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Strategic Effects of Conflict with Iraq: Latin America

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**STRATEGIC EFFECTS OF THE CONFLICT
WITH IRAQ: LATIN AMERICA**

Dr. Max G. Manwaring

March 2003

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FOREWORD

War with Iraq signals the beginning of a new era in American national security policy and alters strategic balances and relationships around the world. The specific effects of the war, though, will vary from region to region. In some, America's position will be strengthened. In others, it may degrade without serious and sustained efforts.

To assess this dynamic, the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) has developed a special series of monographs entitled *Strategic Effects of the Conflict with Iraq*. In each, the author has been asked to analyze four issues: the position that key states in their region are taking on U.S. military action against Iraq; the role of America in the region after the war with Iraq; the nature of security partnerships in the region after the war with Iraq; and the effect that war with Iraq will have on the war on terrorism in the region.

This monograph is one of the special series. SSI is pleased to offer it to assist the Department of Army and Department of Defense in crafting the most effective strategy possible for dealing with the many consequences of war with Iraq.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

MAX G. MANWARING is a Professor of Military Strategy at the U.S. Army War College. He is a retired U.S. Army colonel and Adjunct Professor of Political Science at Dickinson College. He has served in various civilian and military positions at the U.S. Army War College, the U.S. Southern Command, and the Defense Intelligence Agency. Dr. Manwaring's areas of expertise include theory of grand strategy, U.S. national security policy and strategy, military strategy, military and nonmilitary operations other than war, political-military affairs; and Latin America. Dr. Manwaring is the author and co-author of several articles, chapters, and reports dealing with political-military affairs. He is also the editor or co-editor of *El Salvador at War*; *Gray Area Phenomena: Confronting the New World Disorder*; *Managing Contemporary Conflict: Pillars of Success*; *Beyond Declaring Victory and Coming Home: The Challenges of Peace and Stability Operations*; and *Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century*. Dr. Manwaring holds a B.S. in Economics as well as a B.S., an M.A., and a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Illinois. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College.

STRATEGIC EFFECTS OF THE CONFLICT WITH IRAQ: LATIN AMERICA*

Conclusions:

Latin Americans maintain a strong bias against North American interventions.

At the same time, Latins perceive that a possible war against Iraq and its leadership would be directed against the wrong foe and in an inappropriate manner.

The U.S.-Latin American partnership is an unequal relationship. The result of balancing Latin interests against those of the “Colossus of the North” is a dilemma. In *realpolitik* terms, it is not intelligent to be a “no show” when the list of supporters is posted. Thus, in the best Colonial tradition, “Obedesco pero no cumplo,” (I obey, but I do not comply).

Even so, the United States shares with its Latin American neighbors an increasingly and vitally important financial, commercial, and security/stability stake in the political and economic growth of the hemisphere. Any kind of political-economic-social-security deterioration in the region will profoundly affect the health of the U.S. economy—and the concomitant power to act in the global security arena.

The continuing U.S. Army responsibility goes beyond the narrow purview of unilateral training and equipping to broader multilateral professional military education (PME) and leader development.

* Latin America is defined in this monograph as Hispanic America (Mexico, Central America, Spanish-speaking South America), Luso-America (Brazil), and the various non-Spanish speaking nation-states in the Caribbean basin.

Latin Americans have long memories. For nearly 200 years every school child has been taught in great detail about the more than 100 North American interventions that have taken place in the Western Hemisphere. They range from before the implementation of the No-Transfer Resolution in 1811, to the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, through the period of the Roosevelt and Wilson Corollaries, to the more recent invasions of Panama and Haiti.¹ New generations of Latin Americans in general have learned to be most wary of North American “imperialism” and being subjugated culturally, economically, and politically by the materialistic interests of the “Colossus of the North.” Mexicans, for example, can recall vividly the martyrdom of their Military Academy cadets (*ninos heroicos*) bravely jumping to their deaths rather than surrendering to the U.S. forces invading Mexico City in 1847. Likewise, Mexicans can recite date-by-date the progress of the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-47 that ended with the loss of a third to a half of its national territory (i.e., 529,017 square miles) to the “Great Hegemon.” As a consequence, a very strong juridical-political bias has developed in Latin America that tends to reject North American intervention—anywhere.

More Specific Latin American Perspectives on a U.S.-Iraqi War and the War on Terrorism.

Latin American peoples and leadership may be expected to become angry and possibly violent over a U.S. invasion of Iraq. That will prompt governments to seek political and military distance from the United States, while paying minimal “lip-service.” The best case scenario would be a quick and decisive U.S.-led effort and rapid subsequent withdrawal. That would have to be based on a UN Security Council Resolution that is based on irrefutable and clear public evidence (not intelligence) of Iraqi wrongdoing. Otherwise, “it would seem more reasonable to believe that the real motives for the war are oil, and U.S. hegemony.”² The worst case would be a long-term, destructive unilateral

U.S. invasion, and a long delegitimizing colonial-type occupation. In the best case, present political, economic, and military partnerships with the United States will likely be not much affected.

In the worst case, the benign neglect occasioned by the necessity of putting virtually all of North America's attention and resources into the Iraqi war and its aftermath would likely result in the deterioration of Latin American-U.S. ties. That neglect would also likely result in a decrease in the minimal cooperation that now exists in the war on terrorism, and an increase in direct security threats from Latin-based terrorists to U.S. interests in the region and to the United States.

A Further Perspective on "Who is the Enemy?" and the Type of War that Should be Conducted. Generally, Latin Americans argue that the terrorist enemy is not a single state or group of "rogue" states. It is not a single terrorist leadership—such as Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda. It is not Saddam Hussien and Iraq. Rather, the enemy is the violent terrorist doctrine of anyone's extremism. In that connection, the enemy is a lethal combination of transnational nonstate actors who exploit for their own narrow purposes poverty, disease, social discontent, refugee flows, illegal drugs, instability, irredentism, and insurgency regardless of geo-strategic location or level of power.³

In this more amorphous context, international organizations such as the UN or the Organization of American States (OAS), or individual national powers such as the United States, should be called on to respond to a given conflict and/or its aftermath. For Latin America, the problems of fundamentalist Islamic terrorism or a Saddam Hussein is not urgent in a context where political-socio-economic instability threats compromise the continuity of democratic systems and free market economies. This is a radically different security environment than that being addressed in U.S. policy.⁴ In the words of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, it is also "una amenaza mayor para

el mundo que Iraq” (i.e., “a greater threat to the world than Iraq”).⁵

The view from the south of the Rio Grande is that the main concerns of the United States regarding hemispheric security and the war on terrorism are related almost exclusively to the Colombian conflict situation. In Colombia, the United States has focused its money, training, and attention almost entirely on the counterdrug campaign. It has seen the Colombian crisis in limited terms—the number of hectares of coca eradicated, and the number of kilos of coca and the number of laboratories that have been detected and destroyed. Even though the United States and Colombia have achieved a series of tactical “successes” in the coca fields, the laboratories, and on the streets, the various nonstate actors (i.e., drug traffickers, leftist insurgents, and self-appointed vigilante paramilitary organizations) remain strong and become ever more wealthy. And Colombia continues to deteriorate and becomes ever more fragile. The main argument is that the Colombian drug issue is only one piece of a larger, more complex, and multidimensional strategic puzzle that goes to the entire hemisphere and the global community.⁶ Moreover, “War on terrorism—as it is now being conducted by the United States in Colombia and the rest of Latin America—will encourage even more terrorism.”⁷

Perspectives on Partnership with the United States. The Latin American-U.S. partnership has always been one conducted between unequals. That inequality is demonstrated in several ways. In general terms, it is often pointed out that North Americans hear far more about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as one example, than about the war in Colombia—though the latter has caused as much carnage as the former and is much closer to home.⁸ More specifically, at the highest political levels, the United States often sends messages that reinforce the notion that Latin America is not important, and that this country does not care about the region.

Two examples will suffice. First, consider what happened at the recent inauguration of Ecuador's President Lucio Gutierrez. The United States sent a delegation head—Clay Johnson III, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget—without sufficient rank to participate in the heads of state meetings. The signal received was that the United States is really not that interested in bilateral relations with the countries of Latin America.⁹ Second, the United States sent Robert Zoellick, the U.S. Trade Representative, as delegation head to the inauguration of Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Again, the message was loud and clear—the United States does not care about the importance of the world's eighth largest economy and fifth largest population.¹⁰

Clearly, the United States continues to move unilaterally in pursuit of its own agenda.¹¹ A major dilemma, then, is that of balancing Latin interests against those of the "Colossus of the North." The result in *realpolitik* terms is that "It is not very intelligent to be a [Latin American] 'no show' when the list of [North American] supporters [of a given situation] is posted."¹² Thus, in the best colonial tradition, "Obedesco pero no cumpro" ("I obey, but I do not comply"). Yet, the United States needs Latin American cooperation to prevent the expansion of terrorism and attendant "lawless areas" and instability in the region. Thus, a strong argument is made that the United States should become more of a partner and less of the proverbial "hegemon."¹³

Changing Patterns. As a result of globalization, Latin America generally has prospered. Today, the United States sells more to Latin America and the Caribbean than to the European Union. The United States sells more to the Southern Cone common market (MERCOSUR) than to China. Mexico has become the second largest goods export market and trading partner of the United States. Brazil's current annual gross domestic product (GDP) of \$514 billion exceeds that of Russia (\$392 billion) by over 100 billion. And, despite its reported political-economic problems,

Brazil continues to build additional infrastructure steadily at a GDP growth rate that has been averaging about 4 percent a year.¹⁴ Thus, the United States shares with its Latin American neighbors an increasingly and vitally important financial, commercial, and security/stability stake in the economic growth and prosperity of the hemisphere.¹⁵ That mutual prosperity and dependence generates yet another dilemma.

When what mattered most in U.S. national security policy toward the hemisphere were military bases, preserving access to sea lines of communication, choke points, and raw materials and hydrocarbons—and militarily denying those assets to the Soviet Union and its surrogates—the United States could ignore internal conditions in Latin America. But, since the United States is now interested in the need for nonhostile dispositions toward the country, the capacity of neighbors to buy American-made products, a commitment to international economic cooperation, the continued development of democratic and free market institutions and human rights—the United States must concern itself with the internal conditions that spawn subnational, national, regional, and global insecurity and instability.¹⁶

This dilemma is critical. Continued neglect and indifference to Latin America's stability problems will profoundly affect the health of the U.S. economy—and the concomitant power to act in the international security arena. At the same time, increasing instability in the hemisphere will likely increase direct security threats from terrorists to U.S. interests in the region and to the United States. Much is at risk.¹⁷

A Developing New View of Future Cooperation on the War on Terrorism. Clausewitz reminds us that “The first, the supreme, the most far reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish . . . the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is

alien to its nature.”¹⁸ Determining the nature of the conflict is thus “the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.”¹⁹ Thus, senior decisionmakers, policymakers, military leaders, and their staffs must correctly identify the nature of the conflict in the Americas; determine the central strategic problem and the primary political objectives associated with it; prioritize the others; and link policy, strategy, force structure and equipment, and coordinated political-economic-psychological-military campaign plans in solving the central strategic problem. This linkage encompasses Clausewitz’s “forgotten dimensions of strategy” and what Sun Tzu indicates is the indirect approach to conflict.²⁰

The idea is that there are other—more effective—ways to “render the enemy powerless” than to attack his military force.²¹ It follows that a multidimensional political-psychological-economic-military effort would be a potent combination of ways to control the serious instability problems developing in Latin America. “Such a coordinated [U.S.-Latin American] exercise may be difficult, but it is absolutely necessary, given the obvious alternative.”²²

In the meantime, Latin Americans perceive that the United States is prepared to go its own way in the war on terrorism and deal militarily with Iraq, North Korea, and other “rogues” as required. In this context, it is also perceived that the United States wants to see Latin Americans deal with their own internal stability threats. The Latins, in turn, argue that they are willing to do that, but that they need help from the United States and the West.²³ The help that has been forthcoming has tended to be directed toward the tactical/operational drug issue and not to the central strategic problems that spawn illegal drug trafficking and myriad other instabilities that lead to more violence, crime, corruption, and conflict. That help has also tended to be piece-meal, ad hoc, and inconsistent. Tellingly, Latin Americans argue that help provides as much support back to the U.S. economy as to the security and stability of Colombia and the rest of Latin America.²⁴ The bottom-line

here is that a unifying U.S.-Latin American organization is needed that can establish, enforce, and continually refine a holistic political-military plan and generate consistent national and international support. Otherwise, authority is fragmented and ineffective in resolving the problems endemic to survival in contemporary multidimensional conflict and—thus—failure.²⁵

Mexico has argued that the 1947 Rio Treaty (The Inter-American Treaty for Reciprocal Assistance) provides the necessary security architecture to deal with the contemporary security and terrorism problems in Latin America. That country has rejected the Rio Treaty as an obsolete mechanism that should be replaced in order to face new threats. Others, including Brazil, argue that a common agenda for hemispheric security—building on the Rio Treaty—is now imperative to the economic integration proposed by the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).²⁶ More recently, at the Defense Ministerial Meetings in Santiago, Chile, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld proposed two things. First, he emphasized that the “Elected governments [of Latin America] do have the responsibility to exercise sovereign authority throughout their national territories.” Second, Mr. Rumsfeld said:

I hope that this week’s conference will consider two initiatives relative to increased [security] cooperation. The first is an initiative to foster regional naval cooperation, to strengthen the operational and planning capabilities of partner nations, upgrade national command-and-control systems, and improve regional information-sharing . . . The second is an initiative to improve the hemisphere’s peacekeeping capabilities . . . We should explore the possibility of integrating these various specialized capabilities into larger regional capabilities, so that we might better participate in peacekeeping and stability operations, given what is clearly a growing need in the world.²⁷

But, before the United States unilaterally initiates “building blocks” based on the Rio Treaty to implement Secretary Rumsfeld’s proposals; before proposals for

standing military and naval forces for the hemisphere are initiated by such countries as Argentina and Chile; and before the OAS is embarrassed into producing some sort of ad hoc security architecture to confront the current and future security environment—a few fundamental problems and reforms must be addressed. Now is the time for concrete action—not rhetoric. Otherwise, in addition to putting broad security interests at risk, the OAS will encourage the U.S. “hegemon” to do the job itself and to perhaps ignore broader hemispheric interests.²⁸

In these terms and because success against transnational terrorism (TNT) requires close unilateral and multilateral coordination and cooperation for an effective unity of effort, the only viable approach to hemispheric stability and security is to devolve the responsibility to the OAS. That organization provides a moral position and structural framework to which member states can transfer the responsibility of the promulgation of binding international agreements directed against terrorism and terrorists; the development of an integrated multilateral anti-terrorism action plan; the planning and implementation of a coordinated and legitimized policy; and the establishment of a supportive security regime designed to maximize advantage and compete effectively against terrorists. Once the OAS leadership has created a strategic political-military anti-terrorism vision regarding exactly where it is going and how it is going to get there, it can initiate a series of treaties and conventions to generate “hard law.” “Hard” international agreements must contain binding commitments by states and enforcement mechanisms that provide harmony, accountability, transparency, and means to impose effective sanctions on noncomplying member states. These reforms, then, would constitute a reasonable investment in effective multilateralism to combat “the grave common crime” perpetrated by terrorists.²⁹

The Continuing U.S. Army Responsibility in the Hemisphere.

Latin American governments and supporting international organizations must do two things to accomplish the task of regaining control of national territories within the context of the actual and anticipated internal terrorism and violence. First, they must professionalize and modernize national police/security forces and judicial systems to the point where they can enforce and administer the law fairly and effectively. Second, governments must professionalize and modernize the security institutions to a level where they have the capability to neutralize and/or destroy all the illegal perpetrators of violence—regardless of label. Governments and organizations, such as the OAS, not responsive to these requirements will find themselves in a “crisis of governance.” They will face increasing social violence, criminal anarchy, and undesired fundamental change. Solutions to these problems take the United States beyond unilateral training and equipping units for conducting aggressive operations against narco-traffickers or terrorist-insurgents to multilateral approaches to broader professional military education (PME) and leader development.³⁰

The most important general areas in which the U.S. Army might make a contribution to the improvement of these capabilities are:

Development of strategy and campaign planning capabilities.

Training and doctrine for joint and combined operations.

Fundamental improvement in the collection, evaluation, and timely dissemination of strategic and operational intelligence.

Development of quick reaction capabilities.

Significant improvement in transport capability and lift.

Recommendations specifically directed at broader PME and leader development would include the following:

Study, understand, and apply the essence of nontraditional conflict.

Study and understand the ways that military force can be employed to achieve political and psychological ends and understand and accept the ways that political considerations affect the use of force.

Study, understand, and apply the concept of indirect engagement versus direct involvement.

Develop the ability to interact collegially and effectively with representatives of international organizations, U.S. civilian agencies, indigenous national civilian agencies, nongovernment organizations, local and global news media, and civilian populations.

Actions that the U.S. Army might facilitate in Latin America would include:

Recommending repeal of the legal prohibition against U.S. aid to foreign police forces.

Helping governments and military institutions identify and correct key strategic political, economic, and social shortcomings.

Ensuring that direct and indirect military aid to a given government makes a direct contribution to the strategic political objectives of that government.

Conclusions.

The contemporary security environment—to include the war on terrorism that Latin American leaders perceive—is a multipolar world in which one or 100 state and nonstate actors are exerting differing types and levels of power within a set of formal and informal cross-cutting alliances. This situation is extremely volatile and dangerous, and requires careful attention. In these terms, the United States and the rest of the international community must understand and cope with the threats imposed by diverse actors engaged in the destabilizing and devastating violence that is often called “terrorism.” If the United States and its major allies concentrate interest and resources on Iraq and ignore what is happening in Latin America—and what is likely to happen without the implementation of the sort of strategic reforms recommended in this monograph—the expansion of terrorism, the expansion of “lawless areas,” and the expansion of general instability could easily destroy the democracy, free market economies, and prosperity that has been achieved in recent years. In turn, that would constitute a direct threat to U.S. national security and an indirect threat to the U.S. position in the world.

ENDNOTES

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