

“Western Hemisphere Defense Policy Statement”

A commentary by Gabriel Marcella

“In the Americas, we are bound by proximity, integrated markets, energy interdependence, a broadly shared commitment to democracy, and the rule of law. Our deep historical, familial, and cultural ties make our alliances and partnerships critical to U.S. interests. We will work in equal partnership to advance economic and social inclusion, safeguard citizen safety and security, promote clean energy, and defend universal values of the people of the hemisphere.” Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy*, 2010, p. 45.

Introduction

The eloquent statement captures the unique and complex quality of inter-American relations. No other region of the world has the capacity to transform American society through intense interaction. Days before Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta arrived in Montevideo for the October 8, 2012 for the Conference of the Defense Ministers of the Americas the Department of Defense published the *Western Hemisphere Defense Policy Statement*. The timing was not accidental. Observers of Latin American policy eagerly awaited the opportunity to assess its contents, hoping that the region achieved higher standing among American global strategic priorities. The following comments will analyze the principal themes of the document and assess the balance between its stated goals and the feasibility of achieving them.

Strategy Documents and Latin America

To evaluate the contents of the *Western Hemisphere Defense Policy Statement* it's imperative to first understand the strategic planning process in Washington. The United States government produces policy and strategy documents in order to bring analytical discipline, focus, budgetary realism, and democratic accountability before the American people and Congress, and to assign responsibility to the respective departments. The global audience of these documents--friends, allies, and opponents alike--also matters. The most notable documents are the *National Security Strategy*, the *Quadrennial Defense Review*, the Department of

State's *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review*, the occasional *National Military Strategy of the United States*, and the *National Drug Control Strategy*. The daddy of them all is the congressionally mandated *National Security Strategy*, which traces its ancestry to the latter years of the Cold War and serves as the intellectual framework for the rest.

These national level documents engage all the national security and foreign affairs departments in the production. There will be obvious continuity with previous administrations, as well as recalibrations in the balance between realism and idealism about America's role in the world, in accordance with the party that holds the White House. Moreover, the documents will attempt to capture the changing global environment, such as emerging threats and power transitions, and project trends into the future. The intellectual challenge is to propose policy recommendations that will promote the national interests of the United States. Congruence with the national interests of allies and friends around the globe is essential for successful policy.

A common complaint is that Latin America seldom receives sustained high level attention. While there is much truth to that, one of the realities of Washington is that just about every administration promises to be active with respect to Latin America, but that seldom happens, unless Latin America imposes itself on the agenda. In recent years this occurred with, for example, the intense policy activism in response to the Colombian crisis since the 1990s. It generated a cascade of policy and strategy papers, speeches, congressional testimonies, an intelligence surge, high level studies, and intense interagency activity, as did the Central American crisis of the 1980s, the current Central American security problems, and the policy response to Mexico's drug related violence. The strategic implication is that Washington can sustain attention and resources for Latin American policy in times of crisis.

Language

Language has consequences. A salient characteristic of the document is the inclusive, soaring, and at times celebratory language. This is typical of policy documents, which are designed to mobilize domestic and international support. Thus it emphasizes the positive, casts the broadest net, appeals to the most commonly held values, cites the authority of political leadership, and summons common effort. The first concern to be raised is the title. Why is the word Statement part of the title, why not simply the economical, elegant, and assertive *Western*

Hemisphere Defense Policy? The needless differentiation could be attributed to tentativeness, but since it bears the signature of the Secretary of Defense and cites the words of President Obama it is indeed official policy. It requires no qualifier.

Strategic writing can be dry, antiseptic, dense-- in a word, boring. Metaphors and imagery can flavor the concoction and relieve the reader. For some years the lexicon of policy and strategy has absorbed a useless locution: stability. The term appears five times in the document, as in "regional security and stability" for Latin America. What kind of stability are we desire: stasis, equilibrium, no change, or lack of instability? Or is it progress towards peace, cooperation, and social and economic development in a democratic setting? The most stable place in the Americas is Cuba, hardly a worthy goal.

Defense Transformation

One of the distinguishing features of the Latin American scene has been the movement towards the modernization of defense institutions, from defense ministries, armed forces, and to democratic civil-military relations. These institutions are more professional, accountable, effective, and many are focused on international responsibilities. The document links American policy to this transformation, espousing more defense cooperation: "As hemispheric military institutions increase their capacities and become more professional, the United States will seek to leverage military-to-military relationships for common good."

Equal Partners?

The organizing framework for the *Policy Statement* is the imperative for partnership. In the Foreword to the document President Obama asserts: "I believe that in the Americas today, there are no senior partners and there are no junior partners, there are only equal partners. Of course, equal partnerships, in turn, demand a sense of shared responsibility." While the sentiment of "equal partners" may be noble, the reality of international relations says that the asymmetry in power between the United States and the Latin American "partners" is still enormous, despite the rise of Brazil as a global player and the emergence of countries as purveyors of security support to other countries. If "equal partners" is overstated, the asymmetry in capabilities should nonetheless allow certain defense responsibilities to be shared. This can be done despite the fact that the United States and the Latin American countries do not comprise a robust collective security arrangement

(despite the Rio Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance of 1947), and certainly not collective defense like NATO. In recent years some strong bilateral relationships have developed, particularly the United States with Chile, Colombia, El Salvador. There is good news on burden-sharing in the Americas. Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay have participated in multinational security and peace operations. Colombia is sharing its extensive expertise in counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism in Latin America and West Africa.

One of the most compelling and perceptive statements of the document is: "These regional and sub-regional partnerships reflect a new era of defense cooperation based on a mutual understanding of the range of security challenges and interest. Institutional relationships at the hemispheric level ensure respect for sovereignty and international norms." Building respect for sovereignty and international norms is a significant achievement in the pursuit of cooperation for peace, security, and development. It increases the possibility of sharing other norms, such as democracy, the rule of law, and free trade. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant would be proud that his formulation of the interactive triangle of democracy, trade, and International institutions is alive and well in the document.

Budgetary Constraints

American statesmen who toil in the vineyards of Latin American affairs face the dilemma of increasingly diminishing budgets. The document reminds us that during this era of fiscal austerity funds for a defense policy for the Hemisphere will be more limited. Accordingly, it is replete with caveats: "DoD will develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches..." and "In a resource constrained environment..." The remedy is shared responsibility, partnership. Left unsaid in the document is the inescapable fact that other countries are eager to fill the gap left by the American "low cost" and "small foot-print approaches." China is becoming a player in providing equipment and training to some Latin American militaries, though its efforts so far are of limited impact. Ideology aside, most countries regard the United States as the preferred source of military technology, doctrine, and training. It is also the only country with a full spectrum of smarts and capabilities to

address what Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution calls the "soft security" agenda.¹

Governance and Development Challenges: The Latin American Security Dilemma

"U.S. and foreign partners in security cooperation discussions are mindful that security, economic and social development, and responsible governance are bound together inextricably. Given these conditions, our defense cooperation must complement bilateral and regional development efforts to increase economic opportunity, foster social inclusion, rule of law, and respect for human rights."

Under the rubric of "governance and development challenges" the document captures the essence of the Latin American security dilemma. In the 1950s Latin American military and civilian strategists developed the doctrine that security requires economic and social development (*desarrollo*). This powerful notion waned with the retreat of military governments but it has had a rebirth in recent years. Threats in the Americas are of lower scale than those of other regions. Crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, proliferation of small weapons, cyber threats, environmental damage, and contraband are all tied to the weak state syndrome. Countries have insufficient security capabilities to deal effectively with narco-trafficking, terrorism, high rates of crime, and poor territorial and border controls, all in the face of weak judicial systems, poverty, social exclusion, corruption, proliferation of weapons, and natural disasters of increasing magnitude. These maladies are captured under the need for effective governance.

Strengthening National Institutions

The answer is partnership for defense cooperation, partnership based on the principles of democracy and civilian control of the military. The Department of Defense will, states the document, "...develop innovative partnership approaches. Our partnerships must be flexible, agile, responsive to the desires of the partner country, and able to transform as nations' militaries grow in capacity." Moreover, "...without creating dependency or an imbalance between defense and civilian authorities...the department will ensure that military support for the mission remains transparent, respectful of human rights and the rule of

law, and support the continued consolidation of democratic values in support of civilian authorities.”

Strengthening National Institutions

How will this be done? By implementing “whole of government” programs, sustained engagement, and “emphasis on education, training, and relationships.” Numerous means are to be employed, such as educating civilian and military professionals by using the various DoD educational institutions and the highly successful International Military Education and Training program. In addition, DoD will continue to address the defense modernization needs by furnishing defense articles and services through grants and sales.

Integrating Capacity

The document makes a plea for “integrating capacity,” by assisting security forces in enhancing interoperability and the capacity to respond to missions “where there is consensus throughout the region for collective action” and DoD will cooperate with foreign military forces by providing logistical, communications, engineering, infrastructure, training, and analytical support for a range of activities: counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism, to counter weapons proliferation, to support civil authority in humanitarian and natural disasters, and law enforcement. A new challenge is protecting cyberspace from attacks. In addition, the document states that DoD “must remain vigilant against the potential for terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in this hemisphere.”

Peace and Humanitarian Operations

As noted above, Latin American countries support United Nations peacekeeping operations. Some, like Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil are leaders with highly developed capabilities and training centers. The United States promotes the continued development of peacekeeping capabilities, in part because it prefers that other nations take over those duties so that it can focus on major defense responsibilities around the globe.

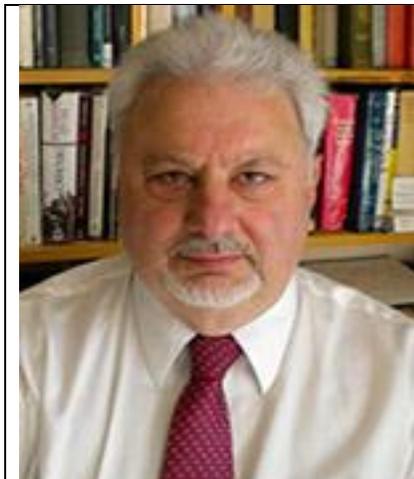
Defense Cooperation

Finally, the document advocates strengthening the system of defense cooperation in the Hemisphere. Although the Rio Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance provides a framework for collective security,

it is at best an historical relic that has been replaced by a more complex and, as noted earlier, pluralistic concept of security, to include deep bilateral defense cooperation between the United States and certain countries. There are a number of institutions for promoting common initiatives on defense. Among them: the Organization of American States, Conference of Defense Ministers, the Conference of the American Armies, Inter-American Naval Conference, Navies, and the System of Cooperation of the Air Forces. These are important foundations for professional communication and for building confidence for future initiatives.

Conclusion: Mismatch Between Goals and Resources

The document clearly steers away from allocating resources to the various proposals, which are ambitious in scope and carefully nuanced. Thus we have the classical dilemma of policy mandates awaiting funding, which will likely fall short of the mark because of competing global priorities and the domestic agenda. The goals are, nonetheless, a fine balance between realism and idealism in American foreign policy, with its normal appeal to democratic values, the search for international order, and a common security agenda. US defense programs with Latin American defense establishments will have to rely on small resources, innovative means, and synergies that can emerge from better interagency coordination within the US government and by developing realistic partnerships with Latin American defense establishments which are willing to contribute to regional and international security.



Dr. Gabriel Marcella is adjunct professor at the US Army War College, where he teaches the Americas course. During his career in government he taught at the Army War College and served as International Affairs Advisor at the US Southern Command. He has written extensively on Latin American security issues and American policy. Recent publications include the Colombian conflict and American policy, in addition to the teaching of strategy, as well as national security and the interagency process. He has also been a consultant for the Department of State and the Department of Defense. Born in Italy, the President of Italy recognized his academic work with the distinction of *Commendatore al Merito della Repubblica Italiana*.

Notes

1. Michael O'Hanlon, "Obama's Weak and Failing States Agenda," *The Washington Quarterly*, Fall 2012, pp. 67-80.