



National Defense University

Institute for National Strategic Studies

COLLEAGUES FOR THE AMERICAS SEMINAR SERIES

“Political Change in Latin America: Regional Geopolitical Implications”

April 20, 2006

Featured Speaker: Gabriel Gaspar, Ph.D., Chilean Ambassador Designate to Colombia and Former Undersecretary of War

Gabriel Gaspar served as Chile’s Undersecretary of War from May 2000 until early this year. Dr. Gaspar is considered one of his country’s foremost experts on Latin American politics. In this capacity, he was a professor of political science for many years at the University of Chile and lectured at the Army War Academy, Air Force Academy, and various Latin American civilian universities. More recently he taught courses at the National Academy for Political Studies dealing with Chilean foreign policy, post-Cold War strategy, and a seminar for Chilean diplomats. Dr. Gaspar has been a member of the Latin American Political Science Council and editor of the *Armed Forces and Society* magazine. Dr. Gaspar also has been a frequent columnist for two newspapers, *La Nación* and *La Época*. He has published extensively; his works include *Christian Democracy in Central America*, *El Salvador: the Ascent of the New Right*, and *The Transition in Latin America: the Case of Chile and El Salvador*. In his capacity as Undersecretary of War he was a major contributor to *The Book of the National Defense of Chile* (2002).

A summary of the seminar follows.

US-Latin American Relations

Following the end of the Cold War, most Latin American countries experienced three formative changes: a democratic transformation after overcoming dictatorship, an economic opening in a globalized environment, and peace within nations as well as among nations. These trends continue to reconfigure power in the hemisphere and change the strategic stature of Latin countries. Political changes initially suggested the possibility that Latin American interests and values would converge with those of the United States. However, the ability of elected leaders to meet popular expectations varied widely in the region as did the quality of democratic governance. Disenchantment with democracy surfaced as societies were plagued by persistent socio-economic problems. This gave rise to political instability and populism in several countries.

The events of September 11, 2001 and the U.S. reaction to them ended hope for convergence. Latin Americans understood the U.S. shift in focus to terrorism, but this concern was not the reality that their nations deal with daily. Differences in the perception of threats as well as how to respond to them introduced a divergence of

interests between the United States and Latin America, and as a result the region lost its priority in Washington. Recent polls taken by Latinobarómetro reflect this divergence in a trend toward anti-Americanism. The region's perception of Washington's actions on human rights issues, the situation at Guantanamo, and the U.S. stance on the International Criminal Court that would impose sanctions on countries that refuse to waive its jurisdiction when U.S. personnel are at issue, is reflected in the region's growing opposition to U.S. policies.

Sub-regional Cooperation

Latin American countries differ in many ways, but at the sub-regional level neighbors can share common concerns and work together to address them. The security environment in particular is an area marked by problems stemming frequently from ineffective national governance. Many political systems are not capable of meeting citizen demands to address social and law enforcement needs, and socioeconomic development gradually worsens until it becomes a security concern. Cooperation must take place to help address serious problems of governance such as the breakdown in Haiti. A practical political response is one that is sub-regional. Caribbean Basin countries, for instance, cooperate on immigration and narco-trafficking challenges. Many ethnic issues, the growth of youth gangs, and the nature of public forces can be sub-regional in their scope. It is an opportunity for confidence building among states. This also is true of the Andean countries that have to deal with guerrillas, narco-trafficking, and political instability.

The countries of the Southern Cone are approaching issues in a manner that leaves behind disputes of the past. Particularly on economic and security matters, they have adopted a common cooperative approach. There is a combined peacekeeping battalion with Argentina, for example, that has an integrated staff. The United Nation's peacekeeping force in Haiti, MINUSTAH, is a model of sub-regional teamwork. Effective cooperation on this level can attract foreign investment and improve the sub-region's credibility in the world. Countries are beginning to accept the reality that they cannot operate alone anymore: they must address challenges with others. The armed forces have a clear view of this situation. Over 90 percent of Southern Cone trade moves by sea, for example. Naval forces should work together to ensure sea safety.

Chile's Future

Chile has a strong institutional base, a growing economy, and a presence in the hemisphere. Its government is willing to assist other countries to develop their institutions. Chile understands that the need to grow and expand means engagement not only in the Southern Cone, but also in the hemisphere and beyond. Its economic model pushes its national companies abroad. Over 5000 companies of all sizes are now engaged globally in foreign trade. In addition, this model emphasizes maintaining contact with Chilean citizens working in other countries and expanding foreign educational opportunities at home. Such a concerted focus on development and trade is not unique to Chile, but the Chilean government believes that Latin America must break away from its

provincialism. Countries need to shift from an almost exclusive export of raw material to trade in manufactured products. Chile is moving in this direction.

The INSS Colleagues for the Americas Seminar Series is a program of monthly meetings that commenced in 1994 to further research on hemispheric security and defense issues and to contribute to the professional education of United States and foreign practitioners.

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