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Research Report

A NEW STRATEGY

FOR

LATIN AMERICA

GARY L. HOOKER

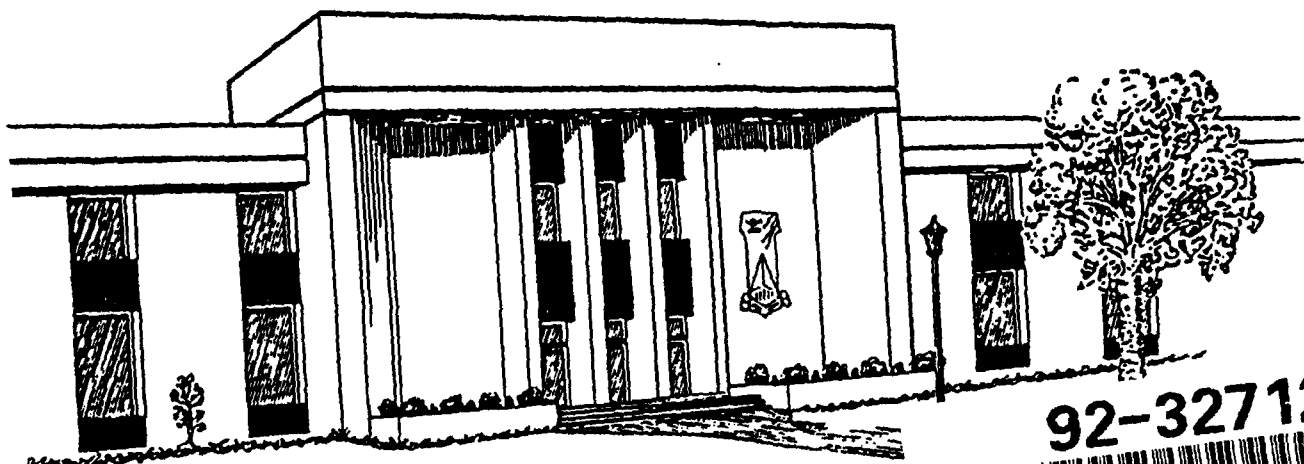
LIEUTENANT COLONEL, USAF

and

LENNART WENDEL, JR

COMMANDER, USN

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PUBLICATION PAPER
ON
A NEW STRATEGY
FOR
LATIN AMERICA
by

Gary L. Hooker
Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

AND

Lennart Wendel Jr.
Commander, USN

AIR WAR COLLEGE
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel Gary L. Hooker graduated from the US Air Force Academy in 1972 with a bachelor of science degree in engineering management. After graduation, he attended Undergraduate Pilot Training at Reese AFB, Texas. His first operational assignment was as an A-7D pilot at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. In April 1977, he reported to Osan AB, Republic of Korea, and flew the OV-10 as a forward air controller (FAC). His next assignment was FAC tactics officer at the Tactical Fighter Weapons Center, Nellis AFB, Nevada. In November 1979, he was reassigned to Hill AFB, Utah as an F-16 instructor pilot. Lt Col Hooker then served as an F-16 operational test and evaluation pilot and flight commander at Nellis AFB, Nevada. He was then selected to serve as the chief of F-16 fighter operations, Hq 10th AF, Bergstrom AFB, Texas. His most recent assignment was commander, 24 Tactical Air Support Squadron, Howard AFB, Republic of Panama. He is a graduate of Squadron Officer School and the Air Command and Staff College.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Commander Lennart Wendel Jr. is a student at Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base. A native of Michigan, he graduated from Michigan Technological University with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in 1975. He started his career as an Naval Aviator in 1976 and has flown almost three thousand hours in both fix wing aircraft and helicopters. He attended Naval Postgraduate School in 1985 and received a Master of Science in Business Administration in 1987. His last tour was with the Chief of Naval Personnel as the Director of Officer Performance.

ABSTRACT

TITLE: A New Strategy for Latin America

AUTHOR: Gary L. Hooker, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

Lennart Wendel Jr. , Commander, USN

Latin America has undeservably occupied the cellar in national foreign policy and strategy councils during United States' history. The exception has been crisis response when US political or military perception indicated a real or imagined threat to US security interests. These have spanned the cultural spectrum of economic, political, and military interests. Today's realities of decreasing federal budget accounts and increasing congressional oversight, combined with historic changes sweeping Latin America, pose a serious question, challenge, and strategic alternative: (1) The QUESTION -- is Latin America still important to US national security interests? ; (2) If so, what is the CHALLENGE facing US security agencies in a low intensity conflict environment?; (3) What strategic ALTERNATIVE to current US efforts would prove superior in obtaining regional US national security objectives? This article attempts to provide those answers.

INTRODUCTION

For almost fifty years the United States has focused on the possibility of global war, fought primarily on the European continent. On August 2 1990, in an address at Aspen, Colorado, President George Bush said that US defense policy must adjust to significant changes in the world, without neglecting the realities of the nation's security. We are now moving from the grand strategy of containment of communism to one of seeking strategic stability in which low-intensity conflict (LIC) plays a vital role. The counternarcotics segment of LIC is now the principle concern for the US military in the Latin American region. This transition corresponds to President Bush's vision for the US military establishment in his "New World Order".

The cold war is over but the United States will continue to face increasing instability in developing nations throughout the world. The virtual certainty of this is dictated by the ever increasing gap in resources between the "haves" and "have nots" of the world. The strategic geography and strategic culture of Latin America are two realities that combine to ensure the continued importance and relevance of this region to US security interests.

The recent trend of semi-democratic systems across Latin America, ensures the US military involvement in LIC operations to support these governments. In the past, US military actions have ranged from civic actions to overt interventions, but seldom has the United States undertaken successful joint military actions when dealing with the countries of Latin America. This led to each service providing uncoordinated piecemeal actions as readily evident in after-action reports from recent operations in Grenada and Panama. These actions, along with the United States' failure to comprehend the realities of the strategic and culture geography of the region, clearly define US past performance and unilateral perception throughout the region.

This article will examine how the strategic geography and culture of Latin America defined the past relationships between the United States and Latin America and explore the opportunities available to joint US military forces to combat narcotics in the region today and in the future. With a decreasing share of the Foreign Military Financing program (FMFP) dollars and increasing conflicts in that part of the world, the US military needs a new command structure and force. This article will attempt to describe that structure by examining the unique characteristics of Latin

rica and low-intensity conflict operations in particular
internarcotics and then suggesting a new structure that
addresses the proper application of tested principles in this
region.

Before this new structure can be addressed it is
necessary to provide the background traits and factors of
Latin America and LIC operations.

TRAITS AND FACTORS SHAPING LATIN AMERICA STRATEGIC GEOGRAPHY AND CULTURE

GEOGRAPHY

The incredible size of Latin America, extending over
4000 miles from the Mexico and US border south to Tierra
del Fuego in Chile, can only be understood by comparison to
familiar geographical locations. With a total land
area of 7.8 million square miles, compared to 3.5 million in
the U.S., Latin America contains roughly 20 percent of the
world landmass. Another noteworthy geographical
characteristic of the region is the sheer size of some of
the countries located there. Brazil, with a land area of
3.3 million square miles, is only exceeded by four other
countries in the world. Chile, long thought of from the

North American perspective as a narrow and small country that borders the Pacific, can only be appreciated when one understands that its landmass exceeds Texas by almost 30,000 square miles. The vast stretch of Argentina can be appreciated when overlaid on North America. It would stretch from Hudson Bay in Canada, cover most of the US east of the Mississippi River, and end in the south at the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico, covering a distance of almost 2,300 miles.¹

The region also contains some of the most diversified terrain features in the world. From Mexico in the north, dominated by the great highlands of the Meseta Central; to the volcanic ranges of Central America (Guatemala to Colombia); to the rain forests of Brazil and Bolivia; to the great pampas of Argentina; to the Andes mountain range that runs from Ecuador to Chile, Latin America's geography has played a large role in regional development. These geographic characteristics have tended to drive most countries of the region, with the exception of Bolivia and Paraguay, to develop coastal economies. Consequently, most large cities were established as outlets to European markets and along trade routes that have flourished during the last

500 years.² Geography of the region acted as a barrier to normal growth and resource exploration and this barrier effect continues today.

CLIMATE

The climate throughout Latin America is as diverse as its size is startling. Mexico is characterized by hot, arid deserts in the north, moderate temperatures in the central highlands, and humid tropical climate in the southern rain forest. Central American countries and the Caribbean countries all have tropical climates and most have distinct rainy and dry seasons. Along the Pacific coast of South America, most of the land west of the Andes mountain range consists of some of the driest areas in the world. Indeed some areas have no recorded rainfall in their histories.

The Amazon Basin region of Venezuela, Brazil, and Bolivia is tropical and dominated by the large central rain forest with up to 70-90 inches of rain a year. The rain forest eventually yields south to open low land pampas through Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina. One excellent example of the extremes to be encountered in the region is Argentina's high point at nearly 23,000 feet and its low

point at 130 feet below sea level. The Andes mountain barrier, extending from Colombia to Chile, is dominated by extremes of cold above 15,000 feet and moderate weather along the Andean desert plains below that altitude.³

RESOURCES

A unique aspect of Latin America during the last 500 years has been the exploitation of its many resources. This unique nature is characterized by the systematic removal of resources, with little of the profits being reinvested throughout the region. This systematic plunder began in the early sixteenth century with the conquest of the Aztecs and Incas, along with their gold, silver, and copper resources. It continued unabated into the twentieth century with the exploitation of Mexico's oil and Bolivia's silver, primarily by U.S. and European interests. Other resources of note are tobacco, coffee, and a variety of fruits, vegetables, and flowers throughout Central America; oil in Venezuela; emeralds in Colombia; and gold, silver, copper, and tin in Peru, Chile, and Bolivia. There is also a mix of farmland and cattle industry along Brazilian, Uruguayan, and Argentinean coastlines.⁴

GEOGRAPHICAL DIVISIONS

From Latin America's earliest administration by Spain and Portugal, five independent viceroyalties emerged in the eighteenth century: New Spain, including all of modern day Mexico and most of Central America; New Grenada comprising present day Panama, Colombia and Ecuador; Peru including Chile; La Plata including Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Bolivia; and Brazil, a huge viceroyalty unto itself. During the nineteenth century, these viceroyalties, due primarily to geographical and nationalist factors, divided into essentially the countries we see today. Panama is the noted exception that evolved out of direct US intervention, in order to build the Panama Canal in the early twentieth century.

A most unique and remarkable aspect of the region is the fact that from 1804 until 1824, virtually all of present day Latin American countries achieved their independence from their European monarchs.⁵ Unfortunately, the cultural factors inherent throughout the region from the first 300 years of colonial rule would be determining factors in the next 200 years.

PEOPLE

During Latin America's past 500 year history, the population of the region developed along three distinct lines: the native indians; the Europeans descended from five centuries of colonial migration of Spaniards, Portuguese, Jews, Italians, Germans; and Blacks that were originally imported from Africa as a cheap labor source.⁶ Diversity of race and culture began immediately after conquest as intermarriage among these three groups resulted in six significant racial groups; Indians, Europeans, Mestizo (Indians & Europeans); Black, Mulattoes (Black & Europeans), and Zambos (Indians & Black). In some countries, such as Brazil, all six groups are well represented. In other countries, such as Uruguay, only two are significant. The class and social structure in Latin America however is largely based on individual economic power and landholding, as well as educational, cultural, and racial distinctions.⁷

In general, the population density in Latin America is quite low when compared with the rest of the world. However, this can vary considerably from a density in Brazil of two per square mile to a density in El Salvador of 150 per square mile. Throughout Latin American history the pattern

of settlement was to create cities where the native Indians were located, as this provided the greatest amount of labor. These centers tended to be along the coastal margins and the more accessible areas. The population pressure generated in these mega-cities is one of the biggest concerns for the rise of conflicts in the region today and for the foreseeable future.

POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Political systems in Latin America developed through the concept of large landholding caudillos or strongmen. These patrimonial caudillos essentially were the political system and this persisted as a political way of life well into the twentieth century.¹ In the twentieth century, most political systems in the region have gone through cycles of democracy and military intervention. Chile and Costa Rica are two notable exceptions where strong democratic traditions have prevailed.

Only in recent years have the countries of Latin America, for the most part, evolved to elected semi-democratic systems. However, power still equates to large

land ownership throughout the region and small land ownership is a continuing source of conflict in most of these countries.

CHURCH INFLUENCES

To say that the Roman Catholic church touched every aspect of Latin America life during its history would be an understatement. In most countries, the church was the state and as such provided religious guidance and control from birth to the grave.' These effects of the missionaries were largely responsible for the high birth rate that continues today. With well over ninety percent of the total population today catholic, the church will continue to play a major role in shaping the traits of Latin American Countries. The teachings of the church have led to a rigid social hierarchy in all countries in the region. This philosophy has led most lower class people to an introspective belief that poverty is inescapable and there will always be a rigid division between the "haves" and "have nots". Likewise, the "haves" perpetuate this philosophy across the cultural spectrum.

Past US Objectives And Interests In Latin America

The United States has viewed Latin America with benign neglect for most of our common history. The policy the US has adopted for Latin America has been one to preserve the status quo in the region. As long as a country did not drift toward communism, the US would provide support to that country regardless if the government was dictatorial or a military junta.

Since the early 1950s, US interests in the region originate from two primary issues: military, and economic. The military concern based on Latin America becoming an area of strategic opportunity for the Soviet Union and Marxism. This situation occurred due to the continuing lack of democratic Latin American governments.

Adding to this were the influence from Cuba, the continuing wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua and the insurgencies in Guatemala, Colombia and Peru. The situation intensified from the regions' negative economic growth, debt, and illegal drug trafficking. These issues added to instability in the region.

One of the United States' main interests in Latin America has been ensuring access to the Panama Canal. The

Canal is important for its strategic location. Since the US maintains essentially a two ocean navy, the canal provides the rapid Pacific/Atlantic transit capability essential in wartime. The US can ill afford a government in Panama that could affect its access to the Canal.

The economic side of US interests is two-fold. First, two-thirds of the oil the US imports, many of its strategic minerals and half of the US trade passes through the canal or the Caribbean Basin. Secondly, most countries in Latin America have accumulated huge debts that could have severe economic consequences for the US if these countries were to default on these loans.

LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT (LIC) OPERATIONS

Low-intensity conflict operations represent an arena of conflict that is present today throughout the world and in all likelihood will be more prevalent in the future. There is little doubt that LIC poses unique problems for American interests and policy. The United States has been directly or indirectly involved in low-intensity conflict environments for the last 45 years.¹⁰ On 22 May 1991, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and

Low-Intensity Conflict, James R. Locher III said, "it [LIC] is the form of conflict in which the United States armed forces will most likely be engaged in the future."¹¹

Low-intensity conflict is an environment which involves the struggle of competing beliefs and doctrines below the level of conventional war. The Department of Defense in Joint Pub 1-02 defines low-intensity conflict as: a political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It frequently involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies. Low-intensity conflict ranges from subversion to the use of armed force. It is waged by a combination of means employing political, economic, informational, and military instruments. Low-intensity conflicts are often localized, generally in the Third World, but contain regional and global security implications.

The American style of conducting war involves large, well equipped forces trained for conventional combat. This method is inadequate for fighting an adversary in LIC operations. Therefore, the US must be capable of dealing with a full range of threats that can lead to instability and uncertainty.

Many of the instruments found in LIC are beyond the control of the military alone. One solution in this area needs to emphasize the a synergistic "joint" working relationships between military, civilian, and host country agencies throughout the region.

This, in turn, makes it exceptionally difficult for the local military command to influence the action unilaterally as has often been the case in the past. As such, a unique mind set is required to work in a LIC environment. The military component of LIC is a non-traditional defense function. The US cannot apply a conventional resolution to the unconventional challenges present in LIC.¹²

The United States' concern in LIC ranges from taking part in development assistance programs to unanticipated crisis response requiring the direct use of military power. There are five categories of military operations in low-intensity conflict. They are:

- Counterterrorism and anti-terrorism operations
- Counterinsurgency and support to insurgency
- Counternarcotics
- Peacekeeping operations
- Peacetime contingency operations,

Counternarcotics currently receives the greatest emphasis and funding for the US armed forces.

The Department of Defense is not the only player in low-intensity conflicts. By its very nature LIC crosses a multitude of jurisdictions necessitating the close coordination of 13 federal agencies directly involved in some aspect of drug law enforcement.¹³ Some of the key players are: Departments of State, Justice, Commerce, and Treasury; the Agency for International Development; the Drug Enforcement Agency; the Central Intelligence Agency. Of the aforementioned players, the Department of Defense plays a key role in LIC due to its significant contributions across the spectrum of LIC operations.

As previously alluded to, there exists a conflict in US policy where the US proclaims that it is seeking to expand democracy and yet is satisfied with just stability. Another fact that is not considered is democracy could cause instability in itself. Additionally there are numerous conflicts outside the US not directly affecting our national security interests. However, the US must assist in stabilizing conflicts before they reach national or world interest crises. The US must deal effectively with threats that can destabilize international order and threaten

internal security and prosperity. This was readily demonstrated recently by a coup in Haiti that threatened US borders with uncontrolled immigration; an attempted coup in Venezuela threatening the loss of Venezuelan oil imports; and a coup in Peru prompting a halt to counternarcotics efforts in that country and an indecisive US stance in support of Latin American style democracy. The latter event being touted by US newspapers and supported by 95% of the voting Peruvian people.¹⁴

A New US Military Reorganization For Latin America

Recent US initiatives seeking solutions to economic, political, social, and military sources of LIC in the region are laudable and should continue to be pursued at the highest levels. The Uruguay round, North American Free Trade Agreement, the General agreement on Taxes and Tariffs (GATT) and the administration Enterprise for the Americans are most notable in this area. However, if a new US military command structure to counter counternarcotics is not developed, these other US efforts may go for naught.

The existing counternarcotics structure attempts to combine the sizeable resources of the US government, both

military ,civilian, and host government into a coherent joint defense against drug trafficking. The less-than-stellar performance to date can be attributed to a faulty application of strategic principles of war. If the assumption is made that time tested principles of war apply equally in both conventional and LIC operations, then a better military command structure can be developed for the region.

The next review of the Presidents's Unified Command Plan could go a long way in addressing the proper strategy to obtain national counternarcotic objectives.

Those DOD objectives are:

- (1) Expand international initiatives
- (2) Implement intelligence agenda
- (3) Increase interdiction efforts

Although the first two areas are well defined and have received considerable attention and financial support during the past year, the third area, increase interdiction efforts, has been sadly lacking due to its vague nature. How much increase is required compared to increasing cartel resource allocation? What is the measure of merit in these increases? The fact that interdiction efforts intercepted 5% or 10 tons more than in a previous year is no more

significant than the body count or strategy of gradualism was in Vietnam. Therefore, the principle of the objective needs reevaluation. Clear, concise, and obtainable national objectives are needed that can translate into a likewise clear, concise and doable military strategy. The principle of unity of command likewise has not been achieved. With a number of civilian agencies competing with four in-theater CINCs for visibility and funding over three large areas of responsibilities, a disjointed effort is practically ensured. When US Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) begins its Panama Canal Treaty mandated exodus from the theater later this year, the situation can only get worse.

A reasonable and efficient solution to the unity of command problem could be the absorption of USSOUTHCOM's large area assets into Forces Command's (FORSCOM) structure, creating the American Command (ACOM). This would put the direct responsibility for objective accomplishment with the Commander in Chief of ACOM (CINACOM) and create a single, new unified command.

This unity of command will allow the vast assets of the US armed forces to be efficiently utilized in a joint services effort resulting in ACOM becoming the theater CINC for North, Central, and South America. The efficacy

his type of force support provides was recently demonstrated by a large joint force counternarcotics raid in the Chapare region of Bolivia, involving host nation forces in conjunction with joint US military and civilian forces.¹⁵

The new command would parallel the reasons and efficiencies derived for creating the Strategic Command (STRATCOM). This combination would tightly "mass" all available sea/land/air/space assets in the region into a joint team, much as the command structure did for Desert Storm. This massing of assets is absolutely essential if counternarcotics efforts have a chance to match current monetary resources available to drug cartels without an order of magnitude increase in matching funds in budget authority from Congress.

This combination would also streamline the planning and execution of counternarcotic strategic, tactical and LIC operations. It would provide enhanced communications between CINACOM, supporting CINCs, and civilian department heads, and be in keeping with the intent of the Goldwater-Nichols act of 1986.

An additional benefit would derive through a new host nation perception of a unified hemispheric approach in

relationships in comparison to the historical geographical/cultural separation of North and South America. A unified Americas approach would provide for equal and individual dealings with the unique aspects of each country. This in turn will assist in dealing with the cultural (religious, government, and military) influences that the US did not consider in past policy decisions.

CONCLUSION

The realities of US relations with its neighbors to the south today offer a historic window of opportunity, but also provide significant national security challenges. Security Assistance Programs throughout the region involving joint training exercises, civic action initiatives, and military-to-military contacts are well worth the relative small costs involved to support them. With an ever decreasing slice of the budget pie, a priority ranking of these countries would establish where the best benefits lie for US national security.

As discussed, Latin America will acquire increasing relevance to US national security interests for the foreseeable future. If US foreign policy decision makers

comprehend the dynamic historical culture and geography of the region, perhaps policy will move from one of confrontation to cooperation for the betterment of the entire hemisphere. A grand chasm for sure, but one that could be bridged with knowledgeable understanding from all sides.

Low intensity conflict is not an abstract idea, but stark reality. As shown, it is alive and growing throughout Latin America, if not the US and Canada as well. The creation of ACOM, with the other CINCs and civilian agencies in support, would provide a most formidable team against low intensity conflicts throughout the region.

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