Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to speak with you today on security issues facing the United States in Latin America. Contemporary threats to U.S. interests and those likely to emerge in the foreseeable future from the Western Hemisphere are far different than the traditional threats the United States faced during the cold war or in the decades prior to it. Since the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, the principal concern of the United States in Latin America had been to prevent other great powers from projecting military force into the hemisphere and thereby acquiring the ability to pose a physical threat to the U.S. homeland.

During the cold war, the Soviet Union was the principal great power rival to the United States. It had little capability to project conventional military power into Latin America; its only opportunity to gain a foothold was to be invited in by ideologically sympathetic governments. Consequently, Washington's security concerns in the region came to be framed primarily in terms of preventing leftist governments from coming to power, lest they provide the Soviet Union an opening. Cuba epitomized the potential problem: After the revolution in 1959, Cuba turned to the Soviet Union as its patron and became a persistent threat to U.S. interests, posing a direct threat at the time of the 1962 missile crisis.

With the end of the cold war, these traditional security concerns virtually disappeared. There is no major power that has any motivation, and few that have even the capability, to project military force into Latin America in ways antagonistic to the United States. No Latin American country has any interest in disrupting commerce or the capability to do so. Although Fidel Castro remains in power and U.S.-Cuban relations are as antagonistic as ever, the threat posed by Cuba to U.S. security has diminished to the vanishing point. The loss of Soviet economic and military assistance forced Cuba to downsize its armed forces, and robbed it of its ability to project military power off the island. The Cuban military, while still large and formidable, is essentially restricted to the role of a homeland defense force. Significantly, in Southcom Commander Bantz Craddock's 2005 posture statement before this Committee, the only mention of Cuba came in connection with Southcom's management of the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay.1

As traditional security concerns have receded, a new set of "nontraditional" security issues has arisen. Some, like the problem of insurgency, are old concerns that have not been eliminated by the changing global balance, but whose significance has been changed by it. Others, like narcotics trafficking, are concerns that have emerged more recently. In fact, narcotics

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trafficking was the first of these nontraditional issues to be formally declared a threat to national security by President Richard Nixon in 1971.

In 2003, the Organization of American States (OAS) held a Special Conference on Security and adopted a Declaration on Security in the Americas, outlining the principal nontraditional threats to hemispheric security, including:

- criminal activity and the resulting lack of public safety
- narcotics trafficking
- terrorism
- health and environmental risks
- proliferation of weapons of mass destruction
- poverty and social exclusion

General Craddock's posture statement focuses on many of the same issues.

Before reviewing these problems individually, I would like to offer some general thoughts on the advantages and dangers inherent in reconceptualizing as "security threats" issues that have historically been thought of as political, social, and economic problems. To the extent that we broaden our concept of "security" to recognize that human security— the overall well-being of individual citizens— is at risk from sources more diverse than military attack, this reconceptualization of security is positive. As the OAS declaration points out, these nontraditional threats are multidimensional; not only physical, but economic, political, and social. Thus they require multidimensional remedies that draw on all instruments of national power: economic, political, and social, as well as military. But conceptualizing a broad array of heterogeneous problems as security threats poses two dangers as well:

(1) By conceptualizing these problems as security threats, we may create exaggerated expectations about how amenable these problems will be to traditional military instruments of power. The new security threats are fundamentally different than the old and are not likely to respond well to old remedies. The reconceptualization of these issues as threats is meant to emphasize their importance to national well-being, thereby justifying the same priority attention and investment of resources we have historically made to meet traditional security threats. The reconceptualization was not meant to suggest that because these problems are "security threats," they can be alleviated with the same instruments of power as traditional threats were. The potential for a fundamental misunderstanding of this distinction is real, and already visible in the way that some Latin American militaries have responded to nontraditional threats. This is also something U.S. policymakers must keep in mind when crafting strategies to address these problems and making decisions about where to allocate scarce resources.

(2) By engaging Latin American armed forces to respond to these problems, which are not primarily military problems in the first place, we run the risk of breaking down the boundaries between civilian and military roles, especially in the area of public safety. In the 1980s and 1990s, Latin American civilians worked hard to establish democratic governments to replace the military regimes that had proliferated across the region in the 1960s and 1970s. The history of Latin America warns us that civil-military relations are a perennial issue in the region, and that
the pendulum has swung back and forth between democracy and military authoritarianism. There is no reason to believe that these issues have been fully resolved.

Today’s democratic governments are by no means well-consolidated. In many countries, democratic institutions have been plagued by corruption, unresponsiveness to popular needs, and ineffective economic policies. The legitimacy of the democratic system has consequently been eroded, and opinion polls across the region find little public confidence in government. The appeal of populist leaders like Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia are symptomatic of these deep problems in Latin America’s democratic institutions. Historically, at moments when civilian government proved ineffectual and its failures gave rise to popular movements demanding sweeping change, Latin American militaries have been tempted to seize power to restore order. To the extent that the armed forces are routinely involved in civilian affairs as a consequence of the blurring of civil-military roles, an important bulwark against military intervention in politics is eroded. Even in the United States, we draw a bright line between military and police functions, which is crossed only in times of extreme national emergency. The logic of that tradition applies even more urgently in Latin America, given its history. The militarization of public safety poses a greater danger to Latin American democracy than any of the ills it is intended to alleviate. Let me turn now to specific issues:

**Lack of public safety**

The growth of violent crime and gang activity has become a severe public policy problem across the region. If the maintenance of public order and safety is the first task of government, many Latin American governments are deficient. Victimization rates in most countries are between 30% and 40%, and across the region, the vast majority of citizens perceive a significant increase in crime and personal insecurity in recent years. The direct economic losses from violent crime are estimated at $15 billion annually, 2% of the region’s Gross Domestic Product. As a region, Latin America has the highest level of violent crime in the world. Not only does spiraling violent crime cause immediate economic and physical harm to its victims, it deters foreign investment and tourism, erodes faith in government, and stimulates vigilantism.

The long term structural causes of violent crime are the same in Latin America as elsewhere: poverty, inadequate investment in human capital (health and education), and inadequate employment opportunities, especially in urban areas. The weak economic growth experienced by Latin America over the past decade and the inability of government to ameliorate levels of poverty have made these underlying problems worse.

The more immediate cause for the growth of violent crime is the inadequacy of public safety agencies. Police forces are not well-trained, equipped, or paid. Poor training leaves them ignorant of investigative techniques and policing procedures. Poor equipment leaves them, at times, less well-armed than their criminal adversaries. Poor pay leaves them vulnerable to corruption.
The public’s yearning for basic security has led to demands in many countries for the armed forces to take a more direct role in policing— even in countries like El Salvador, where the military’s history of human rights violations previously caused them to be restricted to external defense functions only. The militarization of public safety poses its own risks for democracy, as discussed above.

The spread of crime and gang violence in Latin America has direct relevance for the United States. Many of the gangs have transnational ties. In fact, Central American gangs are a U.S. import. The large migration of Central Americans to the United States, begun during the region civil conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s, resulted in young Central Americans being drawn into the gang culture of U.S. cities. Arrested for gang-related crimes, many of these youths have been deported back to the region, carrying the gang culture home with them, where it has flourished in the soil of poor urban barrios.

Violent crime in Latin America can threaten U.S. citizens directly. Kidnapping has grown in recent years as a lucrative criminal trade, and U.S. business representatives are attractive targets. This in turn, reduces the willingness of U.S. firms to invest in the region. Insecurity and violence also spur migration, as they did during the Central American wars.

Finally, the inability of governments to provide basic security for its citizens puts democratic institutions at risk. At the extreme, failed states can result, as in the recent collapse of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s government in Haiti.

The problem of violent crime and gang activity can be ameliorated in the medium term by improvements in the quality of public safety services. In the long run, however, these problems cannot be eliminated as long as the structural economic and social problems plaguing the urban poor persist. Good police can capture criminals quickly and efficiently, but a wretched urban environment that offers no hope to poor youth will constantly produce new criminals to take the place of the old.6

Narcotics Trafficking

Of all the nontraditional security threats, narcotics trafficking has the most significant direct impact on the United States. Ninety percent of the cocaine and over half the heroin that enter the United States come from Latin America.7 The economic cost of illegal drug use is estimated at over $160 billion annually, over $65 billion of which is spent on the drugs themselves. Illegal drug use contributes directly to a large portion of the crime in the United States. In a 2001 survey, nearly two-thirds of the people arrested for crimes in the United States tested positive for illegal drugs.8

Since President Richard Nixon declared a “war on drugs,” the United States has spent $25 billion fighting it.9 The war on drugs is a two-front war. Since the beginning, anti-drug efforts have focused both on the supply-side (preventing drugs from entering the United States) and the demand-side (reducing U.S. demand for illegal drugs). Supply-side efforts, including crop
eradication and shipment interdiction, have been focused in Latin America, particularly the Andean region, where most cocaine and heroin are produced.

The problem of narcotics trafficking is closely linked to the problem of public insecurity and crime. Because of the huge profits involved in the drug industry, criminal organizations have been able to raise private armies and contest the state's monopoly of coercive force in parts of several countries. Through corruption and violence, they have been able to threaten the stability of democratic institutions.

The principal cause of narcotics trafficking in Latin America is the unremitting demand for illegal drugs from U.S. consumers. This demand makes the trade extraordinarily lucrative. Even for poor peasant producers, who receive a vanishingly small fraction of the profits from the drug trade, growing coca or poppies pays far more than growing traditional crops. Many such producers live in remote areas where the soil is poor, making traditional crops difficult to grow, and basic infrastructure is lacking, making it hard to get traditional crops to market.

The weaknesses of the police, described above, makes law enforcement against traffickers difficult. The power of traffickers overwhelms the capabilities of most police and has led to the enlistment of the armed forces in the war on drugs more than in any other area of public safety, with the attendant risks of militarizing police functions. The Colombian government's shift in the late 1990s from relying primarily on the police to relying primarily on the armed forces is a case in point. Although it is not a military threat in the traditional sense, drug trafficking appears amenable to military response because smugglers, like armies, have an identifiable logistics system. And at the point of production in Latin America, the traffickers also have well-provisioned armies to defend their enterprises.

The vast sums of money involved in trafficking have led to corruption at the highest levels of some governments, diminishing the resolve of senior policymakers to pursue traffickers as persistently as they might. Even honest politicians are affected by the political power of traffickers and growers. In Colombia, traffickers have backed the political campaigns of candidates for Congress, and local politicians in areas of coca production have opposed crop eradication policies that deprive their constituents of their livelihoods. In Bolivia, Evo Morales has organized peasant growers into a formidable mass movement.

The problem of narcotics trafficking is not one that will be resolved in the foreseeable future. The U.S. market for illegal drugs has proven highly resistant to government efforts to reduce it, and as long as the market persists, criminal entrepreneurs will find ways to supply it. The profits available from the drug trade are so large and the cost of entry to the business so low in relative terms, that supply-side efforts at eradication and interdiction have proven only marginally effective. Successful crop eradication in one region simply pushes production elsewhere. The land, air, and sea routes into the United States are so numerous that interdiction efforts, too, simply push traffickers from one avenue to another, never reducing the supply enough to alter the price of the drugs on the U.S. market.
The drug problem is a perfect example of the multidimensional nature of nontraditional security problems. It requires both a strategy for reducing supply and a strategy for reducing demand. On the supply-side, it requires not just security assets to fumigate crops, destroy labs, and interdict shipments, but requires political and economic resources to provide small growers with economically viable alternatives and to blunt the political power of traffickers. On the demand side, it requires not just increased policing, but more resources for treatment and prevention, not to mention investment in the social and economic infrastructure of the poor neighborhoods that are breeding grounds of addiction.

**Insurgency and Civil Unrest**

Classical insurgency, of the sort prevalent in Latin America in the 1960s and especially in Central America in the 1980s, has become rare today. Only Colombia has such an insurgency, in which guerrilla movements are attempting to overthrow the state by force of arms. The transition to democracy in Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s is the principal reason for the dearth of contemporary insurgencies. When opponents of government have peaceful democratic avenues for expressing their discontent and organizing their followers, violence in rarely an attractive alternative. Indeed, most (though not all) of the major insurgencies in Latin America in past decades were prompted by the unwillingness of authoritarian governments to allow the free expression of demands for social and economic reform. War-weariness among the populations who suffered major internal conflicts or authoritarian dictatorships is another major obstacle to any political movement that might seek popular support for armed struggle.

Is the age of insurgency over in Latin America? Not necessarily. The weakness of democratic institutions—corruption, lack of transparency, poor responsiveness—damages their legitimacy, making them a less effective avenue for channeling political demands from social movements seeking change. These weaknesses, combined with the ineffectiveness of neoliberal economic policy in the region, means that demands for social and economic improvement are going unmet. Social and economic inequality, together with unresponsive and illegitimate government, is precisely the mix of conditions that gave rise to insurgencies in the past.

In contemporary Latin America, this mix has given rise to social movements that channel their frustration not into armed insurgency, but into massive, sometimes violent, street demonstrations demanding change in government. This tactic of “recall by street demonstration” has led to the resignation or congressional removal of six Latin American presidents since 1997: Abdala Bucaram (a populist himself, albeit an unpopular one) and Lucio Gutierrez in Ecuador; Gonzalo Sanchez de Losada and Carlos Mesa in Bolivia; Fernando de la Rua and Adolfo Rodriguez Saa in Argentina. These mass movements are a step short of insurgency, but active repression of them by security forces could lead, as it did in Central America in the 1980s, to armed conflict.

Since there is virtually no chance that a successful revolutionary movement will steer a new regime into the arms of a global power hostile to the United States, what security interest does Washington have in suppressing insurgencies? When insurgents threaten democratic institutions, the United States has an interest in defending them, of course. Armed conflicts also produce
refugees from areas of combat, and those displaced persons often flee across international borders. The conflicts in Central America in the 1980s produced significant refugee flows into surrounding countries, including the United States.

In crafting policy responses to insurgency and civil unrest, the United States would do well to keep in mind the multidimensional character of the problem. The origins of insurgency are complex, and military conflict is but a single element-- and not the most important element-- of the struggle. Insurgencies are politico-military conflicts, with the emphasis on the political. The tinder of revolution is social and economic inequity; the match is exclusionary government that resists political demands for reform. The best vaccine against insurgency is democracy-- not just governments that periodically goes through the motions of having elections, but governments that are responsive to the needs and demands of their citizenry.

Bringing about the sorts of reforms that would make Latin American societies relatively immune to revolutionary challenge has long been an aim of U.S. policy (with ups and downs) since the Alliance for Progress. But it has also been an elusive goal. Historically, it has proven much easier to provide military assistance and train the recipients to use it than it has been to remedy the underlying social, economic, and political weaknesses that spawn revolutionary movements.

**International Terrorism**

The danger of international terrorism in Latin America is relatively insignificant. As General Craddock said in his testimony last March, there are no known Islamic terrorist cells operating in Latin America, though there are some supporters willing to provide financial and logistical assistance. This is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future, given the small size of the Muslim community in Latin America (estimated at 3-6 million people, smaller than the Muslim population within the United States).

However, since September 11, 2001, there has been a tendency to conflate international terrorism with internal insurgencies and civil violence. In Colombia, for example, three guerrilla and paramilitary groups—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the United Self-Defense Forces (AUC)—have been designated terrorist organizations by the Department of State. Our support for the Colombian government has been described as an important front in the war on terrorism. This constitutes a serious confusion of threats. There is no doubt that these three Colombian have engaged in acts of terrorism. However, they are not “international terrorists” in the sense that Al Qaeda is. The aim of the Colombian groups is to achieve political ends inside Colombia and the targets of their violence are Colombian. Unlike Al Qaeda, they have no intention of attacking the United States and their aims are not international. Their threat to U.S. interests is therefore fundamentally different. Guerrillas and paramilitaries in Colombia pose a threat to Colombians and the Colombian state. They may pose a threat to citizens in neighboring states as a result of the internal conflict “spilling over” borders. But they do not pose a physical threat to the United States, as Islamic terrorist groups do.
Perhaps the most persistent campaign of international terrorism in the Americas has been the campaign of paramilitary attacks against Cuba conducted by a small number of Cuban exiles. These attacks date to the early 1960s, when they had the support of the United States government. The end of U.S. support for such actions did not end the attacks, however. The most notorious was the bombing of a Cubana civilian airliner off Barbados in 1976, an attack that killed 73 people. In 1997, a series of bombs were detonated in Cuban tourist hotels and nightspots, injuring dozens and killing an Italian tourist—bomblings for which Cuban exile Luis Posada Carriles took responsibility. Posada Carriles is currently in the United States fighting deportation. In 2000, Panamanian authorities thwarted an assassination plot against Fidel Castro (also involving Posada Carriles), and the U.S. Coast Guard foiled another plot to assassinate Castro in Venezuela in 1997.

Historically, these attacks have been planned and organized from several countries in the hemisphere, including Venezuela, Panama, El Salvador and the United States. Vigorous enforcement of U.S. laws against terrorism is essential in these cases, lest the international community conclude that the United States is tolerating paramilitary attacks against Cuba because of our distaste for the Cuban government. Such an impression would seriously undermine U.S. credibility as it works to enlist the global community in the fight against Islamic terrorist groups.

Public Health and Environmental Degradation

One effect of globalization has been the expansion of international trade and travel, both of which increase the speed at which contagious diseases can spread. Pathogens respect no borders, so international cooperation to contain diseases like HIV/AIDS, SARS, and avian influenza are essential. Because of Latin America’s proximity to the United States, the spread of communicable disease in Latin America would simply be prelude to its spread into the United States. Similarly, environmental degradation is a common problem, whether globally (in the case of global warming) or among neighbors (in the case of river pollution along the U.S.-Mexican border). Military assets can be used in civic action programs for vaccinations, natural disaster response, and other emergency situations requiring large-scale deployment of manpower. But the longer term safeguard against health and environmental threats is to strengthen the capacity of Latin American public health services, environmental safeguards, and regional cooperation. For these threats, an ounce of prevention will certainly be worth a pound of cure.

Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

Like the threat of international terrorism, the danger from weapons of mass destruction in Latin America is relatively low. No Latin American country has nuclear weapons or aspires to obtain them. Every Latin American country except Cuba is a signatory to the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco which commits them not to acquire, manufacture, test, use, or station a nuclear explosive device in their sovereign territory.
In 2002, the Department of State expressed concern regarding Cuba's capability to produce biological weapons, in light of its advanced pharmaceutical industry. In retrospect, however, the intelligence community has backed away from its initial conclusion that Cuba was exploring the possibility of a weapons program. In response to the initial U.S. accusations, the Cuban government offered to allow international inspection of its pharmaceutical facilities to assure that they were not being used for weapons production.

“Radical Populism”

Over the past decade, Latin America has experienced the rise of populist and leftist political movements, ranging from the radicalism of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela to the sedate socialism of Ricardo Lagos in Chile. What all these movements have in common is a political appeal to poor and working class Latin Americans for whom the transition to democracy and the adoption of neoliberal economic policies in the 1980s has done little to improve their lives. In opinion polls and at the ballot boxes, Latin Americans have been registering their disgust with corrupt and incompetent government, and with a political class that seems more interested in self-enrichment than promoting the general welfare. Moreover, they have been electing politicians who criticize the neoliberal economic policies of the past two decades, which produced slow growth, no improvement in poverty rates, and sparse investment in human capital through health and education programs.

The most moderate of these politicians have called simply for new policies within the framework of existing institutions. The most radical have called for the transformation of those institutions. Beginning with the election of populist Abdala Bucaram in Ecuador in 1996, six populists or socialists have won the presidency in Latin America: Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 1998; Ricardo Lagos in Chile in 2000; Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in Brazil in 2002; Nestor Kirchner in Argentina in 2003; and Tabare Vazquez in Uruguay in 2004. Left-populist candidates are also strong contenders in upcoming presidential elections in Bolivia and Mexico.

Does this new political trajectory in Latin America represent a threat to the United States? In his 2004 Southcom Posture Statement, General James T. Hill, defined the growth of “radical populism” as an emerging security threat because of the anti-American appeals of populist leaders. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s recent trip to Latin America also focused on the danger populism, most especially Hugo Chavez’s version, poses for hemispheric democracy.

Populists may or may not pose a threat to domestic democratic institutions, and they may or may not be hostile to the United States. While it is true that Hugo Chavez’s actions have called into question his commitment to democratic norms, it is worth remembering that Chavez and all the other left-populist leaders who have come to power in Latin America in the past decade have gotten there through democratic elections. The most serious threat to constitutional democracy in Venezuela was mounted not by Hugo Chavez, but by his opponents who orchestrated a short-lived military coup in 2002.
Populists in power may not please the United States, especially because of their skepticism about the value of unfettered markets and free trade. Their rhetoric may sometimes offend us. But they are a product of democratic contestation, and they are expressing and responding to the views of their constituents, who are increasingly in the majority. For Washington, tolerating governments in Latin America with whom we disagree is the price of democracy. The alternative is authoritarian regimes that can afford to ignore the will of their own people.

The antidote to radical populism is good government and economic policies that improve the standard of living and provide economic opportunity to classes across the social spectrum. Notably, whereas the United States has tended to see populist movements as a threat, Latin American governments have identified poverty and social exclusion as the real threat. The suppression of populist demands, now being articulated, for the most part, nonviolently through existing political institutions, runs the risk of sparking armed conflicts. That is the lesson of Central America in the 1970s: if nonviolent avenues are closed to popular movements, violent ones will be opened.

Concluding Thoughts

In short, the problems facing Latin America today are complex, multifaceted, and less amenable to traditional military instruments of national policy than the security threats the United States confronted during the cold war. Almost of these problems derive from underlying economic and social inequities, especially poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth and income. All are aggravated by failures of government which make it ineffective and unresponsive to popular grievances, despite the establishment of electoral democracies across the region. Responses to these problems, by Latin America and by the United States, must be integrated, encompassing all aspects of national power—political, economic, diplomatic and cultural, as well as military.

Even in cases where there is a necessary role for traditional security assets, we would be well-advised to avoid the militarization of internal public safety functions as much as possible. Excessive reliance on military assistance during the Alliance for Progress, in the 1960s, facilitated the rise of military authoritarian regimes in Latin America. Military aid programs that create large, resource-rich military institutions in countries where civilian institutions are relatively weak pose a threat to democracy. Historically, far more Latin democracies have been overthrown by their own armed forces than by drug traffickers, insurgents, and radical populists combined.

Notes


12. Castro responded to Bolton in two speeches: “Key Address by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the Open Forum Held in Sancti Spiritus Province, May 25, 2002,” and “Response from Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, to the Statements Made by the United States Government on Biological Weapons,
