

CONFIDENCE AND SECURITY BUILDING MEASURES IN LATIN AMERICA

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It is common to say that compared to other regions, Latin America is a relatively stable and safe one, with reduced levels of force and military expenditures. However, the region has had and still has many problems both internal, as in the case of Colombia and international.

Nevertheless, the situation is promising due to a number of events that have taken place in recent times and for which the concept of confidence building has been essential.

Without explicitly stating so, in general latin american countries are now more than ever applying confidence building policies. These policies are not unknown and basically refer to the respect of International Law and obligations deriving from treaties, respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, non interference in their internal affairs, good neighborliness, good will and co-operation.

If this appears simplistic, it should be taken into account that foundation, context and purpose are necessary for confidence building measures (CBMs) effectively apply. CBMs materialize, give concrete expression, especially in the security and military spheres, and are conducive to the application of these policies. They are not to be adopted "in instead of" and will have very little meaning outside them. If intended, there is a risk of "diplomatic or military lace-making" with eventual failure and frustration.

Thus, the feed-back process and cumulative effect of confidence is beginning to take hold in the region, slowly but steadily replacing the vicious circle of distrust, arm races, confrontation and violent conflict.

This situation has not been attained by sheer luck. Latin America has known a number of crises and even now there are some unsolved situations with a capacity to produce international conflict. Additionally, there is the emergence of the so-called "new threats" to security. Latin America is trying to deal with them in a situation that is rather different than the one prevailing only a couple of decades ago.

It is appropriate to remember that almost all of Central America was engulfed in conflict, some countries were at the brink of acquiring nuclear weapons and most south american countries had conflict scenarios not excluding the possibility of wars. In fact, armed conflicts, albeit of no general dimension took place.

Where the present level of confidence comes from?

There cannot be a simple answer to a complex question. The existing confidence is the result of the interaction of general and specific events, elements and circumstances. It is possible to categorize them in very basic terms as:

- 1) General; that could be either hemispheric or latin american.
- 2) Sub-regional; central american, andean or southern cone endeavors.
- 3) Bilateral; agreements among several pairs of countries, with different degrees of sophistication and fulfillment.

- 1) General.

In matter of confidence, the most important latin american achievement is the Treaty of Tlatelolco, that has come into full implementation making that no country in the region posses nor will ever posses nuclear weapons and also that the area has completed all the requirements of a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone as defined by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

There is not, nor could be, a major source of confidence for the region as the guarantees, inspections and other provisions contemplated in the Treaty. The fact that it took three decades to enter into general acceptance bear witness to the difficulties of a situation where the possibility of having nuclear weapons either "imported" or "locally produced" was a real and tangible threat. It also testifies of the vision, the tenacity and finally the wisdom of many statesmen, diplomats and the population at large that enjoys now the total absence of these weapons.

A second element is the general process of democratization in the whole region. There was a time when for a few exceptions, countries were governed by military regimes. It is a statistical fact that those governments increased to historical levels the number of forces, expenditures and weapons acquisitions. Also, not a few among them went into rather elaborated and sometimes esoteric "geopolitical" schemes where the options for open conflict were growing all the time. Democratic governments were forced to reduce expenditure and are still in the long process of gaining proper control of the armed forces. Also, the most farfetched visions were promptly discarded. In years past, there has been considerable movement towards democratic values, human rights and respect of the principles and dispositions of the United Nations and Organization

of American States Charters.

A third and very important element is the interamerican system. With all its flaws and problems, this system has promoted a number of legal obligations with respect to the maintenance of peace and peaceful solution of disputes. It also serves as a general forum for consideration and discussions of international security matters that is becoming more efficient, transparent and useful. It has made possible the faster dissemination of the potential of confidence building for the enhancement of hemispheric security. Two special conferences have been devoted to CBMs and the number of resolutions on matters of security that the hemispheric fora are approving is growing in number and significance.

2) Sub-regional.

Latin America is a vast space with many different types of situations. Sometimes, sub-regional perceptions and priorities are more relevant than general visions.

Central America.- Only some years ago was in a state of general and often open conflict. It took tremendous efforts to produce a cease-fire and create minimal conditions for peace and stability. States are now members of the so-called "Framework Treaty for Democratic Security" which is a model of political will and wisdom to do things differently and better. The Treaty is in force since 1997 and provides for a number of very significant CSBMs as well as for the consolidation of democratic regimes, respect of human rights, civilian control of the military, etc. The recent agreements in Guatemala sustain the hope that the region is in the way of stability. Even in the Caribbean the situation while not ideal looks more less concerning than in the past.

In the southern cone area also, only years ago, the possibilities for general conflict between Argentina and Brazil and Argentina and Chile were openly considered. In the first case, it was not a territorial or border dispute but rather conflicting visions about sub-regional hegemony. The second was, in part, a matter of disputed delimitations of continental and maritime spaces. Visions of conflict were exacerbated by military, nationalistic regimes and vast weapons procurement. Brazil and Argentina, as part of their rivalry, left in abeyance the full implementation of Tlatelolco. Eventually they abandon the hegemony confrontation, settled a matter of use of water of international rivers and with the return of democratic governments fully reconsidered the problem of

nuclear weapons. The "rapprochement" of these two countries once they left behind their rivalry was impressive. Now, they conduct joint military exercises.

In the case of Argentina and Chile, they settle a few days ago the last issue on the demarcation of the borderline. They have requested the Economic Commission for Latin America CEPAL to devise a methodology for the comparability of their military expenditures.

Last year, the Presidents of MERCOSUR and of Bolivia and Chile proclaimed the area as a Zone of Peace and free of chemical and bacteriological weapons. There are many CBMs agreements in application in that region.

Andean countries. These countries started a process of economic integration thirty years ago. In part due to the "spill over" factor, in several circumstances the group acted politically and in matters of security. In 1973, the Declaration of Ayacucho was the beginning of a process of consultation in arms and forces restraint for the area. In other occasions as in Galapagos in 1989 matters of security and confidence building were considered and resolutions adopted upon.

In 1991 in Cartagena, the Andean countries declared their reject of all weapons of mass destruction and only a few weeks ago, again in Cartagena the Presidents approved the outlines for a common external policy, the reinforcement of the political character of the process and confidence and security building regimes.

The Rio Group was formed in 1986 as a consequence of the practice of political dialogue that began with the Contadora and Contadora Support Groups for giving latin american countries a possibility for participating in the solution of the central american crisis.

The result of the efforts of these groupings in terms of CBMs is not even but the essential fact is that never before in the area was possible to attain such a level of political communication and dialogue and a commonality of purposes.

3) Bilateral.-

Finally, at the bilateral level between pairs of countries, there is a substantive number of agreements and understandings that provide for many CSBMs, some rather formal and non-committal, some very intrusive.

The result of all these measures is also mixed. Some are still at the level of development, some have succeeded and some specific have failed as in the case of Ecuador-Peru. However, this conflict is now totally and definitively solved.

In general terms, the experience has been rich, useful and rewarding. The most important fact is that despite serious difficulties, the general situation is much better than has previously been.

The importance of the peaceful and satisfactory solutions found for a number of international disputes with a potential for conflict should be underlined. The weight of these happy events in the level of present confidence is not to be minimized.

In these conditions, it is no surprise the massive and prompt adherence of most Latin American countries to many substantive international agreements on matters of disarmament: NPT, CTBT, Chemical weapons, land mines, etc. This participation is in itself a source of increased confidence, as is their growing presence in the UN registers on military expenditures and arms transfers as well as in other related multilateral activities.

Despite these mainly positive developments, a number of serious problems relevant for security remain. First and foremost, the fact that not all territorial or border or delimitation claims have been settled. There is potential for conflict in these cases.

Another problem is the relative fragility of the new democracies and some of the old, and various degrees of ambiguity with respect to the roles and responsibilities of the armed forces. In a number of cases, these have kept a degree of autonomy bordering on independence. This is not to say that Latin America is bound for another round of military coups since, among other factors as the willingness of peoples to persevere in democracy, there are interamerican legal obligations that should prevent a breach on the democratic process from happening. The concern is more with the meaning of "civilian control" of the armed forces.

This has to do with another problem which is the traditional lack of education and information of Latin American politicians in matters of security and military affairs. The armed forces have been for too long "on their own" and for civilian authorities that are not adequately acquainted with these subjects, establishing an adequate relationship with them is not an easy task.

Finally, there is also a lack of Latin American institutions or fora to discuss

security matters. This reflects the internal situation of many countries where in practice the participation of academic and other social sectors in security matters is clearly marginal.

Therefore, the consideration given to security concepts and concerns is not sufficient, even sometimes in official circles. Then, there are not many clear ideas, for instance, on how to cope with the "new security threats" where the relationship of the defense systems with problems of environment, poverty, illegal migration and other is, to say the least, neither simple nor promising. Further, the problems related to subversion and drug production and traffic are daunting.

In conclusion, Latin America is not a security problems free area. Internally and externally there are reasons and situations for serious concern. Nevertheless, the situation shows clear improvement in recent years and, perhaps more important, a general willingness to continue exploring ways of better international relations with less military tension and expenditure, more democracy and respect of human rights and a clear vision that outside the rule of law, in this case International Law, there is no solution to any problem.

Latin America has very clear that possibilities exist for building sustainable peace and development and establish mechanisms for friendly co-operation among them and with the countries of North America. These achievements shall be of real benefit for all peoples of the hemisphere. The role of confidence building in the coming into reality of this vision is essential.