



Letter to the Defense Ministers of the Americas

From

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Excellencies, Ministers of Defense of the Americas,

Permit me, first, to introduce myself. I am a citizen of the Americas, having been born in Guyana in South America, and for the past few decades a citizen and resident of the United States of America, in North America. My business is that of the academy, and I have the honor to serve as Professor of Political Science and Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs of York College of The City University of New York, which is the largest urban public university in the United States, serving over 260,000 undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students from over 100 countries, including from every nation in the Americas.

I am a fairly close observer of the security dynamics of our hemisphere, especially the Caribbean Basin, and have had the opportunity to contribute to the scholarship on security matters by publishing seven books, 44 scholarly journal articles, and 40 book chapters and encyclopedia entries, among other writings. Mine also has been the pleasure to consult with several security-related entities in the Americas, to speak at military academies in the Americas and Europe, and to testify before the Congress of the United States of America on security challenges and opportunities. It is against this backdrop that I take the liberty to share some observations. These thoughts are not so much about the thematic issues or Agenda items you might consider at the forthcoming 9th Defense Ministerial—the “What” matters. They are more about how you might frame the analysis to help reveal thematic aspects. Thus, they are more about “How” matters, mindful of the utility of a holistic approach to the task at hand.

There is good reason to believe that, much like previous Defense Ministerials, the 9th Ministerial will assess the Hemisphere’s security landscape as a basis for deciding policies and programs to meet the threats and apprehensions facing us. In other words, the 9th Defense Ministerial will provide an opportunity for you to undertake an hemispheric security reality check.

In thinking of reality checks I am reminded of a prescient observation attributed to 1930s European Statesman Anthony Eden: “There’s nothing more dangerous than a foreign policy based on unreality.” Eden was positing the importance of conducting situational assessments before designing or redesigning foreign policy. Of course, the value of this advice extends beyond the foreign policy arena, to health, or education, or defense or security policy. Moreover, it includes program delivery that flows from policy design or redesign. Thus, paraphrasing Eden, one might suggest that “There’s nothing more dangerous than a defense or security policy based on unreality.”

As you carry out your reality checking in Bolivia, it would be prudent to keep three Cs in mind: the value of **Context**, the need to situate **Content**, and the importance of sharpening **Countermeasures**. Allow me to comment briefly on each.

Value Context

As is the case with other parts of the world, our hemisphere does not operate in an existential vacuum; there are several contemporary (and historical) contextual factors at work, influencing both security-related and non-security-related matters. Time constraints oblige me to note just a few contemporary manifestations.

Excellencies,

The world-wide transportation, economic, and other domino effects of the volcanic eruptions in Iceland this past April (and which continue less powerfully) constitute a powerful reminder of **globalization** as a contextual reality. But more than this, they highlight the **vulnerability interdependence** of peoples and places near and far and to developments natural and man-made. They remind us of the local-global nexus that inheres in or is derivable from many developments or phenomena, and of the stark reality that one does not need to be in close geographic proximity to a human or natural development to be negatively impacted by it.

In relation to security matters, distinguished Political Scientist Robert Keohane, perhaps best known for *Power and Interdependence* and *Neorealism and its Critics*, among other books, reminded us in the Spring 2002 edition of *Dialog-IO* that: “Power comes not simply out of the barrel of a gun, but from asymmetries in vulnerability interdependence—some of which, it turns out, favor certain non-state actors more than most observers anticipated. The networks of interdependence along which power can travel are multiple, and they do not cancel one another out. Even a state that is overwhelmingly powerful on many dimensions can be highly vulnerable on others.” The reality is that military or law enforcement actions in the far reaches of the earth—whether by state or private armies, or by criminal networks—can impact us here in the Americas.

An additional contextual reality, connected with globalization and accentuated by vulnerability interdependence, is that many of the core security threats in the Hemisphere are transnational, constituting what former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan called “problems without passports.” In his preface to the 2000 *World Drug Report* he posited: “Globalization offers the human race unprecedented opportunities. Unfortunately, it also enables many anti-social activities to become ‘problems without passports’.” As such, these threats are not amenable to countermeasures just by single nations; they necessitate collaborative engagement bilaterally and multilaterally.

But they also are multidimensional, with manifestations and connections at the individual, national, regional, hemispheric, and global levels. Indeed, the October 2003 Organization of American States (OAS) Declaration on Security in the Americas states: “The security threats, concerns, and other challenges in the hemispheric context are of diverse nature and multidimensional scope, and the traditional concept and approach must be expanded to encompass new and nontraditional threats, which include political, economic, social, health, and environmental aspects.” Quite important, that Declaration was reinforced by the 2009 Declaration of Port-of-Spain, coming out of the Fifth Summit of the Americas, held in Trinidad and Tobago in April 2009.

The said Declaration on Security in the Americas and Declaration of Port-of-Spain remind us of another important contextual factor: the **framework of democracy**. As there is a tendency to wrap the democracy discourse around the fulcrum of elections,

it is important to observe that democracy is not just about elections. As former United States President Jimmy Carter told his audience at the January 2005 OAS Lectures of the Americas in Washington, DC: “Democracy is much more than elections. It is [about] accountable governments; it is [about] the end of impunity for the powerful. It is [about] giving judiciaries independence from political pressures so they can dispense justice with impartiality. It is [about] protecting the rights of minorities, including those who did not vote for the majority party. It is [about] protecting the vulnerable.”

President Barack Obama reinforced this view in his April 2009 visit to Strasbourg, France, where he declared: “Democracy, a well-functioning society that promotes liberty and equality and fraternity, a well-functioning society does not just depend on going to the ballot box. It also means that you’re not going to be shaken down by police because the police aren’t getting properly paid. It also means that if you want to start a business, you don’t have to pay a bribe.”

As such, although the wheels of justice tend to turn slowly in most parts of the Americas, it is important that the holders of state power do not violate constitutions or undermine the rule of law in combating threats and pursuing the perpetrators of criminality. As a matter of fact, the 2008 Declaration of Banff, from the 8th Defense Ministerial, speaks about “The importance of the support provided by the armed forces and security forces to civil authorities during national and international major events within the framework of national constitutions and legislation.”

Excellencies,

Needless to say, globalization, vulnerability interdependence, and democracy are not the only contextual factors to bear in mind. However, they are among the most vital. Moreover, time constraints oblige me to move on to the matter of Content.

Situate Content

There are two key aspects to the Content realities: definitional consensus and situational analysis. In relation to the first, noted security scholar Barry Buzan noted correctly in his book *People, States, and Fear* that : “It is almost no longer controversial to say that traditional conceptions of security were (and in many minds still are) too narrowly founded. That advance does not, however, mean that consensus exists on what a more broadly constructed conception should look like.”

Luckily for us in the Americas, much has changed in our hemisphere since Buzan published his book in 1991. The 2003 Declaration on Security in the Americas is pellucid: “Our new concept of security in the Hemisphere is multidimensional in scope, includes traditional and new threats, concerns, and other challenges to the security of the states of the Hemisphere, incorporates the priorities of each state, contributes to the consolidation of peace, integral development, and social justice, and is based on democratic values, respect for and promotion and defense of human rights, solidarity, cooperation, and respect for national sovereignty.”

Thus, the discourse about hemispheric security refers to both traditional defense matters and non-traditional security matters. The Declaration on Security in the Americas captures the wide ambit involved:

Traditional threats to security and the mechanisms for addressing them remain important and may be different in nature from the new threats, concerns, and other challenges to security and from cooperation mechanisms for addressing them.

k. The new threats, concerns, and other challenges are cross-cutting problems that require multifaceted responses by different national organizations and in some cases partnerships between governments, the private sector, and civil society all acting appropriately in accordance with democratic norms and principles, and constitutional provisions of each state. Many of the new threats, concerns, and other challenges to hemispheric security are transnational in nature and may require appropriate hemispheric cooperation.

l. The states of the Hemisphere recognize different perspectives regarding security threats and priorities. The security architecture in our Hemisphere should be flexible and provide for the particular circumstances of each sub-region and each state.

m. The security of states of the Hemisphere is affected, in different ways, by traditional threats and the following new threats, concerns, and other challenges of a diverse nature:

- terrorism, transnational organized crime, the global drug problem, corruption, asset laundering, illicit trafficking in weapons, and the connections among them;
- extreme poverty and social exclusion of broad sectors of the population, which also affect stability and democracy. Extreme poverty erodes social cohesion and undermines the security of states;
- natural and man-made disasters, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, other health risks, and environmental degradation;
- trafficking in persons;
- attacks to cyber security;
- the potential for damage to arise in the event of an accident or incident during the maritime transport of potentially hazardous materials, including petroleum and radioactive materials and toxic waste;

, such as drugs, terrorism, and environmental hazards.

Yet, while definitional consensus is necessary, it is not sufficient. Needed also is situational analysis. This is critical because of the hemispheric landscape, which is characterized by asymmetric power relations, sub-regional and regional differences and nuances, and differences in how states across the hemisphere are impacted by the Contextual factors discussed earlier. Thus, while there are broad, hemisphere-wide threats and apprehensions the Content realities of Southern Cone countries are different than those of the Caribbean, those facing North America are not necessarily the same as those of the Andes, etc. Important, too, the situational analysis will help with determination of appropriate countermeasures.

As regards the Caribbean, there are both traditional and non-traditional issues. In the traditional area, the most serious territorial disputes involve Guyana and Venezuela, Guatemala and Belize, Suriname and Guyana, and France (French Guiana) and Suriname. As this list indicates, a few countries are involved in several disputes. For example, Guyana is facing a claim by Venezuela for the western five-eighths of its 214,970 km² territory and one by Suriname for 15,000 km² to the east. Drugs, crime, arms trafficking, and environmental hazards are the chief non-traditional security concerns. There is no uniformity in the importance statesmen and scholars ascribe to these concerns, but more countries place a higher premium on the non-traditional area than on the traditional one; the Special Caricom Security Summit of April 2008 made this clear. Especially in this respect, public security issues are prominent, suggesting the wisdom of the decade-old observation by Harvard's Jorge Domínguez: "The most common sources of insecurity in the Caribbean affect the quotidian experiences of ordinary people."

As I showed in a book called *Drugs and Security in the Caribbean: Sovereignty Under Siege*, what generally is called "the drug problem" in the Caribbean really is a multidimensional phenomenon with four problem areas: drug production, consumption and abuse, trafficking, and money laundering. However, the drug phenomenon does not constitute a security matter simply because of these four problem areas, but because:

- These operations have multiple consequences and implications, such as marked increases in crime, systemic and institutionalized corruption, and arms trafficking;
- The operations and their consequences have increased in scope and gravity over the last few decades;
- They have had dramatic impact on agents and agencies of national security and good governance, in military, political, and economic ways; and
- The sovereignty of many countries is subject to infringement, by both state and non-state actors, because of drugs.

Excellencies,

Clearly, your deliberations must go beyond Context and Content realities; the citizens of the Americas deserve an amelioration of their security circumstances. Hence, Countermeasures must be a consideration at your 9th Ministerial.

Sharpen Countermeasures

As you focus on Countermeasures, you will be well served by **focusing on outcomes** and not just inputs and through-puts. You might also want to **assess the relative gains** (and losses) since the last Ministerial, and take these into consideration in articulating new

policies and mandates. Considering what was said above about Context and Content, our hemisphere's security environment requires multidimensional and multi-agency security engagement.

This engagement may be viewed in terms of zones. Moreover, the conceptual approach to zone engagement that I articulate for the Caribbean Basin in the book *Caribbean Security in the Age of Terror* has utility in thinking of the Americas writ large. The conceptual mapping involved *multilateral security engagement (MSE) zones*. Such zones exist at the sub-regional, regional, hemispheric, and international systemic levels. Although the Zones are relatively discrete spaces, they are not exclusive spaces; they overlap. Moreover, each MSE zone has several state and non-state entities. Working within the MSE zones entails dealing with many challenges, among them challenges related to establishing priorities, institutionalizing agreements, cooperating with other actors, and sharing intelligence. Of course, these challenges are not the only possible ones related to engagement in the zones. Further, they exist not only in relation to multilateral collaboration; most of them also exist in bilateral relationships. Only a few of these challenges can be discussed here.

Establishing priorities is necessary for several reasons. First, the multidimensionality of the security challenges means that the response must also be multidimensional. Yet—and this is the second reason—both states and organizations face budgetary, manpower, intelligence, and other limitations. Thus, national, regional, and other decision makers have the unenviable task of setting priorities. This should be done in some rational way, guided by some policy framework or strategy, rather than in an ad hoc manner.

A key test of the commitment of many states to meaningfully confront the security challenges facing them is their willingness to **institutionalize the multilateral arrangements** by incorporating them adequately into national policy. In practical terms this can be judged, among other things, by the following criteria:

1. Whether they sign, and later ratify, the multilateral engagement instrument, whether treaty, convention, or memorandum of understanding.
2. Whether they procrastinate on such action or act with deliberate speed.
3. Whether they adopt enabling, supporting, or collateral legislation or other domestic policy instruments.

Some countries have poor records when it comes to sustaining—and sometimes just launching—initiatives. This is often because of financial, technical, manpower or other constraints, but often it is due to simple neglect driven by a lack of political will or administrative lethargy, or both. Sometimes it is a manifestation of what in the same book *Caribbean Security in the Age of Terror* I call the *Solution by Platitudes Syndrome* found in many parts of the Americas. This behavior occurs when political elites seem or prefer to believe that the delivery of a grand speech or proclamation or the signing of a convention or treaty *ipso facto* solves the problem at hand, and that they can afford to pay scant attention to the implementation, institutionalization, and evaluation aspects needed. Political and bureaucratic elites therefore must recognize that meaningful multilateral engagement requires rising above platitudes and going beyond signing ceremonies. They are obliged to follow through, institutionalize, and implement or delegate the appropriate tasks to other officials whom they hold accountable.

The **cooperation challenge** lies partly in the fact that, whether viewed in bilateral or multilateral terms, the need for cooperation raises the prospect that conflicts may ensue, in relation to capabilities and sovereignty, among other things. Capability disputes between or among cooperating states do not arise merely because of the actual money, equipment, and other constraints on the part of partners. They often occur because inherent in the capability disparities of cooperating partners is the expectation that those with fewer limitations will give relatively more to the collective effort. This is likely to be especially so in a multilateral context with many actors, and where just a few of them have meaningful resource capacity.

Effective cooperation is not always achievable, and for a variety of reasons, including political leadership changes within countries, public opinion within the more resource-endowed states, and the fact that policy makers in the relatively better-off states are sometimes unsure that there will be commensurate national interest returns on their nations' investments in the collective project. Often, it is not that they are against collaboration; sometimes there is uncertainty or rethinking about the amount of investment to be made in the various response mixes—unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral—and the form that investment should take.

The cooperation challenge has an additional dimension, which pertains to coordination between and among agencies *within* countries. Problems spawned by bureaucratic politics give rise to jurisdictional and turf battles and coordination difficulties between army and coast guard, army intelligence and police intelligence, foreign affairs ministries and defense and security ministries, and such. Thus, the coordination within countries deserves the same emphasis as cooperation between and among countries; 'cooperation among' and 'coordination within' are but two dimensions of the same challenge.

Excellencies,

Allow me to end this letter with some words of wisdom from Carl von Clausewitz, one of the great strategic thinkers of the modern era: "The greatest and most decisive act of judgment which a statesman and commander perform is that of recognizing correctly the kind of war in which they are engaged; of not taking it for or wishing to make of it something which under the circumstances it cannot be. This is, therefore, the first and most comprehensive of all strategic questions."

My contention is simple: addressing this "first and most comprehensive of all strategic questions" requires the adoption of a holistic approach, where matters of Context, Content, and Countermeasures (among others) are examined. I am hopeful that your commitment to enhancing the security landscape of our Americas will result both in thoughtful deliberations in Santa Cruz as you consider "the war" in which we are engaged and in positive outcomes to meet the extant challenges after the 9th Ministerial.

Yours in honor,



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Citizen of the Americas