

Latin America's Military Partner of Choice: A U.S. Necessity

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Abstract

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Latin America's Military Partner of Choice: A U.S. Necessity

Over the past decade, the increasingly Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) environment of the 21st Century has demanded both the attention and resources of the United States on a global scale.¹ As the current and future strategic environments continue to evolve, the United States faces many threats including an increasingly aggressive Russia, an emergent China, a malicious and provocative North Korea, Iran's increasing malign regional influence and the nefarious activities of numerous non-state actors and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO). As senior strategic leaders scan the environment and forecast future requirements to preserve United States national interests, some may argue that the United States should refocus currently allocated resources away from Latin America and instead allocate them toward other regions of the world. Based on the known global threats of the current and future environments and given the absence of any significant hemispheric security challenges, the already limited resources and the growing and seemingly insurmountable United States deficit, why should the United States be committed to remaining Latin America's military partner of choice?

Although reallocating United States resources away from Latin America could be initially appealing and potentially produce localized short term gains in other world regions, long term effects could prove devastating. As an economy of force in terms of committed United States resources and security cooperation efforts, any move to pivot the already limited resources away from Latin America could have significant consequences. Perhaps most importantly, it could ultimately hamper United States efforts to secure the homeland and simultaneously undermine the trust and confidence of its regional partners damaging or destroying relationships decades in the making.

Instead of shifting United States attention and resources away from Latin America, there are three reasons why the United States must remain Latin America's military partner of choice given the VUCA environment of the 21st Century.² First, as Latin America's military partner of choice the United States can maintain and potentially expand the vital partnerships required to better influence and shape the hemispheric environment in accordance with U.S. national interests and universal values. In addition to providing opportunities for increased regional access, the importance of partnerships is further amplified considering the expanding extra-hemispheric influence of both Russia and China, whose values, beliefs and motivations are vastly different than the universal values system recognized by the United States. Second, as Latin America's military partner of choice the United States can more effectively assist its regional allies and partners with addressing their own internal challenges. As a vital component to the whole of government capacity building approach, the soft power aspects of military partnerships help to reduce the appeal, influence, and need for extra-hemispheric assistance. Moreover, military partnerships conducted in concert with a holistic capacity building approach simultaneously enable regional partners to more effectively contribute to regional security efforts. Third, building upon the commitments and hard work already invested, remaining the military partner of choice offers the United States an affordable and relatively low-cost approach to regional stability. Not only does this contribute directly to achieving the United States national interest of securing the homeland and protecting its citizens, it allows the United States to continue to enjoy significant hemispheric security benefits simply by maintaining the trust, confidence and relationships of its regional partners.³ To effectively secure the United States homeland

and protect its citizens at a low cost, the United States must maintain the vital partnerships needed to influence and shape the hemispheric environment and assist regional partners with addressing their own internal challenges.

Before illustrating the importance of remaining Latin America's military partner of choice, a short historical overview of United States security cooperation efforts in Latin America will provide the appropriate context. Following the overview, an example highlighting the success of security cooperation efforts in Colombia will illustrate the benefits that can be gained as a trusted military partner of choice. Finally, each of the three arguments illustrating why it is imperative that the United States remain Latin America's military partner of choice will be addressed in greater detail.

Since the inception of U.S. security cooperation activities in Latin America nearly seventy years ago, the focus of these efforts has undergone a variety of changes due to the continually changing strategic environment. Although the enduring interests of the United States have remained largely unchanged over the decades, the level of intensity assigned to each enduring interest has varied from one United States political administration to another. For Latin America and the Western Hemisphere, the modern defense role "is framed by the terms of the 1947 Rio Treaty, the 1948 Charter of the Organization of America States (OAS), and subsequent bilateral and multilateral protocols" such as the creation of the 1982 Regional Security System (RSS) in the Eastern Caribbean.⁴

In the 1950's, the role that the United States assumed in Latin America was one of hemispheric defense.⁵ Confronted with the global Communist threat raised in the National Security Council (NSC) memorandum known as NSC-68 in April 1950 and the

Korean War, which began in June 1950, the United States became increasingly reliant on its Latin American partners.⁶ For the United States to effectively “increase both military preparedness and a determination to contain communism” it needed to both assist Latin America with becoming more resistant to communism and simultaneously bolster “hemispheric solidarity” to encourage Latin American cooperation “against external aggression and internal subversion.”⁷ To achieve these objectives, the United States incorporated the Military Assistance Program (MAP), which provided support to Latin American regional partners through extensive military training programs, foreign military exchanges and military equipment sales initiatives.⁸ Although preoccupied with the Korean War and the threat of Communism, the United States maintained “a status quo stance toward the region” and reaffirmed its long held view that Latin America remained within the United States’ military/strategic sphere of influence.⁹ This hemispheric defense role in Latin America endured for nearly ten years, before the focus changed to one of “preventing internal insurgency.”¹⁰

The 1960’s witnessed a much more engaged United States security cooperation effort in Latin America focused on “promoting counter-insurgency training throughout the region.”¹¹ The aftermath of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 sparked an increasing concern by both United States policymakers and traditional Latin American elites that “the Cuban Revolution or its principles” would spread to the rest of the region.¹² As a result, in September 1961, Congress passed the Internal Development and Security Act, which changed the purpose of military assistance in Latin America from hemispheric defense to “internal defense and development.”¹³ In years following the establishment of the Internal Development and Security Act, the United States built a

new counterinsurgency security structure including a “substantially expanded Special Forces presence” and a Special Action Force within the region.¹⁴ As the Soviet Union continued to expand its Communist influence, the United States and many Latin American nations became increasingly concerned about the spread of Communism and the potential impact it could have on regional security, stability and prosperity. To stymie the spread of Communism, the United States provided additional support to its regional allies and taught “anti-communist counter-insurgency training.”¹⁵ Over time, these initiatives continued to expand in scope and significantly enhanced the quality of partner nation capability to address “urban counter-insurgency projects” and arguably prevented the expansion of communism within the hemisphere.¹⁶

In stark contrast to the growth that the security cooperation program experienced in the 1960’s stemming from the threat of Communism, security cooperation efforts experienced a significant downturn in the mid-1970’s. The Carter administration reduced both United States resource assistance and overall support to the security cooperation program within Latin America “as a policy response to reports of human rights abuses” thought to be condoned by military allies within the region.¹⁷ It can be argued that President Carter’s policy shift away from partner nation assistance and the subsequent reduction of United States counter-insurgency training contributed to an increase of insurgent activity in some countries, which had previously experienced success.¹⁸ A notable example illustrating this upswing in insurgent activity within the region was the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government in 1979 by the Sandinista National Liberation Front guerrillas.¹⁹

The 1980's introduced a new United States administration and renewed concerns about Communism changing the strategic policies of the United States yet again. The United States resumed regional security cooperation efforts and even expanded their scope to include a dual focus to counter both Communism and drug trafficking operations.²⁰ The United States then maintained a relatively consistent regional security cooperation focus over the next two decades. That all changed, however, following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, which drove the United States to incorporate counter terrorism training and activities into the security cooperation mission set.

Although the security cooperation program has led to numerous successes within Latin America since its inception nearly seventy years ago, Colombia is the most recent and perhaps the most widely publicized success story. The following example highlights the benefits that the United States can gain while operating as a trusted military partner of choice and illustrates how the United States can assist partner nations with building their capability and capacity to better contribute to enhanced regional security.

Nearly twenty years ago, Colombia found itself on the brink of total collapse due to extensive "drug trafficking, organized crime, and internal armed conflict."²¹ "By 1999, a failed peace effort had left Colombia's most powerful guerrilla group – the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, better known as the FARC – in control of territory roughly the size of Switzerland."²² A substantial force with approximately "20,000 fighters under arms," the FARC also boasted "an annual income of \$400 million from the illegal drug trade, and another \$500 million from other illicit activities."²³ Increasing in size and power, the

FARC's illicit activities and violent demeanor was having a tremendously destabilizing effect on the country.

Recognizing the volatile situation and concerned for the future of the nation, the Colombian government requested assistance from the United States. Together, the Colombian government and the United States developed *Plan Colombia* to "combat narco-trafficking through training, advising and equipping Colombian security forces."²⁴ After decades of conflict, Colombia now stands in a much different position due to the will, perseverance, commitment and sacrifice of the Colombian people enabled by United States assistance. While much work remains to be done to finalize the conditions of the peace process, today Colombia is one of Latin America's strongest and most willing and capable partners.

The increased capability and capacity of Colombia's government and her military have rendered significant benefits for Colombia as well as for the United States and the entire Western Hemisphere. No longer decisively engaged with her own internal threats and challenges, Colombia has recently begun to focus its efforts outward as a regional exporter of security. In fact, in 2015, "Presidents Obama and Santos agreed to formalize joint security cooperation activities to minimize the impact of transnational crime and illegal drugs on partner nations by providing capacity-building training and fostering greater bilateral and multilateral law enforcement and rule of law cooperation in the region."²⁵ As a new key regional player, Colombia is now taking a much more active role in sharing lessons learned to assist her neighbors with security efforts, human rights training, counter drug operations, and a myriad of other mission sets for the betterment of the region.²⁶ Not only do these efforts increase hemispheric cohesion and a sense of

shared responsibility, they also reduce Latin American dependence on United States assistance and help foster regional solutions to regional challenges.

Notwithstanding the success that United States security cooperation efforts have had in Colombia, regional stability and a lasting hemispheric peace cannot be achieved through United States efforts alone. Instead, peace and stability can only be achieved through the collective efforts of all hemispheric partners operating with a collective responsibility and a shared regional vision. During his 2016 Posture Statement, Admiral Tidd, Commander of United States Southern Command, emphasized this very point saying that because “we face an increasingly complex, interconnected security environment, we must look beyond borders and boundaries and seek not just whole-of-government, but whole-of-hemisphere solutions to our shared challenges.”²⁷ As a trusted military partner of choice, the United States can help to facilitate this initiative through security cooperation efforts aimed at bolstering regional partner capability and capacity so that regional countries can join their neighbors in achieving the desired endstate of regional peace, stability and prosperity.

The successful transformation of Colombia, although years in the making, illustrates the enormous impact and potential benefits that United States security cooperation efforts can render. The enduring support and commitment provided to Colombia over the past twenty years has enabled the United States to remain Colombia’s trusted military partner of choice. As such, the United States is subsequently afforded the opportunity to maintain this key regional partnership, which better provides the United States with the ability to shape and influence the hemispheric environment in accordance with its national interests and universal values. As a component of enduring

United States national interests, the idea of maintaining these key regional partnerships, which help to shape the environment is the first reason why it is imperative that the United States remain Latin America's military partner of choice.²⁸ Maintaining the ability to shape the environment becomes particularly important to the United States considering the motives and activities of other actors both internal and external to the Latin American region. From the internal perspective, Latin America faces a single significant political regional threat - the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA).

Although the consistently clear anti-American stance ALBA takes does not pose a direct threat to the United States, it can affect Latin American countries differently. Using a "toxic mix of anti-democratic values, massive corruption, and a doctrine that draws on terrorism and totalitarian models," the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America has a destabilizing effect on the region as it competes with the United States for regional influence.²⁹ The overt anti-western stance ALBA takes poses a threat to newly democratic Latin American countries, developing countries still reliant on United States assistance, and even to independent nations with strong relationships with the United States.

Although potentially waning in recent years with the 2013 death of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, the current state of affairs and regional influence ALBA nations possess still produce a moderately destabilizing effect within the Latin American region. Despite their geographic separation, the ALBA member nations of Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua and several Caribbean nations coupled with their associated stance against the principles of Western influence and democracy produce

an intimidation effect on neighboring countries.³⁰ Moreover, the nefarious influence ALBA nations already possess is further exacerbated given Iran and Syria's recent observer status making the situation even more alarming.³¹ Countries that conduct active trade with, or those that border, ALBA nations must consider potential adverse side effects based on the extent of their relationship with the United States. This constant threat of "guilt by association" could influence some countries to either reevaluate the extent of their relationship with the United States, or attempt to more closely align with ALBA nations to avoid upsetting the status quo.

In addition to ALBA's threat of "guilt by association," Latin American countries are also faced with perhaps an even more dangerous regional effect involving sanctuary. Given ALBA's anti-western ideology it's no surprise that the alliance has demonstrated a willingness "to offer sanctuary, support, and infrastructure to those with an overtly hostile, multifaceted agenda toward the United States."³² Although perhaps not specifically targeted, surrounding Latin American countries are susceptible to numerous adverse collateral effects resulting from ALBA's willingness to offer sanctuary to nefarious actors. Aside from the internal threats and challenges Latin America faces, the region is also susceptible to a variety of threats from extra-hemispheric actors such as Russia and China. Cloaked by good intentions, many of the activities conducted by these actors could threaten Latin American security and could have significant hemispheric consequences, particularly regarding a "rules-based international order" and "respect for universal values."³³

Although perhaps not currently viewed as a significant threat within Latin America, Russian interests and activities can often bring undesirable consequences. In

recent years, Russian President Vladimir Putin has increased his rhetoric emphasizing “a multipolar world where the United States is no longer the dominant power.”³⁴ Instead, “his actions present Russian global leadership as a viable alternative to the United States.”³⁵ In addition to military engagement and diplomacy, much of Russia’s engagement in Latin America comes at the hand of front groups, business associates, and transnational organized criminal networks.³⁶ This coupled with a vastly divergent view of the universal values system both observed and promoted by the United States and many other Latin American countries make Russia a potentially significant destabilizing threat to the region.

Despite much of Russia’s attention and engagement efforts being focused on the ALBA nations, the emergence of transnational organized criminal networks has resulted in expanded regional consequences. This is especially apparent given Latin America’s existing internal challenges. Since many Latin American countries possess weak government institutions, transnational organized criminal networks can produce significant adverse security impacts at both the state and system levels within the hemisphere. With direct linkages between Russia and the ALBA nations, Russia can also offer other benefits as a powerful ally on the United Nations Security Council in return for cooperation. This “quid pro quo” relationship becomes especially important on the global stage given the importance of the universal values system and its apparent infringement by Latin American countries for human rights violations and the presence of massive corruption issues such as electoral fraud.³⁷ In addition to increased influence on the United Nations Security Council, Russia also offers ALBA nations “weapons, police and military training and equipment, intelligence technology and training, nuclear

technology, oil exploration equipment, and financial assistance.”³⁸ In fact, General Kelly’s 2015 Posture Statement to Congress indicated that “since 2008, Russia has pursued an increased presence in Latin America through propaganda, military arms and equipment sales, counterdrug agreements, and trade” and perhaps most alarming, a renewed emergence of “Cold War-tactics.”³⁹

Although Russia claims that the assistance it provides to Latin American countries is simply to assist with building increased capacity, there are numerous Russian ulterior motives and benefits. The expanding Russian weapons sales program brings “the opportunity for long-term military-to-military relationships” to include weapons training, maintenance, and renewable contracts.⁴⁰ Moreover, the police and military training Russia provides Latin America could also bring lucrative and strategic benefits to Russia including increased dependency on Russian equipment and support. Moreover, increased Russian presence within the region also overtly challenges the longstanding role of the United States regarding counter-narcotics efforts. Operating in close geographic proximity to the United States also provides Russia with “a wealth of intelligence, logistical, and military information,” as well as access to United States counter-drug and counterterrorism tactics and strategies.⁴¹ Despite the increasing political and military influence Russia possesses within Latin America, the region is also faced with increased activities by another extra-hemispheric actor: China.

The turn of the century has witnessed a marked increase of Chinese economic interest within the Latin American region. In terms of trade, China “has become a major trading partner for many countries in the Latin American region ranking as one of the top two export and import markets.”⁴² Over the course of just one decade, “total Chinese

trade with the region grew from almost \$18 billion in 2002 to about \$259 billion in 2012;” an increase of nearly 1,500 percent.⁴³ The accelerated increase of Latin America’s economic relations with China indicates yet another challenge to the current United States regional hegemony. Instead, Chinese activities in addition to ongoing Russian initiatives “offer the potential for a new multipolar scenario within the region.”⁴⁴ Despite China’s focused effort regarding increased trade within the region, it is not China’s endgame. Instead, China looks to increase its access into Latin America by wielding its economic power to gain a greater foothold on the availability of the region’s natural resources and expand its growing regional influence.

The role that Latin America’s natural resources play in China’s interest in the region is undeniable given China’s need to increase the amount of raw material to support its manufacturing requirements, which in turn sustains its economy.⁴⁵ Although Latin American countries can achieve short term gains from the trade of natural resources with China, long term benefits to increase internal manufacturing capacity and increased internal development will continue to elude Latin America. While China continues to achieve its own national interests such as sustaining its manufacturing engine, its activities in some part hinder Latin American countries from achieving their national interests. In addition to rapidly consuming Latin America’s natural resources, Chinese activities simultaneously rob Latin America of internal manufacturing development opportunities and thereby increase Latin America’s dependency for external support.

In addition to greater access to Latin America’s natural resources, China also seeks to forge other relationships with Latin America as part of its strategy to increase

its regional influence.⁴⁶ While many Latin America experts discount the possibility that China has other regional interests beyond trade, China's activities suggest otherwise. Other than the numerous agreements China made in 2015 "to double bilateral trade to \$500 billion" over the next ten years, China also looks "to diversify its sources of energy, find new markets for its infrastructure companies" and to project both soft and military power.⁴⁷

By offering Latin American countries an alternative to United States military partnership, China seeks to entice countries with "low-cost military hardware, no-strings-attached sales and financing, and the co-production of other infrastructure facilities within the region."⁴⁸ Admiral Tidd illustrated a variety of recent examples highlighting Chinese soft power initiatives to increase its regional influence in his 2016 Posture Statement to Congress. Activities ranging from offers of military training in Beijing, high-level diplomatic visits, equipment donations, and a variety of naval diplomacy efforts all illustrate Chinese activities to attract Latin American partnership and cooperation.⁴⁹ With nearly 20 Latin American countries already receiving military training from China, the United States cannot afford to abandon or reduce Latin American military partnership programs as doing so would risk opening the door to a very willing and capable China to fill the void.⁵⁰

To counter any adverse consequences resulting from the realist initiatives of both Russia and China as they compete for regional influence and power, the United States must continue to maximize military security cooperation and soft power initiatives to maintain its key regional partnerships. Although arguably more challenging to implement and slower to show results, the use of soft power in concert with continued

military partnership and security cooperation will attract Latin American partners by appealing to shared regional interests and universal values.⁵¹ The regional partnerships that the United States maintains through military security cooperation efforts and the continued use of soft power initiatives will allow the United States to more easily shape and influence the hemispheric environment. In addition to maintaining the vital partnerships within the hemisphere, United States efforts to remain Latin America's military partner of choice also directly support United States national interests. The second reason why it is imperative that the United States remain Latin America's military partner of choice is to better assist its regional allies and partners with addressing their own internal challenges so that they can more effectively support regional security and stability efforts.

Notwithstanding the internal political threat that ALBA poses to the region or the potentially nefarious activities of extra-hemispheric actors such as Russia and China, Latin America is confronted by a variety of internal challenges. Although not all encompassing, the three fundamental challenges encountered by many Latin American nations are inequality, crime and weak government institutions. While United States security cooperation efforts cannot directly address the political threat that ALBA nations pose to the region or directly confront extra-hemispheric actors such as Russia or China, they can have a tremendous effect on Latin America's ability to address their own internal challenges. As a vital component to the whole-of-government capacity building approach, security cooperation activities complement other activities aimed to assist partner nations with addressing their own problems and ultimately enhance regional stability efforts.

The United States can support Latin American partner nations with building their own internal capability and capacity to address the fundamental challenges that they face, which also helps to bolster their independence. The ability of Latin American partner nations to address their own internal challenges enables them to have increased diplomatic and economic leverage and reduces the potential for malign influence by nefarious actors. As a complex adaptive system, the challenges of inequality, crime and weak government institutions must be addressed in near simultaneous fashion both individually and holistically. Of the three, inequality is perhaps both the most regionally widespread challenge and potentially the most difficult to overcome.

Although Latin America certainly has no monopoly on inequality challenges, it continues to struggle with addressing the challenges inequality poses. In fact, inequality is such a significant global concern that it was addressed in the 2015 United States National Security Strategy (NSS) as an inhibitor to prosperity.⁵² From the United States perspective, the NSS assesses that if the United States is “to prevent conflict and promote human dignity, we must pursue policies that eradicate extreme poverty and reduce inequality.”⁵³ In terms of shared universal values, this perspective holds true for Latin America as well. Since the divide between the “haves and have nots” historically leads to heightened societal tensions and often results in some level of conflict, a concerted effort to reduce Latin American inequality benefits the entire region. Since inequality remains as dynamic as the environment, Latin America’s ability to address the challenges inequality poses is further compounded by crime; the second most prevalent internal challenge facing Latin America.

Fueled by vast equality gaps, crime remains prevalent within the region ranging from simple theft to organized crime and gang violence earning Latin America the infamous title as “the world’s most violent region.”⁵⁴ According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “countries with high levels of income inequality have homicide rates that are four times higher than countries with low levels of income inequality.”⁵⁵ For many in Latin America who struggle to provide the basic needs for themselves and their families, crime offers economic opportunities through either gang violence or participation in organized criminal activity. Although crime is prevalent in areas where vast inequality gaps exist, it is not by any means limited to the lower classes of society. Despite the type or intensity of crime, its continued presence will inhibit forward regional progress. Moreover, from the United States’ perspective, the unimpeded presence of “regional domestic crime threatens United States economic interests and the security of our citizens abroad,” encompassing two of the four enduring United States national interests.⁵⁶ Without the presence of effective government institutions to adequately address the high levels of criminal activity, crime will continue to worsen the already existing inequality gap prevalent within the region.

Another indicator that crime inhibits progress is the tremendous negative impact it has on the rate and level of Latin American development. For example, building or modernizing infrastructure is much more challenging in high crime areas especially considering the added security costs required to prevent theft, destruction of property, and employee safety. While Latin America’s crime disease can be attributed to various factors such as the demographic bulge of young men, the demand for drugs and supply of weapons, the “more tractable culprit is the region’s criminal-justice system,” which is

a component of weak government institutions; the third internal challenge facing Latin America.⁵⁷

Many Latin American countries suffer from weak government institutions, which are vulnerable to malign influence and can have tremendous negative effects on both individual states and the entire regional system. In his 2016 Posture Statement, Admiral Tidd stated that “as criminal networks threaten the integrity of institutions and jeopardize citizen security, we must help countries build on the considerable progress achieved to date and continue working towards our shared priorities.”⁵⁸ Unfortunately, building and developing effective government institutions that can adequately “address citizens’ needs through responsive legislative, judicial, and law enforcement organizations” continues to remain elusive in Latin America.⁵⁹ Politically, weak government institutions erode overall credibility in both the eyes of the public and in neighboring countries. Even if a country possesses the capability of making criminal arrests, it must also possess effective judicial processes and a penal system capable of imposing and sustaining criminal sentences. Economically, weak and ineffective government institutions can also squander already limited resources and worsen the effects of inequality.

Weak government institutions are also much less capable of providing adequate security for their citizens. For some governments within Latin America, citizen security is limited to specific social circles further increasing the gap between the “haves and have nots.” In order for a state to effectively institute basic democratic order, it must “attain the level of citizen security commensurate with the quality of life already enjoyed in other regions across the globe.”⁶⁰ Only then can there be “true respect for human rights, genuine protection for the exercise of political rights, and a climate conducive to

productive investment.”⁶¹ Additionally, weak government institutions also tend to be ill equipped to conduct fair or effective diplomatic relations, which increases the likelihood of unfair treatment by larger or more influential state or non-state actors. Considering the importance that strong and effective government institutions have on security, stability, and prosperity within Latin America, many of the United States security cooperation efforts complement the holistic approach taken and focus on assisting partner nations with building and developing their institutional capacity.

The importance of United States security cooperation efforts, as a key component of the whole-of-government approach to strengthen institutions, is clear given Latin America’s struggle to adequately address the internal challenges of inequality, crime and weak government institutions. Notwithstanding the benefits gained regarding increased capacity to achieve regional security, United States security cooperation activities that are fully integrated and coordinated as a holistic approach better enable Latin American countries to address their internal challenges. Although it remains difficult for the United States to directly address the various internal and external threats Latin America faces, it can assist countries with increasing both their capability and capacity to address their internal challenges. Through increased institutional capability and capacity, Latin America will become better equipped to address the challenges and threats it faces both now and in the future.

Latin America’s ability to autonomously overcome obstacles and protect itself against the threats it encounters will continue to remain in the best interest of the United States. In fact, the 2015 NSS explicitly outlines security, prosperity, universal values, and international order as enduring national interests that “promote peace, security, and

opportunity through stronger cooperation.”⁶² If the United States can maintain the role as Latin America’s military partner of choice, it is better postured to continue to assist regional allies and partners with building the necessary capability and capacity to solve their own internal issues in accordance with universally accepted values. Not only can United States security cooperation efforts assist regional partners at the state level, they can also enhance regional cooperation at the system level and lead to a shared vision focused on lasting security, stability and prosperity within the region.

The two reasons addressed thus far use a liberal institutionalist approach to illustrate the importance of the United States remaining Latin America’s military partner of choice. By leveraging the use of soft power to build institutions and encourage international cooperation, the United States can both maintain the key partnerships required to influence and shape the hemispheric environment and assist Latin America with addressing internal challenges.⁶³ In contrast, the third and final reason why it remains imperative that the United States be Latin Americas military partner of choice contains elements of a realist approach. By understanding the “limits of cooperation and change,” the United States will continue to maximize the “self-help system of alliances,” but will simultaneously maintain the position that its “core interests transcend all other special interests.”⁶⁴ The benefits that the United States gains in terms of protecting the homeland and securing its citizens is far greater than the cumulative resource costs required to continue security cooperation efforts.

From a cost perspective, the United States can capitalize on the regional security cooperation investments already made by leveraging its key relationships as a relatively low-cost approach to ensuring hemispheric stability. Maintaining the key partnerships

forged over decades of investment coupled with willing and capable partners is far easier and much more cost effective than having to rekindle or build new relationships. The obvious benefit of this low-cost approach to remain Latin America's military partner of choice is that it provides the United States with a stronger position to more easily secure the homeland and protect its citizens; a key enduring United States national interest.⁶⁵ Although cost can be described using many factors, the two factors that will be used in this analysis to illustrate security cooperation efforts in Latin America as a low-cost approach are economic cost and manpower cost.

From a monetary perspective, considering the changing levels of intensity and focus that United States security cooperation efforts have endured, the investments in Latin America over the past 70 years are surprisingly modest when taken in context. Over the past 15 years the United States has invested nearly \$15.5 billion on military and police aid within Latin America.⁶⁶ In comparison, during the same timeframe the United States invested just short of \$112 billion in the Middle East and North African region amounting to more than seven times that invested in Latin America.⁶⁷ In fact, with more than \$282 billion invested globally over the last 15 years for military and police aid, Latin America's share has amounted to less than six percent.⁶⁸ Despite the relatively low monetary investment that the United States has made in comparison to other regions, Latin America continues to remain relatively stable and free from the threat of major conflict.

In addition to the cost of military and policing assistance efforts within Latin America, the United States also provides economic assistance in other capacities across the region. Due to the region's high vulnerability to a wide range of natural

disasters, costs supporting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) efforts tend to be relatively high. In fact, over the course of a decade, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded just shy of one billion dollars in response to a multitude of natural disaster relief efforts in Latin America with nearly \$800 million expended in a span of just three years.⁶⁹ Considering the whole-of-government efforts required to respond to and render assistance in times of need, the extensive monetary costs funded by USAID reflect only a portion of total disaster relief operational costs.

Through military security cooperation, the United States can better assist partner nation military and government institutions with expanding their current mission sets to adequately respond in times of need. Over time, as partner nations continue to develop their own capacity to respond to crisis situations, they too can begin to provide external assistance to neighboring countries. The compounding benefit of Latin American nations protecting their neighbors significantly reduces the need for United States assistance, which allows the United States to decide whether to preserve resources or dedicate them elsewhere.

Another monetary comparison worthy of mention is the low cost of security cooperation efforts in comparison to Peace Keeping Operations (PKO) or stabilization operations. Although major combat operations are highly unlikely in the Latin American region, a wide range of stabilization operations could occur considering the potential for failed or failing states. For example, in 2004, the United Nations Security Council established the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) to “secure and stabilize the capital, Port-au-Prince, in response to a deteriorating political, security and humanitarian situation in the country.”⁷⁰ Although a United Nations effort, Brazil

voluntarily assumed the role as mission lead and has contributed the largest contingent of manpower support over the past 13 years.⁷¹ In addition to Chile, Argentina and a multitude of other countries, Brazil's regional leadership role in MINUSTAH illustrates the powerful effect that willing and capable partners can achieve by applying regional solutions to regional problems.

The resources and collective regional efforts committed by Brazil, Chile and a host of other nations to stabilize Haiti allowed the United States to continue to focus its attention and resources on other global challenges outside of the hemisphere. In fact, as of 2013, the United States had "spent close to \$2 trillion in direct outlays for expenses related to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation New Dawn (OND)."⁷² This significant monetary commitment in support of the ongoing missions in Iraq and Afghanistan would have been more burdensome if the United States was forced to commit extensive resources to stabilize Haiti. While security cooperation efforts differ greatly from stabilization operations, the cost of conflict prevention is far less than stabilization operations in terms of monetary value and other resources. As a regional economy of force effort for the United States, Latin America continues to receive United States support and enduring commitment despite the vast disparity of resources as compared to other regions around the world.

In terms of manpower, security cooperation efforts have relatively minimal requirements. Many security cooperation efforts are initially coordinated through a small military staff working in concert with United States embassy teams throughout the region. Despite their small size, these whole-of-government teams coordinate for and synchronize a myriad of activities conducted by a variety of resources in the Joint,

Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational (JIIM) environment to support United States national interests. Although humanitarian and civic assistance programs and exercises provide valued training for United States military personnel, they also complement Department of State and USAID goals of advancing community development and hemispheric prosperity; an enduring national interest of the United States.⁷³

In stark contrast to the relatively minimal resources needed to conduct security cooperation efforts as the military partner of choice, the resources required to respond to natural disasters are both enormous and costly. As an example, following Haiti's devastating earthquake in 2010, Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE was initiated to support USAID as "the lead federal agency."⁷⁴ Operating in a complex JIIM environment, "U.S. forces delivered 2.3 million meals, 17 million pounds of bulk food, 2.6 million bottles of water, and almost 150,000 pounds of medical supplies" in addition to providing critical rescue, medical, and relief supply distribution support to the Haitian people.⁷⁵

Finally, a critical and direct linkage exists between security cooperation efforts and efforts to strengthen United States national defense to protect the homeland and secure its citizens. As stated in the 2015 NSS, "Our military is postured globally to protect our citizens and interests, preserve regional stability, render humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and build the capacity of our partners to join with us in meeting security challenges."⁷⁶ The relatively low cost approach to remain Latin America's military partner of choice in terms of both money and manpower truly enhances the overall ability of the United States to secure the homeland and protect its

citizens.⁷⁷ The idea of fostering a shared regional responsibility to achieve lasting regional peace and stability is crucial to hemispheric success. Due to the increasingly VUCA environment and the already constrained resources of the United States, perhaps Admiral Tidd said it best during his 2016 Congressional testimony when he emphasized that “we cannot afford to have our attention to other parts of the world overshadow the significant gains made in our own hemisphere.”⁷⁸

The threats and challenges confronting Latin America are amplified by globalization and will continue to have profound impacts on enduring United States national interests given Latin America’s close geographic proximity. Although derived nearly two centuries ago, the Monroe Doctrine remains the bedrock of United States foreign policy and emphasizes the importance of Latin America given its proximity to the United States.⁷⁹ While Latin America has never threatened the United States, the fear is that another major power might launch an attack on the United States from a base in nearby Latin America.⁸⁰ To prevent an attack on the United States originating from Latin America and to maintain security and stability within the region, the United States must continue to capitalize on the security cooperation program as Latin America’s preferred military partner of choice.

“Transnational organized crime, threats or attacks against United States citizens abroad and our allies,” and “significant security consequences associated with weak or failing states” are among the top strategic risks highlighted in the 2015 United States National Security Strategy.⁸¹ The direct correlation between the strategic risks facing the United States and the challenges currently facing Latin America demand continued United States engagement within the region. The internal challenges faced by Latin

America enable transnational organized criminal networks to flourish, set the conditions for foreign fighter and terrorist recruitment, training and operations, and drive migration – all of which threaten United States national interests.

It is imperative that the United States remain Latin America's military partner of choice in the 21st Century and beyond for three important reasons. First, doing so allows the United States to maintain the vital partnerships required to better influence and shape the hemispheric environment given the potentially nefarious activities conducted by extra-hemispheric actors. Second, those partnerships enable the United States to more effectively assist its regional allies and partners with addressing their own internal challenges so that they can more effectively contribute to regional security efforts. Finally, maintaining partnerships builds upon the commitments and hard work already invested as a low-cost approach to regional stability and supports the United States' national interest of securing the homeland and protecting its citizens.

The 21st Century has witnessed numerous successes in Latin America such as the ongoing Colombian Peace Process, Brazil hosting an extremely successful 2016 Olympic Games and even the orderly and democratic impeachment process of a Brazilian president. Despite these gains, the struggle to achieve regional security continues to be “put at risk by weak institutions, high crime rates, powerful organized crime groups, an illicit drug trade, lingering economic disparity, and inadequate education and health systems.”⁸² These widely diverse challenges illustrate why it remains in the best interest of the United States to continue to support our partners in Latin America through security cooperation efforts. As Admiral Tidd stressed in his 2016 Posture Statement, with the continued support and commitment of the United States,

Latin America can remain “committed and capable partners who can control their borders, address drivers of insecurity and instability, respond to natural and man-made disasters, and contribute to regional security—all of which help generate an extended layered defense of the United States homeland and protect our interests.”⁸³

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