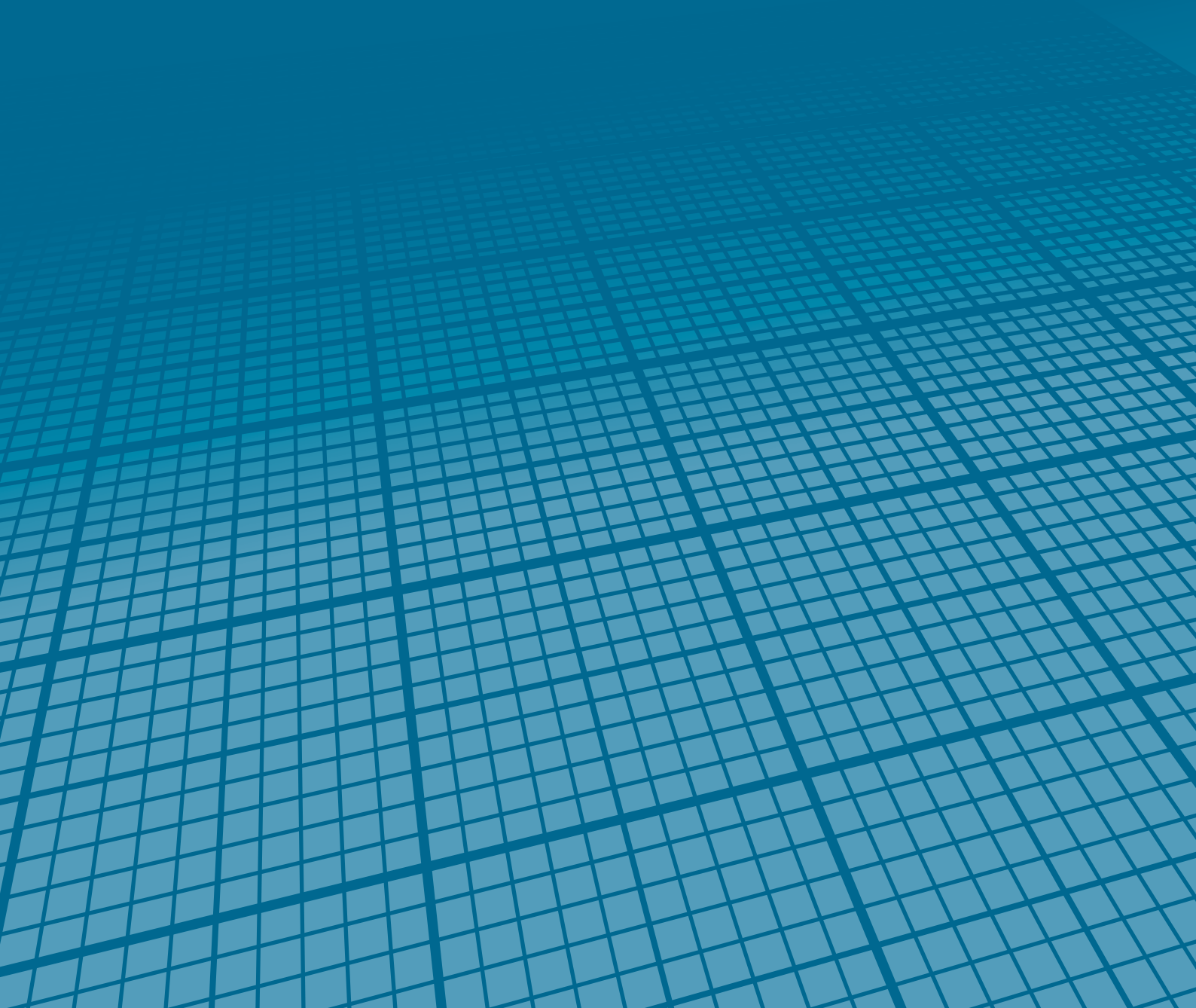


# THE REGION





## Considering the Region

# Latin America and the Caribbean

## Rhetorical progress and no binding agreements

**Francisco Rojas Aravena**

*Secretary General of FLACSO*

Latin America continues to be a zone of peace. The region presents a low degree of inter-state conflict, with reduced military threats. However, both in Latin America and the Caribbean, we have a high prevalence of violence, being one of the most violent regions in the world. With only 8% of the world's population, it suffers 40% of murders and 60% of kidnappings. All this use of force poses growing risks and threats to security.

In the new Latin American and Caribbean context, the new political map generates parallel processes of integration and fragmentation. Significant political turbulence has impacted the region over the last few years. Thus, democratic peace and governance has been weakened and even challenged. Since 1990, ten Presidents have not completed their presidential term, and this may be reflected -in most cases- in coups of "a new kind". The risks of repeating the past have increased; the crisis and coup in Honduras are clear evidence of that.

The region does not have clear leadership; there is no one leader in the region to provide the direction to a shared project. Latin America and the Caribbean do not have a strategic political project or a common vision. The models of development are becoming increasingly divergent. There is fierce debate about the models, pathways and instruments required to overcome poverty, inequality and social marginalization. The various visions break down and fragment the political options available. This becomes clear when analyzing aspects such as insertion in the globalization process, models of political, social and cultural development, military projects and defence policies, international alliances, options related to international trade; and particularly types of relationships inside the political system regarding the division of the powers of government, the role

of the justice system, parliaments, communications media, civil society and the Church. The political scenario of Latin America consequently shows high heterogeneity, fragmentation and in some countries, even polarization, thus making it difficult for Latin America to have one single voice.

The search for unity and integration has been a constant effort of the countries across the region from their very inception some 200 years ago. However, there has been more frustration than success. Without a plural and shared vision built around dialogue and consensus building, it will not be possible to have a strategic political perspective capable of classifying the various dimensions and guiding the integrating process embedded in State policies. The last effort in this way was the Summit of Unity held in Cancún in February 2010. There, three elements were strongly revealed: the integration-focused rhetoric, growing mistrust and the lack of political will to advance further. It is even difficult to build a shared agenda in the region due to its heterogeneous nature and this lack of political will.

All those factors are framed within a new international context of greater interdependency and autonomy of the region. Brazil, as an emerging power, has proven that it can be an active player in the global scenario. South-South cooperation is on the rise. The traditional hegemony is challenged. From the region come demands for relations based on respect for the right to association.

### **Defence and security: parallel or converging roads?**

Three countries of the hemisphere are currently at war: Colombia, Mexico and the United States. In the first two cases, it is an internal war against organized

crime, increasingly involving Central American countries, especially Guatemala and Honduras. The United States supports these war efforts through specific programmes: Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative. Its attention on the region however is relatively low. The US wars are fought in Afghanistan and Iraq. Latin America and the Caribbean are going through unprecedented levels of violence, even worse than those of the Central American revolutionary wars in the 80s.

The 1970s and 1980s were times of dictatorships across the region. Later came a promising democratic transition in which people in the region recovered from a period in which the State represented one of the main threats to their people, applying the so-called national security doctrine. In the 1990s, Latin America and the Caribbean made significant progress in reducing inter-state conflicts and, especially, in demilitarising them. After the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, interest in, and focus on the processes aimed at deactivating conflicts fell off, and many endeavours that were under way were not adequately followed up, particularly in the sphere of confidence and security building measures (CSBM).

Today, many nations in the region lack proper State presence in some geographical areas or in their main cities, thus creating new vulnerabilities and threats to the population. In this scenario, transnational non-state actors are threatening the stability and security of each one of our countries.

We face different types of threats and we must address different kinds of violence. On one hand, we are confronted with sovereignty and border issues which are linked to defence policies and military power. On the other, there is violence caused by organized crime, juvenile gangs and the use of small arms. We can also mention a re-emergence of conflicts over resources and the environment.

In the defence and sovereignty spheres, the dispute among Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela, especially between the two latter countries, has been prolonged in time and escalated considerably in the last two years. Frictions are constant. The statements made by the leadership of these countries show high mistrust, making it even more difficult to find diplomatic ways to settle the conflict. The threat of the use of force is latent and it is necessary to eradicate it. Also in the defence arena, tensions derived from border issues

in Central America, the Caribbean and South America could result in tensions and risks if not handled adequately.

In the case of Colombia, its special relationship with the United States (in relation to Plan Colombia, but particularly the facilities provided to the US in seven military bases), has raised concern and a negative reaction in South America, aside from the ongoing political and ideological differences manifested by various countries. It is a serious concern because of the presence of foreign militaries on South American soil. In meetings with Latin American Heads of State, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton personally undertook to provide the necessary information which could help dissipate their concerns. However, recurring tensions in “the Great Colombia” hinder the possibility of dialogue to deal with these issues.

Hence, in the absence confidence-building measures and given a reluctance to enter into binding agreements, Latin American countries have significantly increased their military spending. During the period of economic prosperity in Latin America (2003-2008), military spending rose almost 100% and the suppliers are UN Security Council permanent members. Sub-regional arrangements aimed at reaching effective agreements in the area are so far still only an aspiration, as shown by the Declaration of Lima (OAS).

In the security sphere, violence increasingly causes more casualties, refugees and displaced persons every day, thus raising the economic cost of security in every society. Mexico’s annual casualties are over 25,000 people and Colombia’s displaced persons amount to over 2.5 million. Murders in Latin America have leaped, creating fear and turning the region into the most violent in the world. National murder rates per 100 thousand inhabitants are: Guatemala 48, El Salvador 52, and Honduras 58. Transnational crime impacts every Latin American country. Its networks are globally connected and make an efficient use of cutting-edge technologies, in many cases exceeding the operational capacity and fire power of government law-enforcement. This situation shows deep problems of inter-state coordination and cooperation as well as the international connections of organized crime.

In a context of fragile Latin American democracies, organized crime is the main security threat to the rule of law and order. The answer to this, from Mexico to Colombia, including Central America and even in Rio



and Sao Paulo (Brazil), has been militarization, which leads to the privatization of security and warfighting and taking away the monopoly of force from the State. Such a policy approach has not rendered the expected results. The clearest example is Plan Colombia and the struggle against drug trafficking, although it has made progress in controlling the guerrillas. To fight against organized crime, an agreed subregional, regional, hemispheric and global effort is required.

The environmental disputes between Ecuador and Colombia, and between Argentina and Uruguay, have found a settlement vehicle in the International Court of Justice. However, new conflicts linked to resources and the environment might possibly arise, and no adequate institutional forum is in place to manage them.

However, to address such conflicts, all with chances of escalating, there is no shared doctrine. Nor is there a common doctrine on the roles for the military and law-enforcement. Aside from political and ideological differences, approaches on defence and security are varied, thus making it difficult to build a common strategy. All actors involved claim the need for a transnational and global approach; however, no substantive agreements on key principles in order to further a common vision have been reached. In this area, the United States is the main player, whereas the European Union has little weight and other Asian countries are virtually absent.

Poverty, inequity and inequality are a significant element of the risks and threats to security. In this matter, countries have not discovered how to confront and resolve the situation, nor do they have sustainable and agreed plans for the short term.

### **Progress outside formal institutions.**

#### **How to establish cooperation?**

If we consider institution-building efforts, we must underscore that there is no effective formal mechanism for conflict prevention and resolution in Latin American and the Caribbean. However, if we take a look at specific situations such as the UNASUR effort, in Central America and the Caribbean, prospects should be brighter. UNASUR and its Defence Council, however, have not been ratified yet. UNASUR is a political project of cooperation and integration in a wider sense, covering from economic and commercial aspects to defence and security. It is a proposal for unity in diversity, integration with pluralism, and

regional cohesion with national sovereignty. Bicentennial anniversaries of countries' independence are a significant incentive in these convergence processes. UNASUR's South American Defence Council has set very ambitious goals. However, the progress and consensus achieved have not translated into binding agreements. Aside from the principles of a step-by-step approach and flexibility in institutional development, the ambitious proposals in CSBM's or signing a Treaty of Peace, Security and Cooperation have yet not resulted in practical measures to deescalate conflicts in the region in relation to defence. Matters related to security must be addressed in the South American Anti-Drug Council (*Consejo Suramericano de Lucha contra las Drogas*), but the progress made in this Council is minimum. A clear distinction is made with respect to military and law-enforcement roles, though this is not reflected in practice by the actions of member countries where militarization blurs roles.

If no progress is made in a political atmosphere of trust among Latin American and Caribbean heads of state and leaders, there will be no progress in transparency and confidence-building. The proposals and consensus reached in this matter show high density prevailing in paper rather than in binding and verifiable agreements.

Mechanisms established to reduce tensions between neighbours, including agreements between Colombia and Venezuela, have ceased to be effective and are not used. In other cases, meetings have been consistently postponed. If institutional mechanisms are not used for the purposes they have been created for, mistrust increases.

It is essential to work towards consolidating, legalizing and legitimizing the institutions in place, through the ratification of treaties signed. It is also necessary to generate an effective, candid and transparent dialogue to address complex situations, while helping match rhetoric with substantive agreements reached. An essential aspect in this process is to establish control mechanisms.

The 9th Defence Ministerial of the Americas, to be held in Bolivia, could be an excellent opportunity and an appropriate forum to consolidate the objectives of these Ministerial Summits. The meeting in Santa Cruz may create spaces to develop shared concepts in each of the subregions, report them back to the whole region, and build confidence and dialogue towards the attainment of peace and security.

## Considering the Region

# Defence and Cooperation in the Hemisphere: today's puzzling scenario

**Hal Klepak**

*Professor Emeritus of the Royal Military College of Canada*

The strident nature of so much of today's inter-American and inter-Latin American relations should make us pause about the dangers when rhetoric and more than mere rhetoric, crosses into the defence and military realms and threatens shared hopes for cooperation, integration and development. Armed forces and defence policies are the summum of considerations of sovereignty and fears about one's neighbours and sometimes other states as well. Indeed, the existence of such policies and forces and their importance are normally a result of considerations of threat coming from others. It is hardly surprising then that those responsible for countering those threats, as well as those, like the military, using 'worst case planning' to prepare to do so, are often reluctant to think in terms of cooperation with those same possible sources of threat.

When the history of those relations is brought into

the discussion, the likelihood of defence considerations being a favourable 'push' factor for cooperation and unity is usually hardly great. One might almost say that defence policies and armed forces are traditionally about *not* putting down your guard and undertaking experiments with integration and cooperation that might threaten one's independence and rarely about doing any such thing.

In reality, however, the situation in the Americas in recent decades has not reflected this traditional state of affairs, a point about which the region should surely feel proud.

In our hemisphere, defence has many times been an element of cooperation-building among the countries of the region, rather than an obstacle. Far different from the historical experience of Europe or Asia, where defence has traditionally been the last link in the cooperation and integration building chain (or



close to it), in the Americas this sector of national and international activity has often been used creatively at an early stage, solidifying efforts to achieve more profound economic and political cooperation.

In North America, for example, we can mention the extraordinary transformation in the context of Canada and the United States which, after centuries of confrontation, changed in less than forty years to become one of the most impressive examples of defence cooperation round the world to date. The role of bilateral cooperation during World War II, when Ottawa saw that it was possible to cooperate with Washington on the world sphere without being squeezed like a dwarf by the giant, was essential to lessen the historical Canadian perception of the United States as a threat. Later in time, the role of NORAD and NATO in confidence-building was key to the evolution of an attitude of mutual respect, which in about one generation or so, changed three centuries of Canadian preparation to defend itself from invasions of the south. Likewise, the United States came to understand that Canada was not merely a Trojan horse for the United Kingdom, but on the contrary sought a friendly relationship with its giant neighbour. Without those changes of perspective, it would have been simply unthinkable to attain political cooperation and ultimately a free-trade agreement. It was defence that opened the door to this change in perception.

Also in Latin America, there are many cases, not so far back in history, where something similar took place. In a dramatic manner, the nuclear programmes of Brazil and Argentina played a significant role as a vehicle for cooperation on key matters between these countries. These ceased to be subject to disagreement and suspicion between Brasilia and Buenos Aires and became a clear demonstration of good will and a shared desire to seek fundamental changes to the historical rivalry between both countries and, eventually, replace such rivalry with a close and friendly relationship.

The connections among Central American countries, again the focus of distrust over most of the period since the late 1830s, likewise changed with the end of the civil wars over the period 1992-1996. Following on the 1996 signing of the *Tratado Marco de Seguridad Democrática*, by all the Central American States, the relationship among regional militaries changed abruptly. Confidence-building measures of

unprecedented scope were put in place as were a vast range of other cooperative arrangements. This also played no small part in the re-establishment of a wider climate of cooperation and integration resulting in the rebirth of the Central American Common Market and many other wider initiatives.

The historic role of Mexico as Central America's 'gigante del norte' has likewise been affected by military efforts in recent decades where Mexico's armed forces have moved quickly to assist Central American countries in dealing with natural disasters. The improvement to Mexico's prestige and the level of regional trust in it has grown and permitted efforts such as Plan Mérida to get a better reception in the region.

Even between Cuba and the United States there has existed a level of defence cooperation on key matters such as controlling illegal migration and support for the US base at Guantánamo that gave the lie to the idea that mutual trust and cooperation between the two countries was somehow impossible. Instead by the 1990s there was considerable military and other security cooperation between the two involving safety and approaches to Guantánamo, handling of overflights of aircraft en route to disaster stricken areas, and the more public joint measures against illegal immigration that troubled both countries. And while no one would surely argue that this was going to lead to political integration or economic cooperation, it did lead to reduced tension and at least the opening of communications between the two.

In Mercosur too, military cooperation has been a growing and significant part of the moves towards wider integration and political cooperation in the regional and some bilateral contexts. Argentine-Brazilian joint military cooperation is now well advanced and like Argentina and Chile a total *volte face* if compared with historical precedent. Chile and Argentina even have in hand the preparation of a joint if small force, termed Cruz del Sur, in stark contrast to their past experience. And while relations between La Paz and Santiago remain deadlocked at the most formal level, cooperation between Bolivia and Chile in the defence area is surprising and reminds both sides that there is much to be gained by working in important fields outside the purely diplomatic to establish confidence. All of this naturally reinforces wider moves for economic and political cooperation.

At the hemispheric level also, the meetings every



two years of the Conference of Defence Ministers of the Americas have become a powerful confidence building measure since the process was started at Williamsburg in 1995, and the gatherings of commanders of armies, navies and air forces, since the 1960s, continue to be friendly gatherings where co-operation is furthered. There is little doubt that the level of confidence these meetings help generate has some spill-over effect into other fields or at least supports other efforts by reducing potential tensions and historic rivalries in the central area of defence.

### *The Present*

The difficulty is that all this past of favourable elements coming from defence for the wider goal of regional or even hemispheric economic and political cooperation, is currently availing less than it might. The continued progress of these efforts is now found against a backdrop of what some analysts consider the worst phase of inter-American diplomatic relations since Independence. Even during the cold war, with the widespread rupture of relations with Cuba, nothing like the present moment has been seen, with at the time of writing Bolivia and Chile, Ecuador and Colombia, Cuba and the United States, and Venezuela and Colombia all having no formal diplomatic relations with one another, and between the US and Bolivia, relations remaining but not at ambassadorial level. Ideological considerations have been added to traditional frontier and jurisdictional issues to produce a grim scene of poor or no relations, heightened name-calling among leaders, and an alarming poisoning of the regional political atmosphere.

The picture could hardly be much more confusing and seemingly contradictory. For in the midst of this negativism, sub-regional advances in cooperation have become not the exception but the rule. While less and less centrality is given to hemispheric security matters, other initiatives have been nothing less than remarkable given the overall state of inter-American and even inter-Latin American relations. UNASUR, the union of South American countries formerly only dreamed of, is now showing real signs of dynamism in the construction of a regional defence agenda. And its South American Defence Council also appears to be an increasingly serious joint initiative with work on founding a regional strategic studies centre, the building of an impressive range of confi-

dence building measures, and other initiatives already in hand. While troubling to many in its exclusion of other nations of the Americas, there is no doubt that as a regional initiative it is impressive and holds out real promise for a South American defence and security forum with clout and importance.

Likewise the Regional Security System in the Eastern Caribbean has shown its utility not only in the anti-narcotics area but also in support for the complicated but successful World Cup of Cricket in 2007. And in the wider Caribbean, joint initiatives such as a single pilot training scheme and school for the whole of the Commonwealth Caribbean is working well and allowing the security forces of those countries to address many issues with until now elusive economies of scale in the defence area.

Indeed, arguably it is in the Caribbean region that the Americas and Latin America in particular have their greatest joint success. For in Haiti, Chile provided a rapid reaction force of exceptional efficacy in the events leading to the deployment of MINUSTAH, the United Nations current mission on the island, Brazil has provided its largest contingent as well as its vital command element, and Latin Americans make up the majority of its force. Many see or at least hope to see this as the first experience of Latin American at least partial 'jointness' that may pave the way to more in the future.

CFAC, the recent Central American military cooperative organisation, is an undoubted success, and crowns the efforts of the post-civil war years and the confidence building that marked them. Not only does the organisation jointly prepare for peacekeeping and natural disasters taskings but also builds confidence. And to the north, Mexico's slow but sure *acercamiento* to North American defence cooperation is a fact greatly appreciated by its US and Canadian neighbours. Since the 1994 Zapatista risings in Chiapas, and now reinforced by the strains on Mexico's internal security of recent months, the relationship with the United States has known the beginnings of what appears to be a sea change with traditional Mexican attitudes so quickly evolving that the country was able and willing to help out the United States, in dramatic fashion, during Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Again in contrast, the issues causing current rancour in the region in the defence area are many. Some have been caused by US actions such as the reactivation of



the long-disbanded IV Fleet, a naval formation whose deployment had only been contemplated previously for the purposes of World War II and the early cold war (1942-1950), and which therefore would almost certainly raise eyebrows in much of Latin America at a time of rising tensions and distrust of US intentions among many regional governments. The formalizing and expansion of seven base arrangements in Colombia, supposedly merely supportive of the anti-narcotics effort but referred to in US official documents as a means to permit that country to operate more effectively on the military scene in the region as a whole, could hardly fail to annoy some countries. Cuba's obviously absurd placement on the US list of states supporting terrorism, despite its excellent record against that scourge, is another sore point for many.

These are combined with the odd role of the United States in connection with events before and after the coup in Honduras. This event, smacking of traditional coups in the region in its union of oligarchy, church, embassy, and military interests in ousting the constitutional if increasingly illegitimate Zelaya government, sent shock waves through the region especially in reformist governments whose links with their armed forces are often uncertain. Those formerly optimistic that coups were a thing of the past, already shaken by that of Venezuela in 2002, now more rarely hold this view and the ideological and other divisions that wrack the hemisphere have been evident indeed in the aftermath.

The arrival in greater force of extra-regional powers has also had an impact. China especially, but to a lesser degree India and Iran, are now present but at least in the defence field, this presence has been limited. China is the source of concern in some US

circles as to its intentions in the region but Beijing has been careful to allay such fears by a measured military policy which eschews actions which would raise Washington's ire. It is more difficult to say where Teheran and New Delhi's interest may lead, especially in the nuclear field but the US doubtless watches such activities carefully, leading to yet another source of potential discord.

Latin American and hemispheric defence affairs are thus in a confusing context of seeming progress combined with an overall situation of widespread discord and negativism. The ideological divisions faced by the hemisphere and its regions are serious indeed and the poisoning of the atmosphere for wider cooperative efforts is real even if often papered over by sub-regional successes. When those rifts spill into the military and defence field, they gain an importance they do not necessarily have if left in economic and even political spheres. Bombing across borders, basing extra-regional forces without adequate and convincing explanations, wars of words with little moderation of language, military deployments to frontiers each time things look bad: all these point to deep divisions which are dangerous indeed when brought into the military sphere. It will be important, as OAS Secretary-General Insulza has said, to have more opportunities for dialogue, not fewer, if such discord is to be kept within bounds. The disposition for such a dialogue is not always visible nor is its urgency seemingly always understood. It will be a challenge to see that this situation does not endure and that this dangerous context, not only for cooperation and integration but potentially even for peace, is kept under control.