CRISIS IN THE ANDES: THE BORDER DISPUTE BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND ECUADOR, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGION

BRIEFING AND HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

APRIL 10, 2008

Serial No. 110–159

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Available via the World Wide Web: http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

41–757PDF WASHINGTON : 2008

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512–1800; DC area (202) 512–1800
Fax: (202) 512–2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402–0001

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

HOWARD L. BERMAN, California, *Chairman*

GARY L. ACKERMAN, New York
ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA, American Samoa
DONALD M. PAYNE, New Jersey
BRAD SHERMAN, California
ROBERT WEXLER, Florida
ELIOT L. ENGEL, New York
BILL DELAHUNT, Massachusetts
GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York
DIANE E. WATSON, California
ADAM SMITH, Washington
RUSS CARNAHAN, Missouri
JOHN S. TANNER, Tennessee
GENE GREEN, Texas
LYNN C. WOOLSEY, California
SHEILA JACKSON LEE, Texas
RUBÉN HINOJOSA, Texas
JOSEPH CROWLEY, New York
DAVID WU, Oregon
BRAD MILLER, North Carolina
LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ, California
DAVID SCOTT, Georgia
JIM COSTA, California
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey
GABRIELLE GIFFORDS, Arizona
RON KLEIN, Florida
BARBARA LEE, California

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, Florida
CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
DAN BURTON, Indiana
ELTON GALLEGLY, California
DANA ROHRABACHER, California
DONALD A. MANZULLO, Illinois
EDWARD R. ROYCE, California
STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
THOMAS G. TANCREDO, Colorado
RON PAUL, Texas
JEFF FLAKE, Arizona
MIKE PENCE, Indiana
JOE WILSON, South Carolina
JOHN BOOZMAN, Arkansas
J. GRESHAM BARRETT, South Carolina
CONNIE MACK, Florida
JEFF FORTENBERRY, Nebraska
MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas
TED POE, Texas
BOB INGLIS, South Carolina
LUIS G. FORTUÑO, Puerto Rico
GUS BILIRAKIS, Florida
VACANT

ROBERT R. KING, *Staff Director*
YLEEM POBLETE, *Republican Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

ELIOT L. ENGEL, New York, *Chairman*

GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York
LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ, California
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey, *Vice Chair*
GABRIELLE GIFFORDS, Arizona
ENI F. H. FALEOMAVAEGA, American Samoa
DONALD M. PAYNE, New Jersey
BILL DELAHUNT, Massachusetts
RON KLEIN, Florida
GENE GREEN, Texas

DAN BURTON, Indiana
CONNIE MACK, Florida
MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas
LUIS G. FORTUÑO, Puerto Rico
CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
ELTON GALLEGLY, California
RON PAUL, Texas
VACANT

JASON STEINBAUM, *Subcommittee Staff Director*
ERIC JACOBSTEIN, *Subcommittee Professional Staff Member*
MARK WALKER, *Republican Professional Staff Member*
ERIN DIAMOND, *Staff Associate*

CONTENTS

CRISIS IN THE ANDES: THE BORDER DISPUTE BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND ECUADOR, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGION

THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2008,

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 12:06 p.m. in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Eliot L. Engel, (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. ENGEL. Good morning. I think that we will get started in our new refurbished committee room. It is a pleasure to be here. I am sorry for the delay. As you know, we had a series of votes right at the start of the briefing and hearing.

I am going to try to rush this a bit because Secretary General Insulza has got to go after a few minutes, and we really want the benefit of listening to him. So I am pleased to welcome you to today's briefing and hearing on the Andean border crisis. I will make my opening statement and allow other members to make opening statements after we complete the briefing portion of today's session so we can hear the Secretary General.

It is a real honor and pleasure for me to welcome to the subcommittee my good friend, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, José Miguel Insulza. I have enjoyed very much meeting with Secretary General Insulza on numerous occasions in my capacity as chairman. He has an impressive background having served as Vice President, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Interior of Chile.

Secretary General Insulza has taken an impressive leadership role in resolving the border crisis between Colombia and Ecuador. He led a mission of OAS ambassadors to both countries in March, and we look forward to hearing about his findings from the trip.

Mr. Secretary General, the floor is yours to make your statement, and thank you for coming before our subcommittee.

STATEMENT OF HIS EXCELLENCY JOSÉ MIGUEL INSULZA, SECRETARY GENERAL, ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Mr. INSULZA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for this opportunity to participate in this public briefing. I want to express my own appreciation for your commitment——

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Secretary, could you just pull the microphone a little bit closer?

Mr. INSULZA. Yes, of course.

Mr. ENGEL. We are having difficulty hearing you.

Mr. INSULZA. Yes. I think I can. Thank you. I want to express my appreciation for your commitment to our inter-American issues, both by the chairman and by the ranking member, Mr. Burton. We have had a chance to discuss some of the issues dealing with the inter-American system many times.

You have my written statement for the record, so I will be very brief so we can get to the questions that you want to ask. I think it is very important to say that when we talk about the Andean crisis, it was a crisis that flared up for a very specific reason which has little to do with the political and economic situation in Colombia or Ecuador.

It is very important to remember here that both countries have made tremendous progress in the past years and the past months. In the case of Colombia, I think that Colombia has achieved some very important successes in the recent years in its battle against armed groups inside the country, and the violence has diminished very much.

Some of the groups have been mostly demobilized. Some who still exist are associated almost exclusively with the drug gangs. Other groups are the ones coming from the left, the FARC and the ELN, have also been greatly reduced and put on the defensive. Of course, let us make no mistake, violence still exists and there are still armed groups working.

This morning we had sad news of the death of eight Colombian soldiers precisely in the area which we are talking about now, but the situation in Colombia has greatly improved. It has also improved in Ecuador where, as you know, we have had for several years a very unstable situation, several changes of government in the last decade, and now there is a government that is carrying out a lot of important reforms with great support from its country's population.

So these are two countries with very stable government and very popular leaders, I should say. Very popular leaders in both cases, as the polls show every time they are taken.

What happened in this case, and it is not a permanent problem between Ecuador and Colombia, they are two friendly countries between themselves with a lot of exchanges, but then there is a problem of the drug trafficking, and the war is still going on in Colombia for several years.

That is affecting the population. As the situation gets better in Colombia, the drug trade, and the drug dealers and the armed groups tend to move to the borders where, as you know, the nature of the geography of the terrain is very good for them.

This is a jungle area. If you go to the border and you fly from a helicopter, from above it is just forest, with one exception, when you see the patches of land in which the coca was grown and was eradicated or the patches of land in which the drug is still planted. Those patches exist in the Colombian side.

If it weren't for those patches, this would be a region of only native forest with very little population, with very little activity, and therefore, with very little military interest or strategic interest. This is an area in which the population can be counted in the thou-

sands, if not in the hundreds, and what exists are the drug lords and the FARC.

That is the problem, and that is what created the problem. I mean, there is no doubt that the guerrillas are there only to protect the drug trade and only to keep their 700 or more hostages that they are still holding, some of whom are in that area. The problem is, therefore, that it is really hard to eradicate them because there is sparse population, there are not many people, and the forest is so thick.

Actually, when we went to Ecuador we were in a camp. The camp was, I would say, a settlement for them there. Except for that place there was nothing, no other place to land. Not even to land. It was possible to land there because there had been a bombing previously and there was a piece of land in which the trees had been blown out.

I mean, we went around the camp, and if they had told you there was another camp 500 yards from there you wouldn't have seen it. So how do you eradicate those people without a common effort? That is the problem. The Colombians have to fight the drug dealers, and they want cooperation in fighting the drug dealers and the FARC. And the guerrillas of course seek a place for refuge.

There is no drug planting in Ecuador, and there is no war in Ecuador, and of course the Ecuadorian Government wants to keep it that way. So we have here two very legitimate interests, very legitimate interests. From Colombia, to continue the war against the drug lords and the war, which has been successful, against the drug lords and the terrorists, and from Ecuador, to keep the country peaceful and not having the war inside their territory.

Those are two legitimate interests that we have to find ways of reconciling. I think that what we did was what we had to do. We assembled very quickly a Permanent Council; we reaffirmed the principle of territorial integrity.

Then, at the meeting of the Rio group, the Colombian Government gave the explanation requested of them by Ecuador, there was agreement in the sense that this would never happen again without previous consultation between the governments, but of course now we are in the process of settling things, of making this peaceful agreement more stable.

Now, we are trying. We have a commission that is working on bringing forth the recommendations of our special General Assembly. We want to try to have a fast restoration of relations between Colombia and Ecuador. We want to see if we can activate the political consultation mechanisms. We want to see if it is possible to verify in a concerted way that the agreements reached between the two countries on matters of cooperation on border issues are carried out.

We want to find ways of strengthening these mechanisms. Also, we want to promote a better dialogue between the two countries. That is exactly what we want. I think that we have been successful in averting a crisis that could have been very dangerous while maintaining, while upholding the principles in which our inter-American system is based.

The principles of self-identity, and territorial integrity and cooperation among the countries in the issues dealing with the com-

mon security. That is what I want to say to start this hearing, sir. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Insulza follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HIS EXCELLENCY JOSÉ MIGUEL INSULZA, SECRETARY GENERAL, ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Thank you very much for this opportunity to participate in this public briefing. I would particularly like to express my own appreciation for the commitment to our inter-American issues demonstrated by the Chairman Eliot Engel and Ranking Member Dan Burton.

I have submitted for the record my written statement as well as key official OAS and related documents on the recent events in the Andes. I will briefly summarize this statement and look forward to our dialogue on these crucial matters.

As you know, on the morning of Saturday, March 1, 2008, military forces and police personnel of Colombia entered the territory of Ecuador without the express consent of the government of Ecuador to carry out an operation against members of an irregular group of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as the FARC, who were clandestinely encamped on the Ecuadorian side of the border.

How did the OAS become involved in this situation? Very quickly as on March 2, the Ecuadorian government requested a special meeting of the OAS Permanent Council, which consists of the ambassadors to the OAS from the 34 democratically-elected governments in the Americas. On March 4 and 5, at our headquarters here in Washington, DC, the government of Ecuador stated its strong objection to the Colombian action and the Colombian government stated its reasons for such action. The issue was discussed amongst the countries and three steps were taken. First, to reaffirm the principle of territorial integrity enshrined in Article 21 of the OAS Charter; second, to establish a commission to travel to the region and prepare a report on the situation, and third, to convene a Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the OAS to receive the findings of the commission and make recommendations for subsequent action.

By happenstance, a Summit meeting of the Rio Group was scheduled for March 7 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. The members of the Rio Group are Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. The meeting focused diplomatic attention at the highest level on the tensions between Colombia and Ecuador and, with the able leadership of President Leonel Fernandez, these tensions were diffused. A Declaration was approved which denounced the violation of the territorial integrity of Ecuador, noted the apology of Colombian President Uribe for the violation of territory, supported the principles of the OAS Charter, reiterated a commitment to peaceful coexistence in the region and to counter threats from irregular groups or criminal organizations, and supported the March 5 resolution of the Permanent Council of the OAS and as well as my work as Secretary General in carrying out its recommendations.

From March 9 to 12, the OAS commission called for by the Permanent Council, consisting of ambassadors to the OAS from Argentina, Brazil, Panama, Peru and the Bahamas, as well as myself, traveled to Ecuador and Colombia. In Ecuador, we met with President Correa who raised specific concerns about the incident and expressed his desire to reactivate the Bi-national Border Commission between Ecuador and Colombia to address border security matters. The commission members arrived at the FARC camp on March 10. The camp is about 1,800 meters from the Colombian border. We went through the camp to see the impact of the bombs dropped by Colombian aircraft, the trees with bullet marks, the locations of the Direct TV antennas, the living areas used by the FARC members and the location where the bodies and injured victims were found. The camp is located in a remote forest zone, with very tall trees, dense vegetation, and no inhabited areas in the vicinity.

Traveling to Colombia, we met with President Uribe who expressed the need to move beyond political agreements that are necessary to ease tension between the two countries, by identifying concrete mechanisms that ensure compliance with existing bilateral and cooperation agreements. Following this meeting with President Uribe, we met with the members of INTERPOL who, on request from the Colombian government, are going to conduct an expert examination of three computers, three USBs (portable memory) and three hard disks, which, according to Colombian officials, had been found in the FARC camp. The INTERPOL delegates said that the results of their investigation would be ready in late April.

After these and additional extensive discussion, the OAS commission made the following recommendations:

1. The restoration of diplomatic relations between Colombia and Ecuador and the reactivation of existing political consultation mechanisms.
2. The formulation of an OAS mission for follow-up on and verification of commitments assumed and agreements reached by the two countries for cooperation on border issues and other matters of common interest.
3. The strengthening of border mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation, and study of a possible bilateral early-warning system.
4. The development, with the support of international organizations and entities like the Inter-American Development Bank, the Andean Development Corporation, and the United Nations Development Program, among others, of border area cooperation and integration programs, including environmental projects.
5. The provision of incentives to dialogue among civil society organizations in the two countries.
6. The strengthening of relations among business organizations of the two countries, to identify ways to increase bilateral trade, including border-area trade.

As called for by the OAS Permanent Council on March 5, a Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs was convened on March 17. The results of this meeting, which went well into the night, was a resolution—reiterating much of the Declaration of the Rio Group; instructing me to use my good offices of the OAS General Secretariat to implement a mechanism for restoring an atmosphere of trust between the two parties; taking note of the report of the OAS Commission to Colombia and Ecuador; and stating that the Ministerial-level consultation will continue at our annual General Assembly to be held June 1–3 in Medellin, Colombia.

In the meantime, we have an OAS team, headed by Victor Rico, the Director of our Department of Sustainable Democracy and Special Mission, traveling to Ecuador on April 6–8 and Colombia April 9–10 to help restore diplomatic communications and an environment of cooperation between the two governments. We will report to the General Assembly on the status of these efforts.

As is clear from the evolution of events, this is an on-going exercise of maintaining peace, uncovering facts and implementing solid diplomatic mechanisms to address problems of irregular groups and criminal activity across borders in a cooperative manner among the governments of our region. As the region's premier political forum, the OAS created a diplomatic space to discuss these difficult issues, quickly launched a mission to collect information on the incident, proposed mechanisms for long-term conflict resolution and continues to support projects to bring peace and the rule of law to the Andean region.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. ENGEL. Well, Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary General. Let me ask you a couple of questions. The March 17 resolution was agreed to by consensus among OAS member states, but the Bush administration added a footnote noting its feeling that the resolution does not "affect the right of self-defense under Article 22 of the OAS Charter and Article 51 of the U.N. Charter."

So, in other words, the footnote implies that Colombia was acting in self-defense in killing Raúl Reyes in Ecuadorian territory. So let me ask you this in light of what I have just said. Does the OAS resolution fail to take into account Article 22 of the OAS Charter and Article 51 of the U.N. Charter which provides that nations can use force in acts of self-defense, and what is your reaction to the U.S. footnote to the OAS resolution?

The March 2008 issue of Latin American Security and Strategic Review argues that the United States was "left isolated on the matter of full respect for the principles of sovereignty and nonintervention enshrined in the Charter of the OAS." Do you agree with this conclusion?

Mr. INSULZA. Just to comment, Mr. Chairman, first, the article on legitimate defenses exists, of course, in the Charter of the OAS but was not argued by anybody.

The reason for it not being argued by the Colombian Government is that all the doctrine in the matter, and this also even includes the recent resolution by the United Nations on the matter of Afghanistan, assumes that self-defense is against a foreign government attacking you or at least if it is against an irregular group being abetted or protected by a foreign government.

None of these situations existed that morning. Nobody has said. I mean, in this case nobody has ever accused Ecuador of abetting or sustaining the terrorists within their borders. So everybody understood that, in this case, the article on legitimate defense did not apply.

The Colombian Government actually first presented apologies for what had happened and said that this situation would not happen again, which is a far cry from saying that it had acted in the legitimate defense. Legitimate defense was actually presented in the meeting of ministers, and the U.S. Government, I mean, for very understandable reasons which we perfectly accept, decided not to oppose the resolution but also made a footnote, which is a common procedure among us.

There was general agreement that in this case there couldn't be talk about legitimate defense. By the way, there had been no real attack at that moment. Legitimate defenses are against some concrete attack. Maybe there have been actions from the FARC from one territory to the other, but on the morning, on the date of March 1, 2008, there were no attacks against the Colombian territory.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you. Let me ask you one more question. On March 7, Mr. Secretary General, the Rio group meeting in Santo Domingo, and then the March 17 OAS resolution agreed to at the Foreign Ministers Meeting in Washington helped to ease the tensions between Ecuador and Colombia. Still, tensions remain extremely high between the two countries, and Ecuador has yet to reestablish diplomatic relations with Colombia.

So let me ask you this. What is the OAS doing to help Colombia and Ecuador return to normalized relations? What specifically do you think it will take for President Correa to restore diplomatic relations with Colombia? The March 17 resolution instructs the Secretary General to implement a mechanism for the restoration of an atmosphere of trust between the two parties.

Can you please tell us more about how specifically you are restoring the trust between the two countries? Finally, on the day-to-day functional level, how much willingness have you seen by both Colombia and Ecuador to restore bilateral cooperation at the northern border?

Mr. INSULZA. Thank you very much. Well, first, I think that both countries do want to establish diplomatic relations as soon as possible. We think that it is safe to say that probably when our General Assembly meets again, it meets by the end of May, first days of June in Medellin, Colombia, I think that, we hope that we will have the relations restored.

What are the problems? The problems are basically of course a lot of things hanging out there and there have been a lot of discus-

sions. Rhetoric is still very high. Many things have been said from one part to the other by members of the governments. So to the question of what should be done I will answer first we have to quiet things down, lower the tone of the rhetoric and sit down to negotiate the problems that really exist.

What are our proposals? Well, we are establishing two observing groups, one in each of the countries, first to receive the complaints that countries have to make on the border situation, and the demand for cooperation and different aspects or the situations of violation that somebody can argue.

Second, to examine the rules of procedure for the exchange of information between the two countries and see if they can be reestablished, or reformed, or reformulated. Third, to propose a more confident mission between the two countries, such as work by common patrols, exchange of information, et cetera, et cetera.

We think that will take time. Even though there was no actual confrontation, we think that the problems still remain, that a certain mistrust still remains, so it is going to be, I would say, quite awhile, our mission is probably going to be there on both sides for some time. We really don't expect anymore material problems.

Now, it will probably take longer to normalize the situation than we had expected before.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you. Mr. Burton?

Mr. BURTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Did the OAS adopt and incorporate into an obligation for OAS and member states the post-9/11 U.N. Resolution 1373 as part of the duties and obligations of the member states on the issue of support for safe havens for terrorists? Didn't the OAS adopt that U.N. resolution?

Mr. INSULZA. Well, actually, all the countries that are member of the OAS are members of the U.N., so of course the resolution was adopted. The agreement to fight against terrorism is——

Mr. BURTON. It was adopted?

Mr. INSULZA. Yes, of course.

Mr. BURTON. Okay. Are you aware that Ecuadorian Minister Larrea met with the FARC number two man, Raúl Reyes, in Ecuador without giving Colombia any notification of it?

Mr. INSULZA. Well, let me say one thing, Mr. Chairman. I think that it is important to say this. We do have our convention against terrorism, and we have the resolutions that you point out. We have agreements that certainly cover the situation of the FARC because we have agreements to fight against the irregular armed groups, against drug trafficking, and certainly the FARC has also committed some terrorist acts.

I am not sure that I can say that all countries have agreed on qualifying the FARC as terrorists. Second, everybody knows that before the attack there were contacts by different people or persons with the FARC to see if they could solve the situation of the hostages. That is the explanation the Ecuadorian Government has given, and I certainly cannot argue with that explanation.

Mr. BURTON. Well, U.N. Resolution 1373 requires that all states shall, not may, shall deny safe haven to those who finance, plan, support or commit terrorist acts or provide safe havens. Ecuador had to know that camp was there. That camp had very sophisticated satellite communications, equipment, they had television

sets. It was more of a permanent base than it was just an overnight camp.

If Colombia knew it was there I would assume that Ecuador knew it was there, and if they did know it was there they were providing safe haven in violation of 1373. Would you agree with that?

Mr. INSULZA. No. No, I don't agree with it, Mr. Burton.

Mr. BURTON. You don't agree with it?

Mr. INSULZA. I will tell you why. Because the fact that the irregular forces are there does not mean that they are being provided safe haven. It means that it is very difficult to eradicate them. That is a fact. It is only a matter of going around the border and looking at the places where this camp is—I mean, let me tell you one thing.

If you take what everybody says about the past operation, I mean, when the Ecuadorian forces were called into the place they took many hours in getting there because it was impossible to land anywhere near the border. No, no, no. So unless, as the President of Ecuador says, somebody will think of the possibility of a very large-scale operation to eradicate all the forces there——

Mr. BURTON. I have a couple more questions.

Mr. INSULZA. What I am saying is that it is not possible to demand from a government in those conditions to eradicate them all. What is possible is to do it if the two governments cooperate amongst themselves. If the two governments cooperate among themselves they will still have to work for a long time to eradicate those camps there.

Mr. BURTON. I respect your position as head of the OAS, and I want to show due respect, but if a high level member of the Ecuadorian Government, Mr. Larrea, met with Raúl Reyes, this was a permanent camp. The Colombian Government knew about it, and with all the technology that there is available for countries to know where and when terrorists are moving it seems to me Ecuador knew about it.

If Ecuador knew about it, why didn't they do something about it? Why didn't they have a joint exercise with Colombia saying we are going to get rid of these terrorists because they are a threat to the entire region? You know, it just seems incredulous to me that Ecuador would know that there was a permanent camp there, and I don't see how they could not know that, and not do anything about it.

Didn't even tell Colombia about it. Instead, they had one of their high level officials meeting with one of the terrorist leaders.

Mr. INSULZA. Well, I am sure that Ecuador and Colombia are aware that there are camps in the region, in the zone, but I am not really sure if you can say that they can pinpoint them exactly where they are first, and the reason, I just gave. The reason is simply that the forest is too thick, and you would have to have a large military capacity to patrol all that area.

I mean, the only way to get to that area is to go by helicopter or walking into the forest for several miles. So it is not an easy thing to do.

Mr. BURTON. Well, Colombia got out of there.

Mr. INSULZA. Excuse me, no. You have to realize that also inside Colombia there are groups and nobody says that anybody is abet-

ting them, it is simply that it is a large forest, sir. I mean, no, this is a fact, there are still a lot of armed groups inside Colombia.

Everybody would like to have them eradicated, and I am sure that the Ecuadorian Government would love to have all those forces outside of their territory, but another problem is to say that this is fully possible. Let me say this, that I think that we can, starting from this problem, establish a good cooperation among the governments and deal with the issue, but it is just not as simple as saying let us go and take them out. It is not as simple as that, sir.

Mr. BURTON. Well, thank you, Mr. Secretary. I appreciate you being here, and I respect you and the OAS very much. We just have a little disagreement on this. Thank you.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Delahunt.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you. Mr. Secretary, let me applaud the OAS for its excellent work in diffusing this situation. I understand what you are talking about in terms of capacity. I have had an opportunity to fly along the border of Venezuela and Colombia. I challenge anyone to point out that border to me.

I mean, that is what the reality is on the ground. I dare say that if it was that easy to find bases and launch attacks to destroy the FARC, that the Colombian army, which is clearly a superior force, would have eliminated the FARC probably 1 year, 1½ years, maybe 2 years ago, within Colombia.

I would suggest that there are a number of FARC installations and bases in Colombia that are known to the Colombian forces. Their intelligence appears to be excellent. Yet, these bases apparently continue to exist. If it were so easy.

I am encouraged by your words or your hope that by the General Assembly some time in June that there would be the restoration of diplomatic relations between Ecuador and Colombia. I think on both sides we encourage that. I think any role that we can play, and maybe the role is simply, as you would suggest, staying quiet, maybe that is a new role that we can assume and allow the OAS and our neighboring countries work out their differences.

I would note that both President Uribe has expressed the need to move and create political agreements that are necessary to ease tension between the two countries by identifying concrete mechanisms that ensure compliance with existing bilateral and cooperation agreements. We support that, at least on this side of the aisle we support that.

I am confident that my good friend, the former chairman, the now ranking member, Mr. Burton and Mr. Mack, also support that. I know that I am pleased to hear that President Correa, I am reading I think from your testimony, has raised specific concerns about the incident.

However, he expressed his desire to reactivate the Binational Border Commission between Ecuador and Colombia to address border security matters. That is something that is very positive. I don't really have a question other than simply to say that I think it is about capacity, and I think meetings with Mr. Reyes have occurred between heads of state, primarily from the European Union.

I know that there was a member of the United States Congress that actually met with Mr. Reyes, and it was I, and it was at the

request of the then President of Colombia, Mr. Pastrana. It was to no avail, but it was an effort on his part to attempt to secure the end of the violence in Colombia.

So meetings to secure the release of hostages, particularly when there are three Americans that have suffered at the hands of the FARC over the course of the past 6 months, ought to occur. Whatever is required. They are our men, and they are being held against their will under the most inhumane conditions.

So when it comes to meetings that may most likely prove to be futile, if there is even a slim possibility to secure the release of these hostages it ought to occur. With that, I will yield back.

Mr. INSULZA. Thank you. I just want to say one thing which I think is very important. I think that it is really relevant to say here that Colombia has achieved some very important successes over these past years in their battle against the armed groups. Of course that has to do with the political disappearance of the Autodefensas Unidas.

I mean, there are a few remaining groups, but they are groups of, well, drug traffickers, actually. With the fact that the other groups, the FARC and the LN, have been greatly reduced and they have been put on the defensive, they are about half what they were before.

They controlled populated parts of the territory of Colombia and now they have been moved into the places precisely which they can work because very few people live there and because it is very difficult for the army to get to them. So there have been very important successes in the past few years in Colombia.

While the Congressman was mentioning Mr. Reyes, we all saw when he was killed the pictures of him on television appearing in all kinds of places in the times in which the FARC control 46,000 square kilometers of territory that had been disoccupied for them, and the army was not moving into those places. That situation has radically changed, but it will take a long time because it is very difficult.

The situation on the border is very difficult, and everybody wants to help and everybody wants to do things the way they should be done, but it is very hard to drive them out from a thick jungle where practically nobody lives, people who know the place, who have been settling in those places for years, and we can certainly expect that they will withdraw a little more, that they will go more into the defensive.

To completely eradicate them, I am sure that will take them a longer time. It is the successes of Colombia in these years that have to be stressed in this moment in this matter, sir. Thank you very much.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you. Mr. Secretary General, I know you have to leave. I am wondering if you could just stay a few minutes to take a quick question from Mr. Mack and Mr. Green?

Mr. Mack.

Mr. MACK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have got to tell you, I am sitting here right now wondering exactly what you are doing. Let me put it this way. Where were you before the incidents happened?

The OAS should certainly have been aware of the tensions that were mounting, certainly should be aware of Hugo Chavez's apparent support of the FARC, you should certainly have been aware of the alliance between Hugo Chavez, and Ecuador and Bolivia. Please tell me that this is something that is not new to you and your organization, and that you actually are looking for real solutions.

I hear the talk, and I agree, you know, and I know members of this committee agree that you have to have those communications, but where were you before this happened? Where is the teeth in the organization to be real effective in the region? There are many places to point to that this should have been a hot spot that your organization should have been engaged in.

I am going to go through a couple of things and then let you respond. As you may know, I have been someone who has spent some time on Hugo Chavez, and the ranking member talked about the OAS's position on terrorism, and I would like for you to comment on the growing suspicion that Iran is having an influence in terrorism in Latin America, specifically with its relationship with Hugo Chavez in Venezuela.

Certainly I think that would fly in the face of some of the resolutions and things that the OAS says it stands for. There is no doubt that Hugo Chavez has supported the FARC, whether it is through the recent knowledge of the money that was spent calling for the FARC to be taken off an internationally-recognized terrorist list.

I have sponsored a resolution to put Venezuela on the list of state sponsors of terrorism. If you look at the definitions of why, I think it would be hard for you or anyone else to find a way not to support that idea. It seems to me that some of these countries that have been influenced by Chavez, whether it is by money, or help in elections, or just overall support, that he is using those leaders as puppets.

I cannot imagine the people in those countries like the idea that somehow they are being used or manipulated by someone like Hugo Chavez. Two last things.

Do you support the idea of a Colombian free trade agreement here in the Congress, and do you believe that Plan Colombia has made a significant policy changes that have allowed to Colombia to begin to have a change in its own government, and do you also recognize that having a country like Colombia will help spread the idea of freedom and democracy through Latin America against a wave that is being pushed by Hugo Chavez? I look forward to your response.

Mr. INSULZA. Well, I will be very short in the first two responses. I agree with both. From the beginning and up to now I never waivered in full support of the free trade agreement between the United States and Colombia and as to the free trade agreement of the United States with Peru, with Central America, with Mexico, with Chile, and I am very supportive.

I very much also support the agreement with Panama. Let there be no mistake in that. I believe that those agreements have been good for the United States and good for those countries, and I sincerely hope that the agreement is voted favorably, and I don't see any reason why that shouldn't be because I think, as I said before,

that if there is one thing you can say about Colombia it is that it has achieved immense progress in the matters that you are dealing with today.

Second, I very much agree that, as I said before, Colombia has made great strides in its fights against the irregular forces in the past years, strides that have not been made, unfortunately, in the previous years because, actually, I think when President Uribe came into power there has been a deterioration of the situation more than an improvement.

It was a fight against the paramilitaries, and the FARC and the ELN, and it was feared that the strategy was not working and the strategy that President Uribe is following has worked. So I have no argument on that. Now, on the other matter, first of all, the OAS is very much depending on the programs that exist in the countries.

Certainly we know that there are problems in the border areas because we know the region, and we know that unfortunately, as Congressman Delahunt said, the borders of Colombia in general, except for a part of the border with Venezuela, are covered by jungles, by forests. So they are very difficult to see, they are very difficult to work militarily or in other ways in those border areas.

We have a lot of activity there. I must remind you that the largest mission that we have as the OAS in another country, in an American country, is in Colombia where our mission of support for the peace plan of President Uribe has been very active in verifying that the disarming of the paramilitary is taking place.

In the case of the FARC, we have always offered all our support to the Colombian Government, and we will continue to do so. Now, in general, however, sir, I must say I don't share the views that you have given the situation in the region. You see, we no military teeth. This is not an organization that has a military organization.

Mr. MACK. Excuse me real quick. You can have a great impact in the region by stepping up. There have been many times when there were opportunities for the OAS to take a stronger position in which you have not.

Mr. INSULZA. So if you let me finish.

Mr. MACK. I will let you finish.

Mr. INSULZA. When these things are said, they are said in speeches saying we should cooperate with this country, with this other country, or this other country, which are our friends. Well, why don't you ask our friends? Why don't you ask Brazil? Why don't you ask Chile? Why don't you ask Peru?

Why don't you ask the Central Americans if they want to have that kind of activity in the region?

Mr. MACK. I am asking you as the OAS, then why aren't you doing more?

Mr. INSULZA. The founder of the OAS, the former——

Mr. MACK. Secretary General, I am asking you and your organization to step up and do more.

Mr. INSULZA. I will answer, sir. The founder of the OAS, the first Secretary General, the former President of Colombia, Alberto Lleras, said the OAS will not be any more than what the member countries want it to be. As it was stated here, a resolution of peace

was passed by the assembly because we haven't had many wars among us for several years, and we don't want to have them.

What we do is try to dialogue with the countries, try to discuss it with the countries, and everybody is involved in that. In a few days there is going to be a meeting of a regional organization called the union of South American countries, "communidad sur americano," South American Community or South American Union, and I think it is going to be in Rio de Janeiro, to approve the statutes of this new union.

All these countries you mentioned will be there. Bolivia will be there and Brazil will be there, Chile will be there and Peru will be there, Colombia will be there and Venezuela will be there and Ecuador of course. So why try to go against what is the will of those countries? Now, of course there are differences, of course we have problems, of course we have discrepancies, but we don't want to follow the way of confrontation and war between us.

Mr. MACK. Do you believe that Venezuela and Hugo Chavez is aiding in terrorism?

Mr. INSULZA. You mean supporting terrorist groups? No, I don't believe that, sir.

Mr. MACK. You believe they are turning a blind eye to it?

Mr. INSULZA. No, I don't believe that, sir. I don't believe that there is any proof that there has been support from the Government of Venezuela for terrorist groups.

Mr. MACK. Well, I believe you are mistaken. Thank you.

Mr. INSULZA. Well, I am sorry to hear that.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Green.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, welcome, Mr. Secretary General. Let me just make a statement. I think the cross-border incursion, and I agree with my colleague from Massachusetts having been to the northern part of Ecuador, the border is really unmarked, like a lot of countries.

I guess the success of this, though, is that the three countries actually, through the OAS, sat down and diffused the situation relatively quickly. I think that is the success we ought to talk about, although, like my colleagues, it bothers me that—and I have not seen the evidence of the $300 million that allegedly President Chavez of Venezuela has been providing the FARC. That is where I would like to go.

That if that information, if Colombia had an interest in bringing that request or information to the OAS, would it take a majority of the OAS to consider a complaint that you have two countries that are members, one actually contributing to a guerilla campaign in the other country? Is that something the OAS would entertain?

Mr. INSULZA. Sir, I can assure you that if there was any evidence that somebody is supporting terrorist groups in the hemisphere the OAS would take action. I can assure you of that. The problem is that there is no proof, or that it has never been delivered. Of course it is possible that there is some help from some countries to others for political groups, for political organizations, but aid to terrorist groups, material aid, money for terrorist groups, we have no evidence of that.

If there was any evidence, certainly we would very, very, very, very, very, very, very glad to entertain it. There are 34 member

countries in the OAS including this one. We have never had any evidence of that presented to the OAS.

Mr. GREEN. Mr. Chairman, I appreciated the opportunity a couple of months ago to go with you and meet with President Correa in Ecuador, President Morales in Bolivia, and also, in Argentina. I would hope that our committee—because that is the reason I am serving on this committee.

I have a great deal of interest in Latin America and the western hemisphere, and I think our country does need to be more involved in issues with our neighbors because of the trading partners and because of the relationship between our countries as neighbors. I think we ought to look at that success even though the military was activated and moved to the border from Venezuela.

We saw, like I said, using OAS to sit down and diffuse the situation very quickly, but like a lot of folks, I would be concerned if Mexico was contributing to a guerilla activity in our country just like Mexico would have some concern if we were contributing to their problems.

That is why I think the two countries, or the three countries in this case, Ecuador, Colombia and Bolivia, obviously they are mature enough to be able to take care of their situation because they were able to do it. Now, we need to go from there to make sure that these countries are not infringing on each other.

If they are, then it needs to be used, Organization of American States, in its benefit to be able to see if we can also deal with that. I thank you for being here. I know, Mr. Chairman, he has to leave. I will be glad to yield to my colleague from Massachusetts.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I know that there was a codel to Ecuador, and my understanding was, and I am looking to the chair, that our own State Department indicated that Ecuador was doing a reasonably good job dealing with the FARC.

It is also my understanding that there is an individual that is currently serving 60 years in an American prison by the name of Simon Trinidad, who is a member of the FARC secretariat, that was captured by the Ecuadorians, and during the course of that capture, several Ecuadorian soldiers were killed.

I think it is important to make that as a matter of record, and I think that, again, my memory of that briefing, and I didn't accompany the codel, was that there were some 100 FARC encampments that had been closed by the Ecuadorians. Am I correct, Mr. Secretary? Because I don't want to make any statements that can't be supported.

Mr. INSULZA. I wouldn't know about the statement from the State Department that you mentioned, but I do know the facts about what you have said about Simon Trinidad. He was the leader of course extradited by the Ecuadorians to the Colombians, and from there to the United States. And certainly as President——

Mr. DELAHUNT. But it is your knowledge, then, that Simon Trinidad was captured by the Ecuadorians, delivered to the Colombians and then extradited to the United States?

Mr. INSULZA. I do know that. I don't remember exactly the date in which that happened. I do know of course that President Correa spoke about 90 camps that had been dismantled. Now, the problem is, as I say, that the size of the territory, the thickness of the jun-

gle, is—I believe that you can dismantle a camp here and there might be another one less than a mile away and it will still continue being there.

Even if it is permanent I agree, because I think it is true, that the camp was not just a temporary camp. I mean, there were some installations that show that it had been there. I am not really sure that you can say that because it was there for some time it could have been recognized and dismantled before.

The other thing I want to say is that I think that—let me say this. I mean, I am certain that the Ecuadorian Government wants the FARC out of their territory. I am fully convinced of that. The problem is that the costs of that militarily and materially are very high, and I am not sure that there a real possibility of doing that without destroying a very large part of the territory.

That is a problem. So the eradication has to be done in a way that can be compatible with the interests of peace for the Ecuadorian people and with the needs of all the region to fight against terrorism.

Mr. ENGEL. Well, thank you, Mr. Secretary. I think we will let that be the last word because you have been very generous with your time, and we very much appreciate your coming here. Let me just say that your coming today was unprecedented, and we appreciate it very, very much.

Your presence really shows, as far as I am concerned, that the OAS is an open institution with very, very good relations with the United States. We appreciate those relations, we appreciate all the work that you have done and the OAS has done, and appreciate your willingness to always come and speak with me and your excellent staff always has an open door.

Whenever my staff calls them they are always very, very responsive. So I want to thank you. I apologize for the delay, but we can never tell when votes are going to happen, and look forward to continuing our dialogue.

Mr. BURTON. May I just say that on the Republican side we also admire you and your organization. The only thing I would add is that we do have some differences from time to time.

Mr. INSULZA. Thank you very much. I must say that, Chairman Burton, when you were chairman we had all the facilities, and everything was—we had a very good dialogue, and we are very grateful for that. I want to thank the chair, also, for this invitation.

I must say that I very much believe that this is our organizational governments, and the governments have three branches, so any time any of the branches on any of the government will call out, we will be very happy to come. We have to serve the Congresses, also, as well as the governments.

We are very willing to have these meetings any time you want, sir.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you. Thank you very, very much.

Mr. INSULZA. Thank you.

Mr. ENGEL. We will now call on our second panel to come and take their seats. All right. It is my pleasure to welcome everyone here to the second panel. I want to again thank my good friend, José Miguel Insulza, for briefing our subcommittee on his recent mission to Colombia and Ecuador. It is a special honor to have him.

As you all know by now, March Madness did not begin on our nation's college basketball courts, but instead, with a Colombian raid on a FARC camp in Ecuador on March 1. The incursion caused a major diplomatic crisis between Colombia and Ecuador when Ecuador cut off diplomatic relations with Colombia and sent additional troops on its northern border with Colombia.

Venezuela followed suit by cutting off diplomatic and trade ties with Colombia and sending 10 battalions of troops to its border with Colombia.

Immediately after the crisis began, Ranking Member Burton, Congressman Meeks and I, along with 11 of our colleagues, sent a letter to the OAS, to Mr. Insulza, and OAS Permanent Council Chairman Cornelius Smith, asking the OAS to send a high level diplomatic mission to visit Colombia and Ecuador to gather facts on what happened and to negotiate a reduction of tensions in the region.

I was pleased that on March 5 the OAS member states decided to send such a mission, and I was particularly impressed by the leadership displayed by Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Panama, whose OAS ambassadors participated in the mission with Secretary General Insulza.

Sometimes, much to our pleasant surprise, diplomacy and face to face interaction have a way of resolving things when we least expect it.

That is precisely what happened on March 7 in Santo Domingo when Dominican President, Leonel Fernandez, masterfully transformed a meeting where you could cut the tension in the room with a knife to an exchange of handshakes and abrazos among the Colombia, Ecuadorian and Venezuelan Presidents.

The OAS then passed a resolution on March 17 rejecting the Colombian incursion to Ecuador and asking OAS Secretary General Insulza to implement a mechanism to restore trust between the two countries. I believe that the OAS stepped up to the plate in alleviating tensions between Colombia and Ecuador, and countries like Brazil, Chile and Argentina played an essential role in helping the OAS member states reach consensus.

One publication writing about the crisis and its resolution noted that "South American diplomacy went into overdrive." I agree with that. Of course regional diplomacy was just the start. The relations between Ecuador and Colombia are still at a historic low, and there is a long road ahead.

Ecuador has not yet restored diplomatic relations, as we mentioned before, and tensions between the two countries remain extremely high. While I won't comment on the merits of Ecuador's recently filed case against Colombia and The Hague over drug fumigation near their shared border, I believe it will not help in the short-term to allay bilateral tensions.

A likewise serious allegation of Venezuelan and Ecuadorian connections to the FARC have emerged from the files found on laptop computers belonging to slain FARC leader Raúl Reyes. Colombian officials maintain that files on the laptop show that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez may have channeled $300 million to the FARC.

There are also charges that the FARC made campaign contributions to President Correa in 2006. I believe that we must let cooler heads prevail here. I encourage our Colombian and Ecuadorian friends to avoid steps which might exacerbate tensions and impede efforts to improve cooperation.

I think Colombia should suspend the release of any further files from the laptops and give Interpol every opportunity to take an unbiased look at the documents before we jump to our own conclusions. At the same time, I think Ecuador should consider restoring diplomatic relations with Colombia and temporarily suspending its case in The Hague.

Let me also be clear that the FARC is a terrorist organization. As a New Yorker and U.S. citizen, I understand that such a brutal group needs to be confronted at all levels. Prior to the recent crisis the State Department had informed me, as Mr. Delahunt mentioned before, that Ecuador is doing a reasonably good job in taking on the FARC.

They reportedly closed more than 100 FARC encampments, captured FARC leader Simon Trinidad and even lost several Ecuadorian troops in the process. Nevertheless, while terrorists must not be permitted to use another country as a sanctuary, it is unclear exactly what happened in this instance.

So in all, I believe there are equities on both sides, and the United States should work with Presidents Uribe and Correa, along with our other partners in South America, to improve relations, communication and security cooperation so that such a crisis can be averted in the future. It is a little fuzzy here.

While I don't believe that borders should be used as sanctuary for terrorists, the question is: What actually happened? Of course we get different versions from both the Colombian and Ecuadorian Government. I think what we have to do is look forward, not backward, and agree that the FARC and other terrorists remain a threat to all countries, and there needs to be more cooperation in confronting them.

Let me make a brief comment on U.S. policy as it relates to the border crisis. As most of you know, I have been impressed with the administration's renaissance in diplomacy toward Latin America under the leadership of Assistant Secretary Shannon.

I may not be in the same political party as the President, but I believe that foreign policy must be bipartisan. I have never been shy about praising the administration's positive initiatives or being critical when I thought enough wasn't being done in the hemisphere.

Shortly after the tensions began to flare up between Colombia and Ecuador, President Bush reached out to Colombian President Uribe. I thought that was good, but President Bush didn't personally reach out to Ecuadorian President Correa. I think that was a mistake. I recently traveled to Ecuador, and Mr. Green mentioned it, he was with us, we had a very positive meeting with President Correa.

I am convinced that he is someone with whom the United States can and should work with. Frankly, I believe it was a mistake for the administration not to reach out to President Correa. I have also been to Colombia twice and have met with President Uribe twice.

I am very impressed with the job that President Uribe has done in transforming Colombia.

I am also impressed with the fact that Colombia has been a good ally of the United States, and in particular, President Uribe has done a lot to improve relations with us and also done a lot for his people in combating drugs, and crime and all the other things, and we should work with him as well.

I want to encourage Assistant Secretary Shannon and other Bush administration officials to visit Ecuador soon to compliment the administration's many visits to Colombia and show our commitment to bilateral relations. I believe that President Correa is someone that the United States can and should do business with.

I agree with everything we do with Mr. Uribe, and I encourage it, but I think that we should not turn our backs on Mr. Correa, who is U.S. educated and has said to me personally that he wants to have good bilateral relations with the United States. I was also disappointed that some of the things the administration was saying were sort of going off track.

I think that what we really need to do is figure out how the United States can play a very, very positive role in helping to ameliorate this crisis. I have introduced our people. I would like to turn to Mr. Burton for his opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Engel follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ELIOT L. ENGEL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK, AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

A quorum being present, the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere will come to order.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to today's hearing on the Andean border crisis. And, I want to once again thank my good friend José Miguel Insulza for briefing the Subcommittee on his recent mission to Colombia and Ecuador. It is a special honor to have the OAS Secretary General with us, and I know we all look forward to hearing his thoughts about the situation in the Andes.

As you all know by now, March madness this year unfortunately did not begin on our nation's college basketball courts, but instead with a Colombian raid on a FARC camp in Ecuador on March 1st. The unauthorized incursion caused a major diplomatic crisis between Colombia and Ecuador when Ecuador cut off diplomatic relations with Colombia and sent additional troops to its Northern border with Colombia. Venezuela followed suit by cutting off diplomatic and trade ties with Colombia and sending ten battalions of troops to its border with Colombia.

Immediately after the crisis began, Ranking Member Burton, Congressman Meeks and I, along with 11 of our colleagues, sent a letter to Organization of American States (OAS) Secretary General Insulza and OAS Permanent Council Chairman Cornelius Smith asking the OAS to send a high-level diplomatic mission to visit Colombia and Ecuador to gather facts on what happened and to negotiate a reduction of tensions in the region.

I was pleased that on March 5th, the OAS Member States decided to send such a mission to the region, and I was particularly impressed by the leadership displayed by Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Panama whose OAS ambassadors participated in the mission with Secretary General Insulza.

You know, sometimes, much to our pleasant surprise, diplomacy and face-to-face interaction have a way of resolving things when we least expect it. That's precisely what happened on March 7th in Santo Domingo when Dominican President Leonel Fernández masterfully transformed a meeting—where you could cut the tension in the room with a knife—to an exchange of handshakes and *abrazos* among the Colombian, Ecuadorian and Venezuelan Presidents.

The OAS then passed a resolution on March 17th rejecting the Colombian incursion into Ecuador, and asking the OAS Secretary General to implement a mechanism to restore trust between the two countries. I believe that the OAS really stepped up to the plate in alleviating tensions between Colombia and Ecuador. And

countries like Brazil, Chile and Argentina played an essential role in helping the OAS member states reach consensus. One publication, writing about the crisis and its resolution, noted that "South American diplomacy went into overdrive." I agree.

Of course, regional diplomacy was just the start. Relations between Ecuador and Colombia are still at a historic low, and there is a long road ahead. Ecuador has not yet restored diplomatic relations with Colombia, and tensions between the two countries remain extremely high. While I will not comment on the merits of Ecuador's recently filed case against Colombia in The Hague over drug fumigation near their shared border, I believe that it will not help in the short term to allay bilateral tensions.

Likewise, serious allegations of Venezuelan and Ecuadorian connections to the FARC have emerged from files found on laptop computers belonging to slain FARC leader Raúl Reyes. Colombian officials maintain that files on the laptops show that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez may have channeled $300 million to the FARC. There are also charges that the FARC made campaign contributions to President Correa in 2006.

I believe that we must let cooler heads prevail here. I encourage our Colombian and Ecuadoran friends to avoid steps which might exacerbate tensions and impede efforts to improve cooperation. I think Colombia should suspend the release of any further files from the laptops and give Interpol every opportunity to take an unbiased look at the documents before we jump to our own conclusions. At the same time, I think Ecuador should consider restoring diplomatic relations with Colombia and temporarily suspending its case in The Hague.

But, let me also be clear that the FARC is a terrorist organization. As a New Yorker and a United States citizen, I understand that such a brutal group needs to be confronted at all levels. Prior to the recent crisis, the State Department had informed me that Ecuador was doing a reasonably good job in taking on the FARC. They reportedly closed more than 100 FARC encampments, captured FARC leader Simon Trinidad, and even lost several Ecuadoran troops in the process. Nevertheless, while terrorists must not be permitted to use another country as a sanctuary, it is unclear exactly what happened in this instance. Moreover, while what President Uribe did might be understandable, I think it is possible that the Colombian military action might have been carried out differently, including with more notice.

So, all in all, I believe there are equities on both sides and that neither side is completely right and neither is completely wrong. Rather, the United States should work with Presidents Uribe and Correa, along with our other partners in South America, to improve relations, communication, and security cooperation so that such a crisis can be averted in the future.

Let me make a brief comment on U.S. policy as it relates to the border crisis. As most of you know, I have been impressed with the Bush Administration's renaissance in diplomacy toward Latin America under the leadership of Assistant Secretary Shannon. I may not be in the same political party as the President, but I believe that foreign policy must be bipartisan, and I have never been shy about praising the Administration's positive initiatives in the hemisphere. That said, I must say that I was very disappointed by the Bush Administration's reaction to the Colombia-Ecuador border conflict.

Shortly after tensions began to flare up between Colombia and Ecuador, President Bush reached out to Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. Unfortunately, President Bush failed to personally reach out to Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa. I recently traveled to Ecuador and had a very positive meeting with President Correa. I am convinced that he is someone with whom the United States can and should work. Frankly, I believe it was a mistake for President Bush not to reach out to President Correa. I encourage Assistant Secretary Shannon and other Bush Administration officials to visit Ecuador soon to complement the Administration's many visits to Colombia and show our commitment to bilateral relations.

I was also disappointed that the Administration wrapped the Colombia—Ecuador border dispute in the flag of the U.S.—Colombia Free Trade Agreement. This, too, was a mistake. Whether Congress should pass the FTA is a question for another day, but it certainly has nothing to do with the Colombian attack on the FARC just across the frontier into Ecuador. This rhetorical connection only isolated us from other countries in South America which were disturbed by Colombia's cross border raid. In the end, I believe a balanced response was called for—our response was skewed too heavily toward one side.

I now would like to introduce our distinguished witnesses. Julia Sweig is Nelson and David Rockefeller Senior Fellow for Latin America Studies and Director for Latin American Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. Michael Shifter is Vice President for Policy at the Inter-American Dialogue. And, finally, Ray Walser is

Senior Policy Analyst for Latin America at the Heritage Foundation. We look forward to hearing from all three of you.

I am now pleased to call on Ranking Member Burton for his opening statement.

Mr. BURTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I won't speak too long. There are things that trouble me. The alleged support for Correa by the FARC, the $300 million that went from Venezuela to the FARC, the money that supposedly went from the FARC to help Chavez in Venezuela when he was in jail. It just seems like that there is a too cozy relationship.

When my colleague was talking earlier, Mr. Delahunt, about meeting with Reyes it was indicated that, you know, he was successful. The meeting between Reyes and Foreign Ecuadorian Minister Larrea was not known to Colombia. I think that Secretary Shannon stated that when he was before the committee.

We all want to see peace and harmony in Central and South America. I was chairman of this committee, as the chairman just said, for some time, and that was one of the goals. The administration, we thought, was not doing enough to work with Central and South America, and this is our front yard so we should be paying attention to it.

We are now starting to pay attention to it more, and we should. The thing that bothers me is that the Ecuadorian Government had contact with the FARC. The Ecuadorian Government got money from Venezuela and allegedly helped Venezuelan President Chavez when he was in jail, and the FARC seemed to have a fairly secure feeling because that was a pretty much permanent camp that was attacked there.

There has to be some open support between all of these countries down there regarding terrorists. When I say open support, they have to get together and talk about really going after them and not violating U.N. Resolution 1373, which has been adopted by the Organization of American States, and make sure that there are no safe havens or what appear to be safe havens by the FARC or any other terrorist organization.

When you have a terrorist organization that is going across the border from one country to the other for protection and sanctuary, then that leads to more problems down the road. I used this analogy to one of my staff people a while ago.

If somebody came into your yard and beat the heck out of your son, and then ran across the yard into their yard and said hey, you can't touch me here, people would really get upset, especially when there is no police agency to do anything about it. They would want to go over there and take the measure of the person that beat up on their child.

I think the same thing is true of a country. I think countries don't like to have their neighbors providing sanctuary for organizations like the FARC. So I won't belabor this point.

I hope the OAS continues to do everything they can to bring every country together, and I hope to go down, hopefully with Mr. Meeks and others, back down to Ecuador and maybe Venezuela again to talk to some of the people with whom we have some disagreements to see if we can't get this thing worked out so that there aren't any more of these cross-border incidents.

I know that President Uribe apologized for that, and I think he is sincere, but at the same time, the FARC has been causing chaos in his country, has killed an awful lot of people, kidnapped a lot of people and done a lot of damage, and it is understandable that he wanted to destroy a main camp of the FARC when that took place. With that, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back my time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Burton follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DAN BURTON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF INDIANA

I would like to personally thank Secretary General Insulza and the private sector panelists for being here today as we address the important role played by the diverse nations in the Andean Region. I look forward to the discussion ahead of us.

First of all, we are here today to discuss the border dispute between Colombia and Ecuador that was aggravated by Venezuelan involvement. I am glad to see that the international conflict was settled peacefully and that the OAS offered an important sanctuary for carrying through with the necessary diplomatic assurances. I have personally asked that the Department of State provide Members of Congress with a secure briefing on the contents of the hard drive that was recovered during the raid on the FARC establishment on March 1st. We will be able to discuss the implications of the incursion in much further detail when we have all of the facts before us. As we move forward I would like to note something that a witness before this Subcommittee pointed out at a previous hearing, state sovereignty must not come at such a price that we are forced to give up the protection of our country. I believe that this is an important nuance to remember in addition to noting that the FARC has been a long time enemy of all democratically elected governments.

Just briefly, I would like to outline my thoughts on the region and the implications of recent events. Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela each offer a unique approach to their region as well as in relation to the United States. Among them is the fact that of the fifteen largest suppliers of petroleum to the U.S., five are from Latin America and three are from Andean countries, namely Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia. Natural resources shape many issues, from Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's threats to cut oil supply into the U.S. to Bolivia's decision not to sell natural gas to Chile, energy is frequently as much a political tool as it is an economic issue.

In addition to Energy, Trade and Drugs are prominent issues in the US/Andean relationships. The U.S. Congress has continuously approved Trade Preferences to our allies in Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia and Peru in order to boost economic opportunities and help fight the war on drugs in South America. The United States has worked with Ecuador to revolutionize the Manta Air Base which has utilized U.S. technology in the air and water to take illicit drugs off the streets. In 2006 alone, aircrews flew more than 1,200 missions from Manta and helped seize more than 258 tons of illegal drugs with an estimated street value of $5.2 billion. Ecuador benefited two-fold in the arrangement through the US investment of more than $70 million to upgrade the airport providing Ecuador with a long runway on a civilian run airfield to transport their tuna and flowers to a large market of investors in the United States. The local economy benefited from more than $6.5 million annually and job opportunities for Ecuadorean citizens. Chile has thrived under a strong democracy and through the US-Chile bilateral trade agreement. Peru is beginning to benefit through a similar arrangement and hopefully soon Colombia will be added to that list.

Ecuador's plan to not renew the contract for the Manta Airbase and Bolivian President Evo Morales' rhetoric against the U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia has been troubling, as have many actions and rhetoric coming from Venezuela. Unfortunately, Ecuador's President has recently followed suit by stepping up accusations against the US as well. The complex political relationships in addition to issues of energy, trade and drug trafficking are factors that we must keep in mind when we look at implications for the region.

With that I would like to once again thank our distinguished panelists for being here today and I look forward to hearing your remarks on the crisis that was averted in the region and how we can best move forward.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Burton. Before I comment let me make a quick 2-minute statement myself. I don't know if Mr. Green has a statement, but right after me, Mr. Green. I wish we were

here today to discuss positive developments in the Andes rather than the tensions that have developed in the region and reverberated throughout the western hemisphere.

I think it is important that we learn from the recent upheaval and determine how to avoid these circumstances in the future. Over the past decade democracy has been consolidating in Latin America. We have seen evidence of this as democratic processes have been utilized to deal with the internal political issues rather than the military conflicts that were more typical just a couple of decades ago.

Generally speaking, civil society feels more empowered, and governments are trying to find ways to respond to the needs of their people. However, we know that the transformation of Latin America is still ongoing, and we must do all we can to ensure that progress is not derailed. I know that many representatives from countries of the Andes region are in the room right now.

I hope to continue this discussion with them long after this hearing has ended because I believe that dialogue rather than acrimony between the nations of the hemisphere is the key to our long-term security. The incursion of Colombia on Ecuadorian territory in the fight against the FARC has shaken the region and must be addressed so that destabilization can be avoided.

The stability and security of the Andes is of strategic importance to our own national security. The mobilization of troops, like that which occurred after the Colombian incursion into Ecuador's territory, demonstrated the speed at which a political conflict could potentially develop into a military conflict.

Those who would be most hurt by the escalation of tensions are the very people who are the most vulnerable. There would surely be a rapid increase in persons displaced by conflict and the creation of an environment within the region that would further facilitate narcotrafficking and encourage terrorist activities.

It is for these reasons that the United States should be doing all that it can to ensure that the political conflicts in the region do not escalate. Despite the detrimental impacts of this political conflict it is pleasing to see the effective use of the Organization of American States and the Rio Summit to formulate an agreement between the states that moves the parties toward renewing normal diplomatic relations.

This was achieved through the Rio Summits' resolution, which rejected Colombia's incursion of Ecuadorian territory but acknowledged Colombia's apology for the incursion and vowed that it would never happen again. In addition, the Organization of American States has called for the restoration of diplomatic ties between Ecuador and Colombia.

These efforts have brought the region back from the brink of war, but diplomatic relations remain strained. However, it is important to note that trade ties in the region have rebounded where they were disrupted. It is also important to note the role played by Venezuela in the recent crisis. This conflict has illustrated the nation's influence in the region.

Venezuela contributed to the escalation of the conflict, but also was integral to the brokering of a resolution to diffuse the situation. I offer words of caution to my colleagues that propose that

Venezuela be deemed a state sponsor of terrorism. We must increase our diplomatic efforts with Venezuela rather than to continue to harmfully exacerbate tensions which do not serve in our nation's best interests.

Oftentimes we talk about Venezuela, but when, for example, they had a recall election, a democratic process took place and we did not come to compliment them on that democratic process.

We have to make sure that we deal with even hands equitably with all the countries, whether it is Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia, so that we can help bring those regions together and not try to pick and choose and force one against the other. It has got to be that we are working collectively together.

That should be the role of the United States of America. Not demonizing one and praising the other but trying to work collectively together with all of them in the region. It is important for the region and it is important for us that we do that. We are moving post the Cold War period, so we should not have those initiatives that we have when we are in the Cold War.

I think that there have been many other missed opportunities in making sure that we have normal relations with Venezuela. There have been missed opportunities I think that Chairman Engel talked about with reference to the President reaching out to President Correa of Ecuador. We must make sure that we don't do that.

We must make sure that from this Congress we don't send the wrong messages to these countries. So with that, I would like to thank Chairman Engel for calling this hearing. The stability and security of the Andes region is critical to the security of the United States and will potentially have far reaching consequences for our foreign and domestic policy.

I look forward to working with the OAS and other regional stakeholders for the betterment of the hemisphere, working collectively because they are just our neighbors to the south. If there are problems there, there will be problems at home. Let us work together. I yield now to Mr. Green for his opening statement.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just submitted the statement for the record. I think our codel that traveled and met with President Correa mainly dealt with at that time the extension of the Andean trade preferences, but we also talked about a number of other things. I would hope, like I said earlier when the Secretary General was here, that we could use the offices of the OAS many times as they were used to diffuse the situation in the area.

We do have a long working relationship with Ecuador as well as Colombia, and I would hope we would continue to do that. With that, Mr. Chairman, I just ask my statement be placed in the record.

Mr. MEEKS. Without objection.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Green follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE GENE GREEN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing and I would like to welcome His Excellency, Jose Miguel Insulza and our other distinguished panelists here today.

I recently returned from a trip in February to the Andean region with Chairman Engel and some of our other colleagues where we met actually with President Correa.

Our meeting mainly focused on the recent extension of the Andean trade preferences, and President Correa seemed appreciative for the extensions.

I think that Ecuador is developing and strengthening legitimate industries and that they not only deserved the preferences for this reason, but because they are working to combat drug trafficking and production in their countries—although this is an ongoing struggle.

I left with the hope that the United States and Ecuador could begin to work more closely on a number of issues important to the Andean region and the hemisphere as a whole.

But just yesterday, we heard that Ecuador's top four military commanders had resigned after President Correa accused the military of aiding the United States in operations against FARC rebels—making this hearing even timelier.

I am interested in what the Organization of the American States has to say about this development and how the witnesses suggest the United States move forward in dealing with Ecuador.

Colombia has been a critical partner to the United States in the Andean region for quite some time now. Our combined efforts to combat drug trafficking and counterterrorism are ongoing.

I am very concerned about any implications that this incident might have for Ecuador and Colombia relations, how the remaining tensions will play out in the region, and particularly, what role the United States should play in reconciling their differences.

Stability in the Andean region is so important, especially given Venezuela's growing influence throughout Latin America and President Chavez's particular penchant for meddling in Ecuador.

The press often portrays President Correa as a friend of Chavez. After meeting him, I am not convinced that this is the case.

I believe that the United States should work with both Colombia and Ecuador.

Representing a district in Texas, I fully understand the importance of good relations with our neighbors to the South.

It is unfortunate that our foreign policy focus has shifted elsewhere for the last five years, but I am hopeful that we can move forward and work with our friends and partners on issues that affect all of us in the hemisphere.

A prosperous and peaceful Western Hemisphere serves as a model for other parts of the world.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing and I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.

Mr. MEEKS. I now would like to introduce our distinguished witnesses. We have Julia Sweig. She is a Nelson and David Rockefeller senior fellow from Latin American Studies and director for Latin American Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. We have Michael Shifter. He is a vice president for policy at Inter-American Dialogue.

Finally, Ray Walser. He is a senior policy analyst for Latin America at The Heritage Foundation. We look forward to hearing from all three of you.

Ms. Sweig.

STATEMENT OF JULIA E. SWEIG, PH.D., NELSON AND DAVID ROCKEFELLER SENIOR FELLOW, DIRECTOR FOR LATIN AMERICA STUDIES, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Ms. SWEIG. Thank you. Triple thank yous to all of you for the invitation, to the super staff of the committee and for the opportunity to be here with my colleagues. My written testimony is available. I am going to speak just for 5 minutes and will be happy to take your questions.

About 4 years ago, which in our calendar could be an eternity, but is not, unfortunately, in the calendar in the Andean region, the Council on Foreign Relations put together a bipartisan task force

that produced this report which is not obsolete, unfortunately, in its recommendations or analysis I think and very germane to the discussion today. Andes 20/20: A New Strategy for the Challenges of Colombia and the Region.

It is available here, too, and I address the central recommendations. The analysis in it focuses on four issues. Number one, the sort of consequences of a very entrenched bilateralism of the United States/Colombia relationship in the absence of more dynamic regional mechanisms and regional diplomacy on behalf of the United States and on behalf of the key players in the region.

Number two, the focus on drug policy at the core of Plan Colombia, without adequate attention to the other social, legal, political issues that underlie the conflict in Colombia.

Number three, the absence in the entire region of what we call a social contract. That is that the weakness of the institutions and the inequality and poverty create kind of vulnerability to criminal syndicates, to terrorist organizations, to insurgent groups and that United States policy needs to, along with our partners in Latin America, better address those dynamics in order to get greater investment in the people and institutions of that country to resist the vulnerabilities that have created the kind of crisis that we have today.

The other issue of course that we addressed is the matter of long-term what it is that the United States can and increasingly can't do. I think that is one of the issues that we face today, which is that perhaps our limitations are much greater than our possibilities in terms of playing a role, and maybe that is not such a bad thing.

As we have seen in the recent resolution or reduction of tensions, other powers, other institutions, the OAS, the Rio group, Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Peru, Argentina, Mexico, have played a role in this with the United States having a much lighter touch. I want to raise a couple of questions that go to the crisis itself and the behavior and the role of different actors in that crisis.

These go quite a bit beyond the issues that I put in my testimony. I am sorry.

The fourth issue in this set of policy recommendations that we do get at is the importance of a regional trade agreement. Not just bilateral trade arrangements but that regional trade arrangements need to go forward.

Of course the real etiological environment has changed a little bit in the region since that, but I believe that is still critically important. Much more recently, look, I think we have to raise this question. Colombia took out a FARC camp in Ecuador's territory, and that issue of sovereignty versus self-defense we have been heard discussed today.

I guess my question is: Would President Correa have allowed President Uribe to do so had President Uribe asked permission? That is a tough question, but I don't work for a government so I am going to just put it out there. One question. Second question. Did President Uribe do Ecuador any favors by doing that?

That would be another question. It is totally reasonable for Ecuador to have vociferously objected to the violation of its sovereignty,

but what this issue goes to is that we now have governments of the region who ought to be cooperating closely with one another in neutralizing the effects of the FARC's weakening status—because it is weakening, I think we have seen that—who seem not to be talking to one another.

We are now seven, 8 years into Plan Colombia, and we don't have the kind of regional diplomatic discussions and regional security mechanisms in place that really should have gone at the front end. I think this is an opportunity that we are going to see going forward, that the OAS and other powers will step in to try to push that because that is really what we see having been absent.

Of course the other issue goes to Venezuela. In my digestion of what happened in this crisis, Ecuador was relatively silent until Venezuela stepped up the rhetoric, and then the tensions seem to have escalated. It seems to be true that Venezuela played a role in reducing the tensions as well, but I still don't understand why, other than as an opportunity to sort of beat up on the United States, we had this kind of escalation of rhetoric and movement of troops.

It was very, very unfortunate. I think we are going to see the Interpol investigations yield some more information that will probably force a fairly serious discussion based on what those investigations find from the FARC computers. The OAS has taken a role in dialing back the tensions.

The question is: What kind of support does the OAS need going forward in order to put in place the kind of mechanisms to bring together the countries of the region, regardless of their etiology, to try to actually try to contain and neutralize the FARC and other organizations of that nature.

Last, the United States. You know, look, it is one thing to defend an ally and important to defend and support Colombia, to support Plan Colombia. I think the grievance is legitimate that we seem to be seen as playing favorites in a region where that is not at all helpful.

I share Chairman Engel's embrace of Tom Shannon's efforts to enhance our diplomatic standing in the region, but, again, playing favorites is a very bad idea, and we seem still to be tone deaf about how unilateralism plays in this hemisphere. I will stop there. Thank you very much.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you. Mr. Shifter.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Sweig follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JULIA E. SWEIG, PH.D., NELSON AND DAVID ROCKEFELLER SENIOR FELLOW, DIRECTOR FOR LATIN AMERICA STUDIES, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to accept your invitation to testify today about the recent border crisis between Colombia and Ecuador and its implications for U.S. foreign policy and the region.

Under Secretary General Insulza's leadership, the OAS and a number of its member states have begun a process of finding new and more responsive mechanisms for the region's countries and institutions to more closely monitor and hopefully ameliorate the conditions that prompted the March 2008 events.

While we will know more once Interpol has completed its investigation, recent events have made clear that one feature of the FARC's increasingly recognized decomposition and greater weakness is its interest in international activities beyond Colombian territorial borders. These borders are shared not only with Ecuador and Venezuela, the focuses of the recent border crisis. Brazil, Peru and Panama also

share borders with Colombia. In that light, mechanisms for regional actors to help contain, and to help Colombia contain, the negative affects of the FARC's deterioration are increasingly urgent and recognized as such.

The weakening of an armed insurgency or criminal syndicate, indeed, even its demobilization, as in the case of the paramilitaries in Colombia, or its disarming and reintegration in a full blown peace process as in Central America, or as we see today in Iraq, can produce unintended consequences: without a number of conditions in place, violence and social conflict can continue and even worsen. And as General Petraeus pointed out in his recent U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, without adequate institutions in host nations, the gains of a counterinsurgency military campaign will not translate into political progress.

You have asked me to reflect on the implications of the recent and still unfolding crisis in the Andean region for U.S. policy going forward. I will take this opportunity to make some observations about the limits and possibilities for the United States, at a time when its capacity and standing is highly constrained in the hemisphere, owing to involvement elsewhere in the world, to the country's own economic and financial conditions, and to an ever greater demand and capacity for independence by an ever more democratic Latin America.

In 2004, four years into Plan Colombia, I directed a year-long bipartisan task force sponsored by the Center for Preventive Action at the Council on Foreign Relations: Andes 2020: a New Strategy for the Challenges of Colombia and the Region. I know that four years can seem an eternity, and I wish I could say this report has become obsolete. But this crisis has demonstrated that the three principal assumptions underlying our analysis, conclusions and recommendations remain highly germane today and going forward.

First: drug policy. In the last twenty years the United States has spent approximately $30 billion dollars on eradication and interdiction in the Andean region. With the net acreage under cultivation roughly the same or greater than in 1989, and with the price lower and purity higher, we have to ask what other conditions we and our Latin American partners and other consuming countries must address in order to more effectively weaken the illegal drug industry and the criminal syndicates and insurgent groups that thrive on them.

Second: an absent social contract. Although this is now changing for the better, those three words for many decades now—no, centuries—aptly characterize the region. If we measure the commitment of a country's elite to their own people by the percentage of GDP that governments collect from tax revenue (whether on property, investment, income or consumption), Latin America, but especially the Andean region, ranks at about one third the average industrialized country's, with approximately 17 percent of GDP coming from tax revenue. (The United States has declined from the low thirties to the mid-to-high twenties in percentage of GDP from tax revenue). Especially in the face of significant structural inequality and ethnic cleavages, and in a region with ample natural resources, a regressive tax take—but more importantly, a simply inadequate one—means that governments cannot pay for the kinds of institutions, public services and investments in human capital and infrastructure this region of the world will need to reduce its vulnerabilities to organized crime and narcotics-fueled insurgent violence.

Third: regional problems require regional solutions. The problems in the Andes that make the region vulnerable to criminal syndicates and guerrilla and paramilitary groups that traffic in contraband, including drugs, are shared by Colombia's neighbors: rural poverty, structural inequality, weak or nonexistent state institutions, widespread informality in the labor sector, corruption, impunity, ethnic cleavages, vast ungoverned rural and urban spaces and of course porous borders, or "fronteras vivas," in the region's vernacular. As we know, the FARC, the ELN and the paramilitaries have historically relied upon the ungoverned spaces of border regions with Ecuador and Venezuela as rear guards, for rest and relaxation, to bolster supply and to hide hostages. And these are the very regions where, though often low in population and high in rural poverty, as elsewhere that coca is cultivated, coca and the business it generates becomes an option—often the only option. Regional problems, those that do not recognize borders, require regional solutions, and for the United States that means moving beyond the entrenched bilateralism that has characterized our approach to the Andean region, whether with respect to Colombia or to any other country.

Against this backdrop, some reflections on what Plan Colombia and the U.S.-Colombia bilateral relationship, a relationship both President Bush and President Uribe, but also their predecessors, described as a key, even strategic alliance. The intensity of the bilateral relationship has become especially stark in contrast to the deterioration of U.S. standing among governments and publics elsewhere in the Andes.

However imperfectly, Plan Colombia has helped the Colombian government produce important successes, especially in strengthening Colombia's armed forces and in reducing homicides and kidnappings, though sometimes these successes come with major problems regarding the rule of law and human rights, and the ubiquity of paramilitary influence in many of Colombia's institutions, to be sure. But as a result of its dependence upon the United States for security assistance, and because of the close affinity between these two presidents and the former two presidents, Colombia I believe has tethered itself too closely to the United States. We are seeing the domestic fallout of this relationship play out in our own election cycle, and likewise, in Colombia, as in many other allied countries with a long history of close ties, public attitudes toward the United States are growing suspicious, even as support for Uribe remains high. Likewise, the United States, though this is changing, has invested a lion's share of its diplomatic capital to Colombia at the expense of more forceful and comprehensive diplomatic dialogues in the neighborhood. Neither Colombia nor the United States benefit from diplomatic isolation, and the security consequences of that state of affairs became obvious in early March.

Although there is a recognition that the United States needs to recover lost time and lost standing, we are fortunately seeing other powers, such as Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Peru, the Dominican Republic, and regional institutions such as the OAS step into the policy and diplomatic vacuum created as a result of a heavy emphasis of resources put towards strengthening Colombia, and all this despite a very ideological tone emanating from several capitals over the last years—whether Washington, Caracas, or Bogotá.

Over the coming months and years, I believe the region's countries and institutions of the region, as a result of this border crisis and as a result of the constraints on the United States, are going to strengthen their own mechanisms for conflict prevention and regional diplomacy. The United States should take the opportunity to have our own debate about counternarcotics policies and about how we talk with nations in the region about the challenges they face.

Our Andes 2020 report offered some very detailed recommendations to move beyond the myopia of drug eradication as the centerpiece of our policies in the region, focusing on rural poverty and security, especially in border regions, and on U.S., multilateral and sub-regional mechanisms to boost attention and revenue for both. Mr. Chairman, as the countries of the Andean region (and more broadly of South America) start talking with one another to sort out new more responsive modalities for security and diplomatic ties, the United States can play a facilitating role, as Admiral Stavridis has undertaken.

But in Latin America it is my hope that soon it will no longer be necessary for the United States to mediate, convene, cajole or berate in order to get things done. In fact, as we've seen in other parts of the world, but especially in Latin America, a lighter touch can often be far more effective than the tone deaf "Father-Knows-Best" approach that the countries of the region have come to anticipate, but increasingly hope to leave behind, as a relic of the 19th and 20th centuries.

I am not saying the United States needs to renounce its interests: our own security and prosperity gives us a stake in seeing poverty and inequality reduced; we have a stake in stronger public institutions; we have a stake in helping insure truly fair and democratic access to local and global markets (as opposed to the illiberal market environments that still prevail); we have a strong stake in open societies and democratic governance deepening and taking root.

With these priorities broadly shared throughout the hemisphere, I believe we are approaching a moment, especially following our own presidential election, and whatever its result, when we can turn a corner. We need to recognize that in the 21st century the lion's share of the policies and political decisions that will make a real difference in improving the quality of life for Latin Americans, whether their physical or economic security, will be made by Latin Americans. The United States will be but one of many outside actors to influence events on the ground in a region that at every turn is diversifying its trade, investment and diplomatic portfolio to encompass not just the hemisphere but the globe.

In our policy dialogue we should demonstrate that we recognize the severity of problems such as poverty and inequality, of common and organized crime, of the rule of law, of public health. And we should move more resources, and not just dollars, into initiatives designed to address these challenges.

The implication for U.S. foreign policy is that if Plan Colombia stagnates as a primarily security based policy, without growing to become a policy framed around strengthening the Colombian state's political institutions by encouraging revenue generating capacities, enhancing rule of law, and stressing the independence of human rights offices from political offices, for example, then the gains we've seen militarily could quickly evaporate, as in previous cycles of the Colombian conflict.

There are also a few things we need to do at home, that directly bear on whether Latin Americans can create a better security environment and the regional mechanisms necessary to support them. A country such as the United States that maintains an avid taste for recreational drugs, needs to make available accessible, affordable treatment to its users and addicts. Likewise, the United States needs to employ the financial and other intelligence resources developed since 2001 to track and freeze drug-related money-laundering and undertake other measures to crack down on drug-related organized crime rather than focus, as in the Andes, on eradicating the coca leaf, cocaine's least lucrative stage of production. Likewise, with a thriving weapons market of its own, the United States needs to regulate the flow of light arms south and participate in regional multilateral regimes designed to do so.

I hope these observations are useful and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

STATEMENT OF MR. MICHAEL SHIFTER, VICE PRESIDENT FOR POLICY, INTER–AMERICAN DIALOGUE

Mr. SHIFTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to submit my testimony for the record, and also to commend you for holding this hearing. I appreciate the opportunity. The incident that prompted this hearing I think was indeed ominous and showed that the region is very unsettled and very complicated. I think there is a lot of good news that came out of this that I think is important to highlight.

No one in Latin America, no one at all, certainly not the big countries, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, other countries, wanted to see this crisis develop. All were concerned about the opposing priorities and the dangers involved, the violation of sovereignty on the one hand, which is an important principle, and also, security cooperation against violent groups on the other.

That is why fundamentally the resorting to the OAS worked in this case, because it is an instrument for the nations to work together. I think Secretary General Insulza deserves credit for his leadership in this situation. We would recognize that there is no desire at all to let the region break up into competing camps and let etiological differences balloon into geopolitical crises.

The test for the OAS comes now I think to see how this mechanism that is being set up on the border works and whether it could be effective.

There is a basic dilemma that has been alluded to this morning moving forward which I think we should focus on, as Chairman Engel said, how to on the one hand alleviate the tensions, enhance peace and security while at the same time examining the credible information on the alleged connections between governments in the region, Venezuela and Ecuador, and the FARC.

The good news is that this incident has taken the lid off the situation and has allowed us to examine what is happening. The test now is how do we handle it, how do we manage it and how to move forward. It is hard to overstate from Colombia's perspective the extent of anger and revulsion that is felt toward the FARC.

As we have seen in recent months with the various marches that have taken place, including one this last Sunday, the country is going through a collective catharsis. They desperately want to end their decades-long conflict. This question is sensitive about possible cooperation with other governments. It needs to be treated with great care and responsibility.

How does the U.S. act in this situation, and what are some guidelines for going forward? First thing to notice is the U.S. played a very secondary and marginal role. We didn't have many choices, in fact. We don't have the capacity to intervene as we once did in this region, the United States is distracted on other questions, and also, the Latin Americans won't really tolerate or accept such intervention.

The region has changed in basic ways and so has the U.S. relationship with the region. At the same time, the crisis was too dangerous to ignore entirely, and there was potential that things could get out of hand and for there to be real trouble. So we essentially I think in this case followed the Latin American lead for mutual settlement, which proved effective.

I agree that President Bush's statement of support for the Uribe government was entirely understandable given the relationship between the United States and Colombia, which I support, but at the same time, it was not too helpful. I think a more even-handed expression calling for calm overall would have been more constructive at that moment.

It is also not in Colombia's interest to be isolated from its neighbors because peace and security for Colombia depends on cooperation and trust with its neighbors. Let me just, if I can, very briefly talk about six guidelines that might be useful and something to think about in moving forward on U.S. policy.

Mr. MEEKS. Just a second. We have a vote coming up, and I want to try to get to the testimony of the witnesses and come back to the questions, if we can.

Mr. SHIFTER. Well, the first is that the United States in dealing with this information needs to be very careful and very delicate. I think the main approach is to go to our main allies in the region and to consult with them how they see this information about the alleged connections and what they would like to do about it.

I think there should be a consultative process going on with Mexico, Brazil especially, Chile and other countries. Second is support Colombia and the free trade agreement, and to work toward the passage of that agreement. The approach toward Venezuela I think has improved. We learned some lessons.

We have to review this information that is coming out, but I think we also have to keep in mind any consequences of any decisions made regarding Venezuela toward peace and security. We move forward on the hostage releases of the FARC. I think there are still 700 hostages being held. There is a strong humanitarian question at stake, and the U.S. could be helpful on that.

Stay engaged with Ecuador. I think support for counternarcotics trade preferences are also essential. Finally, Mr. Chairman, to support the OAS and other multilateral fora I think is absolutely essential. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Shifter follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MR. MICHAEL SHIFTER, VICE PRESIDENT FOR POLICY, INTER-AMERICAN DIALOGUE

Last month's ominous episode involving three Andean countries offers a much-needed opportunity to examine what is happening more widely in the region and to assess its implications for U.S. policy. The Colombian government's military incursion against a Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) camp in north-

ern Ecuador and the international reaction reveal a great deal about the changing realities in the hemisphere and the capacity for effective diplomatic responses. Tensions have mercifully subsided, but the underlying problems that provoked the flare-up have not disappeared, leaving the region uneasy and combustible. It is essential not to ignore what has been learned from the recent crisis, but instead to address the challenges, acutely mindful of the consequences for regional peace and stability.

WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR ACTIONS AND REACTIONS BY COLOMBIA, ECUADOR, AND VENEZUELA?

Colombia is going through a collective catharsis. The closest analogy to what is happening may not be elsewhere in Latin America, but rather South Africa. The country has endured a dreadful drug-fueled armed conflict and a severe humanitarian crisis for decades and is now palpably struggling to confront and overcome the trauma. After experiencing such an ordeal, any serious attempt at cleansing and reconciliation will take place at best by fits and starts, running into enormous resistance by those wedded to the status quo. But the catharsis is underway, and that is salutary.

Perhaps the most dramatic sign of such a catharsis is the unprecedented series of recent street marches. Last Sunday thousands mobilized demanding that the FARC release the hundreds of hostages it holds—some for over a decade—including former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three Americans kidnapped in Colombia over five years ago. The March 6th protest against violence in Colombia, particularly paramilitary brutality, was also significant. Most impressive were the massive marches on February 4th in Colombia and many other cities throughout the world (including Washington, DC), expressing outrage at atrocities committed by the FARC.

Most Colombians believe that in the past several years the country has made notable progress towards greater security and peace. That widespread confidence largely accounts for the overwhelming public support—84% in the most recent poll—enjoyed by President Alvaro Uribe. His "democratic security" strategy has helped the government assert its authority and expand state presence throughout the national territory. The demobilization of paramilitary forces, initiated in late 2003, has been accompanied by significant and sustained military pressure against the FARC. Last August, President Uribe undertook an initiative to free hostages held by the FARC, enlisting the support of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. That effort ended just three months later, but Chavez has since facilitated the unilateral release of six FARC hostages.

Against that backdrop, it is hardly surprising that the March 1 raid on the FARC camp was applauded by a large majority of Colombians. The killing of Raul Reyes, regarded as the second most important FARC official, was seen as a significant blow against a hugely unpopular insurgency that has wreaked much havoc for decades. Any diplomatic costs incurred were outweighed by the belief that the strike moved the country a step closer to ending the conflict. Armed with sound intelligence on Reyes's whereabouts, the Colombians acted quickly and decisively. From their perspective, they had previously solicited the Ecuadoran government's cooperation, but to no avail.

The Ecuadoran government deems Colombia's targeted attack unacceptable, arguing that it has in fact pursued the FARC and destroyed camps in its territory. Ecuador's strong reaction to the military strike on its territory and to the subsequent discovery that one of its citizens was among those killed was predictable. Most Ecuadorans do not want to get caught up in the Colombian conflict. They believe the Colombian government should do a better job confining the conflict to its country and containing any spill-over effects. Ecuador has managed to prevent coca production in its territory and does not want to jeopardize that achievement. Among the least politically stable countries in Latin America, Ecuador has profound governance and poverty challenges that would only be exacerbated by involvement in the conflict.

Of course, the outrage expressed by Ecuadorans also stemmed from the fact that Colombia violated its sovereignty and territorial integrity. These are sacred, inviolable principles in a region that has suffered from foreign intervention in the past. The anger was compounded since it is well known that Colombia has received ample security aid from the United States over the last decade. Further, in stark contrast to Colombian public opinion, most Ecuadorans side with the government in its skepticism of the authenticity of files in Reyes's laptop computers found after the raid. President Rafael Correa, in office since January 2006, has expressed the popular outrage in Ecuador and benefited politically. He is in the midst of leading an effort

to rewrite his country's constitution, and Colombia's incursion helped him consolidate political support and reverse a slide in popularity.

The crisis clearly reveals the vast differences in national priorities as well as the high levels of mistrust on this sensitive matter. Unfortunately, the Ecuador-Colombia diplomatic relationship has been ruptured as a result. Commerce between the two countries has been largely unaffected, but cooperation along the border in attacking the drug problem has suffered. This marks a serious setback. Prior to the March 1 attack, both governments were working together more productively on the drug issue. The Correa administration has filed a suit against Colombia at the International Court of Justice to stop aerial coca fumigation along the border, citing the negative human and environmental impacts. The move makes prospects for a rapprochement in the near term remote.

It is striking that, given that Venezuelan territory was untouched, President Chavez initially reacted to Colombia's raid even more angrily and vigorously than President Correa did. Chavez saw Colombia's military action as a unilateral intervention instigated by the United States. His decision to move tanks to the border and his defiant posture were aimed chiefly to Washington, as a warning against future US military involvement.

The response was also partly designed to shore up domestic political support. According to several reliable polls, Chavez's popularity has been dropping steadily since December 2, when he was narrowly defeated in a national referendum on constitutional reforms. Nonetheless, unlike Uribe and Correa, who have benefited politically from their handling of the Andean situation, Chavez has alienated voters with his bellicosity and nationalism. Most Venezuelans wonder why their president was compelled to assume center stage in response to an episode unrelated to their country. For many this seemed like yet another example of misplaced priorities—regional adventurism while Venezuelans face growing problems at home.

Like Correa, Chavez has categorically rejected the claim that the computer files found in the FARC camp are authentic. Still, it is worth pointing out that Chavez has recently been uncharacteristically restrained regarding Reyes's laptop information. The information in those files, if verified, would raise serious questions about the relationship the FARC had with Chavez and, to a lesser extent, Correa.

WHY DID THINGS CALM DOWN? WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FLARE UP?

The potentially explosive situation in the Andes last month was defused chiefly because Uribe and Chavez checkmated one another. Whereas Uribe was concerned about international criticism of the violation of sovereignty, Chavez was perceptibly uncomfortable with the information found in the computer files. It was in neither president's interest to press on with a confrontational strategy that would keep delicate issues in the limelight. In the end, they both decided to back down, embracing at the Rio Group meeting in the Dominican Republic, which was fortuitously timed on March 9. That Chavez quickly resumed diplomatic relations and trade with Colombia reflects his desire to move on and the importance of bilateral commerce. Last year, trade between the two countries was up sharply, totaling $5.5 billion.

Indeed, one of the principal lessons from the border incident and its aftermath is that these Andean nations—particularly Colombia and Venezuela—have profound connections with one another that serve as shock absorbers and help prevent volatile situations from spiraling out of control. The links are not only economic, but also involve energy cooperation, cultural ties and fluid migratory patterns. They simply have too much at stake to proceed down such a perilous course.

Another key lesson is that despite the indisputable mistrust and bitterness between Colombia and these two neighbors, there is a fortunate propensity to turn to regional bodies to help resolve disputes. From the outset, the three relevant governments were eager to engage the international community. No one in Latin America—especially the larger nations like Brazil and Mexico—wanted to see a crisis develop.

As an instrument for nations to work together, the Organization of American States proved to be the logical place to deal with the dispute and help facilitate dialogue and ventilate differences. Under the leadership of Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza, the meeting of the OAS Permanent Council on March 4 and the convening of the hemisphere's foreign ministers on March 17 were helpful in alleviating the tension.

The OAS mission to both countries also served a useful purpose in strengthening the organization's credibility. Perhaps the most important task facing the OAS in this crisis will take place in the coming period, as it sets up a binational commission to monitor the Colombia-Ecuador border and prevent another flare up. This case

will test the OAS's capacity to establish an institutional mechanism and deal with comparable situations effectively.

The governments of Latin America, both through the OAS and separately, reaffirmed the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention on the one hand and legitimate self-defense on the other. They were rightly concerned with the competing priorities, and dangers, the situation exposed. Happily, there was no move to break up into competing camps or allow ideological differences balloon into geopolitical crises. On balance, the region exhibited remarkable pragmatism.

LOOKING AHEAD: SOME SCENARIOS

The fundamental dilemma is how to alleviate tensions while examining credible information on the alleged connections between governments in the region and the FARC. The guerrillas are working to overthrow a democratically elected government of Colombia, which makes it critical that this question be treated with utmost care and responsibility. The possibilities raised by the files are serious, but need to be pursued in a professional fashion, with due consideration to possible consequences for peaceful, democratic order. Although the region's increasingly polarized geopolitical configuration could result in heightened criminality and chaos, it also offers an opportunity to achieve more stable governance and social cohesion.

Whether Colombia is on the verge of ending its armed conflict is unclear, but the signs that the FARC are weakening are unmistakable. This progress is to be celebrated, but some caution is warranted. Just as the Medellin and Cali drug cartels fragmented into smaller cartels in the 1990s and the paramilitaries have morphed into drug gangs more recently, so too might the FARC become fractured, breaking down from a single army into independent units. Though preferable to the current situation, violence would certainly continue in that scenario, especially since the drug problem remains formidable in Colombia and throughout the region.

A second concern would be the weakening of Colombia's strong, democratic institutions. Though Uribe deserves credit for the impressive strides in security, the economy and other areas, there is a real risk in continued reliance on a single leader to tackle all problems. Another reelection would likely tarnish Uribe's legacy, weaken democratic governance, and damage Colombia's international image.

Ecuador has embarked on a path of seeking to overhaul its political order. The outcome of the constituent assembly process is uncertain. Given the country's high level of political volatility—there have been nine presidents in the past dozen years—it is important that Correa successfully translate his substantial legitimacy and support into forging more effective governance structures. Any confirmation of an association between the government and the FARC would not contribute to the viability of Correa's stated project or to restoring political stability in Ecuador.

In Venezuela, despite record oil prices, Chavez is facing his most significant vulnerabilities in nearly a decade of rule. The country's politics remain polarized and a more coherent opposition has yet to emerge. Inflation, crime, corruption and scarcity of basic foods are mounting and are proving difficult to remedy. The governance model Chavez has forged simply is not working. In advance of presidential elections in December 2012, local elections in November of this year will give other political forces a chance to present alternative policy prescriptions for the country's future.

Though it manifests itself in different ways, the drug problem is serious in all three countries—as it is in the United States and much of the hemisphere. As the recent crisis illustrates, the drug issue intersects with ideological divisions in the Andean region. Chavez in particular is pursuing an agenda that explicitly defies U.S. interests in Latin America and elsewhere. The drug trade alone has a decidedly corrupting impact on any political system. But for the United States, and the region's governments and societies, the challenge becomes especially daunting when ideology and the illicit drug problem converge.

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE FOR U.S. POLICY?

The U.S. has a considerable interest in fostering a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous Andean region. The key question is how the U.S. can orient its decisions and actions with that goal in mind. The U.S. cannot and should not succumb to either of two common temptations: intervening with a heavy hand to dictate a preordained solution or remaining disengaged from the central questions that most concern our neighbors.

For the most part, and largely to its credit, the Bush administration played a marginal role at best in the Andean crisis. In the end, a formula to calm things down was worked out by the relevant parties and other regional governments determined to avoid any escalation. Washington rightly yielded to the Latin American

desire for mutual settlement. Latin America is often said to be the "backyard" of the U.S., but Washington certainly did not behave that way in this case. It is still unclear, however, whether the U.S. consciously decided to play the role it did, whether it simply did not know how to react or, worse, did not care.

President Bush's expression of support for the Uribe government on March 12 was ill-advised. The President took advantage of the situation to promote the free trade agreement with Colombia, citing the security risks in the region. Yet, while defending a close ally like Colombia in such circumstances was understandable, it would have also been appropriate, as a demonstration of evenhandedness, to express concern about the violation of Ecuadoran sovereignty. Siding so strongly with Colombia undermined any chance the U.S. could be an honest broker in a regional dispute. It also further isolated Colombia, whose peace and security ultimately depends on trust and cooperation with its neighbors.

Moving forward, the United States would be wise to maintain a low profile and avoid the kind of protagonism that would only be counterproductive in light of the anti-Americanism prevalent in the region. At the same time, it would be a mistake for the U.S. to retreat from the region at this critical moment. Some guidelines for possible U.S. actions:

1) Pursue a discreet and measured approach when managing the information that emerges from the computer files. It would be a mistake to sound the alarms, but equally unwise to turn a blind eye. At the right opportunity, the U.S. might consult with close friends in the region like Mexico, Chile and Brazil to ask how they view any credible information produced and what they consider to be appropriate responses.

2) Support Colombia, which has been a close friend and ally. Assistance should be provided not in a way that sets Colombia apart from its neighbors, but rather in a way that encourages it to diversify political and economic ties, both within the region and globally. Apart from its economic merits, the Congress should approve the free trade agreement with Colombia for sound foreign policy reasons. Rejecting the deal would send a signal to the rest of the region that the U.S. is not a reliable ally and that domestic political considerations continue to drive U.S. policy toward Latin America. Continued support for programs that strengthen security, the rule of law and democracy are also vital.

3) Enhance partnerships with friendly governments in the region. On Venezuela, the Bush administration deserves credit for recently carrying out a wiser and more moderate approach. The main focus should continue to be collaboration with Latin American allies. While it is understandable that the U.S. will want to review any information regarding the FARC's connections to other governments, it is critical to keep in mind the possible consequences—for US interests and the region's general well-being—of putting Venezuela on the list of states that support terrorism. Political prudence would recommend a diligent examination of the information, but restraint in making decisions that may be self-defeating for the United States.

4) Encourage and support reasonable efforts to secure the release of the FARC hostages. Humanitarian concerns are paramount and do not necessarily conflict with policies aimed at ending the armed conflict. Pragmatic approaches should be pursued, including the possible role of Chavez, who has already shown that he can deliver results. The release of further hostages would be in the interest of all parties, including the Colombian government. Such an approach would not reverse the recent troubles of the FARC or Chavez.

5) Stay engaged with the Correa government and explore ways of cooperating more productively. Trade preferences and counter-narcotics assistance ought to be extended and continued. The U.S. should not let decisions by the Correa government—such as not renewing the lease of the forward operating location in Manta—affect the overall bilateral relationship. Disagreements on some issues should be expected, and the U.S. can and should explore other options to replace the Manta facility.

6) Back the OAS and other multilateral fora committed to peace and democratic progress. Although the region is politically fragmented—hemispheric relations are marked by considerable mistrust—it is crucial to find ways to reenergize cooperative efforts, including on the drug question, among the region's governments and civil societies. Such an approach does not necessarily require additional financial resources, but rather a change in style and mindset. The U.S. must recognize that respect in the region must be earned through a genuine give and take. Early in 2009, the next U.S. president will

be meeting with other hemispheric heads of state at the Summit of the Americas meeting in Trinidad and Tobago. That is an excellent opportunity to recover some of the ground that has been lost over the last decade in hemispheric cooperation.

Mr. MEEKS. Know what? I am just looking. We have one vote, so maybe what we should do is just go vote and come right back. Then we will do Mr. Walser's testimony, then we can go right into questions. Because if it was more than one vote I would do a unanimous. This is just one vote. We can run and come back, okay? Very good. House stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:30 p.m., the subcommittee recessed, to reconvene at 1:57 p.m., the same day.]

Mr. MEEKS [presiding]. Thank you. We will resume the hearing now with the testimony of Dr. Walser.

STATEMENT OF RAY WALSER, PH.D., SENIOR POLICY ANALYST FOR LATIN AMERICA, DOUGLAS AND SARAH ALLISON CENTER FOR FOREIGN POLICY STUDIES, THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Mr. WALSER. Mr. Meeks, thank you very much for having me here on behalf of The Heritage Foundation. I appreciate this opportunity. On February 29, members of the FARC and sympathizers bedded down on a rustic but well-established encampment just inside Ecuadorian territory. For the FARC fighters it perhaps seemed just another night in an unending war against the Colombian people.

Suddenly, after midnight on March 1, Colombia's armed forces struck with deadly effect. In the melee, 25 lives were lost and an undetermined number of guerrillas escaped into the jungle. Two of the dead included FARC leader Raúl Reyes, along with computers and flash drives recovered and flown to Bogotá.

Operation Phoenix was a well-coordinated, punitive strike that eliminated the FARC's southern front commander. For years, Reyes had played a conspicuous role as a godfather to the FARC in war, kidnapping, extortion, drug trafficking. While recognized as the public face of the FARC, in the eyes of Colombian law he was a criminal fugitive with over 100 charges or convictions for murder and kidnapping.

Mr. MEEKS. I could barely hear you.

Mr. WALSER. I am sorry. I usually am accused of just the opposite, of being rather loud. Colombia's military strike into Ecuador's sovereign space ignited a diplomatic crisis that was among the most acute witnessed in the hemisphere in the past decade. Now, more than a month after the initial incident, threats of war between nations has largely subsided, but not the tensions and the polarization.

Fortunately, South America is a continent where military conflicts between nations remain rare. The restraints on belligerent behavior are substantial, include common cultural and linguistic ties, largely democratic governments, a tradition of nonintervention and increased interdependence and integration of regional economies.

While nationalism encouraged war-like emotions in the Andes, none of the parties in the recent crisis are driven by deep seeded

territorial, ethnic, tribal or religious beliefs that are the hallmarks of conflict and war in the 21st Century. None of the parties, even Venezuela I believe, truly wanted war.

Public discussion and diplomacy has centered on Colombia's violation of Ecuador's sovereignty, an action for which Colombia has been reprimanded and has apologized. There has also been constructive talk of OAS mediating commissions, mechanisms of dialogue and confidence building measures. These should be encouraged, but can they bridge the gap between neighbors?

The three nations most affected, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela, are drifting away from any consensus on how to resolve the problem of the FARC and other irregular combatants and how to improve regional cooperation in the drug fight. The political will necessary to confront the true enemies of stable democracies is becoming lost in a thicket of ideological divisions, personal rivalries and myopic decision making.

Although the FARC is a murderous narcoterrorist group lacking political legitimacy in Colombia, it appears to be winning fresh support in Ecuador and Venezuela. The new brand of interventionism practiced by President Hugo Chavez and his Bolivarian pals seeks directly or indirectly to exploit the political situation in Colombia and prolong, not resolve, its cycles of a conflict.

At the root of the crisis is a clash of paradigms for Latin America's future. One is generally democratic, free market oriented based on building rule of law and partnerships with the U.S. The other is the Bolivarian brand of personality driven populism financed by resourced nationalism and command economies, the socialism of the 21st Century which believes there will be no enemies on the left.

The region is in the process of creating, as one veteran Latin American official observed, a perfect zero sum game. Central to the war against drugs is strong cooperation from source to market. The breakdown in cooperation with two of the five countries that border Colombia is troublesome.

Venezuela has essentially ceased cooperating with the United States, and Ecuador appears to be headed in a similar direction. Ecuador is beginning to suffer from the balloon effect of the drug war. The March 1 incident is a stark reminder of the serious governance and security problems that prevail in this part of the hemisphere.

Large, ungoverned spaces and the continued existence of transnational criminal and terrorist threats demonstrates the need to overhaul or revise existing practices of international law and redouble cooperation.

In a world of sovereign states enshrined in the fundamental agreements governing hemispheric relations, what rights, what mechanisms do nations charged with defending the lives and security of their citizens against illusive terrorist or insurgent forces operating in ungoverned spaces have, especially if these hostile forces shelter and maneuver in the territory of another sovereign state that is either unable or unwilling to enforce its borders and remove the threatening force?

The events that began on March 1 remind us of the critical challenges that exist in the Andes will require close scrutiny and realistic policies in the United States. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Walser follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RAY WALSER, PH.D., SENIOR POLICY ANALYST FOR LATIN AMERICA, DOUGLAS AND SARAH ALLISON CENTER FOR FOREIGN POLICY STUDIES, THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

My name is Ray Walser. I am the Senior Policy Analyst for Latin America at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own, and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

On the night of February 29, 2008, a group of guerrillas/terrorists of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and sympathizers bedded down for the evening in a rustic but well-established encampment in the jungle near the Putumayo River, approximately one mile inside Ecuadorian territory. For the FARC fighters it must have seemed like just another night in the guerrilla movements unending war against the Colombian people.

Suddenly, in the first hour of March 1, Colombia's armed forces struck out of the dark skies with deadly effect. Bombs rained down on the FARC camp, followed by the arrival of an assault force of elite Colombian troops. In the confused melee of bombs and gunfire, 25 died, three women were wounded and an undetermined number of FARC guerrillas escaped into the jungle. Two corpses, one the body of Luis Edgar Devia Silva, known by the nom de guerre Raúl Reyes, along with three lap top computers, hard disk and flash drives were recovered and flown to Bogotá.

Called Operation Phoenix by the Colombians, the punitive strike aimed a carefully coordinated blow at the commander of the FARC's Southern Front and the number two man in the leadership of the insurgent/terrorist force. It was viewed by the operation's architects in Bogotá as a significant blow to the FARC's seemingly invulnerable leadership structure.

Reyes argued the Colombian government was no ordinary guerrilla fighter! For years, he played a conspicuous role as a godfather to the FARC on matters as diverse as war fighting, murder, kidnapping, drug trafficking, hostage-taking and hostage-negotiations, dealing with foreign governments, meeting with a steady stream of sympathizers and presumably working to secure international backing for the FARC. While recognized as a public face of the FARC to the outside world of the extreme and violent Left, he was in the eyes of the Colombian courts a notorious criminal fugitive with over 100 charges or convictions for murder, kidnapping and extortion outstanding.

The Colombian military strike against Reyes and FARC guerrillas ignited a diplomatic crisis that was perhaps the most acute witnessed in the Hemisphere in the last decade. Now, more than a month after the initial incidents, the threat of direct conflict between nations has largely subsided but the polarization and loss of cooperation and trust between nations, particularly between Ecuador and Colombia, will have serious repercussions throughout the Andean region, especially if foreign governments further align themselves with the FARC and the so-called revolutionary forces active in and around Colombia.

COLOMBIA

The basic facts of the raid are no longer in dispute. The Colombian military had been hunting Reyes for years and earlier operations to eliminate him were frustrated on several occasions. Clearly the Colombians would have preferred to strike against the elusive Reyes on Colombian territory, but this proved difficult. The Colombians were able to able to fix Reyes' location in a well-established safe haven on Ecuadorian soil, reportedly by tracing phone conversations with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez.

President Alvaro Uribe and the Colombians surely weighed the cost and benefits of the operation before launching it. Since previous cross border incidents had produced minimal consequences, perhaps they believed the attack would cause no significant fallout.

The Colombians reported that fighter aircraft that delivered the bombs on the FARC camp did not enter Ecuadorian air space. Four Colombian Blackhawks, however, carrying special forces and judicial police did cross the frontier after the initial bombardment. The Colombian force exchanged fire with the surviving members of the FARC band and a Colombian solider died in the firefight.

Colombia's President Uribe admitted to considered notifying the Ecuadorian government in advance of the operation but did not for fear of someone warning Reyes,

and perhaps also for fear of a negative response. It was not until after the attack was underway did President Uribe telephoned President Rafael Correa of Ecuador to inform him of the raid. In the conversation, President Uribe apparently made it seem the encounter was between hostile forces and involved "hot pursuit." Shortly afterward, the Colombian military passed the coordinates of the camp to their Ecuadorian military counterparts.

On March 2, the Colombian government began releasing selective documents recovered from the computers belonging to Reyes. The FARC documents in the form of letters and e-mails between members of the FARC leadership indicated close connections between the FARC and the political leadership of Ecuador and Venezuela, not just on matters relating to the exchange of political hostages the FARC holds, including former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three U.S. citizen contractors, but also information regarding contacts with Ecuadorian Minister of Security Larrea about establishing a more permissive operating environment for the FARC in Ecuador and about friendship and support offered by President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela.

The partial release of documents exposed the extensive web of the FARC's foreign ties and friendships. If Colombia was to be faulted for a violation of international law, it wanted national and world opinion to recognize that foreign officials were engaging in dangerous relationships with the FARC and acting against international obligations not to aid and abet terrorists.

On the other hand, as the crisis mounted, Colombia did not severe diplomatic relations with either Ecuador or Venezuela or fall in with efforts to militarize the diplomatic crisis. Colombia said it would welcome Organization of the American States (OAS) and United Nations investigations into possible terrorist linkages as well as independent technical verification of the authenticity of the computer's contents.

Given the high value assigned to the target, the Colombians took a calculated risk. Perhaps they believed mistakenly they could strike without serious repercussions in the largely ungoverned, unpoliced space where the FARC, not the government of Ecuador, tend to predominate.

On balance, the Colombians, when presented with an opportunity to strike punitively at a dangerous terrorist *capo dei capo*, they did not let the opportunity slip. I believe leaders in the U.S government would have acted similarly to protect the lives of its citizens.

ECUADOR

The reaction of the government of Ecuador to the March 1 incursion became within a few hours one of disagreement and anger. President Correa quickly denounced the attack as a massacre, perpetrated by aircraft entering Ecuadorian air space and aided by sophisticated technology provided by the U.S. He faulted President Uribe for lying and for a wanton attack on Ecuadorian territory. Correa also claimed that some of the dead had been shot in the back and reported that international humanitarian laws were violated. Later evidence would surface regarding the presence of an Ecuadorian and Mexican citizens among those killed in the FARC camp. If Colombia believed the incursion might pass as another unfortunate incident in a largely ungoverned area where brief cross border incursions and incidents were not uncommon, they were mistaken.

On March 2, President Correa denounced the raid as "an act of aggression" and expelled the Colombian ambassador. He also called several hemispheric presidents and demanded the prompt involvement of the OAS. On March 3, Ecuador severed diplomatic relations with Colombia. President Correa outlined his government's demands: an international rejection/condemnation of the attack; an OAS investigation and a promise of no further incursions. Relations between the countries, which had been deteriorating since Correa took office in 2006 appeared to hit bottom.

Correa and his senior officials set out within the first 24 hours to disentangle themselves from any possible connections with the FARC. Correa dismissed the Colombian efforts to link his government with the FARC via the computer files as a comedy [*"una cantinflada"*]. The refusal to recognize the potential validity of the information contained in the FARC files was equally advanced by the Foreign Minister Salvador and Minister of Public Security Bustamante when they later appeared in Washington. They too heaped ridicule on the documents and showed no readiness to invite a public investigation of links between the FARC and sympathizers in Ecuador.

President Correa visited five countries to argue the Ecuadorian position on the incident and to pressure for a sharp condemnation of Colombia's actions.

Before the OAS on March 5, Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Salvador defended Ecuador's record of standing against terrorism, policing the border, dismantling FARC

camps and sheltering refugees from Colombia's wars. She denounced the release of the FARC documents as "a hostile and deliberate attempt to divert attention" from Colombia's act of naked aggression.

Ecuador's officials attempted to paint a positive image of their government's non-involvement in the Colombian conflict, to deny any complicity with the FARC in providing havens and to demonstrate that Ecuador was doing all that was possible to keep the FARC out of Ecuador.

In my view, in their zeal to defend national sovereignty and to win a diplomatic contest with Colombia, President Correa and high Ecuadorian officials rendered a one-sided version of very nuanced and difficult case, obscuring inconvenient facts such as the failure of their civil and military intelligence to locate an established guerrilla encampment that could be reached in a matter of days by visiting Mexican Leftists.

VENEZUELA

On Sunday, March 3, President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela in his weekly television program *Aló Presidente* startled Venezuelans by turning the bilateral incident into a regional crisis. Before a national audience, Chávez eulogized Reyes as a "good revolutionary." In his pep talk to the nation, Chávez digressed, informing Venezuelans that one of the cherished goals of his foreign policy was to carry his anti-American campaign to Colombia and to see Colombia liberated from the yoke of U.S. imperialism.

Chávez proceeded to reaffirm solidarity with Ecuador, recalled his diplomatic personnel from Bogota and instructed his Defense Minister to "send me 10 battalions to the border, including tanks." Chávez warned Colombia that he would interpret a strike against the FARC on Venezuelan territory as an act of war. Following Chávez's intervention it appeared that the Andean region might be spiraling toward armed conflict.

In my view the response of the President of Venezuela was to encourage what one Latin American commentator called "the diplomacy of microphones." How far Chávez intended to go with his brand of brinksmanship remains unclear. But if he had wanted to manufacture an incident and provoke a shooting war, he had all the opportunities.

THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES—1

The incident was one of the gravest challenges to the OAS in the last decade. Under Secretary General José Miguel Insulza, the OAS moved swiftly to defuse the crisis and reduce it to manageable proportions. On March 4, the OAS convened its permanent council. Ecuador rushed its Foreign Minister to Washington to argue her nation's case largely around Article 21 of the OAS Charter which states:

> "The territory of a State is inviolable; it may not be the object, even temporarily, of military occupation or of other measures of force taken by another State, directly or indirectly, on any grounds whatsoever. No territorial acquisitions or special advantages obtained either by force or by other means of coercion shall be recognized."

As Secretary General Insulza noted, "this principle is one of the cornerstones of the international legal order and, in particular, the inter-American legal system, and a principle that has always been indisputably linked to the principle of peaceful settlement of controversies between States and cooperation to safeguard peace, security, and development."

The debate in the OAS centered on often-repeated prohibitions against the violation of territorial sovereignty enshrined in numerous instruments of the Inter-American and international system versus an equally recognized right of self-defense, between the protection of state sovereignty and the duty not to allow one's territory to be used to harm others. At the core of the debate was the clash between classic upholders of an overarching set of international laws and realists who rigorously defend their right and obligation to protect the lives and safety of their people in an essentially anarchical international environment.

The initial OAS resolution issued on March 5 reaffirmed "the principle that the territory of a state is inviolable and may not be the object, even temporarily of military occupation or other measures of force taken by another State, directly or indirectly, on any ground whatsoever." The permanent council instructed the OAS Secretary General to lead a mission to Ecuador and Colombia in order to "propose formulas for bringing the two nations closer together." The permanent council also summoned the foreign ministers of the Hemisphere to meet in a special session on March 17. The government of Brazil constructively provided a military aircraft for

the special OAS mission and the governments of Ecuador and Colombia covered the daily expenses and in-country transportation of the mission.

THE RIO GROUP

It was fortuitous that most regional heads of state of the Hemisphere were already committed to meeting in the Dominican Republic for the 20th meeting of the 20-member Rio Group in the Dominican Republic on March 7. The Rio Group is a mechanism of consultation that evolved out the Contadora support group during the Central American crisis of the 1980s. It remains a vehicle for Latin American heads of state to consult annually on topics of common interests. The U.S. does not participate in the meetings of the Rio Group.

The gathering of most presidents of the region [Brazil's Lula da Silva did not attend] offered ample opportunity for regional leaders to confer, publicly and privately. It was also a chance to indulge in some political theater. At President Uribe's request, the entire session was opened to the media. With the world watching, the pressure mounted for the contending parties to moderate their positions and produce a positive outcome.

Although at one point, during President Uribe's initial speech, President Correa stormed out of the session, he returned. Uribe yielded to the demand for a public apology for the March 1 incident and a promise there would be no repeat of attacks on Ecuadorian soil. Dominican President Leonel Fernández engineered a meeting of Presidents Correa and Uribe, including handshakes and abrazos. The march toward war yielded to promises of peace and renewed friendship.

The passage of a resolution by the Rio Group greatly defused the animosity built up in the previous six days. The key text of the resolution stated:

> "We reject the violation of the territorial integrity of Ecuador, and consequently reaffirm the principle that the territory of a State is inviolable and cannot be the object of military occupation nor other measures of force taken by another State, direct or indirectly, whatever the reason."

Wrote the Bogota weekly *La Semana*, the meeting of the Rio Group "did not moderate the inclinations of the leaders of the three countries but it did curb their impulses." After the Rio Group meeting, threats of conflict, particularly the tension between Colombia and Venezuela, swiftly defused, leaving many to wonder just how profound was the crisis.

THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES—2

The foreign minister gathered for the OAS ministerial meeting on March 17. After lengthy discussion, the OAS agreed to a resolution, the final text of which called on all OAS members and the involved parties:

> To reject the incursion by Colombian military forces and police personnel into the territory of Ecuador, in the Province of Sucumbíos, on March 1, 2008, carried out without the knowledge or prior consent of the Government of Ecuador, since it was a clear violation of Articles 19 and 21 of the OAS Charter.
>
> To take note of the full apology for the events that occurred and the pledge by Colombia, expressed by its President to the Rio Group and reiterated by its delegation at this Meeting of Consultation, that they would not be repeated under any circumstances.
>
> To reiterate the firm commitment of all member states to combat threats to security caused by the actions of irregular groups or criminal organizations, especially those associated with drug trafficking.
>
> To instruct the Secretary General to use his good offices to implement a mechanism for observing compliance with this resolution and the restoration of an atmosphere of trust between the two Parties.

The ministers charged the OAS with encouraging Colombia and Ecuador to reestablish diplomatic relations and to reactive existing political consultation mechanisms. It also called for the formation of an OAS mission for follow-up and verification of commitments assumed and agreements reached by the two countries for cooperation on border issues and other matters of common interest and for the strengthening of border mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation and the study of a possible bilateral early-warning system.

While the OAS resolution appeared to vindicate Ecuador's grievances, it did not produce a condemnation of Colombia and recognized the responsibility of states to combat security threats posed by groups like the FARC. It also makes clear that the OAS approach to terrorism requires further updating of international law and accepted practice in light of the growing challenge of transnational crime and in the

aftermath of 9/11 to synchronize the inherent rights of self-defense against terrorist attack with traditional protections of national-sovereignty and territorial integrity.

THE UNITED STATES

The initial response of the U.S. government was to encourage Ecuador and Colombia to take the incident to the Organization of American States. In light of the Venezuelan belligerent reaction and dispatch of troops to the Colombian border, the White House quickly recognized the importance of supporting President Uribe and Colombia in its struggle against narco-terrorism and in standing up to Chávez. On March 4, President Bush called President Uribe and reaffirmed his full support for democracy in Colombia. The President expressed opposition "to any acts of aggression" aimed at destabilizing the region. The statement made clear where the U.S. government stands with regard to any possible military attack by Venezuela against Colombia.

In the OAS debate on March 17, the U.S. representative urged a balanced resolution, one that weighed the responsibility of states to respect frontiers and guard national sovereignty but one that also urged nations to take collective action against international terrorism. The U.S. joined the consensus that passed the OAS resolution but caveated its vote by inserting a clear reference to the obligation of states not to support international terrorism.

On March 18, President Bush spoke of the connections between the FARC and Venezuela's government, reaffirming, "the United States strongly supports, strongly stands with Colombia in its fight against the terrorists and drug lords."

A U.S. position that stands up for a vital friend and partner in the Hemisphere and recognizes the transnational, destabilizing threats posed by the narco-terrorists of the FARC and those who support and sympathize its activities is, I believe, fully consistent with the security interests of the American people.

OBSERVATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

The March crisis in the Andes produced a heightened state of tensions and a surge in nationalist sentiment that are often the antecedents of war. Three nations sought to exploit the March 1 incident for full political advantage and to rally domestic support behind their positions. How serious was the threat of war remains a matter for debate.

South America is fortunately a continent where military conflicts between nations remain fortunately rare. The restraints on belligerent behavior are substantial and include common cultural and linguistic ties, largely democratic governments committed to peace and non-intervention and increased interdependence and integration of regional economies. While nationalism helped encourage warlike emotions in the Andes, none of the parties involved appeared to have been driven by deep-seated territorial, ethnic, tribal or religious beliefs that are the hallmarks of conflict and war in the 21st century.

The crisis for these reasons was also contained by the active diplomacy of the OAS and the Rio Group and by the reluctance of the parties themselves to escalate the crisis to the point of war.

The crisis, nevertheless, will likely have enduring and troubling repercussions. The three nations most involved in the conflict are drifting away from any collective recognition of the need to resolve either the problem of the FARC and other irregular combatant and criminal forces and to enhance regional cooperation in the fight against the drug trade. The political will needed to confront the true enemies of organized, legal states is becoming lost in a growing thicket of ideological divisions, personal rivalries and myopic decision-making. At a time when the FARC is increasingly exposed as a murderous, narco-terrorist group lacking political legitimacy in Colombia and a waning military force, it is winning fresh political converts in Ecuador and Venezuela. The new interventionism of the Hugo Chávez and his Bolivarian/leftist pals seeks directly or indirectly to exploit the political situation in Colombia and prolong, not resolve, the conflict. To date, none of the new Bolivarians have offered constructive proposals aimed at ending the conflict in Colombia on a balanced basis.

The longer-term fissures underlying the March crisis will be difficult to resolve as long as there is a loss of common understandings and a clash of rival paradigms for Latin America's future political and economic course: a battle between a generally liberal, democratic, free-market philosophy based on partnership with the U.S. and the new Bolivarian brand of activism which holds the view that there should be no enemies on the Left, even if the parties operating under the mantle of "revolutionary internationalism" are prepared to follow the path of armed violence and rebellion and have unalterable terrorist and narcotics-trafficking tendencies.

Where there is an increased need for cooperation among governments to control ungoverned space, to act in concert against narcotics-trafficking and to curb and eliminate the actions of irregular forces is giving way to bitter political rivalries and partisanship. The region is in the process of creating, as one veteran Latin American official observed, a classic zero-sum game.

Another troubling facet of the crisis is the reluctance of many in the hemisphere, adhering to the long-established principle of non-intervention to speak out openly and forcefully against the FARC and to join with the people of Colombian in repudiating acts of terrorism by all parties. This laissez-faire attitude gives further oxygen to the fire that has consumed Colombia for decades.

Finally, a central concept in the war against drugs has been the recognition that strong regional cooperation from source-to-market is necessary if progress is to be made in the anti-narcotics fight. The breakdown in cooperation with two of the five countries that border upon Colombia is troublesome and indicates that the regional collaboration needed to make headway in the drug fight has largely disappeared. Venezuela has essentially ceased cooperating with the U.S. and Ecuador appears headed in a similar direction. Ecuador is suffering from the "balloon-affect" of the drug war. The decision of Ecuador to take Colombia to the International Court of Justice because of aerial spraying or President Correa's efforts to root out so-called "CIA influences" in his intelligence service, i.e. pro-American officials, are not helpful. Any effort to preserve a working relationship and counter-drug cooperation faces an uphill struggle. These divisions will undoubtedly be rapidly exploited by the FARC and other drug traffickers.

The March 1 incident is a stark reminder of the serious governance and security problems that prevail in parts of the hemisphere. The presence of immense ungoverned spaces and the continued existence of severe transnational and terrorist threats demonstrate the need to overhaul or transform existing practices of international law. In a world of inviolable, sovereign states, what rights, what mechanisms do nations, operating in a real time world, have to defend themselves against elusive terrorist or insurgent forces operating in ungoverned space beyond its borders, especially if these hostile forces operate with the tacit support of another sovereign state that is either unable or unwilling to enforce its borders and remove the belligerent force?

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you. Let me just ask a few questions in regards to the tensions. You know, as I recall, President Bush spoke to President Uribe regarding the border tensions between Colombia and Ecuador and subsequently made a public statement pushing for the United States and a Colombia in a free trade agreement.

Do you think that President Bush should have also reached out to President Correa? I would like to get your opinion on that. Do you believe that by not—well, just answer that first question first, all three of you. Do you think Bush should have reached out to President Correa?

Ms. SWEIG. Yes.

Mr. SHIFTER. Yes.

Mr. WALSER. I think the President spoke to Uribe after the Venezuelan had sort of amped up the crisis, but I also agree that there should have been communications with the President of Ecuador.

Mr. MEEKS. Now, do you believe that by not reaching out to President Correa that the United States, we might have damaged our credibility in the hemisphere, and what do you think the perception of those in the hemisphere have of the United States as a result of not reaching out?

Ms. SWEIG. I think the perception of the United States in the hemisphere didn't start in a very positive place in the background to this moment.

The fact that the United States didn't reach out reinforced the sense that the United States and Colombia both have isolated themselves in this kind of entrenched, close alliance that they have developed for good reasons but the fallout from that is the sense

of favoritism, this sense of playing favorites, kind of, and reinforces perceptions that the United States is etiologically driven, although that has changed as well, as we know, in the last couple of years.

We have a much more forceful diplomacy with as many actors as possible. It was just all of a piece, in my view.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Shifter.

Mr. SHIFTER. I think that—I wouldn't overstate the effect to the rest of the hemisphere. I think it had a very bad effect in Ecuador because it really helped stir the nationalism, the aggressive response that we are seeing now. I think one of the reasons why things are so difficult to resolve between Colombia and Ecuador today is because things got very, very hard.

I think the United States not reaching out to Ecuador I think contributed to that. I think it was counterproductive. I am not sure about the rest of the region. It is sort of a small piece. I think I would be careful about overstating its consequences.

Mr. WALSER. I think the U.S. was already condemned in the eyes of Correa. The initial responses were how is this possible? Was this U.S. technology? Was this a U.S.-directed attack? To what extent was the MANTA base used as an operational platform? The diplomatic and the optics would have been good, but Correa had very quickly decided that the U.S. was behind this strike.

So I am not sure whether reaching out at the point would have really satisfied him or ended the issue.

Mr. MEEKS. Well, you see, one of the reasons why I am going down this line, because I am trying to figure out what can the United States do? You know, can the United States, if it is not seen as a fair arbitrator—and I will ask you at this point, can the United States do anything to help Ecuador and Colombia expedite their restoration of relations given the circumstances that have taken place?

Is there anything that the United States can do at this juncture?

Mr. WALSER. Being an ex-diplomat one never wants to give up on diplomacy. I think it is a difficult period in the next couple of months would be my judgment. There seems to be something of a witch hunt going on inside Ecuador at this point. Correa just fired the Defense Minister and the Head of Intelligence.

There is a lot of turmoil that appears to be taking place. I don't know whether at this juncture, but I think that the United States does have to reengage with Ecuador perhaps after the mechanisms are in place after the OAS has sort of hopefully cooled tensions. There should be a role for the U.S., but it is going to be difficult at this particular moment.

Mr. SHIFTER. I tend to agree with that. I think one thing to remember, though, is that the United States had, there was a long interview given with the U.S. Ambassador in Ecuador just a few months ago which was she said very, very favorable things about President Correa and the relationship with Ecuador.

So there is a communication there, and there is a basis for moving forward. This is a very difficult time, so I think in the near term the United States doesn't really have a role to play. If it does, it should be very, very discreet and low profile. I think it is important to wait until things calm down and cool off a little bit.

Mr. MEEKS. You are passing?

Ms. SWEIG. An element of this I think has to do also with the kind of knee jerk expectation has been the United States will focus on Colombia as friend and ally and demonize Venezuela, and that doesn't play well within the region.

We have seen that we have tried to back off of that, but the characterizing Venezuela's actions where you have clearly a relationship between Ecuador and Venezuela that is important, too, and trying to demonize Venezuela probably doesn't play well in Ecuador.

I also would say that the Congress, as Chairman Engel has suggested, does have a role to play that is separate and different than the Executive Branch. So when you say what can the United States do? I would just sort of break that down and say that is very, very positive to continue to have congressional delegations, both parties, going down and talking on a range of issues and not just with governments but with civil society and other actors in all of these countries.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Chairman, I just have two more questions, and the first is right on the line of what you just talked about because, you know, I am directly opposed to it. I was just going to ask you, and I guess I will ask the other gentlemen also, about the proposal that some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have suggested that you add Venezuela to a state sponsor of terrorism.

I know what I think, but I would like to just hear you. What kind of impact would you think that would have on the hemisphere? Will it further splinter it? I just got to be on the record. I just think that it is absolutely the wrong direction to go in, but since you are the experts I would like to hear your opinion.

Mr. WALSER. Well, I have ventured to write a little piece on The Heritage Web site on this. I think that first we have to have a full investigation in a very forensic fashion of the whole content of the computer files that are there, and I think that is underway. Secondly, if some sort of action were to come out of this it should be in the terms of looking for evidential trails, it should be potentially some sort of smart or very directed sort of sanction.

Clearly the situation that prevails in Venezuela with an elected government is not like that which prevails in many terrorist states, so you do have to tread cautiously in this area. Plus, we have tremendous trade and human relations with Venezuela, so it is a difficult track to go down.

Mr. SHIFTER. I would strongly advise against this for a variety of reasons. One is, we haven't talked about this, but Venezuela, you know, President Chavez did lose a referendum on December 2. Polls show that he is falling as well. If the United States is interested in him coming back in the polls and being strong again the best thing they could do is to pass this resolution.

It would help him tremendously. Politically, I am not sure. That is a consequence that Members of Congress would want. Also, it is important to think would President Uribe, our ally, even want that? The two leaders are going to meet soon. They just diffused this crisis. Would this really risk peace in the region, stability in the region?

And also I agree that there needs to be a very careful, credible review of the information, first of all, and that is not really a basis

to take this kind of decision, which potentially could have very serious consequences for the region and for U.S. interests in the region.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you. Let me ask, because I always try to look, you know—and I will turn it back over to the chair after this and later I will ask some other questions—but of opportunities, opportunities that may lie ahead. I mean, I think you are correct. Just discussing Venezuela for a second, you know, sometimes I think that we underestimate the Venezuelan people.

I happen to have been there when there was a recall election and I saw the people come out in droves. I was one of the observers, and I saw a democratic process take place. I saw people wait in line for hours to vote. The will of the people, not the will of the person—the will of the people at that time was to elect or make sure that Hugo Chavez reelected.

Likewise, there was another election where he was trying to extend his term in office. The will of the Venezuelan people again was reflected. There was no violence. There was nothing. That is democracy. At some point, democracy is not what we want in the United States, but what the people want in the countries in which they come from.

I think that it becomes important for us to just acknowledge that as opposed to then push them aside and say that is not likewise the will of the Colombian people for President Uribe. You know, you look at his approval rating, which is also overwhelming, and we don't say that he is a populist, but eh is a guy that has changed that community in a different way.

It is the will of the Colombian people to have it moved in the direction that he was moving it. So maybe it is a result of the leadership of those respective countries moving in the direction that the people in their countries want them to move in. Unfortunately, you know, it seems that in this country it is different.

The people seem to be moving one way and the administration is moving in another way if you look at the populist polls. I think that sometimes, you know, we need to acknowledge that.

That being said, and knowing the history of the western hemisphere and now that it seems to in my opinion becoming stable and having democracy, because of the border conflicts is there an opportunity now—because I think that what it has brought out is some of the other issues or other problems that may be in the area, you know, with Ecuador now going to the International Court of Justice claiming that Colombia failed to halt area fumigation along the border lines, and then with Colombia claiming that Ecuador violated their air space—do you see, is it the time or the opportunity here to address the residual tensions and arising issues that could destabilize the region in the future looking at what is now, possible tensions that could be created, and as a result of waiting for those tensions to mature that we can do an intervention to try to see if we can resolve some of those now before they blow up out of proportion? Is there an opportunity to do that now?

Ms. SWEIG. I think that one bright consequence of this recent episode is that it has shown a spotlight on the fact that the Colombian Government and armed forces are in the process of successfully moving toward weakening the FARC but that the FARC, as

the very senior Brazilian diplomat said recently during this crisis, does have an international reach.

It has got hostages from other countries, it has got presence, it has had those presences across the Venezuelan and the Ecuadorian border for some time. The Brazilians are in the process of convening something called the South American Defense Council. This has shown the spotlight to the other countries of the region, not necessarily the United States, that many countries have a stake in neutralizing, containing the FARC, seeing the conflict in Colombia resolved and have a stake in being involved in a positive, cooperative way.

Those processes are just starting. So I think the opportunities going forward might not—you used the word intervention.

I know you didn't mean it in the sense that historically the word is invoked, but I think that, as the others have said, and I think Secretary Insulza's comments made very clear, this is a moment when it is okay for the United States to have a lighter touch and to step to the side a little bit and see how Brazil and Chile and the other larger powers of the region are going to get involved in pushing the various parties into more discussions on regional security and actions on regional security.

That doesn't mean that there is nothing the United States can do. I am sure you will hear from Admiral Stavridis and others about what the United States is doing, but I just think this is a moment when stepping back, when less will probably be more.

Mr. SHIFTER. I think that it is really a question of style and approach. You know, we do have an OAS. I think, as Secretary General Insulza said, it reflects the will of the governments. The United States is part of the OAS and has good relationships with Brazil, has good relationships with Mexico, with Chile.

That should be the strategy. Those are countries that carry a lot of weight, that are concerned about what is happening. I think sort of a low key discreet approach with those countries, with those governments, and through the OAS mechanism and other multilateral fora is the best way to pursue these opportunities.

I think there are opportunities at this moment. It can go in different directions, and I think we have an interest in pushing it in a more constructive way. Unfortunately, there are the governments with whom we have good relationships that are also share the same goals.

Mr. WALSER. Like to move in a couple of different directions. First of all, I don't think there is any doubt that Mr. Chavez was legitimately elected, and withstood recalls and the like. I think that what concerns the U.S. is not his political standing with his own people but his international behavior, everything from eulogizing a known terrorist as a good revolutionary.

In the same speech he also talks about driving the United States out of Colombia. I mean, this is a very personal issue that he has and a reflection of his Bolivarian vision. His cash contributions in Argentina, his relationship with Iran, the Russian arms purchases, are these what the Venezuelan people really want or is he using elected power to make himself into a sort of "geostrategic rival" to the United States?

I think the great concentration, in your second question, should be for the international community, for the United States, to try to bring together a consensus that the FARC is no longer a political military force that has a role in the future of Colombia but that some mechanism has to be found to sort of open a door for them.

Yes. There has to be some way to let them sort of come in out of the cold. I know it has been tried for over a decade. It has not worked very well. What you need is sort of universal condemnation and at the same time mechanisms for demobilization. I mean, there are other guerilla insurgencies in the hemisphere that demobilized and entered the political process. We have got to go back and look in that direction.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you. I want to thank Mr. Meeks for pitching in for me. I had to leave. Let me ask you this. I am a big fan of President Uribe. I think, frankly, what he has done with his country has been almost nothing short of miraculous in terms of improving the climate there, both in terms of safety, in terms of drugs.

I think he has worked with the United States, and I think that in the times that I have been to Colombia I have had the chance to meet with him on numerous occasions and I am very impressed with what he is doing. I would like to help him in any way possible. In my last trip to the region one of the stops we made was Ecuador.

I met for over an hour, probably about an hour and a half, with President Correa. I was impressed with President Correa. I know there have been some differences of opinion between some in the administration with President Correa, but I personally think that we make a big mistake if we push him off, and push him away and assume he is in cahoots with Chavez, or Evo Morales, or whatever.

I think we make a very, very big mistake. He is American educated. I know that doesn't necessarily mean anything, but I think what it means is that he is aware of our country, and aware of our culture and what we stand for. He conveyed to me and to the other members of my codel that he wanted to have good relations with the United States and wanted to work with us.

I would like to hear your opinions as to the relationship that we should strive to have with Mr. Correa and his administration. While some could make a very good case that Chavez is too far gone for the United States to have good relations with his regime, and some might say that about Bolivia as well about Evo Morales, although I am not so sure, but maybe, I think if we lump Correa in with the rest, with those others, I think we make a big mistake. I would like to hear what your opinion is.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Chairman, if you would yield for 1 second. I just want to say you are absolutely right because I think that is what we did with Chavez. I can recall back in the time where in a bipartisan manner President Chavez was trying to communicate to us in the United States, and we kind of just pushed him off until such time that there was the attempted coup-de-ta.

We acknowledged the coup-de-ta government at that particular time basically pushing him off, and I think that has led. That is why I think that your question is very good, and we should not make that same mistake with President Correa.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you. If anyone would care to answer. Be happy to hear any or all of you.

Ms. SWEIG. You stated that very eloquently. I would just reinforce that I believe the same is the case with respect to Bolivia, to Ecuador, even to Venezuela. One of the things that makes that very hard is when those heads of state engage in the kind of inflammatory rhetoric that can get big points domestically.

It is very tempting to do that, and that comes and goes. I think we need to listen past that and not get caught up in that.

You know, we had a pollster from the Latinobarómetro polling organization give a talk up on the Hill a couple of days ago, and she made a very important point that kind of connects this issue of how the United States should relate to countries that are in major processes of incredible change in their country, as Bolivia is, as Ecuador is, for example, that in Bolivia and in Ecuador, for example, not just in Venezuela and in Colombia, these heads of state have very high ratings even as they are overseeing very tumultuous processes of reinventing their constitutions and facing secessionist movements.

I mean, they are very bumpy, but there is a sense among their populations that the democratic process may well deliver for the first time in a very long time.

I think that we have to acknowledge that. So just to reinforce your point and to take it further, when we say we, who we are, I think we can fall into a habit, whether the codel's respectfully or the administration, when we do go down to the region it is really important to be seen as meeting with a variety of organizations outside of the government as well.

I will just tell you a tiny anecdote and then defer to my colleagues. A few years ago, when we were doing our Andes 20/20 report, we took a group to Guayaquil when we were in Ecuador. We had a meeting first with the representatives of the banana pickers.

Then they said to us, so these were workers, the people that pick the bananas, and they said, you know, we understand you are going to meet with Guayaquil chamber of commerce, well, the chamber of commerce invited us to come to your meeting. Then we all got in a room together, chamber of commerce, bananas growers, packagers and pickers.

So you had the sort of whole economic classes represented there. They said this is the first time that anybody has ever come and sat down with all of us separately or together. Now, we are not the government, but I think the lesson is that it is possible to diversify, and deepen and get some nuance in our relationship by just trying to go outside of the box, especially in these times of, you know, where it is easy to fall into a negative relationship based on rhetoric.

Mr. SHIFTER. My sense is that President Correa is sort of a work in progress still. I think it is a very bad mistake to sort of dismiss him and to say this is a Chavez client. If you met him you know that he has said many times that he is the one who governs in his country and not Chavez.

He has taken a lot of positions that have been different from Chavez. He is a member of the Andean community. He has wanted Venezuela to join the Andean community. They haven't. He didn't

follow Chavez when Chavez wanted to recognize the FARC as a belligerent force. There have been a lot of differences and there has been some cooperation with the United States.

The U.S. Ambassador there has had a lot of contact, communication, good relations with Correa. There had been some good relations between Colombia and Ecuador before this crisis erupted. So there is a foundation there, and things are in a lot of flux. I think it would be a terrible mistake for the United States to say this guy, put him in sort of a category and say we can't deal with him.

I think Ecuador is not Venezuela. It has other needs. They have the Andean preferences, counternarcotic assistance, other things that are essential for them, and I think it creates opportunities for the United States to engage with Correa. There are some experts that believe, and I don't know if I share this, but that as a result of this crisis there has been some differences in tension between Chavez and Correa over a variety of issues.

I think that is something that the United States should be alert to, and if there are possibilities there to strengthen ties I think the United States should pursue it. Again, the situation is in a lot of flux, and we shouldn't sort of rule out possibilities based on one statement or some rhetoric that happens in the heat of domestic politics.

He has enormous support now, and he has gone up. He is not quite as high as Uribe, but according to the latest poll that I saw yesterday he is getting up there, and there is no doubt that this crisis has boosted his political standing in Ecuador.

Mr. WALSER. I would defer to you and your direct contacts with the President of Ecuador. I think we need to continue to engage him. I think it should be a fairly frank discussion particularly outlining potential dangers of the country if it is, in fact, suffering from the balloon effect, the dangers that the entry of the FARC and drug trafficking of that country would present.

I think an opportunity would be to discuss in light of the recent case taken to the International Court of Justice involving aerial eradication to perhaps look at joint strategies along the Colombia/Ecuadorian border to deal with that particular issue. So, I mean, I think there are a number of issues to engage the Ecuadorians on, and I don't think we should put them in the lost column yet.

Mr. ENGEL. Let me just say, and I think these probably have to be the final words unless Mr. Meeks has something that he must ask, because we have to get out of the room. My feeling on meeting with President Correa was shared by my bipartisan delegation. There wasn't a bit of difference between Democratic and Republican members.

We all thought that he was someone that we could engage with. This doesn't mean we will agree all the time, but he is someone that we should engage with. In fact, as was mentioned before, prior to our coming to Ecuador we were told by the State Department that the Ecuadorian Government was doing a reasonably good job in taking on the FARC and that they had closed 100 FARC encampments, captured Simon Trinidad and had lost some Ecuadorian troops in the process.

In fact, I opened the meeting by thanking him. I mean, it is ironic in light of what has happened, but thanking him. He professed

to understand the FARC, to be negative on the FARC, to understand that they were a terrorist group and some group that he had responsibility to curtail.

I appreciate Mr. Meeks' point about Chavez and Morales. You know, we met with Morales as well, and I say we had a reasonably good meeting with Evo Morales, but the meeting with Correa seemed to be a little bit different that the die hasn't been cast, and we should be careful not to push the die in the wrong direction.

So, Mr. Meeks, I will let you have the last word.

Mr. MEEKS. The only thing I want to do is join you in this, Mr. Chairman, and that is also one of the most courageous men that I have met in the region is President Uribe. I want to say that what he has done in his country is nothing short than miraculous. If you look at the condition of that country prior to his presidency and talking to many of the citizens of Colombia, they were afraid to walk the streets.

You know, you look at Medellin, for example, which was known as the murder capital of the world which we visited several times. Now, the murder rate is lower there than it is in many United States cities. That is attributable to him. It is also attributable that, you know, another interest of mine throughout Latin American is the plight of African Colombians, African Brazilians, African Ecuadorians, African Venezuelans.

If you look at, I have seen that President Uribe now with the mission on African Colombians and what he is doing to try to help, and improve and get that community back in the mainstream is absolutely fantastic. So I just wanted to echo your words that I am also tremendously impressed with President Uribe and what he has done and is doing in Colombia.

I think that there is golden opportunity for us in the United States to allow the region and others to work together because I look at the glass as being half full where we can really have a great hemisphere as moving forward in the 21st Century.

Mr. ENGEL. Well, thank you. I think those are good words to close on. I want to thank our panelists for their expertise and for appearing before us. We appreciate it very much. I guess the subcommittee is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:33 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE LUIS G. FORTUÑO, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM PUERTO RICO

Thank you Chairman Engel and Ranking Member Burton. I want to commend you both on the decision to hold this timely and important hearing about the recent border dispute between Colombia and Ecuador and what—if anything—the intelligence collected during the raid teaches us about the links between the government of Venezuela and the FARC. I also want to thank our distinguished panel of experts. I know they will shed light on the complex issues in the Andean region.

Mr. Chairman, Colombia and Venezuela present a study in contrasts. In Colombia, the trend lines are decidedly positive. The government in Bogotá is not perfect. No government is. But we should not allow the few points of disagreement that we might have with the Colombian government to obscure the remarkable progress that nation has made in recent years. When President Uribe took office in 2002, Colombia was on the verge of becoming a failed narco-state. A weak government had allowed the drug trade to prosper. Drug income, in turn, fueled the rise of illegal armies, including the FARC, which has been responsible for the murder of countless innocents, including President Uribe's father. Killings, kidnappings and other human rights violations made Colombia one of the most dangerous places on earth.

Mr. Chairman, it had long been assumed that Colombia's difficult geography and highly dispersed population made the country impossible to govern. President Uribe's two terms in office are an emphatic refutation of that argument. With the overwhelming support of the Colombian people, who were tired of living in fear, President Uribe has expanded and professionalized the country's security forces and pursued a policy of forcefully confronting the guerrillas, whose murderous and plundering ways belie any notion that they are fighting for social justice. As a result, violence has steadily declined and the economy has prospered. Simply stated, because of President Uribe's brave and steady leadership, Colombia has been brought back from the brink. Therefore, I confess that I do not understand those who question whether the United States should stand strong with President Uribe or who choose to focus on the few inevitable points of disagreement between our two governments rather than the many points of agreement. I, for one, will continue to cast my lot with President Uribe and the increasingly hopeful people of Colombia.

Mr. Chairman, on the other, darker end of the spectrum lies Venezuela, where the trend lines are decidedly negative. We are constantly told by experts on the region—both real and self-proclaimed—to resist the temptation to pigeonhole President Chávez or to reduce him to a caricature. I am sensitive to this point. Political leaders are rarely all good or all bad; they usually bring a bit of both elements to the table. I also readily acknowledge that President Chávez was elected in 1998 by a populace that was justifiably unhappy with the existing political and social order in Venezuela.

Nonetheless, after ten years in power, it is difficult to identify any positive aspect of President Chávez's rule. President Chávez has centralized power, militarized politics, restricted legitimate forms of dissent, strengthened relationships with countries like Iran, and—despite record oil profits—adopted economic policies that appear to be driving Venezuela into the ground.

In addition, not only has President Chávez long spoken out in defense of the FARC, but the recent intelligence windfall that resulted from the raid by Colombian forces suggests that his support for that terrorist organization may have been financial and operational, not merely rhetorical. If these initial reports are confirmed, this is a dangerous development indeed. As you know, Mr. Chairman, a number of members of this Committee have co-sponsored a resolution urging the U.S. govern-

ment to designate Venezuela as a state sponsor of terrorism. I have chosen to await a full review of Raúl Reyes' computer and the other intelligence obtained from the operation. But I will follow the evidence where it leads, and I commend my colleagues who co-sponsored this resolution for shining a spotlight on a deeply troubling situation that many would prefer to keep in the dark.

Finally, there is Ecuador, where the trend lines strike me as somewhat mixed. I hope the panelists devote some time to Ecuador, which is too often relegated to the backburner in discussions about the Andean region. Beyond the question of whether Ecuador has knowingly allowed the FARC to take refuge in its territory, I would ask the panelists to address the broader relationship between Washington and Quito, as well as any points of leverage that the United States might have with President Correa.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[NOTE: The report of the Twenty-Fifth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs dated March 17, 2008, submitted for the record, is not reprinted here but is available in committee records. The resolution of this meeting follows.]

MEETING OF CONSULTATION OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

RC

TWENTY-FIFTH MEETING OF CONSULTATION
OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
March 17, 2008
Washington, D.C.

OEA/Ser.F/II.25
RC.25/RES.1/08
17 March 2008
Original: Spanish

RESOLUTION OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH MEETING OF CONSULTATION OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS[1/]

CONSIDERING:

That the Organization of American States is fully competent to address any facts and events that may endanger hemispheric peace and security;

That one of the purposes of the OAS is respect for the personality, sovereignty, and independence of states, as well as the faithful fulfillment of obligations derived from treaties and other sources of international law; and

That among the essential purposes of the OAS Charter is "[t]o strengthen the peace and security of the continent" and "to ensure the pacific settlement of disputes that may arise among the Member States"; and

TAKING UP the text of the resolution of the Permanent Council of March 5, 2008 and of the declaration of the XX Meeting of Presidents of the Rio Group on March 7, 2008,

RESOLVES:

1. To welcome the "Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of the Group of Rio on the recent events between Ecuador and Colombia," adopted in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, on March 7, 2008, and to underscore its contribution to the easing of tensions and to rapprochement between the Parties, based on the principle of international law.

2. To reaffirm the full applicability of the principles enshrined in international law of respect for sovereignty, abstention from the threat or use of force, and noninterference in the internal affairs of other states, which are embodied in Article 19 of the Charter and are founding principles of the inter-American system—principles that are binding on all its member states in all circumstances.

3. To reaffirm the full applicability of the principle of territorial sovereignty, enshrined unrestrictedly and without any exception in Article 21 of the OAS Charter, as a vital principle for harmonious relations among the nations of the Americas.

---

1 The United States supports this resolution's effort to build confidence between Colombia and Ecuador to address the underlying crisis. The United States is not prepared to agree with the conclusion in operative paragraph 4 in that it is highly fact-specific and fails to take account of other provisions of the OAS and United Nations Charters; in any event, neither this resolution nor CP/RES.930 (1632/08) affects the right of self-defense under Article 22 of the OAS Charter and Article 51 of the U.N. Charter.

4. To reject the incursion by Colombian military forces and police personnel into the territory of Ecuador, in the Province of Sucumbíos, on March 1, 2008, carried out without the knowledge or prior consent of the Government of Ecuador, since it was a clear violation of Articles 19 and 21 of the OAS Charter.

5. To take note of the full apology for the events that occurred and the pledge by Colombia, expressed by its President to the Rio Group and reiterated by its delegation at this Meeting of Consultation, that they would not be repeated under any circumstances.

6. To reiterate the firm commitment of all member states to combat threats to security caused by the actions of irregular groups or criminal organizations, especially those associated with drug trafficking;

7. To instruct the Secretary General to use his good offices to implement a mechanism for observing compliance with this resolution and the restoration of an atmosphere of trust between the two Parties.

8. To take note of the report submitted by the Commission headed by the Secretary General and composed of the Chair of the Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of The Bahamas, Ambassador Cornelius Smith; and by the Permanent Representatives of Argentina, Ambassador Rodolfo Gil; Brazil, Ambassador Osmar Chohfi; Panama, Ambassador Aristides Royo; and Peru, Ambassador María Zavala; and to thank all of them for their outstanding efforts.

9. To keep this Meeting of Consultation open and hold its next session during the upcoming regular session of the General Assembly, in order to receive a report by the Secretary General on the implementation of this resolution.

○