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Future Naval Strategy in the Western Hemisphere

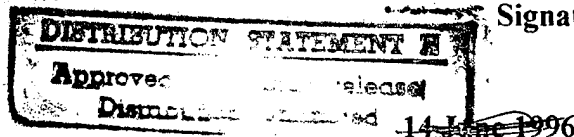
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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.



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19960501 254

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
2. Security Classification Authority:			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
6. Office Symbol: C		7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE 686 CUSHING ROAD NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207	
8. Title (Include Security Classification): Future Naval Strategy in the Western Hemisphere (U)			
9. Personal Authors: Lieutenant Commander Carlos Del Toro, USN			
10. Type of Report: FINAL		11. Date of Report: 12 February 1996	
12. Page Count: 20			
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: Naval Strategy, Western Hemisphere Group, Forward Presence, Latin America			
15. Abstract: The recently created Western Hemisphere Group, composed of 16 naval surface ships -- including two Aegis cruisers -- serves as the operational center of gravity for future naval strategy in the Western Hemisphere. It will significantly strengthen U.S. military forward presence and enhance the execution of U.S. national security strategy throughout the hemisphere.			
16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:	Unclassified X	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
19. Telephone: 841-6461		20. Office Symbol: C	

ABSTRACT

As we enter a new age of democracy, it is critical the United States reconsider its role and future strategy toward a rapidly changing Western Hemisphere. Admiral Mike Boorda, the Chief of Naval Operations, recently approved the creation of a new Western Hemisphere Group consisting of 16 naval surface ships--including two Aegis cruisers--that will serve as the operational center of gravity for future naval strategy in the Western Hemisphere. A dedicated naval cruiser-destroyer group is needed now more than ever to enhance U.S. forward presence and expand naval support to joint and multinational operations. It is the operational focus of a strategy of peacetime engagement and enlargement with emphasis on naval diplomacy and conflict resolution to enhance the regional stability that guarantees America's prosperity at home.

FUTURE NAVAL STRATEGY IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

By Lieutenant Commander Carlos Del Toro, U.S. Navy

The recently created Western Hemisphere Group, composed of 16 naval surface ships--including two Aegis cruisers--serves as the operational center of gravity for future naval strategy in the Western Hemisphere. It will significantly strengthen U.S. military forward presence and enhance the execution of U.S. national security strategy throughout the Western Hemisphere.

As we enter the "fourth historic wave of democracy,"¹ it is essential that the United States Navy reconsider its role and future strategy toward a rapidly changing Western Hemisphere. At the Summit of the Americas meeting in December 1994 President Clinton asserted how our shared aspirations and geography tie our future to that of Latin America, "We are bound together by geography, by history, by culture, but most important, now by shared values--a ferocious devotion to freedom, democracy, social justice, and determination to improve the lives of all our people."² How truly ferocious this devotion becomes is yet to be seen. Henry Kissinger, in his recent publication

¹ Michael T. Klare and Daniel C. Thomas, World Security: Challenges for a New Century (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994) pp. 43-47.

² General Barry R. McCaffrey, address, The United States Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, April 4, 1994.

Diplomacy, suggests this new age will also be one of rising nationalism with nations pursuing self interests throughout the world. Undoubtedly, it will be a world of nations --including those in the Western Hemisphere--no longer bounded by traditional patterns of cold-war diplomacy and dependency on the United States. The United States will increasingly be unable to police the hemisphere with the Monroe Doctrine as a shield to protect U.S. national security interests.

Today, U.S. *vital* and *important* interests in Latin America include maintaining a peaceful southern flank; the security and accessibility of the Panama canal; political stability in the Caribbean basin; economic interests such as access to oil, raw materials, trade, and investments; and finally the promotion of democracy and human rights.³ Threats to national security interests in the region are becoming far more complex and challenging than ever before in our nation's history. The U.S. no longer contends with the clear and present danger that existed during the Cold War. There are significantly fewer direct threats against the survival and security of the United States. However, *vital interests* that affect the vitality of our national entity, including the economic well being of our citizens and the security of our allies, are increasingly being challenged. Other *important interests* that affect our national well-being and the character of the world in which we live are also being threatened. U.S. military strategy must be carefully crafted to protect U.S. *vital* and *important* interests and sustain future theater strategic objectives in the region. A new and innovative naval strategy integrated into a larger joint regional strategic plan must rise to meet this new challenge.

³ Amos A. Jordan, William J. Taylor, Lawrence J. Korb, American National Security: Policy and Process (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993) pp. 443-469.

A Dedicated Naval Forward Presence

Recognizing this need for change, Admiral Mike Boorda, the Chief of Naval Operations, has recently approved the creation of a new Western Hemisphere Group. Launched as part of an extensive global reorganization of carrier battlegroups and cruiser-destroyer groups, the group will operate exclusively throughout the hemisphere. How the Western Hemisphere Group evolves will have significant implications for naval and joint strategy, operations, and doctrine throughout the Caribbean basin, and Central and South America.

A dedicated naval cruiser-destroyer group in the western hemisphere is needed now more than ever to enhance U.S. forward presence and expand naval support to joint and multinational operations. Military analysts have argued that the incentive for such a dedicated group of ships is based on financial constraints that are driven by budgetary politics and increasing maritime commitments.⁴ They contend its mission is strictly to provide tailored forces for counter-drug and refugee operations thereby releasing other forces for deployments elsewhere. Perhaps they are correct in their assessment. Indeed, the creation of this group will result in overall cost savings and reduction in time spent away from homeport for all sailors. These are very important considerations as we reduce our forces while increasing our commitments worldwide. The Western Hemisphere Group, however, is much more than a tactical measure to reduce costs and improve quality of life for sailors. The Western Hemisphere Group is the operational center of gravity for a future naval operational strategy that, if properly executed, can

⁴ Beth Jannery, "Boorda directs new plan: Navy's Atlantic Fleet Restructured, Ships sent to Western Hemisphere," Inside the Navy, Vol. 8, No. 10, March 13, 1995, p. 1, 16.

enhance regional security, support economic and social goals, and promote democratic institutions in a rapidly changing Western Hemisphere. It is a strategy of peacetime engagement and enlargement with emphasis on naval diplomacy and conflict resolution to enhance the regional stability that guarantees America's prosperity at home.

Enhancing Regional Security

Historically, the United States has exercised naval presence in protecting U.S. vital and important interests throughout the hemisphere. U.S. Navy squadrons and task forces have deployed in the region since 1776, when the first amphibious landing was conducted in the Bahamas. Since then, over thirty squadrons and task forces have formed to accomplish a wide variety of missions.⁵ Eighteenth and nineteenth-century squadrons deployed primarily in protection and promotion of commercial interests. During the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first four of the twentieth century, naval squadrons formed to influence and stabilize regional conflict. In the post World War II period, both permanent and annual deployments have served to counter communist expansionism throughout the hemisphere.⁶ However, from W.W.II to the early 1980's the United States placed little emphasis on defense and security relations in the western hemisphere.⁷ Threats to U.S. national security were viewed as minimal. Disturbances could be dealt with by applying quick and decisive force.

⁵ These numbers do not include the 35 UNITAS deployments since 1960.

⁶ Patrick H. Roth, "U.S. Navy Squadrons and Task Forces Organized for Service in Latin America," (manuscript, 1995) covers events throughout the entire period in further detail.

⁷ Ambassador Robert M. Sayre, "Coming to Terms in the Western Hemisphere: Democracy, Defense, and Economic Development," Retired Officer's Association National Security Report, November 1995: p. 29.

Today, regional security issues include challenges to the internal stability of host nations, such as the increasing threat of narcoterrorism; participation in multinational peacekeeping efforts, the acquisition of new weapons technology and training; as well as border and territorial disputes between nations. Fragile democratic institutions, and traditionally autocratic military leaders weaken the delicate balance that is presently sustaining the growth of democracy and stability throughout the region. The causes creating these problems are not as easily discernible as in the past; neither are the solutions! What is clear is as Henry Kissinger suggests: "For the first time, the U.S. can neither withdraw from the world nor dominate it."⁸ Here lies the dilemma! As Western Hemisphere nations grow economically stronger and politically more independent from the U.S., it becomes inherently more difficult yet important to remain engaged in all matters of diplomacy including naval diplomacy.

A dedicated U.S. naval cruiser-destroyer group will significantly contribute to the joint resolution of many of these issues. First, it allows for credible overseas military presence as one vital element of today's joint regional security strategy. This presence will become significantly more important as the United States continues to reduce security assistance funding to Latin America and the U.S. Southern Command transitions military staffs and forces out of Panama. A Western Hemisphere Group, deployed "Forward ... From the Sea," has the advantage of being able to remain on station or transit between stations for long periods of time without need for external logistics nor the permission of host nations. These advantages are significant in a hemisphere where

⁸ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster Publ., 1994) p. 19.

nations frequently find unpalatable the presence of U.S. forces within their sovereign territory. This is the strength of a naval forward presence. Unlike other forms of U.S. military presence, the naval component of forward presence generally is not as threatening to the sovereignty of host nations, but can be employed quickly and effectively in times of crisis. This is not to suggest that naval presence is the panacea of all problems. Indeed, naval presence is often ineffective against land-based threats. Naval presence is but one very important component available to the joint commander. It must be fully integrated into the broader strategic plan.

The Western Hemisphere Group will serve as a viable force with which to target the increasing narcoterrorism that feeds insurgencies, that threaten the political, economic, and military security of all nations in the hemisphere. A dedicated naval group clearly strengthens U.S. resolve and capability to pursue a drug war that is becoming increasingly more sophisticated and violent. Ultimately, the *War on Drugs* must be waged with a combined interagency strategy that primarily emphasizes reducing the demand for drugs while increasing interdiction efforts. A dedicated U.S. naval group, employed as part of a larger hemispheric multinational effort, however, will enhance SOUTHCOM's regional counterdrug programs.

Second, Latin American navies are increasingly indicating a willingness to participate in peacekeeping missions within the hemisphere and abroad. As of June 1995, twenty American countries were supporting fifteen of sixteen United Nations peacekeeping operations throughout the world.⁹ Argentina's legacy of cooperation with

⁹ Naval Command College, conference report, Status of the Americas, Naval War College, Newport, R.I., January 1996.

the United States during the Gulf War has reestablished respect for the Argentine Navy and has piqued the interest of other South American navies, such as those of Brazil and Chile, toward participating in future peacekeeping operations. A dedicated naval squadron conducting hemispheric operations, on a scale greater than what already exists as part of the annual UNITAS international exercise, should greatly enhance regional security.

Third, developing regional security strategy based on cooperative security will result in a greater demand for U.S. technology and training. Since the late seventies, many Latin American nations have relied on European sources for platform and weapons procurement. With an increasing threat of insurgencies and narcoterrorism, many of these nations are now turning to U.S. technology to fight this changing threat. A dedicated naval squadron will especially help to ease many C3 interoperability issues as navies transition and modernize their equipment.

Lastly, an expanding level of cooperation between south american navies will hopefully, ease some of the border tensions that remain within the hemisphere, such as those that exist between Argentina and Chile. By increasing the number of multilateral exercises, the Western Hemisphere Group will help foster an environment of mutual cooperation on security issues across the hemisphere.

Supporting Economic and Social Progress

How does a navy support economic and social progress? It can and should be argued that the role of the United States Navy is to win wars at sea and in the littoral. But, it is also quite clear that most wars are waged to achieve economic and social goals. Therefore, these two ideas are mutually supportive. In a world and a hemisphere where the U.S. is no longer threatened to the degree it was during the Cold War, perhaps there is no greater virtue than to conduct military operations that sustain for all nations economic and social goals which are consistent with our own.

Economic and social progress throughout the hemisphere can be achieved through multinational cooperation on issues regarding regional security, economic development and democracy. These three issues are related. The success of democracy will depend on sustaining an environment of economic development throughout the hemisphere. This economic development is subsequently weakened by threats to regional security, such as narcoterrorism, which undermine the economies of host nations. A dedicated naval group will serve as one important component of a joint strategy to engage host nation navies and other armed services that are now being severely reduced in personnel and force structure. It is important to remember that historically, the military, when severely threatened has been the disruptive element of democracy in many of these nations. The military-to-military contacts and the interaction between navies that the Western Hemisphere Group promotes can only help to strengthen the professionalism and confidence of host nation navies during these very

difficult times. As Rear Admiral James F. Amerault, Commander of the Western Hemisphere Group, has implied, "Healthy navies can be key contributors in support of U.S. objectives such as commercial and economic order; narcotics interdiction; migrant interdiction, theater and global coalition building; and U.S. naval force readiness."¹⁰ The Western Hemisphere Group can through forward presence and the employment of force, when needed, promote economic and social progress throughout the Western Hemisphere by reducing threats to regional security.

Promoting Democratic Institutions

Democracy throughout Latin America is relatively tenuous in many of these rapidly growing countries. It is today, fragile and threatened by complicated social and economic issues that do not lend themselves easily to quick and painless resolution. Since gaining independence, many Latin American nations have been ruled by military governments. Belize, Costa Rica, Guyana, and Mexico are the only countries that have not been ruled by military juntas since 1945. There exists a tradition of governing institutions that are not democratic by nature.

In a relatively fresh environment of cooperation caused by the dramatic growth in democracy, the United States, again, encounters a future of possibilities where U.S. diplomatic and military efforts may likely be able to shape the conduct of future domestic and foreign policy across the hemisphere. One of the most significant achievements has been bilateral regional security discussions led by U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry. During the first ever Defense Ministerial Meeting of the Americas held in

¹⁰RADM James F. Amerault, Western Hemisphere Group briefing materials, Washington DC, 1995.

Williamsburg, Virginia in July 1995, Secretary Perry noted that: "the ministers had reached a consensus that that the armed services should be subordinate to democratically constituted authority, act within the bounds of national constitutions, and respect human rights through training and through practice."¹¹ They further concluded that: "democracy is the basis for ensuring mutual security."¹² Here-in lies probably the most significant role and mission for U.S. armed forces, including naval forces assigned to the Western Hemisphere.

The Western Hemisphere Group has a meaningful role in strengthening democratic institutions across the hemisphere through carefully planned interaction with foreign navies and political leaders of host nations. This interaction is achieved by increasing military-to-military contacts and carefully planning port visits in pursuit of U.S. political-military objectives. Latin American armed services are led by officers with far less exposure to the operational art that guides the behavior of U.S. armed forces. The principle of civilian authority over military affairs is a concept that is still new and threatening to many central and south american military leaders. A long term strategy of naval diplomacy, engaging military and civilian leaders, will result in a future operational environment that promotes civilian authority regarding security issues and emphasizes negotiation and resolution of differences over escalation of conflicts.

¹¹ Sayre, p. 29.

¹² Ibid.

Implications for the Joint Operational Commander

Future naval strategy in the Western Hemisphere must be shaped to fulfill theater strategic regional objectives of the joint operational commander. It must enhance joint strategy and doctrine by bringing to bear the strengths and advantages of naval forces to complement those of other services. The Western Hemisphere Group greatly enhances the strategic capability, credibility, and resolve of both U.S. Atlantic Command and U.S. Southern Command at a critical time when other U.S. forces are being withdrawn from the region.

The Western Hemisphere Group will serve primarily as the naval forces component (CTF 125) to COMSECONDFLT (JTF120) and will train for operations in support of theater objectives. Recent changes to the Unified Command Plan have shifted primary responsibility for the Caribbean from U.S. Atlantic Command to U.S. Southern Command. These changes will allow SOUTHCOM to guide overall strategy and operations throughout all the Caribbean, and Central and South America. The Western Hemisphere Group, trained to mission, will execute joint operations in support of national defense; multinational peacekeeping; cooperative management of air, land, and sea frontiers; regional counterdrug operations; counterterrorism operations; protection of national ecosystems; humanitarian operations and disaster relief; and national development.¹³ Tailored training on such missions will greatly enhance the ability of naval forces to immediately respond to crisis relevant to joint operational commanders. Bilateral exercises, and close liaison between the U.S. and host nation navies will

¹³ RADM James F. Amerault, Western Hemisphere Group briefing materials, Washington DC, 1995.

improve our ability to conduct coalition warfare in times of crisis. It will further enhance the capability of U.S. naval forces to operate in the littoral throughout a region that provides a premier training environment.

The Western Hemisphere Group is further designated as a center of excellence for joint littoral warfare and doctrine development.¹⁴ The expertise of numerous Latin American nations in warfare specialties such as mine warfare, shallow water anti-submarine warfare and coastal defense coupled with the ideal geography to conduct littoral warfare training provides all U.S. forces a premier training opportunity. Joint training exercises employing integrated naval support from tailored naval forces will greatly enhance the execution of joint regional strategy.

A New Direction

The Western Hemisphere Group serves to strengthen U.S. military forward presence and enhance U.S. national security during a period of great change in the Western Hemisphere. It is a bold new direction that demands an entirely new relationship with allies throughout the hemisphere. It is indeed a strategy based on engagement and enlargement. The following four operational concepts regarding the

¹⁴ Ibid.

employment of the Western Hemisphere Group should be considered throughout its development:

- *Establish regional naval strategy* for the sound application of dedicated naval forces in support of joint theater strategic objectives. Operational leadership of commanders and staff must broadly address all issues of national security. Group operations should not be constrained by any one specific mission. The Western Hemisphere Group should not evolve into a counterdrug squadron with limited planning toward other missions.
- *Emphasize broad interaction amongst staffs* to foster unity of effort amongst the many commands and agencies that play a vital role and share resources throughout the region. Senior operational commanders, such as those on cruisers, should be collocated with staff to facilitate integrated planning. A group strategy and plans division should be established to develop short and long term operational planning. It should further serve to interact with the many joint, military service, and civilian staffs throughout the region and in Washington DC.
- *Increase participation in joint and multinational exercises*, such as UNITAS to improve interoperability amongst the services and other nations. An environment of joint and multinational training will foster the possibility of developing future coalitions in times of crisis with well-trained host nation forces. Joint training with foreign navies will further enhance the development of U.S. littoral warfare operations and doctrine.

- *Expand naval diplomatic efforts throughout the hemisphere* by effectively planning port visits and naval transits to maximize interaction between U.S. and host nation forces. U.S. Flag visibility and interaction with senior military and civilian leaders should also be encouraged to develop long term relationships that could likely benefit regional security.

A Future of Possibilities

The Western Hemisphere is a strategically important region with many vital and important interests to the United States. For the first time in history, all but one nation, Cuba, is governed by democratically elected officials. Though rapidly embracing democracy, its future is endangered by many non-traditional threats such as, “drug production and trafficking, depressed economies, fragile democratic institutions, ongoing insurgencies, and recalcitrant military institutions.”¹⁵ It is a future in which the United States must remain engaged if it is to protect its own national security interests.

A new naval strategy in the Western Hemisphere must be widely defined to enhance regional security, support economic and social progress, and promote democratic institutions throughout the hemisphere as required by both U.S. National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy. Only if broadly defined to address all hemispheric issues will future naval strategy contribute significantly to protecting our national security interests.

¹⁵ Col. Antonio J. Ramos, Col. Ronald C. Oates, and LCOL. Timothy L. McMahon, “A Strategy for the Future,” *Military Review*, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, November 1992, p. 33.

The Western Hemisphere Group will significantly strengthen U.S. national security throughout the hemisphere. It promotes a regional policy of engagement and enlargement with naval forward presence as its instrument of power. It strengthens regional security with credible force with which to pursue drug-interdiction operations and reduce the increasing threat of narcoterrorism and insurgencies against allies. A dedicated cruiser-destroyer group will lead to improved relations with navies and nations throughout the hemisphere. These efforts will likely result in greater cooperation in worldwide peacekeeping operations. Increased cooperation will further lead to greater demand for U.S. technology and foster better relations amongst host nations. By promoting an environment of multinational cooperation through active peacetime engagement, the Western Hemisphere Group can sustain for all nations economic and social goals that are consistent with our own, while strengthening democratic institutions throughout the hemisphere.

The possibilities are endless! The Western Hemisphere Group strengthens the United States Navy and will protect U.S national security interests throughout the hemisphere well into the twenty-first century.

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