The Americas in the 21st Century
The Challenge of Governance and Security

Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld speaking to GEN Craddock, USA, Commander USSOUTHCOM, en route to Central American Ministers Conference on Security

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The challenge of governance and security for the Americas in the 21st century has become a timely topic for U.S. and regional government officials. We need to maintain an open dialogue about future directions and how we maximize national and international resources both as nations and as a region—how we can work as a multinational community to best provide for our citizens.

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A Strategic Inflection Point

A night satellite image of Latin America and the Caribbean reveals some fascinating characteristics that affect governance and security. The lights reflect urbanization, commerce, and development. While one may wonder about the role of the armed forces in an urban environment that is generally the province of law enforcement, there is a clear need to focus on the security imperatives of the darker areas.

Does the night image give us any indication of ungoverned spaces within both the darkest and brightest points? Should security forces have an even greater role in those areas where other government presence may be reduced? Is the protection of the environment and natural resources a subset of enforcing national sovereignty?

In the dark waters surrounding the Americas in this satellite image, you can also see tracks of vessels. The majority of those tracks represent fishing boats and commercial shipping, but some of the maritime movement there indicates the illicit trafficking of weapons, drugs, and people.

How do we sort out the illicit trafficking from the legitimate traffic? How do we inspect vessels for contraband without interrupting the flow of time-critical commerce? And how do naval forces protect human life on the high seas, all the while exercising the right of self-defense?

The answers to these questions will depend on those who have authority over national security, as well as the public will, of each sovereign nation. There are no quick or easy solutions, but it is clear that how we address these issues will directly affect the security of all our citizens. The U.S. Southern Command, and arguably the U.S. Government, is at a strategic inflection point. By that term, I mean a concept coined by Andrew Grove, former CEO of Intel Corporation. Grove has defined *strategic inflection points* as "points in the life of every industry where you must change dramatically to reach new levels of performance. If you miss these points, you will decline."[1] These are points in time when the environment changes so dramatically that reliance on the skills, behaviors, and practices that made us successful in one paradigm is no longer enough.

To continue to thrive, we must be willing to radically change our competencies and approach. To remain committed to the old way of doing business means potential underperformance and perhaps failure. This notion applies to our approaches to better governance and security and possibly to recent developments in regional cooperation.

What has changed in the region over the past few decades? What constitutes radical change? Do our current approaches meet the needs of our citizens in the areas of freedom, economic well-being, safety, and security?

According to a recent survey regarding public views on democracy in Latin American and Caribbean countries, 9 of 18 publics favor democracy over alternatives, but most rate their current democracies as generally inadequate. Public preference for democracy ranks highest in Uruguay, Venezuela, and Costa Rica, with increases over the past 4 years in Chile and El Salvador, and decreases in Peru, Guatemala, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic.[2]

One of two key factors influencing public opinion of democracy is economic performance. A United Nations (UN) survey in 2003 revealed that a majority of Latin Americans would prefer a dictator to a democratically elected leader if that change would provide economic benefits.

We have seen an economic recovery across the region in recent years. In 2004, the average growth in gross domestic product (GDP) was 5.5 percent, and in 2005 it was 4.3 percent. Estimated growth for 2006 is 4.1 percent. Argentina, Chile, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Venezuela all registered strong GDP growth for 2005.

While poverty figures have declined slightly, the benefits of growth are still not felt throughout society, with 41 percent of the population living below the poverty line, and 17 percent living in extreme poverty.[3] By 2000, Chile had already achieved the UN Millennium Declaration goal of reducing extreme poverty to half the levels posted in 1990. By 2004, only Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, and Uruguay had met expected progress toward that goal. On the other hand, Argentina and Venezuela had higher levels of extreme poverty than they did in 1990.[4]

Latin America is the least equitable region in the world for income distribution. Poor distribution prevents a society's resources from being allocated to those who would derive the greatest benefit. It also undermines development and hinders progress toward reducing poverty.[5]

Inequitable wealth distribution is a phenomenon we have all recognized. Unanswered grievances and unfulfilled promises to the marginalized segment of the population continue to cause deep-rooted dissatisfaction with democracy as a process and as an institution. In many parts of the region, distrust and loss of faith in failed institutions have also fueled the emergence of anti-globalization and anti–free trade elements that incite violence against their own governments and people.

If the gulf between rich and poor is indeed part of the environment that places institutions at a strategic inflection point, what must we change to better meet the needs of our citizens? This question has to do with the second key factor influencing public opinion on democracy. The answer lies in the government's performance, or its ability to ensure the freedom, economic well-being, safety, security, and human rights of its citizens—in a word, governance.

A report from the Inter-American Development Bank suggests that making and implementing policy rather than the substance of the policy may determine the effectiveness of governments. This study found that countries that scored well on how policies are made and carried out are those where life is improving. Chile tops the list, and El Salvador is also highly ranked. Argentina and Venezuela do not fare so well.[6]

In recent years, World Bank analysts have devised a metric to rate the institutional performance of democracies around the world. The trends captured in this study from 1996 to 2004 show those countries that score highest in governance.[7] Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, and Panama have also shown the greatest progress toward reducing poverty. In addition, those are the countries where the publics show the greatest satisfaction with and preference for democracy.

U.S. Air Force doctor preparing to treat villagers near Quito, Ecuador

U.S. Army South (Kaye Richey)

A Look at the Facts

Public opinion on democracy, economic performance, poverty reduction and inequality, and governance will reveal an initial pattern. Chile, which has the same governance rating as the United States, demonstrates strong economic performance, has exceeded expectations for poverty reduction, and has raised the public preference for democracy in the years since its transition.

Uruguay's public opinion on democracy is the highest in the Southern Cone. The country has registered solid GDP growth, met poverty reduction goals, and has one of the highest governance scores in the region. Additionally, its income distribution is the most equitable.[8]

These are just a few factors that demonstrate the correlation between good governance and a better life for citizens. But how does that relate to defense and security? Any analysis of governance looks at dimensions of public security and national defense or sovereignty. World Bank research on governance takes an integrated approach and looks at six interrelated dimensions, two of which relate directly to security and sovereignty: political stability and absence of violence, meaning the absence of terrorism and violent threats to or changes in government; and the rule of law or the quality of the law enforcement contract, meaning the state of the police and courts, as well as the likelihood that citizens will be confronted by crime and violence.

Other dimensions in the study look at political, civil, and human rights, the quality of public service delivery, and the control of corruption, all of which have relevance for public safety, public security, and national sovereignty.

From a military perspective, we should focus on how the security and sovereignty dimension of governance contributes to economic development, poverty alleviation, and strengthened democracies. Today, Latin America and the Caribbean basin face a wide array of threats that are supremely difficult to tackle. We have recognized that today's globalization has not only allowed commerce to cross borders rapidly and easily, but also allows for the movement of threats to the people of this hemisphere. These include transnational terrorism, narcoterrorism, logistic support and fundraising for Islamic radical groups, illicit trafficking, mass migration, forgery and money laundering, kidnapping, violent demonstrations, crime and urban gangs, and natural disasters.

The common thread running through these threats is that they cannot be defeated by traditional military means. Every facet of the national power of each of our countries will be required to deter or eradicate them.

Two cases in point are Guatemala and its effort to bring security and governance to a specific region, and Colombia, where the effort has been broadly directed at the national level. These two examples illustrate the relationship between security and governance and the need to integrate all elements of national power for better governance.

Satellite image of fires in Laguna del Tigre National Park in Guatemala

NASA Aqua Satellite

An Interagency Task Force

The first example is Guatemala, where we recently visited the Laguna del Tigre National Park area in the Petén region along the border with México. This protected national park is largely unpopulated and, because it is a natural reserve without human infrastructure, it has come to constitute an ungoverned space. The lack of government presence has made this border region an ideal trans-shipment point for drug and other illicit traffickers moving their contraband north, almost always through Mexico.

If you fly over this region, an incredible number of clandestine airstrips are visible all the way to the horizon. What we saw there was startling: planes using these airstrips to offload drugs and other cargo for ground transport across the Mexican border. Often detected by the Guatemalan Air Force or, forced to land in the dark, smugglers crash-land, offload their cargo, and burn the plane before fleeing in waiting vehicles.

The drug trade is so lucrative that airplanes, some large enough for 45 passengers, become disposable. Eight to ten planes that had been intentionally crashed and burnt by drug traffickers to avoid the confiscation of their cargo were observed in an area the size of a couple of football fields.

The effects of this illicit presence and activity in the Laguna del Tigre Park reach far beyond the sale and use of drugs in the United States, and increasingly within source and transit zone countries. These activities have damaged significant national resources, sabotaged economic development, and undermined rule of law, bringing corruption, violence, and crime to the region.

Airstrips are created by burning forests and underbrush. This often leads to uncontrolled forest fires in the park, damaging huge tracts of land and natural habitat. Squatter communities have invaded protected park lands populated by those who could not find legal jobs in their own towns or by the families of drug traffickers. Entire communities have developed to support the illicit trafficking industry, providing security to traffickers and for the airstrips and transporting drug cargo over land or by river.

Within these communities, there is no government presence or rule of law. Instead, there are criminal groups and gangs, poaching of protected wildlife, kidnapping, and trafficking in arms, humans, and most commonly drugs. Illegal armed groups exercise effective control of the population through intimidation and, in many respects, have become the de facto rule of law.

The area of Laguna del Tigre, in the Petén department, includes Tikal and other archeological sites that are primary tourist attractions for the country. The criminal activity and violence engendered by the illicit trafficking elements, so close to the Tikal site, also threaten to undermine tourism throughout the Petén. Guatemala's income from tourism is over $770 million annually, but the potential to expand this resource and extend economic and social development has been held hostage by the lack of security.

In November 2005, the Guatemalan government directed its armed forces to

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stand up an interagency task force in the Laguna del Tigre Park. This unit, led by the best of Guatemala's security forces, supports an interagency mission including the national civilian police, national air sovereignty council, the immigration and justice departments, and other government agencies and nongovernmental organizations. Its mission has been to counter the illicit activity in the Petén department. It has only been in existence a short time but has achieved great success in complete integration, coordination, and information flow across departments and agencies. It is the first government presence in this remote region, establishing law and order and gaining the confidence of the local population (not all of whom are any longer directly linked to the traffickers), reducing illegal arms possession, and destroying clandestine airstrips. Most importantly, this interagency force has denied illegal elements access to this area, as there have been no known drug trafficking aircraft in the Petén for over 60 days (December 5, 2005 to February 2, 2006).

Clearly, illicit trafficking in the Petén and its effects, along with the achievements of the Guatemalan government through the efforts of this task force, demonstrate the linkage between governance and security. Their interagency approach is the first step toward integration of security with other components of good governance. This task force represents a possible model to build upon. Its successes merit our admiration and support.

Protecting Citizens' Rights

Our second example of governance and security involves Colombia. In 2003, President Alvaro Uribe announced Colombia's *Democratic Security and Defense Policy*. This was an

integrated approach involving all instruments of national power and all elements of the government, from the national to the local level. The goal of this national strategy, which frames Colombia's internal security efforts, is to protect the rights of citizens by strengthening the rule of law and the authority of democratic institutions.

A study of the components of this strategy reveals that it addresses good governance, recognizing that military or police action alone cannot ensure the security, safety, and well-being of Colombia's citizens. Just 3 years after the implementation of the *Democratic Security and Defense Policy*, Colombia has achieved successes on the battlefield and brought a security presence to all municipalities, thus paving the way for additional government initiatives to bring social services and infrastructure to these regions.

Key highways beyond Bogotá's city limits have been secured. For the first time in many years, Colombians can travel on the roads from Bogotá to other cities and regions. This has reactivated domestic tourism, internal circulation of capital, and commerce.

An example of Colombia's civil-military approach is the creation of the Center for Coordination of Integrated Action, a cabinet-level interagency center directed by the president to establish governance in conflicted areas by developing economic and social programs, thereby complementing the democratic security and defense policy.

The key function of this interagency body is to extend government presence and hence governance over national territory by planning and executing community development in the areas of security, health, documentation, food distribution, education, justice, infrastructure development, and job creation.

This program is executed at the national, departmental, and local levels of government. It transitions the short-term security gains and successes into long-term belief in, and support for, good governance.

The examples of Guatemala and Colombia and other countries demonstrate the innovation required to adequately address the new security environment. They represent potential approaches to governance that merit further exploration and increased support.

Profound choices lie before us in today's world. We are at a strategic inflection point and must work together to determine how we can best provide for the needs of our citizens. This may involve breaking old defense and security paradigms and developing and implementing new integrated approaches—always a challenge. **JFQ**

NOTES

[1] Andrew Grove, *Only the Paranoid Survive: How to Exploit the Crisis Points That Challenge Every Company and Career* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1996).

[2] Latinobarómetro, "The Latinobarómetro poll: Democracy's low-level equilibrium," August 12, 2004, available at <www.economist.com/world/la/displayStory.cfm?story_id=3084404>.

[3] UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2005*, November 2005, available at <www.eclac.cl/index1.html>.

[4] UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *The Millennium Development Goals: A Latin American and Caribbean Perspective*, June 2005, available at <www.eclac.cl/index1.html>.

[5] *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2005*.

[6] Inter-American Development Bank, *The Politics of Policies: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 2006 Report,* available at <www.iadb.org/res/ipes/2006/index.cfm?language=english>.

[7] Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, *Governance Matters IV: Governance Indicators for 1996–2004*, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/pubs/govmatters4.html>.

[8] *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2005*.