

# Speech

Organization of American States



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ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES  
SECURITY IN THE AGE OF TERROR: LESSONS FROM THE  
INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM"  
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The nations of the Americas have acquired a wide range of profound and tragic experiences with terrorism. It has come in different guises, from state repression to the use of private armies, as revolutionary violence, and as the unadulterated exercise of sheer terror that we witnessed on September 11, 2001. We have paid dearly for this experience, for the terrorist acts, and, at times, for the measures adopted to combat them.

My intention today is to revisit key moments in our history with respect to security and to extract from them a few lessons that might strengthen our cooperation. I would like to thank WHINSEC, Fort Benning, and the city of Columbus, Georgia for giving me the opportunity to share these thoughts.

1.

The oldest international defense and security organization in the world is the Inter-American Defense Board, founded in 1942. Currently the IADB is composed of 28 member states of the OAS, including Canada, which joined in December 2002. In the past few years, the IADB has carried out highly commendable activities, such as supporting mine-clearing programs in Central America, Peru, and Ecuador; taking part in emergency relief operation following natural disasters; and producing studies and inventories of confidence- and security-building measures, along with other activities. Nevertheless, since the end of the Second World War and the end of the Cold War, the IADB we know today is a much weaker organization.

In large part, that stems from the weakening of the legal framework for regional security. The Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, also known as the Rio Treaty, was signed in 1947, for the purpose of improving procedures for the pacific settlement of controversies and preventing and repelling threats and acts of aggression against any of the countries of America. By means of the Treaty, the High Contracting Parties undertake not to resort to the threat or the use of force in any manner inconsistent with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations or of the Treaty itself and they undertake to submit every controversy which may arise between them to methods of peaceful settlement and to endeavor to settle any such controversy among themselves....Through this Treaty, the High Contracting Parties agree that an armed attack by any State against an American State shall be considered as an attack against all the American States.

Many thought that the Rio Treaty had died in 1982, when Argentina invoked it during its conflict with the United Kingdom over the Malvinas Islands. At that point, the United States insisted that when it ratified the Rio Treaty, it had excluded the Malvinas Islands, and it denied military assistance to the Argentine forces. What the United States argued was true, but it dealt a harsh blow to the Rio Treaty.

Another factor seriously undermining hemispheric security was tension between civilians and the military as a result of internal security issues. At times there were fratricidal conflicts, disappearances, and human rights violations. Obviously the prevalence of such factors varies considerably from one country to another. Nevertheless, at times there appeared to be two separate worlds, one military and one civilian, and sometimes they did not communicate with one another.

The end of the Cold War and the acceleration of globalization brought with them new threats and challenges to the Hemisphere.

In 2003 in Mexico, a Special Conference on Security identified what the member states all now agreed constituted "New Threats" that together create a "multidimensional" threat. The priorities of the largest countries, such as the United States were included (issues such as cyber security, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, drugs and related matters), but so were the concerns of the subregions: in the Caribbean and Central America, nuclear waste and natural disasters; in Central and South America, extreme poverty and social exclusion.

The Declaration listed the following new threats to security:

- "Terrorism, transnational organized crime, the global drug problem, corruption, asset laundering, illicit trafficking in weapons, and the connections among them;
- Extreme poverty and social exclusion of broad sectors of the population, which also affect stability and democracy. Extreme poverty erodes social cohesion and undermines the security of states;
- Natural and man-made disasters, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, other health risks, and environmental degradation;
- Trafficking in persons;
- Attacks to cyber security;
- The potential for damage to arise in the event of an accident or incident during the maritime transport of potentially hazardous materials, including petroleum and radioactive materials and toxic waste; and
- The possibility of access, possession, and use of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery by terrorists."

The Special Conference on Security also expounded the defining values of the Organization of American States. It declared that "representative democracy is an indispensable condition for the stability, peace, and development of the states of the Hemisphere." The delegates explicitly reaffirmed their commitment to the full observance of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, thus establishing a direct link between democracy and security in the Hemisphere.

The risk is that by including so much under the category of security, important traditional distinctions about security and the role of law enforcement and the armed forces are blurred.

In practice, without replacing the Rio Treaty, a new security system has gradually been forged. It is less unified and binding than the Rio Treaty's collective security system, but perhaps better tailored to the variety of multidimensional threats to which we are exposed today. This new system is based on confidence-building measures, such as various inventories and databases in the care of the Committee on Hemispheric Security and especially the approval of new Inter-American juridical instruments addressing specific security concerns, such as the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacture and Trafficking in Firearms (CIFTA), the Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions, and most recently, the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism.

2.

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The only time the Rio Treaty has been used since it failed with respect to the Malvinas Islands was following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Within a few days of the attacks, the High Contracting parties of the Rio Treaty adopted by acclamation a resolution in which all of them agreed to provide "effective reciprocal assistance to address such attacks and the threat of any similar attacks against any American state and to maintain the peace and security of the continent."

The Americas themselves have been spared the devastation of major attacks since the tragedies of 2001, but the Madrid attacks a year ago and the bombings in Indonesia and the Philippines demonstrate that seemingly safe areas far removed from zones of active conflict are not immune.

The terrorist threat is insidious because it is indiscriminate and unpredictable. We can never be sure that we have done enough. Yet obtaining action in the absence of a visibly clear and present danger can be difficult, particularly in the face of competing demands for resources.

In the wake of September 11, the countries of the Americas negotiated, signed, and brought into force the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism with record speed. The Convention is notable for its insistence on respect for human rights. No one country has all of the answers for improving the security of our citizens against the threats posed by terrorists, who seek to exploit the rules of civilized society. The answer, however, is not to abandon our rules, or to wink at abuses of the rights of suspects. The Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE) has matured into an internationally-recognized model of counter terrorism cooperation and capacity-building.

3.

Another evil with numerous ties to terrorism is drug smuggling. The Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission was established in 1989 and is known for its work in forging professional ties and developing the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism to facilitate anti-drug cooperation. Only a few years ago, CICAD had a clear, unitary mission: to stop drug abuse through an equally direct approach: to do so by shutting down supply. That vision of the scope of its work has changed dramatically. Supply is now understood to encompass a wide variety of specialized industrial chemicals, organic-based drugs, synthetics and medicines, as well as very ordinary commodities such as glue; all used in a bewildering variety of production processes leading to diversion and abuse. The world of drugs could be described as resembling a new kind of globalized supermarket.

Marketing requirements in this shadowy supermarket include laundering of drug money and corruption, and a growing galaxy of other crimes. Some of these crimes are closely associated to drug trafficking, such as arms trafficking. Other criminal activities sometimes associated with illegal drug movements have less direct ties. Examples of the latter are kidnapping and trafficking in persons.

Illegal drugs have become an industry that reaches far beyond its origins. Its revenues finance organized crime, guerrilla war, and terrorism. Drug production, usage and attempted controls have infected traditional relationships, penetrated many strata of society, and acquired political dimensions that damage political and even regional stability.

Each country is unique. Each situation is different, down to the most local and even individual levels. Yet the problem crosses borders and is truly transnational. We must learn to work not only with each other respecting sovereignty and increasing capacity, but we must learn to work with new partners: municipalities, non-governmental groups, and private industry at the same time that we sustain and adapt ties to our traditional partners in the legal, health and enforcement communities.

4.

A third threat in our times is the proliferation of arms in the possession of unauthorized parties.

In Haiti, small arms pose a veritable threat to governance, democracy, and the population as a whole. They are easy to come by. Everybody is armed: politicians and criminals, businessmen and the poor, and both legal and illegal militias. Not to mention the drug traffickers and former members of the armed forces. Everyone is armed, except for the State, which has no army and only 3,000 policemen in a country of eight million inhabitants. New York City, which has eight million inhabitants, has 60,000 police officers.

Haiti is often considered a unique case, which is true. Yet in Central America, small firearms and light weapons have proliferated since the end of the armed conflicts of the 1980s and pose a serious threat. Combined with the increasingly widespread phenomenon of gangs, they have raised the level of violence and thwarted economic and social development.

According to the National Police of Colombia, 85 percent of murders in that country are committed with small arms, many of which are smuggled into Colombia by drug traffickers, insurgents, or members of paramilitary groups. Thanks to the peace process pursued by the Colombian government with the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), all the violence indicators in some parts of the country have declined dramatically. Between November 2004 and February 2005, eight groups of the AUC demobilized, which meant that 3,793 men and women gave up their armed struggle, an unprecedented number in the long and tragic history of the conflict in Colombia. The OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia, established by the Permanent Council in February 2003 at the request of the Colombian government, is monitoring the process and verifying the demobilization, surrender of weapons, and cessation of hostilities by the AUC.

Faced with internal and international criticism to the effect that the demobilization process is not meeting international human rights standards, the Government of Colombia is attempting to improve the demobilization process and to create a new legal framework for it. To that end the Government has called for special sessions of Congress since February 15.

On the international front, the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (CIFTA) is one of the major existing subregional and regional agreements. Initially proposed by Mexico in the Rio Group, it achieved a consensus among Latin American countries and was signed in November 1997. It entered into force on July 1, 1998.

5.

I am proud to have encouraged – based initially on my experience of the conflict between Ecuador and Peru, but later also of other, mainly Central American, controversies – the establishment of an OAS Fund for Peace, which effectively makes it possible to garner specific funds outside the Regular Fund of the OAS to support the peaceful settlement of disputes.

In the framework of the OAS Fund for Peace, the General Secretariat supported the demarcation of the border between El Salvador and Honduras, by providing the services of a technical expert of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History and a Political Advisor, who in 2003 and 2004 came up with solutions to the technical problems encountered by the Commission, which ultimately made it possible to agree on and demarcate the border. Between 1999 and 2002, we played an important role in normalizing relations between Honduras and Nicaragua, following a sudden crisis triggered by a demarcation issue in the Caribbean Sea, in which there was a real danger of armed conflict. In that process, another OAS team, which included an Argentine and a Brazilian military officer, checked out all the military and police posts to make sure there were no troop movements near the border. In the territorial differendum between Belize and Guatemala, the Secretariat also managed to channel a serious territorial dispute toward a peaceful settlement by providing political, diplomatic, and confidence-building support to settle the issue.

6.

What lessons can we draw from these experiences?

I suggest five conclusions:

1. A legal framework is essential. As we saw in the case of the Rio Treaty, the weakening or lack of a legal framework limits the potential for cooperation. This is even truer at the national level, where the Constitution and the laws determine what is feasible. It is also true that, internationally, multilateral agreements facilitate elective cooperation even when a collective instrument has not been invoked. It is important to note that all modern treaties emphasize the

importance of human rights. It could even be said that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has become the conscience of the Hemisphere.

2. The second point is that it is essential to have a democratic framework. Article 4 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter states that "The constitutional subordination of all state institutions to the legally constituted civilian authority and respect for the rule of law on the part of all institutions and sectors of society are equally essential to democracy."

3. However, not only political factors have to be taken into account: the socio-economic context is increasingly important. If democracy is America's pride and glory, social injustice, poverty, and exclusion are our Achilles heel. The military and other security forces cannot be the "watchdogs of the oligarchy." They must strive to defend opportunities rather than privilege. The core concern of the Fourth Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina, this November is how to create jobs and good governance.

4. The fourth point concerns you. However good intentions might be, a professional framework is needed, like the one WHINSEC offers: Training. Techniques. Values. Mutual trust. We have to find mechanisms to reward cooperation and information-sharing at every level of government. A culture of cooperation is indispensable. Respect for human rights is essential. Ethical and practical considerations combine: respect for human dignity on the one hand and the unreliability of data obtained by force, on the other. Knowledge shared multiplies, and when it is shared among partners, it increases for the common good.

5. Finally, we have the last point that I will call "Ongoing Consultation." The success of our quest for security depends on our military and police authorities, who must act professionally, intelligently, and in close coordination with legitimate civilian authorities. Even so, their and our success depends on an atmosphere that encourages participation, a deepening of democracy, and more abundant opportunities for all. And, having achieved all that, we need to add the ability to understand one another across and beyond our borders.

We can be proud of the troops currently performing to high professional standards in peace-keeping operations often far from their homes. Proud because they are not only doing their duty to their country but also defending a utopia we share.

Thank you very much.

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