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U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY FOR SOUTH AMERICA

CORE COURSE FOUR ESSAY

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U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY FOR SOUTH AMERICA

The current national security strategy of “Enlargement and Engagement” states that the “unprecedented triumph of democracy and market economies throughout the {Western Hemisphere} offers an unparalleled opportunity to secure the benefits of peace and stability and to promote economic growth and trade.”¹ The overarching objective is identified as being “to preserve and defend civilian-elected governments and strengthen democratic practices respectful of human rights”² This is to be accomplished in large part by working with Latin American defense establishments (the unstated but traditional threat to democracy in the region) to strengthen and deepen their commitment to democracy, human rights and civilian control in defense matters. Promoting economic growth and trade is furthered through the commitment of the 34 democratic nations in the region to establishing free trade by the year 2005. Aside from the implied threats of reversals in democratic government or free market policies, drug trafficking is the only issue identified as a “serious” threat to democracy and security.

The above description is, admittedly, just a snapshot of the Administration’s strategy and policy, but a good starting point nonetheless. With this picture in mind, we take a closer look at the region, offer the writers’ views of U.S. national interests in South America, evaluate the current strategy in light of the interests we define, and provide recommendations for future actions.

CONTEXT:

Since the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine, Americans in general and certainly U.S. policy makers have thought of the Western Hemisphere as ‘our’ hemisphere, our rightful sphere

¹ A National Security Strategy of Enlargement and Engagement, The White House, Feb. 1996, pg. 41

² Ibid., pg. 42

of influence. The overriding U.S. interest in the region has been to prevent the emergence of any serious challenge to U.S. power or influence. Translated into policy, this meant supporting governments that followed the U.S. lead, or at least refrained from challenging it, and ensuring that American firms and products were not excluded or unduly disadvantaged. In the post-Cold War era, an emphasis on democratic, versus merely 'friendly', governments has been the most prominent adjustment. We also see a greater emphasis on issues high on the U.S. domestic agenda, such as narcotics trafficking, international crime and protection of the environment. However, the underlying assumption, that the U.S. does and should lead the region, remains unchallenged in this country. Most South Americans do not share this view.

South America is not just a region, it is an entire continent comprising 13 sovereign nations, one of which (Brazil) is as large as the United States. Moscow is physically closer to Washington than is Buenos Aires, Argentina. Colonized predominantly by Spain and Portugal, and later economically dominated by Great Britain, South American nations have deeply resented and staunchly resisted outside, i.e., foreign control since they became independent in the mid-1800s. Until World War I, the United States had minimal influence in South America and the heyday of U.S. influence, from 1945 to the mid-1960's, reflected a shared fear of communism as much as a success for U.S. leadership. Contrary to our view, states in the Southern Cone take pride in an autonomous role in international politics, (as Argentina did when it shattered the U.S. embargo by selling wheat to the Soviet Union in 1979) and bristle at the suggestion that they are 'clients' of the U.S. They believe that the U.S. only gets involved in Latin America when it wants something, and neither seek nor desire U.S. leadership. States in the region prefer 'Latin' solutions to 'Latin' problems, and long ago developed their own brand of balance of power.

politics centering around Brazil and Argentina. This explains, in part, why the two nations resisted U.S. pressure to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) for 25 years. In the aftermath of the Cold War, South America is returning to its tradition of pursuing its own objectives in the world. Nations throughout the region have extensive ties with Europe and Japan, their focus is not solely on the north.

South America today is in the midst of a love affair with democracy and free market economics brought on by the abject failure of military dictatorships/authoritarian governments and the statist economic policies they followed. The first steps towards regional integration were taken with the establishment of MERCOSUR, which creates a preferential trade area among Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay. It is not certain that this shift in policies will endure, but historical and current trends give us some clues.

In South American societies, wealth has traditionally rested in the hands of a small elite, with the vast majority living in poverty. The primary function of the 'state' was to develop and safeguard the nation's wealth, (control the economy) thereby ensuring the state's stability and survivability. The shift to democracy and to neo-liberal economic policies represents a radical change from the past in that, if successful, the change will re-distribute power and wealth from a tiny elite to a much larger middle class.

Thus far, the signs are mixed. Political scandals in Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador that once might have prompted military coups have been settled via democratic institutions, suggesting that the rule of law is working, at least in some instances. On the other hand corruption is rampant, growing, and could erode support for democracy. On the economic front, Venezuela is the only nation thus far to have abandoned free market policies, and that

policy was reversed after two disastrous years. But the short-term hardships that accompany reform -- higher prices, unemployment and a reduced standard of living -- could still lead to social unrest. In sum, democracy and neo-liberal economic policies are here to stay only if they succeed in improving the lot of the majority without completely eliminating the privileges of the elite.

U.S. INTERESTS IN SOUTH AMERICA

We believe that America's greatest interest in the region is to prevent the emergence of a hostile, rival power. We believe economic prosperity is the key to achieving this interest. Strengthening democracy is important but not our first priority. Economic growth is the primary interest because it is the foundation on which progress will be made towards other objectives. Increasing economic opportunity for the population of South America will allow them to move away from government corruption, and could help reduce the underlying causes of insurgencies, terrorism, and dependency on the illegal drug trade. All South American countries have elected, if fragile, governments, we believe a focus on improvements in the rule of law would be best way to root out corruption and strengthen democracy.

THREATS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

We see no immediate threats to U.S. national interests, although it will be critical to ensure that recent progress made by Argentina and Brazil on non-proliferation issues is not reversed. Beyond this, the major challenges are poverty/income disparity, the clash between democracy and austerity programs; civil-military relations, and drugs.

Persistent poverty is a long-standing challenge in South America, but the combination of democratic governments and new economic policies have raised expectations. Economic prosperity is critical both to sustain political support for reform, for continued democracy, and to

build a modern base of consumers and workers for future growth. The disparity between rich and poor is wide and twice the rate of the rest of the world. We support Chilean President Frei's view that education is the key to closing this gap, and we see an opportunity for the U.S. to increase our influence and serve our interests by being more involved in supporting education in South America. Illiteracy rates are high because university-level education for the rich has been emphasized over basic education for masses. We would advocate shifting funds from USIA Fulbright-type programs to support basic education.

A related challenge will be the ability of democratic governments to stick with stabilization or austerity programs that are bound to be unpopular. As we saw most recently in the case of Ecuador, elected leaders are likely to be thrown out if they in fact carry out IMF/World Bank mandated programs and their replacements will have little incentive to comply. We have no specific remedy for this challenge, but it is one the U.S. must be aware of and sensitive to. There may come a time when we will have to choose between democracy and economic progress.

Civilian control of the military is yet another challenge which is also directly related to the success of democratic governments. Current military-to-military programs are useful, but there should be similar programs to teach civilian leaders how to operate in a democratic environment.

Contrary to the popular view that drug kingpins are 'invading' the U.S. with illegal narcotics, the true situation seems to be that commodity suppliers are responding to a genuine demand. The illegal drug trade provides a significant source of capital for development and a decent livelihood for peasant farmers. Farmers can depend on the market prices for coca paste as compared to those for consumer fruit and vegetable crops which fluctuate widely. Cocaine

suppliers are responding to a demand which has not diminished. Current U S drug policy is ineffective in addressing the core issues and should be completely re-evaluated.

The greatest opportunity we see to promote of U S interests is the full support of Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the expansion of NAFTA to include Chile. The Clinton Administration made a commitment to, and gave high visibility to free trade at the 1994 Summit of the Americas in Miami, but has since virtually ignored the region. Every proposal advanced by the U S at the Summit of the Americas Trade Ministerial in 1996 was voted down, showing that the U S had lost leverage and was no longer able to define the agenda or set the pace and direction of the hemispheric trade expansion process. It is also clear that South American countries increasingly support the Brazilian position of establishing a South American Free Trade Area (SAFTA) centered on MERCOSUR before engaging as a bloc in any trade negotiations with the U S and NAFTA. Our inaction after the 1994 Summit reinforced suspicions in the region about U S motives. We would gain influence, leverage, and advance our own economic interests by moving ahead on free trade.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS

- Reevaluate the current U S drug policy for the area to find more successful ways of assisting the Latin American countries to fight drug-trafficking, drug-related terrorism, and corruption.

- Put greater emphasis on judicial reform and the rule of law, which will allow us to be successful in pressing for the protection of intellectual property rights.

- Move quickly to become a partner/leader in the hemispheric free trade zone FTAA / NAFTA.

-Assist Latin America in the alleviation of poverty through an investment in education

CONCLUSIONS:

In an era of free trade and expanding regional integration, economic sanctions will become increasingly less of an option for U S policy makers. Public diplomacy and the creative use of information technologies, on the other hand, are likely to become increasingly important. For example, helping governments in the region to develop and disseminate appropriate public service announcements about how democratic systems really work or why the rule of law is important, may be our best avenue for helping South American countries tackle the dilemma of adhering to tough economic reforms while remaining responsive to the concerns of their publics. If we truly want democracies to succeed, providing training to civilian leaders on how to manage government institutions will be as important, if not more so, as providing training to military officials. Education should be added to the existing tools of statecraft and aggressively pursued.

Ironically, as long as the U S remains the world's only superpower, it may be easier now than during the Cold War to use military power to achieve our objectives. We believe a strategy that relies on military power would be detrimental to our long-term interests, however, because it would only confirm long-standing suspicions that the U S is a 'threat', rather than a partner to its neighbors in the hemisphere. The value of military-to-military contacts and training such as the IMET-E program, are likely to remain invaluable but more military-to-civilian contacts should be added.

The key to future success in the area is incremental changes in the right direction. If governments are stabilized to allow more foreign investment and higher domestic savings then the growth in

free trade will allow for the education of the work force and start the alleviation of poverty In the long run corruption will be pushed aside by strong stable private business and solid central governments

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