unfortunately, a disconnected set of often competing interests revolving around counter-narcotics, human rights, and pro-democracy initiatives tend to dominate U.S. policy in Latin America without a broader strategic context. At the root of this confusion is a failure to understand the importance of the region as a part of the global security environment, looking beyond immediate problems and identifying opportunities.

This article will consider the issue from the perspectives of the three main schools of thought in international relations. When applied on a comparative basis to a single issue, these perspectives provide a powerful tool for systematically analyzing foreign policy and guiding its formulation. Additionally, the three schools act as concentrators or clusters of the great variety of arguments published every day concerning international security.

This survey suggests that, somewhat uniquely, analyzing the current state of affairs in the Western Hemisphere through all three major international relations lenses supports the importance of engagement in the region. This is not the case for every region in the world; consider Realist arguments and bipartisan calls to significantly reduce U.S. involvement in the Middle East, or, as will be more evident in the corresponding subsection, the lack of shared institutions, values, or identities with other regions of the world compared to Latin America.¹

In addition to this general observation, specific foreign policy insights emerge from these schools of thought that should drive U.S. security policy in the region, and provide the deeper “why” behind counter-narcotics initiatives, military-to-military cooperation, and activities that promote democracy and shared values in the hemisphere.

Derived from the Realist school of thought, the first of these insights to consider is that Latin America can play a key role in deterring China from a war with the United States, or winning a conflict should it come to that. The second, from a Liberal perspective, highlights that Latin America has the potential to create and enhance shared institutions that continue to bring the region into the western, democratic, free market family of nations. Finally, in the realm of ideas and ways in which societies identify, the Constructivist lens suggests the very concept of

“Latin America” can be revised. Any such realignment would be inherently beneficial to the parties involved, and also serve as an invaluable model for problem regions searching for a formula to find stability and prosperity.

Latin America in the Current US Security Policy Hierarchy

Latin America’s limited presence in the U.S. foreign policy and security agenda is disproportionate to its true importance. In his 2015 testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, then Commander of U.S. Southern Command and current White House Chief of Staff, General John Kelly, forcefully asserted that “unless confronted by an immediate, visible, or uncomfortable crisis, our nation’s tendency is to take the security of the Western Hemisphere for granted. I believe this is a mistake.”² Latin America expert Michael Reid labeled Latin America the “forgotten continent,” observing that the region was not “dangerous enough to excite strategic calculation.”³ Criticisms of neglect are not new and officials have responded that engagement has merely shifted from a “paternalistic and shortsighted” policy to one that achieves “self-sufficiency of our neighbors.”⁴ Although there is certainly a dedicated, but small, group of Latin America experts in the policymaking arena, security in the Western Hemisphere simply does not get the attention that other regions garner.

A survey of travel, under the Obama administration, by the President and Secretary of Defense provides some insight into the perceived importance of the region. Of President Obama’s 99 country visits during his time in office, only 10 were Latin American countries. Five of those ten visits were to Mexico, placing the President’s travel to Central America, the Caribbean, and South America on par with his five visits to African countries.⁵ Secretary of Defense travels to Latin America during the same period show 16 country visits in Latin America in seven years. In four of those seven years, the Secretary of Defense did not travel to the region at all.⁶

A review of U.S. strategic documents gleans additional indications of the region’s perceived importance. The little known, but well formulated, Department of Defense’s 2012 Western Hemisphere Defense Policy Statement identifies the broad goals

of “strengthening national defense capacity, fostering regional integration and interoperability, and the constructive evolution of multilateral defense cooperation,”⁷. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to find the reflections of the broad goals of that policy statement in other strategic documents. The 2015 National Security Strategy does an admirable job of capturing the overall US interest in the Americas. “We will continue to advance a Western Hemisphere that is prosperous, secure, democratic, and plays a greater global role.” Unfortunately, this paragraph on the Americas appears last, almost as an afterthought, in the order of regions discussed in the document. If headlines are excluded, the word “Americas” appears only five times in the document, and two of those are in the context of sweeping global statements. In contrast, “Africa” and its variants appears 32 times.⁸

Likewise, the 88-page 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review spends little time discussing the Western Hemisphere. The QDR states “U.S. engagement in the Western Hemisphere is aimed at promoting and maintaining regional stability.” In its “Build Security Globally” section the QDR provides additional guidance on countering “transnational criminal organization networks.”⁹ Mirroring the other key documents, the National Military Strategy, again coming last on the list, highlights the military’s role in the hemisphere. “The U.S. military is supporting interagency efforts with Latin American and Caribbean states to promote regional stability and counter transnational criminal organizations.”¹⁰

While reasonable as a baseline, making regional stability the primary aim of US security policy in the Western Hemisphere discounts the importance of the region to the global security environment and the prosperity of the U.S. It suggests that, if stability is achieved, not much else remains to be said or done with Latin America. Nor do regional stability and countering transnational organized crime achieve the broader goals briefly outlined in the National Security Strategy. Latin America scholar Evan Ellis sadly notes “in the game of geopolitics, Latin America has long been, and continues to be, the ‘minor leagues.’”¹¹ To get called up to the majors, academics, policymakers, and practitioners need to start thinking deeper and broader when examining the Western Hemisphere.

Regional Hegemony and Avoiding the Thucydides Trap

While there are several variants of the Realist school of thought, Realism is centered on the “struggle for power between self-interested states” operating in an anarchic system.¹² Realists are generally pessimistic about the prospects of ending conflict and see alliances, war, and other international relations activities as symptoms of state competition.¹³ For Realists, the hemisphere is more than just drugs and human rights, it is part of the international balance of power. Within the universe of Realism, two insights stand out as critical to understanding Latin America’s importance: regional hegemony and the potential for a global hegemonic war.

Offensive Realist John J. Mearsheimer argues that states are inherently aggressive and seek to expand their power in order to assure their survival.¹⁴ One tenet of Mearsheimer’s thinking is that states that achieve regional hegemony will seek to prevent other states from achieving regional hegemony in their part of the globe. Essentially, the development of local threats will consume the ability of a state to focus its attention on more distant challenges.¹⁵ As such, Mearsheimer advises that “the purpose of American power should be to ensure that the United States remains a hegemon in the Western Hemisphere, and that there is no regional hegemon in Eurasia.”¹⁶

Although often taken for granted, the position of the United States in the Western Hemisphere is not a foregone conclusion. Security scholar Evan Ellis warns of the “potential for a powerful extra-hemispheric actor to use the region to harm the United States or impair its ability to act in other parts of the world in the event of a future conflict.”¹⁷ China is now engaged globally, and is very active in Latin America. A Chinese \$50 billion investment in the troubled Nicaragua Canal project represents a challenge to the existing Panama Canal, and even if never completed, opens the door to increased influence for China in Nicaragua.¹⁸ In a 2015 China-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) meeting, China predicted that trade with Latin America would reach \$500 billion in the next 10 years. Furthermore, China is leveraging its economic gains to support regimes that have been critical of the US, extending credit lifelines to Venezuela and Ecuador.¹⁹ China has also increased its military contact with the region

including weapons sales, training, and naval visits.²⁰ Through relatively modern military equipment -such as K-8 light attack jets, mobile radars and Harbin Z-9 helicopters- provided at inexpensive prices and long term credit, China is expanding its footprint in Latin America. Training and long-term maintenance support usually follows these weapons sales, giving China a new influence tool in the region, according to defense sales expert Iñigo Guevara.

In addition to China, Russia has shown itself to be more active in the region, sending a blunter message to the United States. The Russians have re-invigorated their ties with Nicaragua. Russian ships visit the Central American nation and announced defense agreements began to come to fruition with the donation of 50 T-72 main battle tanks.²¹ Specifically, Russian-built missile-armed corvettes and twin engine fighter aircraft would provide Nicaragua with the means to threaten Colombian patrol ships in the disputed waters around the San Andrés archipelago.²² Repeated visits by Russian Tu-160 nuclear capable strategic bombers to Venezuela and Nicaragua have caused alarm in the region.²³ The Russian and Chinese presence in the hemisphere potentially puts at risk what the United States considers a stable and friendly region, potentially distracting the United States from security threats elsewhere in the globe.

Perhaps the most alarming theory for Realists, at this point in time, is the theory of hegemonic war. Political scientist Graham Allison encapsulated the issue with a disquieting question in an Atlantic article: “The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?”²⁴ The theory, first postulated by Thucydides in ancient Greece, is summarized by Robert Gilpin:

Over time the power of a subordinate state begins to grow disproportionately, and that rising state comes into conflict with the dominant hegemonic state in the system. The ensuing struggle between these two states and their respective allies leads to a bipolarization of the system, to an inevitable crisis, and eventually to a hegemonic war. Finally, there is the resolution of the war in favor of one side and the establishment of a new international system that reflects the emergent distribution of power in the system.²⁵

Under this theory, war with China is all but

inevitable barring “painful adjustments in attitudes and actions on the part not just of the challenger but also the challenged.”²⁶ Based on this dire prediction, it becomes imperative to look at Latin America from the perspective of its role in a potential global hegemonic competition.

Realist thinking utilizes unit level analysis where the internal differences of states are not measured, the only measured variable is state power.²⁷ As such, for Realists, developing economic and military power is key to attaining security. Economic strength translates into a stronger position when managing the rise of new world powers. The economic wellbeing of the United States is tied directly to the economy of the hemisphere in multiple terms, including trade, migration, and the sourcing of key commodities (including energy). The World Bank estimates that China’s GDP is 17.42 trillion dollars. The GDP of Latin America, including Mexico, is 6.07 trillion dollars. When the hemisphere as a whole is considered, the combined GDP reaches an impressive 25.275 trillion dollars.²⁸ This economic power translates to the purchase of weapons systems and military manpower that can deter conflict from revisionist and rising powers. Assisting partner nations to improve their internal security situations and counter powerful criminal organizations creates measurable economic improvements. In turn this enhances U.S. power vis-à-vis global competitors while providing strength to the existing global economic system.

In addition to economic power, developing the military capabilities of partner nations in Latin America provides additional weight to the power of the United States in the international security environment. A strong number of international partners with significant military capabilities will give pause to a power that is considering the use of military strength to assert itself. Security cooperation initiatives undertaken by USNORTHCOM and USSOUTHCOM are crucial in the development of viable partners. Despite perceptions to the contrary, Latin America does exercise its military power globally. In World War II, Brazil deployed an infantry division to the European theater and Mexico deployed a fighter squadron to the Pacific theater. More recently, El Salvador conducted multiple troop rotations in Iraq, while Uruguay regularly deploys peacekeeping forces in Africa. Strengthening alliances and military capabilities

make it less likely that a rising power will risk military confrontation with the United States and its allies.

Expanding (and Consolidating) the Global Democratic Community of Nations

The Liberal paradigm suggests that relations between states that have democratically-elected governments will tend to be more peaceful and, ultimately, more mutually beneficial.²⁹ Additional strands of the paradigm emphasize the power of trade, international organizations, and other shared activities and institutions as helping alleviate the raw power dynamics of the Realist school.³⁰ The liberal perspective thus looks to factors favoring democratic peace, shared international institutions, and trade, to formulate foreign policy recommendations. The more a country or a region showcases those factors, the more likely it is to constitute a valuable ally to the United States.

The main pillar of the liberal school is primarily known as democratic peace theory, and suggests democracies are more likely to be at peace with each other than countries with other types of government. Latin America has the second-largest concentration of democracies worldwide outside of Europe, making it decisively important from a Liberal perspective.³¹ While a complete definition of democratic status is outside the scope of this article, a good foundation is Francis Fukuyama's proposition that liberal states "recognize and protect...through a system of law, man's universal right to freedom, and [that] exists only with the consent of the governed."³² In addition to this broad definition, studies of the region provide a more specific assessment of democracy in the hemisphere. The Center for Systemic Peace's Polity Project found almost every country that it studied in the region scored five or more in its democratic scale, with solidly democratic societies such as Costa Rica, Uruguay, and Chile trending toward the upper ranks. Only Cuba, Haiti, and Venezuela scored poorly. Likewise, Freedom House graded totalitarian Cuba as the only unfree country in the region. Regional public opinion surveys point in a similar direction.³³

This remarkable synergy leads some experts, such as Parag Khanna, to suggest "Elevating South America to its rightful place as the third pillar of the West alongside Europe and North America". However, if Khanna's vision of a "third pillar" is to be

realized, the United States will need to alleviate security concerns that plague the region and drain its potential. The region still faces a number of issues that interfere with its democratic consolidation and potential for global leadership roles. Because many of these issues are security issues, they are relevant to U.S. national security planning.

The most recent difficulties have been authoritarian politics, in the face of which liberal synergies are automatically dismantled; and criminal violence that impedes countries from fully realizing their potential. The United States has had its share of negative experiences trying to work on the first challenge, but there are ways to mitigate the latter.

In contrast to previous decades where it was rife with political violence, Latin America's current top security issue is criminal violence. The region leads most global measures of non-political homicidal violence in both absolute and per capita terms. The ranks of the world's most violent countries and cities are dominated, often monopolized, by Latin American names.³⁴ U.S. efforts like the Merida Initiative in Mexico, Plan Colombia, and the recent \$750 million dollar Central American assistance package passed by the U.S. Congress all seek to tackle the problem of drugs and uncontrolled migration. However, the deeper purpose behind these initiatives must be the development of more stable and capable allies that can contribute to the broader democratic community.³⁵

For the limited number of non-democratic or less democratic states in the region, the Liberal paradigm points to what is now, arguably, a consensus policy: supporting democratic transitions. However, as proposed by Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder during a recent period of regime-change enthusiasm, "Washington and the international community need to think not so much about encouraging or discouraging democratization as about helping to smooth the transition in ways that minimize risks."³⁶ One must accept now that those risks are not limited to conventional war, but also include a descent into criminal violence.

A second major strand of the liberal school states that the development of transnational institutions and norms helps alleviate the friction of raw power geopolitics, and ultimately contributes to

shared peace and prosperity. Latin America is once again well placed from such a perspective, given that it has been one of the earliest and most enthusiastic adopters of international institutions since these were invented in the early 20th century.

Unfortunately, the premier international body in the Americas, the Organization of American States (OAS) has been under challenge over the last decade. However, competing organizations such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), and CELAC have stagnated. The collapse of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was swiftly superseded by the emergence of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and the U.S. free trade agreements with Colombia, Peru, and Chile – while competing bloc MERCOSUR almost lost all meaning.

In terms of hard power, Latin American partners have at times shunned the possibility of integration into other Western security organizations. The oldest regional defense organization in the world, the Inter-American Defense Board, remains extremely limited and in a constant battle for both resources and relevance. At the same time, the United States has secured international military cooperation from countries such as El Salvador and Colombia, while achieving a better understanding with countries from the region in spaces such as the United Nations Security Council or specific peacekeeping missions such as MINUSTAH.

This collection of efforts, both successful and failed, lacks the unitary elegance of the European Union, where virtually all matters for that continent flow through the same few institutional channels. Nevertheless, they have in general managed to sustain U.S. influence through a period, of over a decade, of large-scale hostility to its influence in the region. Given the looming collapse of the “alternative” or Bolivarian model, it may be the case that ideas and institutions such as OAS or FTAA could resurge. Many of these initiatives notably tie in with an additional strand of liberal thinking, which suggests that economies that are more open toward each other – particularly in terms of trade- will increase their mutual prosperity, and be more likely to be at peace with each other.

Ultimately, the Liberal prism has some clear uses for U.S. security policy toward Latin America. Democratic peace theory reveals fertile ground for establishing and consolidating strong alliances. Institutionalism similarly highlights the region’s long track record of implementing and defending transnational institutions as proof of a region that is more reliable than others in alliance building. Liberal economics would note a number of opportunities with friendly, emerging markets in the region.

As more than a decade of anti-American political hegemony in Latin America approaches its end, the region is ideally primed for such initiatives. In terms of concrete pursuits, the liberal perspective would emphasize the importance of the ongoing fight against criminal instability in the region. The potential for counter-criminal efforts to improve democratic governance in the region will, in the long run, tend to benefit the United States in the shape of partners that are more stable, more prosperous, and ultimately more reliable in global strategic terms. U.S. efforts in the region, if properly focused on long term goals, could help Washington incorporate a new cluster of countries to the North America-Europe democratic continuum.

“Latin” America Is What We Make of It

Constructivism famously suggests that major phenomena that are widely discussed and assumed to be permanent are, in fact, the result of social creation and recreation.³⁷ Consequently, ideas, historical periods, and even entities such as countries and cultures can be identified or interpreted differently across time and geography – and this impacts the conduct of international relations. Constructivism is the least policy-friendly of the three major schools of thought in international relations. Nevertheless, Latin America offers a singularly important case for illustrating the explanatory value of this theory, as well as the region’s relevance to the United States.

Constructivist theories of international relations suggest that the likelihood of conflict is better assessed through an examination of shared identities, cultures, norms, and other social manifestations. The more synergies and common understandings that exist across such categories between two or more given societies, the less likely conflict will be. Concor-

dantly, the broader the divides between two societies' core ideals and projections of identity, the more likely conflict will be.

These basic lessons of Constructivist analysis suggest that Latin America has a significant combination of drivers favoring a much closer relationship with the United States. The best place to start is with the very concept of "Latin America".

Consider how there hasn't always been a "Latin America." Like many other regional concepts (such as "Middle East" or "Indochina"), it was made up by specific individuals for specific reasons. It was the concept's considerable success that resulted in its current dominance, to the point where it is taught and accepted as if "Latin America" were a self-evident entity.

Once upon a time, this was not the case at all. "Latin America" was a concept created specifically to extricate a large portion of the American continent, in political and cultural terms, away from the influence of the United States.³⁸ The main instigator of this notion was France, which in the mid-19th century sought to increase its influence in a continent where it was considerably limited compared to that of other countries such as Britain, Spain, or the United States itself. By deploying intellectual firepower toward the construction of a "Latin" identity that was separate, and often hostile, to the "Anglo-Saxon" identity, the American continent could be understood in a new way.

The "Latin America" concept did not take hold initially. In fact, for a long time the dominant political and cultural paradigm was its diametrical opposite: Pan-Americanism. The first few decades of the twentieth century in fact saw the peak of Pan-Americanism, with warm relations established at political, economic, and cultural levels between the United States and several other countries in the continent. In turn, European powers such as Britain and France were kept at a certain distance. They could be trade partners, but there was no talk of "brotherhood" with them, as there was with the United States. Meanwhile, Pan-Americanism also gave birth to the world's first true international organizations, such as the Pan-American Union and the Pan-American Health Organization (thus, as noted in the previous section, making the region a pioneer in liberal institution-building).

As the twentieth century reached its core in the period that goes from the 1930s to the 1960s, a paradigm shift took place. It is beyond the scope of this essay to detail the components and causes of the shift, but suffice it to say that both sides grew mutually distant. The United States hurt its own cause by engaging in numerous military expeditions in the Caribbean and Central America in the earlier part of the century; generations of future Latin American leaders grew up resenting those measures. By the time the U.S. had shifted its attention to becoming a global power, focusing on Europe and East Asia, "Latin America" had been born and engaged in its own efforts at widening the distance.

Latin Americanists (meaning proponents of the concept) differentiated their promoted entity from "Anglo-Saxon" America with considerable ease. One was poor, the other was rich. One was peaceful, the other was nuclear-armed and belligerent. One was the victim of imperialism, the other its perpetrator. Ultimately, one was weak and the other powerful – as far as many were concerned, there could be no talk of brotherhood and partnership. Rather, the Cold War provided the perfect context for a confrontation: national liberation versus imperialism.

The United States responded with a characteristically mixed set of messages. Good Neighbor programs and Alliances for Progress were mixed with incidents such as Guatemala 1954, Bay of Pigs 1961, and Chile 1973 that continued to fuel resentment, particularly when exploited by Communist propaganda and Soviet influence. Ultimately, the United States too came to see itself as more politically and culturally aligned with Europe and even countries beyond. Since then, Latin America has been an entity clearly distinct from North America. These self-definitions have influenced both sides' policies toward each other for decades.

As noted by its major scholars, Constructivism suggests opportunities could lie undetected in the field of ideas. If Pan-Americanism once yielded to Latin Americanism, there is no structural impediment for the inverse taking place. Rather, it is a matter of what factors drive the permanence or change of these paradigms – and this is where U.S. strategic planning comes in. Such planning should consist of identifying what U.S. policies would serve the general interests of both sides, while modifying

the terms of the relationship with a view to undoing the “Latin American” paradigm and embracing the more egalitarian Pan-American one. Such a situation would result in political affinity and proximity that would reduce security tensions considerably, not unlike the situation observable in Europe since 1945 (and 1989 in its second stage). For the Americas, this is not an absurd notion, but rather one that has ample, well-documented cultural, political, and historical precedents. If successfully brought together, this would represent a positive model for other regions to follow.

Adopting a constructivist approach in foreign policy is no easy task. Two building blocks can be prudently identified as starting points. First is the *sine qua non* commonality that states must have to truly achieve the desired level of understanding: a shared political system, most specifically democracy. This was explored in the previous section, but nevertheless matters here because crises of corruption and criminality can lead countries to crises of identity. Criminal violence continues to cripple prospects for Latin American youth to overcome marginalization; it generates dangerous phenomena such as ritualistic violence, parallel government, and marginal or informal economies; ultimately it corrupts the fabric of the state and civic society. The United States and Latin America grow increasingly distant the more this takes place. Similarly, political corruption (both in media-intense scandals and in everyday petty corruption) degrade the quality of civic life and facilitate the emergence of populist leaders, and other demagogues, that inevitably rise to cause trouble at the national level.

The second building block, as observed in the European Union, is not just sharing a political system and a set of institutions, but also sharing a culture, a degree of mutual understanding that is qualitatively different from the norm between any two given states worldwide. This is not something that can be achieved or even tangibly identified by any policymaker or strategist, but is nevertheless demonstrably real. In fact, it already exists to a degree within the Latin American region, precisely due to the success of the latter concept. What’s missing is a bridge to the United States and Canada.

Admittedly, due to globalization, one may argue that all regions of the world are growing closer to

the United States, as they tend to consume the same electronics, dress codes, or language of mainstream American culture. However, beyond this generic observation, a closer look suggests important differences between regions. Consider how inter-state rivalries observed in much of the Asian continent preclude the rise of a cohesive “Asian” region, particularly in comparison to “Latin America” or “the Americas”. Other regions fare no better. The concept of a single European civilization, without question the most developed regional construction in the world, is undergoing a period of crisis in the age of Brexit and nationalisms. In the Islamic world, the common denominator of religion –and its radical variants- has more often than not generated strife, both internally and beyond its borders. Given this context, the case for North America and Latin America to grow conceptually closer to each other has rarely been more historically advantageous for both parties. A Constructivist approach would see, as is the case with the liberal one, fertile ground in Latin America to work toward a relationship that more closely resembles the Atlantic alliance. This is particularly the case if a comparative perspective is adopted vis-à-vis other regions of the world, with whose countries the United States may on occasion find common interests, but rarely a sense of shared civilization, region, or values.³⁹

Placing the Western Hemisphere in a Global Context

The ideas expressed here are not mutually exclusive. In fact, all three lenses come together to create a deeper understanding of the region’s importance. While many regions offer only risk and liabilities for the U.S., Latin America primarily offers opportunities. To capitalize on these opportunities, U.S. security policy in the region should seek to achieve three primary objectives. The first objective is to ensure that the region’s cumulative geopolitical power rests firmly with the current global system while preventing outside powers from meddling in the Western Hemisphere. Second, the United States must more effectively integrate Latin American countries into the liberal democratic family of nations. Finally, the United States should challenge established norms to restore a Pan-American identity.

These objectives can be achieved through continued security cooperation initiatives, strengthening of alliances, and focused engagement by key leaders. Security cooperation activities aimed at improving the interoperability and capability of foreign partners must continue. Developing capable partner blue water navies would bolster the strength of the nations that are in favor of maintaining the global democratic free market norms currently in place. Furthermore, capable and interoperable ground forces could potentially help bear the burden of maintaining stability in the international system should the United States become engaged in a high intensity conflict. In some cases, it may even be possible that Latin American partners would join with the United States in a great power struggle. This is particularly the case with some regional countries that have valuable military assets to contribute to an alliance. In contrast, barring excessive influence from outside powers, alliances with Latin American countries are unlikely to necessitate a U.S. commitment to confront major powers, as is the case with Russia in Europe and China in East Asia. This means that overall, the balance of mutual security commitments for the United States may be more balanced than it is in other regions.

Much of the work in the region, in terms of achieving democratic status, is already done. For such countries, the time is right for the United States to explore formal alliances and deeper bilateral relations that result in more permanent arrangements. The lack of strong alliance systems in the Western Hemisphere is an oversight in U.S. foreign policy that has yet to be corrected despite outstanding progress following World War II. Strengthening multilateral institutions will be key in this process.

The integration of Latin American countries into NATO's Partnership for Peace program has been challenging. Perhaps it is time to examine creating linkages between the Inter-American Defense Board and NATO – an undertaking that would begin to make it normal for the Euro-American alliance to incorporate all of the Americas, even if Euro-Atlanticism and Pan-Americanism will for some time continue to operate separately. Building trans-Atlantic interoperability and common doctrine through an established hemispheric body may be more palatable for Latin American partners. Other structures like the Conference of the Ministers of Defense of the

Americas and the Conference of American Armies may also hold promise as a venue for bridging the gap between NATO and Latin America.

Ultimately, however, it is the consolidation of those democracies that are not yet fully developed that will enable the true re-emergence of Pan-Americanism and its subsequent security benefits. Consolidating democracies requires the United States and its partners to dismantle and degrade the powerful forces of transnational organized crime and systemic corruption that plague the region. The United States has a long history with democracy promotion, one that has ranged from fully militarized regime change by way of invasion to more modest aid programming. For the objective outlined here, such programming should not be interventionist, but rather actions that emphasize the struggles against criminal violence and corruption, as well as the re-discovery of the United States' historical, cultural, and now demographic affinities with the region.

This latter point connects the Liberal perspective, focusing on institutions and open political systems, with the Constructivist reformulation of the very terms of the relationship. By definition this is more difficult to translate into policies; there is no institution, treaty, or initiative that can suddenly spark a re-interpretation of the duality between North America and Latin America. However, consistent engagement and messaging combined with multinational exercises and operations can slowly constitute the strategic component in a wider effort toward a new paradigm in the hemisphere. This can be as simple as changing the language used in senior leader talking points and formal naming conventions that, over time, create new norms and definitions.

Perhaps most importantly, these initiatives are relatively inexpensive. Modest security cooperation budgets under the Department of State and the Department of Defense can create significant results in interoperability and professionalization. Similarly, continued investment in programs to fight transnational crime can help partners reach their security goals and improve governance systems. The most critical and most costly element of this policy is an investment in the time and focus of key U.S. security leaders. Effective engagement and a strategic vision are paramount to escaping the trap of short term, crisis based strategy in the hemisphere. Lead-

ership invested in a broader vision for the Western Hemisphere will enable, the United States, and the region as a whole, to enjoy increased economic and military power that will help assure the survival of the current global security system against rising and revisionist powers while developing a new concept of the “Americas.”

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Endnotes

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