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STRENGTHEN HUMAN SECURITY

The Context

Despite the ever-growing intensity of interactions between North and South America, crucially facilitated by immigration to the United States from the South, U.S. national security policy in the Southern Hemisphere has been increasingly at odds with the security preoccupations of the Latin American governments and populations. While the United States has focused on keeping unfriendly actors out of power in Latin America and illicit flows from the region out of the United States, the governments and publics in Latin America are primarily concerned with human security issues. A joint effort at multidimensional state strengthening in Latin America, however, can bring the two perspectives into congruence and address security concerns of both the United States and Latin American countries.

The U.S. Monroe Doctrine established the principle of keeping other great powers from developing spheres of influence in the Americas. During the second half of the 20th century, the dominant U.S. effort was to prevent the spread of Soviet and Cuban influence in the region and government takeovers by leftist movements and insurgents. The end of the Cold War resulted in the replacement of the traditional “undesirables” to be kept out with new ones—drugs, illegal immigrants, and refugees. During the Bush administration, two new real and

potential threats were added: Venezuela’s anti-American ideological project, *Bolivarian socialism*, and global jihadi terrorists.

Yet with the exception of Colombia, who latched on to the U.S. Global War on Terror, this agenda has generated little resonance in the region. For example, although the vast majority of governments cooperate with the U.S. war on drugs, many disagree with the dominant emphasis on illicit crop eradication. Instead, Latin Americans emphasize a long list of socio-economic problems, such as poverty and hunger, the lack of development, and rising street-level crime – in other words, human security.

The Challenge

Human security includes not only the physical safety from violence and crime, but also economic safety from critical poverty, social marginalization, and fundamental underprovision of elemental social goods, such as infrastructure, education, and health care. Chronically, Latin American governments have been lacking in the provision of all three.

Despite the compliance of Latin American governments with the U.S. counternarcotics policies, street-level crime and public insecurity have increased throughout the region. To an unprecedented degree, ordinary

people in the region complain about living in fear of crime. With the exception of Colombia, criminal activity throughout the region has exploded. Doubling since the 1980s, homicide rates in Latin America are among the highest in the world. Kidnapping is also frequent. Well above 50 percent of the approximately 7,500 worldwide kidnappings in 2007 took place in Latin America (*El País*, 17/2/2008). Overall, the rates of violent crime are six times higher in Latin America than in the rest of the world (Jorge Sapoznikow et al., 2000).

Illicit flows, such as drugs, do greatly exacerbate street-level crime and the day-to-day insecurity of ordinary citizens. They also pose serious threats to national governments in source and transit countries, viz., the drug violence in Mexico. Corruption, fueled by illicit trade, frequently affects not only the top levels of the government, but also corrodes the entire public sector, seriously undermining law enforcement and the judiciary throughout the system.

But from the perspective of many in Latin America, the principal threat is not the cultivation of illicit crops as the source of crime and corruption, or even other illicit flows *per se*. Many in Latin America do not have the ability to participate in formal legal economies. Hundreds of thousands of people across the Andean region cultivate coca and other illicit crops because they do not have legal opportunities. In sprawling urban slums, the majority of the population participates if not in outright illegal economies, at least in informal ones outside the purview of the state because the state is absent and the population's access to the legal economy is limited (and sometimes also because state regulations and taxation are too onerous). Many recent policies designed to suppress such illicit economies, like the cultivation of illicit crops, because they face a critical crisis of subsistence in their absence.

Hence, the populations do not perceive forced eradication to be an appropriate policy. Indeed, such suppression policies without a multifaceted extension of state presence, including the provision of economic opportunities, frequently induce marginalized population to transfer their loyalties to non-state actors, such as insurgents, maras, and even drug dealers, who oppose the state and protect illicit economies from state actions.

The global economic crisis can further exacerbate the problem of illicit economies in Latin America. It can swell the numbers of those dependent on illegal livelihoods and at the same time limit the state's resources for addressing illegal economies through a multifaceted approach that includes not only law enforcement, but also building economic and social opportunities for marginalized populations.

Hemispheric Opportunity

Despite the global recession, changes in the political landscape in Latin America and in the United States provide unique opportunities for strengthening human security in the hemisphere. The new Obama administration has already indicated that targeting inequality and poverty will be a critical priority in the region. Meanwhile, many of the left-leaning governments in the hemisphere, with Brazil as a leading example, have accepted that the state has a responsibility for the social advancement and empowerment not only of the elites, but also of the marginalized populations.

The Summit of the Americas' agenda of critical policy initiatives should include:

- **Expansion of state-strengthening efforts that improve public safety on the Latin American street.** The United States should continue to provide military assistance for counternarcotics operations, such

as interdiction, and for developing intelligence-sharing among the governments in the Americas for counterterrorism and anti-crime purposes. Building a strong collaborative relationship with Mexico as well as multilateralizing the counternarcotics effort in Mexico should be at the forefront of the effort. But the effort to strengthen public safety must extend beyond the front-burner issues and must consist of sustained and systematic efforts to improve and extend the regular law enforcement apparatus throughout the hemisphere to provide effective and accountable rule of law to the entire population.

- **Improving the judiciary throughout the region.** Reforms and expansion of law enforcement and justice need to be integrated. A greater capacity on the part of the state in Latin America to deliver justice and the rule of law to the populations will not only improve their lives and increase accountability, but it will also fundamentally enhance the connection between the individual and the state.
- **Encouraging and extending economic development of the region not only through steadfast promotion of free trade, but also through determined effort to assist national governments with the development of socioeconomic periphery areas.** As the previous two decades have shown, free trade on its own does not guarantee that unskilled, poor, marginalized populations in the rural peripheries and urban slums can participate in the global market and reap benefits from it. The United States and Latin American governments should pay greater attention to rural development in the hemisphere as well as to the integration of urban peripheries into the productive and legal realm of society. If greater segments of the populations are capable of plugging into the global legal economy and see their socio-economic condition improve, they will be both less

dependant on illicit economies and more willing to cooperate with efforts to reduce them.

Such strengthening of their human security will in turn enhance the national security of Latin American countries and help in U.S. efforts to mitigate dangerous trans-national flows.

Want to Know More?

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