



CHALLENGING THE ‘COLOSSUS OF THE NORTH’: MEXICO, CELAC, AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF REPLACING THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES WITH A NEW REGIONAL SECURITY ORGANIZATION

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Introduction

In September 2021, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador hosted the sixth meeting of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). This regional organization was inaugurated in 2011 by then president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, as an alternative to the Organization of American States (OAS) and U.S. dominance in that regional organization.¹ As current president of CELAC, López Obrador has continued to push the separatist agenda established by Chávez, proposing that CELAC should model the European Union (EU), with its political, economic, and social integration as a supranational organization,² thereby eliminating the need for the continuing alliance of the OAS.³

The OAS was created in 1948 as a collective security alliance in the Western Hemisphere before the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. It had a similar goal to NATO—to serve as a unified front against communism during the Cold War. It never formed into a formal military alliance like NATO, but it clearly focused on security relations between states in the region, with the United States as the dominant actor in setting the agenda for the organization.⁴ Its anti-communist stance solidified in 1962 with the expulsion of Cuba as a member, following Fidel Castro's successful revolution and before the Cuban missile crisis. Throughout the Cold War, the OAS continued to function as a regional security organization to promote democracy and condemn communism (the "Red Tide"). After the Cold War, the OAS led the charge against authoritarianism and Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) or "Pink Tide" movements (an ideological trend toward socialism, as opposed to communism). In fact, on September 11, 2001, the OAS foreign ministers were meeting in Lima, Peru, condemning Chavez's anti-democratic policies and signing the Inter-American Democratic Charter. They quickly transitioned to condemning terrorism (the first international organization do so) and, shortly after, on September 21 in Washington, D.C., they signed a resolution—Strengthening Hemispheric Cooperation to Prevent, Combat, and Eliminate Terrorism.⁵

While few observers of Latin America gave much credence to López Obrador's declaration that CELAC could become a replacement for the OAS—much less a political and economic union like the EU—this paper seeks to assess a variety of possible future scenarios using the Framework Foresight methodology.⁶ Combining this methodology with structured analytical techniques (SATs) employed by intelligence analysts, this paper examines these potential scenarios and determines the drivers that could explain how they would come about. The paper begins with background on efforts by states in the Western Hemisphere to form regional organizations and the context for those bodies. It then explains the Framework Foresight methodology and SATs used in developing the scenarios and determining their drivers. Four futures for regional security in the Western Hemisphere are then explored using these analytical tools, focusing on the implications for U.S.-Mexico security relations. The paper concludes with an assessment of policy choices that the United States could implement to support the preferred future scenario.

Background on Regional Security in the Western Hemisphere

Before the formation of the OAS in 1948, there were a number of proposals offered by the United States and others to create regional alliances in the Western Hemisphere. Articulated in the Monroe Doctrine, the United States sought to prevent the former European colonial powers from taking advantage of the newly independent former Spanish colonies in the Americas. Initially stated in President James Monroe's inauguration message to the 18th Congress in December 1823, the United States declared that the Western Hemisphere should be free from foreign intervention, yet also that European powers should recognize the region as falling under the U.S. sphere of influence.⁷ The Monroe Doctrine was actually more a statement of principle than a recognition of U.S. military power, since at the time, the United States lacked the ability to actually enforce it. Yet for some Latin American leaders such as Simón Bolívar, the Monroe Doctrine posed a threat to the newly formed, independent nations of the Americas, signaling the rise of a new regional hegemon (the "Colossus of the North") in the guise of a benevolent protector.⁸ Bolívar proposed a federation of Latin American states at the Congress of Panama in 1826 as a hedge against U.S. influence in the region. Due to the inability of the newly formed republics to agree on such a coalition, the effort failed, leading Bolívar to comment that Latin American unification was "like plowing the sea."⁹

The United States proposed the creation of a pan-American hemispheric union in 1890. The Conferences of American States, commonly referred to as the Pan-American Conferences, was established as an international organization for cooperation on trade and to prevent conflict between states. It was first introduced by former Senator James G. Blaine of Maine (then U.S. Secretary of State) in order to establish closer ties between the United States and its southern neighbors. The Spanish-American War of 1898 and the U.S. occupation of Cuba confirmed Bolívar's suspicions for many Latin Americans and influenced the agendas of subsequent conferences. The U.S. occupation of Panama and U.S. military interventions in Mexico prior to WWI, as well as U.S. military interventions in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic in the 1920s, led to further distrust of the United States and its motivations for any regional organization. Despite efforts by U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the U.S. pursuit of a "good neighbor" policy leading up to WWII, most Latin American states avoided any formal military alliance during the war. Some countries, such as Mexico and Brazil, did eventually join the Allies and provide military forces to the war effort.¹⁰

After WWII, the United States renewed its efforts to form a regional organization in the Western Hemisphere, primarily focused on the principle of collective security. Meeting in Brazil in 1947, the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (referred to as the Rio Treaty) was signed by 23 nations. However, it is not well known that the basis for the Rio Treaty was actually formulated two years earlier in Mexico City, as the Act of Chapultepec. Latin American nations (Mexico in particular) took the lead for creating a regional security agreement due to their concerns over being left out of the negotiations taking place in Dumbarton Oaks and the formation of the new United Nations.¹¹ The culmination of the Act of Chapultepec and the Rio Treaty came in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1948 with the formation of

the OAS. However, during the meeting in Colombia, an uprising (called the *bogotazo*) occurred following the assassination of liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán that pitted conservative and liberal political factions against each other.¹² The United States viewed the confrontation as being communist-inspired, which solidified its view that the threat of communism in the region should be the primary focus of the newly formed OAS.¹³ The events in Colombia would provide further justification for U.S. intervention in Guatemala in 1954 and the CIA's support for the overthrow of the democratically elected leader, Jacobo Árbenz, by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, in what was called Operation PB Success.¹⁴

Throughout the Cold War, the OAS was viewed by most Latin American nations as a tool of American foreign policy to advance an anti-communist agenda while at the same time supporting military dictatorships that were supportive of U.S. policies. After the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and Cuba's expulsion from the OAS in 1962, a further "hardening of the categories" occurred in the U.S. intelligence community toward threats in Latin America, evidenced in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in Central America after the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua.¹⁵ Due to U.S. control over the OAS agenda, some nations took it upon themselves to promote conflict resolution through other means, such as the formation of the Contadora Group, which included Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela and eventually led to the Esquipulas Peace Agreement in 1986 aimed at ending the conflicts occurring in Central America.

After the end of the Cold War, other regional security groupings emerged outside of the OAS. Hugo Chavez's "Pink Tide" emerged in 2004 with the formation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). Initially formed as an alliance with Cuba and an alternative to the U.S.-proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas, ALBA grew into a pseudo-alternative to the OAS, with member states (Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Honduras) headed by leftist, populist leaders like Chavez. Its political and social agenda was to challenge U.S. hegemony in the region. Similarly, the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR)—which included Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay—began as a trade union in 1991, but in 2008 gave rise to the South American Union (UNASUR). It went beyond establishing economic relations to promote political and social integration and even military coordination with the creation of the South American Defense Council (CSD) in 2009.¹⁶ In 2011, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) was inaugurated by Hugo Chávez and headquartered in Caracas, Venezuela. The concept of a new regional organization was originally proposed by Mexico and Brazil in 2010 in Cancún at the Latin American Summit on Integration and Development.¹⁷ CELAC has since grown to 33 member-states (sans the United States). Its agenda has been couched in the same Bolivarian solidarity rhetoric as ALBA, clearly challenging the OAS and U.S. hegemony. While UNASUR is languishing due to political changes in the region, CELAC is growing, bringing in many outside nations as affiliates, including China, Russia, Turkey, and many Arab states.¹⁸

While no states have exited the OAS, a number of countries have left the Rio Treaty, which is the foundational agreement for security cooperation in the Western Hemisphere. Mexico denounced the treaty in 2004 as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Under Chavez's influence, Venezuela denounced the treaty in 2012, along with other ALBA members including Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua.¹⁹

Organization and Methodology

Following the Framework Foresight model provided by Hines and Bishop,²⁰ this paper addresses each of the model's eight steps to assess potential future security relations in the Western Hemisphere: (1) domain description, (2) current assessment, (3) baseline future (4) alternative futures, (5) preferred future, (6) implications analysis, (7) futures to plans, and (8) leading indicators. This method is "a systematic way to develop a 'start-to-finish' future view of a domain or topic of interest, to explore its implications, and develop proposed responses."²¹

Domain Description

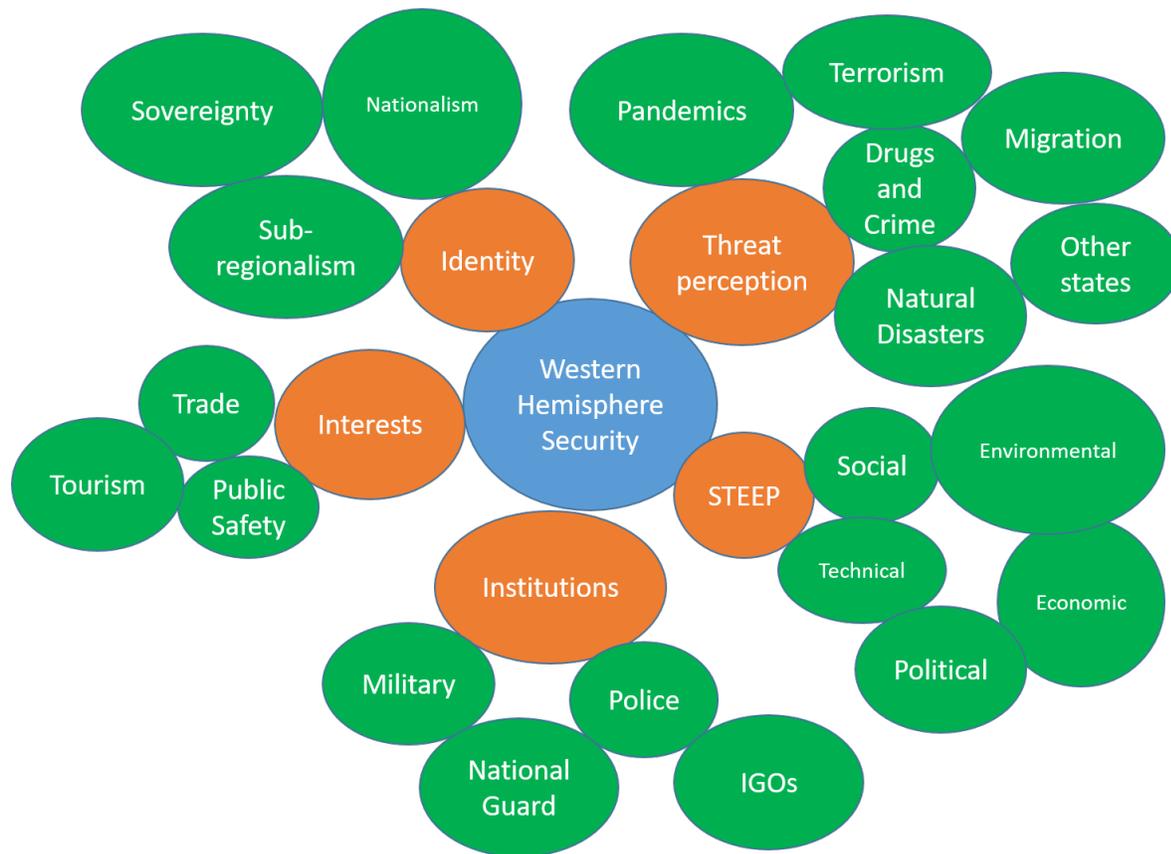
To begin, the Framework Foresight model requires that the domain or topic being explored be defined. The focus of this paper is on security relations in the Western Hemisphere, so the concept of security—which can mean different things to different people and countries—must be determined. For example, the Copenhagen School²² defines security or securitization within a constructivist perspective, to include a number of sectors: political, economic, military, societal, and environmental. While this perspective is helpful in explaining how different countries often frame security outside of traditional public safety and defense functions, for the purpose of this paper, the focus is on hemispheric security and how national security and defense are developed within the context of the institutions that primarily provide these functions for the state and region. Examining these institutions allows for the differentiation of each country's interests in international cooperation and/or boundaries. Furthermore, these institutions help to define what is considered a security perimeter and the areas of influence or responsibility.

The Monroe Doctrine (1823) sought to establish a security perimeter around the Western Hemisphere, although, as previously noted, the United States and the newly independent Latin American nations did not possess the military capacity to actually enforce such a perimeter against foreign states. It was not until the United States proclaimed the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (1905) that one state actually possessed the means to provide some semblance of regional security in the hemisphere, albeit in Central America and the Caribbean primarily.²³ Even during WWII when the United States developed its "Rainbow Plans" for the defense of the Americas against the Axis nations, its focus was still North America.²⁴ Thus, while the geographic scope of this paper is the Western Hemisphere, defense and security have been viewed by states primarily within a subregional context (e.g., North America, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America).²⁵

The power differentiation between states in the Western Hemisphere also impacts threat perceptions. The United States is still a global superpower geopolitically and has very broad security interests that impact the larger international system of states, while countries such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile view themselves as regional powers militarily and in terms of trade and natural resources. Thus, while this discussion focuses on activities internal to each country and their respective regional relations, it is important to consider that major differences exist between countries in the Western Hemisphere on security doctrine, institutions, and power regarding their role and influence in the region.

A domain map is provided in Figure 1, reflecting key issues, boundaries, categories, and questions covered in this paper. In addition to the STEEP (social, technological, economic, environmental, and political) variables, which come from the Framework Foresight methodology, other key variables for this analysis include identity, interests, and institutions. Identity refers to how each country views issues related to sovereignty, nationalism, and sub-regionalism. Institutions refer to the roles of the military, police, national guard, and international governmental organizations (like the OAS and CELAC) that impact security and defense. Interests refer to trade, tourism, and public safety.²⁶ Another key variable is the threat perception of each country. This includes how each country views threats such as pandemics, terrorism, crime and drugs, migration, natural disasters, and potential aggression from other states. However, there are often disagreements within countries when it comes to assessing threats. For example, when then U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry proposed a meeting of all the defense ministers in the hemisphere in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1995, to discuss security interests, Prime Minister Denzil Douglas of St. Kitts and Nevis asked if they would be discussing bananas at the meeting. Secretary Perry said no, this was not about economics, but rather defense and security issues. Prime Minister Douglas replied that for his nation, economic security was his paramount concern in the region.²⁷ Another example is how former U.S. President Donald Trump viewed undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Central America as a serious security threat, which, in his opinion, necessitated the building of a wall along the southern border with Mexico.²⁸

Figure 1. Domain Map



Analytical Methodology

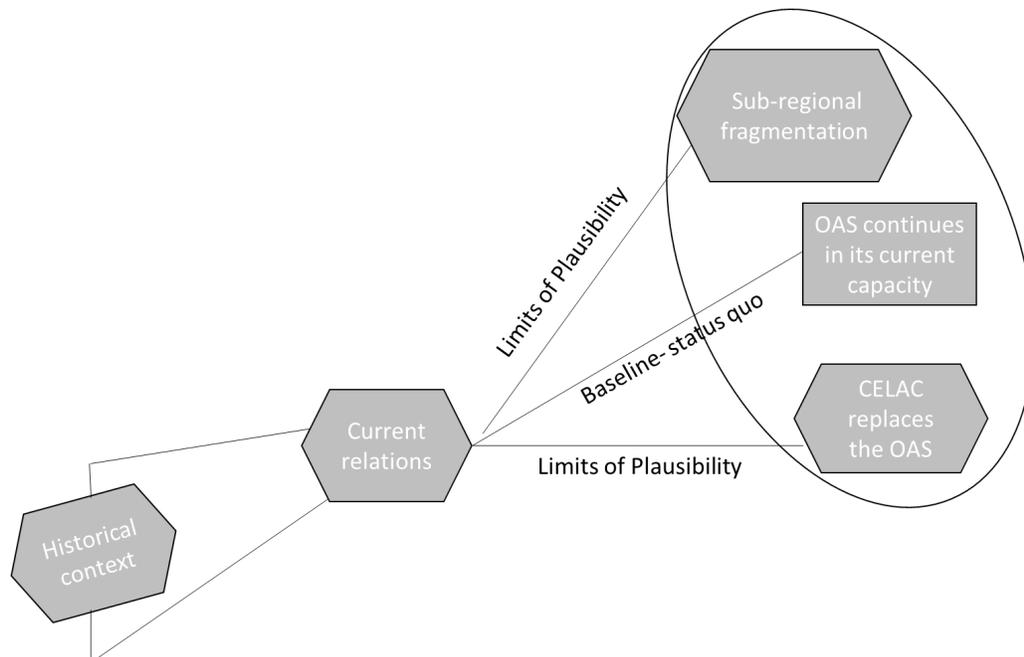
Following the Framework Foresight model,²⁹ this paper evaluates social, technological, economic, environmental, and political (STEEP) variables. It determines key indicators and drivers of outcomes, producing possible future scenarios regarding national security and defense relations between Mexico, the United States, and nations in the Western Hemisphere. This paper also employs analytical methodologies used in the U.S. intelligence community (IC) to support the assessments made using the Framework Foresight model. These structured analytical techniques (SATs) are used by intelligence analysts to make strategic forecasts and are designed to avoid a number of cognitive biases that can impact the IC's ability to assess threats.

The use of SATs became a required part of intelligence analyst training throughout the IC after the end of the Cold War, and later due to the events of 9/11. Richards Heuer, a career intelligence officer at the Central Intelligence Agency, first addressed the problems of cognitive bias in his 1999 pioneering work, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*,³⁰ and later in 2009 developed analytical tools to confront these biases in his *Tradecraft Primer: Structured Analytical Techniques to Improve Intelligence Analysis*,³¹ which first addressed the use of SATs.

Along with Randy Pherson, Heuer developed a textbook, *Structured Analytical Techniques for Intelligence Analysis*.³² This research paper utilizes two of the SATs developed by Heuer and Pherson—argument mapping and what if analysis—to test the futures analysis created through the Framework Foresight model.

Figure 2 depicts the cone of plausibility for three different scenarios presented in this paper. The baseline future is the status quo—that the OAS continues to function as the main regional security organization in the Western Hemisphere, and the United States continues to act as a regional hegemon. Alternative Future 1 is the emergence of CELAC as the new regional security organization, ending the OAS and U.S. hegemony in the Americas. Alternative Future 2 is the breakdown of the existing regional security system, with multiple subregional organizations emerging throughout the Western Hemisphere. The final scenario, the preferred future scenario, is a normative argument: how security relations should develop, recognizing the role of interests, institutions, and identity in shaping a new regional security relationship between states in the Americas. Under the preferred scenario, the OAS would be empowered to function as a collective security organization with shared leadership and responsibility, much like the Security Council functions within the United Nations.

Figure 2. Cone of Plausibility



Baseline—Status Quo

The baseline future for security relations in the Western Hemisphere, despite the political changes occurring in the region, is that traditional multilateral security relationships will continue. In other words, institutions and interests will trump identity, although the erosion of trust between countries will make security cooperation more difficult. Cross-border security cooperation between states will likely continue to focus on the threats of drug, human, and arms trafficking. Due to the pandemic, the incentive for communication and coordination will likely remain high. The increasing number of climate-driven natural disasters will also likely promote more, rather than less, cooperation, particularly in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America, since disasters, like disease, do not stop at the border. Additionally, nations in the Americas that lie along the “Ring of Fire”—a region around the Pacific Ocean that experiences frequent volcanic eruptions and earthquakes—may face devastating impacts in both their rural and urban centers if any high-magnitude earthquakes were to occur.³³ For example, the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City with a magnitude of 8.1 on the Richter scale caused 40,000 casualties and overloaded Mexico’s disaster response capabilities, forcing Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid to accept international assistance.³⁴

Key drivers or indicators for the baseline scenario include: increasing dependency of nations in the region on existing multilateral venues, like the OAS; continued support and engagement by the United States in funding and resourcing OAS regional security initiatives; and increasing cross-border threats, such as crime, drug, and human trafficking, pandemics, and natural disasters that exceed the capacities of states. The OAS has provided security assistance, including disaster response, counterdrug efforts, demining, and deconfliction, for the last 75 years. As the largest contributor of financial resources to the OAS, the United States plays a key role in guiding and directing the activities of the organization. Also, the United States possesses the military resources necessary for coordinating many humanitarian and civic assistance missions of the OAS, such as heavy lift assets, air mobility, and other governmental functions coordinated by the U.S. Department of State’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, in conjunction with the OAS. The OAS’s Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission “serves as a forum for OAS member states to discuss and find solutions to the drug problem, and provides them technical assistance to increase their capacity to counter the drug problem.”³⁵ The OAS is also the coordinating body for the Summit of the Americas Implementation Working Group, which promotes increased dialogue and discussion between nations’ leaders in the hemisphere.

The United States has often taken the lead for coordinating peacekeeping operations in the Western Hemisphere, in conjunction with the region’s militaries. In 1994, after a military coup in Haiti, working through the OAS, the United States led the formation of a multinational force (MNF) of Latin American countries for a peace enforcement mission that helped depose the military junta and restore President Jean Bertrand Aristide to power. The MNF later became the UN Multinational Force in Haiti and then the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, led by the Brazilian military. Similarly, in 1995, after a brief but intense military engagement between Peru and Ecuador, the United States led a

peacekeeping effort, known as the Military Observer Mission Ecuador-Peru (MOMEPE), along with the other three guarantor nations of the 1942 Rio Protocol (Argentina, Brazil, and Chile) to separate forces and create the conditions for a diplomatic solution. Brazil took leadership of MOMEPE operations in 1996 from the United States, which still provided much of the logistical support at the main base in Patuca, Ecuador.³⁶

Alternative Future 1—CELAC Replaces the OAS

A scenario offered as an alternative future is the possibility that López Obrador’s leadership of CELAC increases Mexico’s role as a regional power due to his successful efforts to elevate CELAC into the Western Hemisphere’s preeminent intergovernmental organization, replacing the OAS. Using the structured analytic technique of “what if” analysis³⁷ allows for the assessment of criteria and phenomena that would contribute to creating the conditions for such a scenario to occur.

In this scenario, after decades of U.S. control of the OAS agenda, and Mexico’s growing disillusionment with the United States in general, López Obrador is able to gain the support of key allies in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile to withdraw from the OAS, causing other Latin American and Caribbean states to follow suit. Mexico has also developed its new Stabilization Police Force, the *Guardia Nacional*,³⁸ to a point where it has taken on most of the domestic security roles previously performed by the Mexican armed forces. This has freed up the military to focus more on external and regional threats, allowing it to become a leader in coordinating regional security responses from the CELAC member states.

As a result of a further implosion of Venezuela and its fragmented political situation, the headquarters of CELAC moves to Mexico City, removing its stigma as a relic of Hugo Chavez’s failed ALBA movement of leftist leaders in the Americas and mainstreaming it as a regional power center for Latin American nations apart from the United States. Support from CELAC’s international supporters grows as China pledges a large financial contribution to the organization to fund major infrastructure development as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. Russia agrees to provide military aid to countries in the Americas with generous concessions through its foreign military finance program and direct commercial sales from Russian arms manufacturers. Russia and Cuba also create military assistance advisory groups (MAAGs) to replace U.S. MAAGs in its embassies throughout the region. The final blow to the United States is Canada’s withdrawal from the OAS due to its frustration with the second Trump administration’s renegeing on USMCA commitments, moving to shore up bilateral relations with Mexico over trade and security.

Key drivers of this scenario include: Trump (or one of his Republican acolytes) returning to power in 2024, continuing his previous policies of alienating U.S. allies, particularly Mexico and Canada; the OAS becoming more irrelevant as a regional actor due to the loss of U.S. funding; political changes in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile with leaders who are less tied to the United States or in need of U.S. or International Monetary Fund support; China and Russia forming a more cooperative foreign policy, challenging U.S. hegemony in the Americas (and U.S. relevancy globally); and López Obrador’s success in mobilizing Mexican nationalism, as

well as growing Mexico’s military strength to be able to project power outside of its borders, in order to take over leadership of the regional security agenda.

Alternative Future 2—Breakdown of the Regional Security System

The other alternative future is a variant of the first. In this scenario, Mexico’s efforts to empower CELAC as a replacement to the OAS actually leads to the fragmentation of the existing regional security system into subregional actors. With the breakdown of the OAS, UNASUR is reinvigorated with its South American Defense Council (CSD) taking on a larger role in regional security, particularly among southern cone countries. As one example, the CSD is able to facilitate a joint military operation between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay in the Tri-Border Area to confront the growth of terrorist organizations, such as Hezbollah, in the region. The Central American Parliament takes the initiative to reform the United Provinces of Central America of the 1820s (Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica) as a regional security organization to jointly confront the problems Central American nations face with transnational criminal organizations and rising homicide rates.³⁹ The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) expands beyond former British colonies to incorporate all the French, Dutch, and Spanish island nations, focusing on common threats such as natural disasters and drug trafficking. Nations in the Andean Pact (Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Venezuela) join forces to form their own security alliance due to fears that the CSD nations could pose a threat to other nations in the region. Mexico, after its failure to empower CELAC, accepts an expanded military role within the U.S. Northern Command, joining with Canada and the United States in the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD).⁴⁰

Key drivers for this scenario would include: López Obrador’s loss of domestic support for his foreign policy agenda; fiscal concerns, along with an increased ambivalence in the United States toward the continued need for funding international governmental organizations like the OAS and the United Nations; empowered political leadership throughout Latin America that is less reliant on U.S. support to confront threats; and increasing regional identity among Latin American and Caribbean nations to forge subregional alliances.

Preferred Future—A Reimagined OAS

Institutions matter, particularly those international governmental organizations that have existed for almost 75 years, like the OAS. Although not a formal military alliance like NATO, the OAS was created as a result of the Rio Treaty, which was a collective security agreement for the nations of the Western Hemisphere. However, like NATO, the OAS needs to adapt to the changing international political environment of 2022 and address the concerns of its member states as a more representative and inclusive body. The United States has effectively controlled the OAS agenda since its creation during the Cold War to the present day, now including the threats of terrorism and transnational criminal organizations as major priorities. However, not all states in the Americas share the same threat perceptions as the United States. Nor does the United States have the political or economic capital it once held globally, much less regionally in the Americas. Today, the

United States is also challenged militarily by a rising China and a more belligerent Russia. Neither country considers the United States to be the dominant actor in international affairs it once was, and some states, like Mexico, no longer consider it to be the hegemonic power in the Americas.

For the OAS to maintain its relevancy in a changing global security environment, it needs to adapt and address the concerns of its member states. López Obrador's call for CELAC to replace the OAS should not be dismissed. Rather it should serve as a wake-up call to the United States and the OAS bureaucracy to reimagine its future in the Western Hemisphere. The following suggestions are offered as a preferred future scenario where the OAS can evolve as a more relevant security organization in the Americas well into the next 25 years.

Key drivers for this scenario would include: a new organization structure in the OAS, potentially modeling the UN's Security Council with six permanent members (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico, and the United States) and eight rotating members (two each) from the subregions (the Caribbean, Central America, Southern Cone, Andean Ridge); movement of the headquarters out of Washington, D.C., to a more central location in the region, such as Panama (utilizing the former military facilities of the U.S. Southern Command, which moved to Miami, Florida, in 1999); creation of an office of military affairs to coordinate peacekeeping or peace enforcement operations by member states, including responding to disasters, pandemics, and transnational criminal threats; and an empowered Secretary General with the ability to act both regionally and globally in expanding the OAS's ability to interact with other international governmental organizations in confronting transregional threats, including climate change and environmental security.

Leading Indicators and Analysis

Using argument mapping, in Figure 3 the three scenarios (CELAC replaces the OAS; breakdown of the regional security system; and a reimagined OAS), excluding the baseline scenario, are evaluated. The main argument for each scenario is offered as a contention, followed by a reason that supports the contention and an objection. Evidence is offered to support the reason, while a rebuttal is offered to the objection. The purpose of this SAT is to test a hypothesis through the use of logical reasoning.⁴¹ Since the focus of this paper is on strategic forecasting and framework foresight, the evidence in these cases can also be considered key indicators of future events that would support the contention or the objection. The value of using an argument map is that it provides insight on how policy choices can shape events and possibly prevent future conflict.

Figure 3.1. Argument Mapping: Alternative Future 1

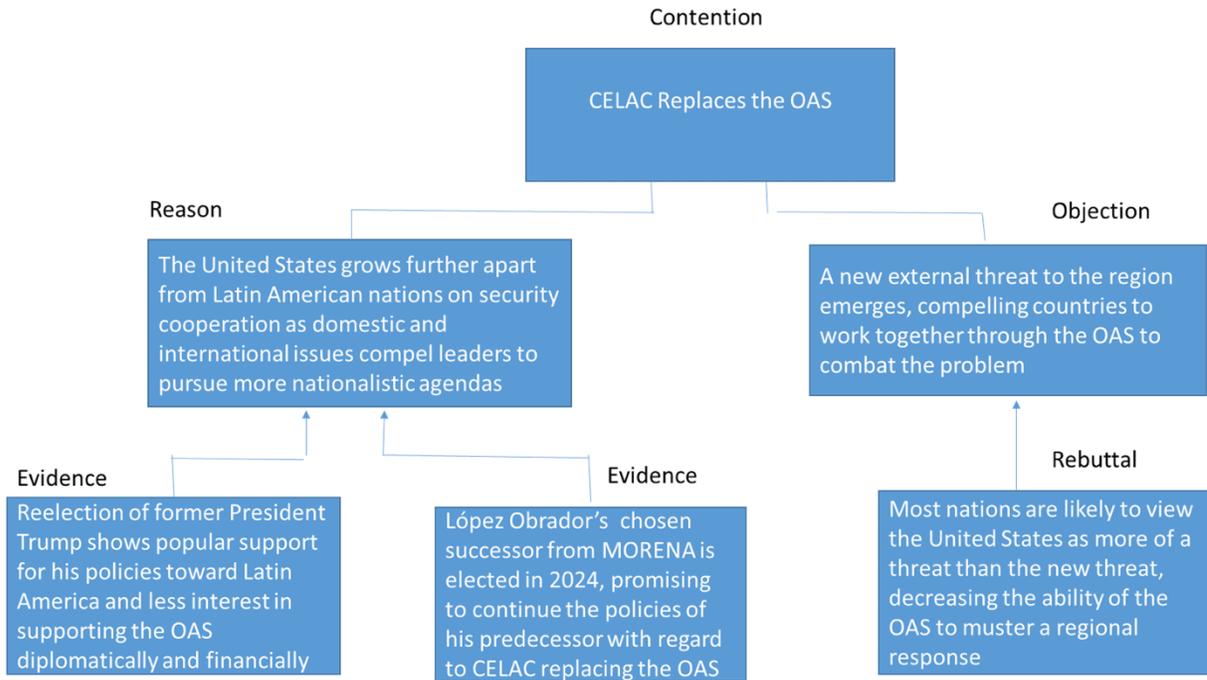


Figure 3.2. Argument Mapping: Alternative Future 2

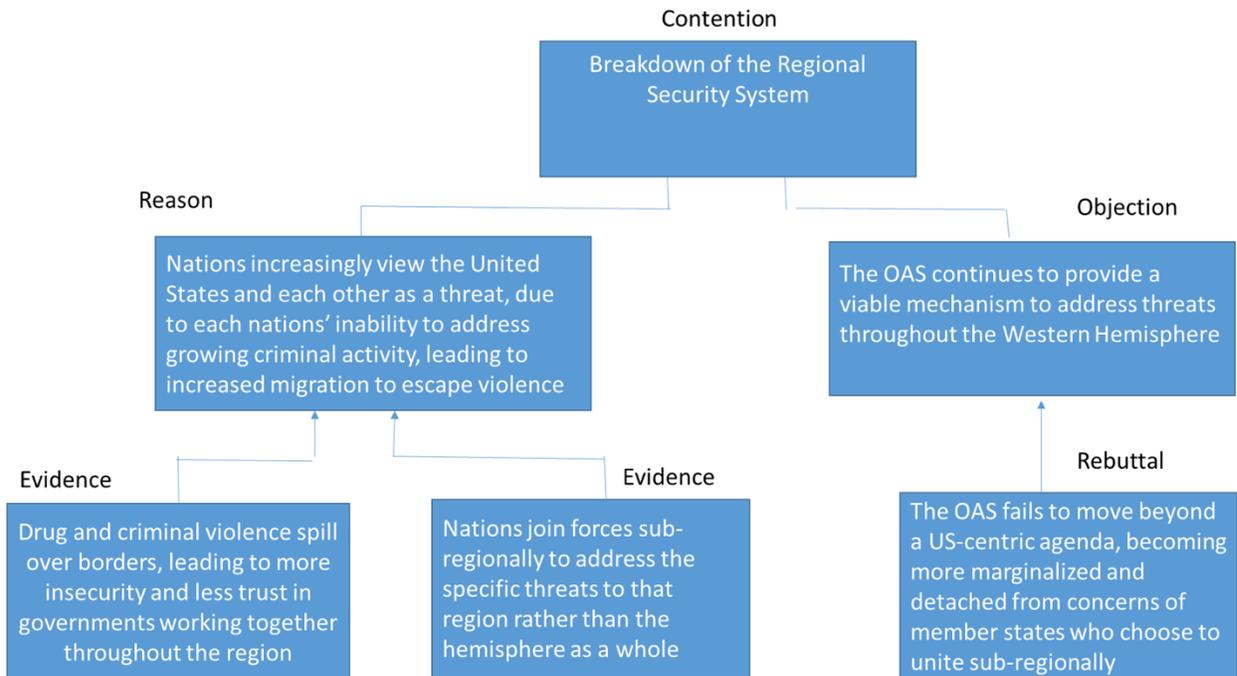
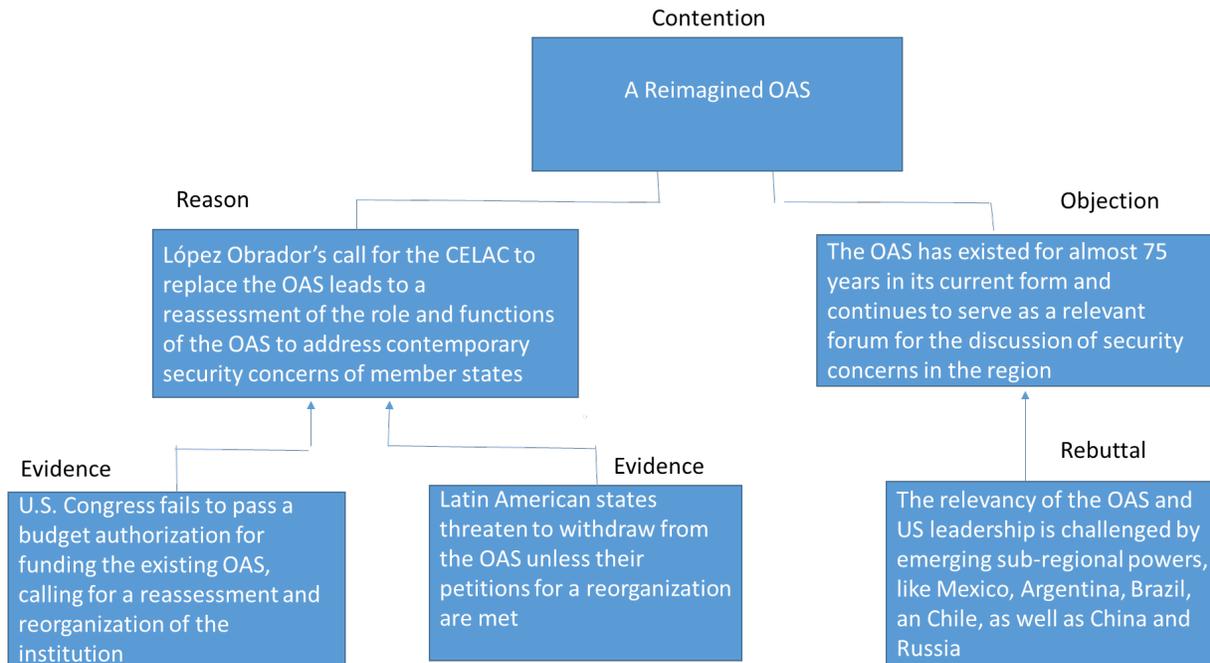


Figure 3.3. Argument Mapping: Preferred Future



Policy Recommendations

Two years into President Joe Biden’s administration, there are already signs that Democrats are in trouble in the United States. Holding a slim majority in the House of Representatives and only the tie-breaking vote of Vice President Kamala Harris in the Senate, the Republicans are poised for taking control of Congress, as well as the White House. If former President Donald Trump does not run for president in 2024, it is highly likely that an acolyte of Trump’s will garner the party’s nomination and continue the divisive policies of the previous Republican administration, domestically and internationally.

Unfortunately, the Biden administration appears moribund, failing to demonstrate competence in either domestic or foreign policy. Despite the availability of the COVID-19 vaccines in 2021, the United States still lags behind most Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations in vaccination rates, even trailing Brazil, which had one of the highest infection rates.⁴² Confusing information coming from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding the omicron variant has further decreased the administration’s credibility. The hasty withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan at the end of August 2021, which led to the Taliban’s rapid takeover of the country and the death of 13 U.S. service members assisting with the evacuation, further eroded global confidence in the United States, with observers drawing comparisons to the U.S. retreat from Vietnam in 1975.⁴³

President Biden has a very short window of opportunity to address the issues raised in this paper regarding security cooperation in the Western Hemisphere and the continued relevancy of the OAS. Through active U.S. leadership, Biden could play a significant role in shaping the future of the OAS and the role of the United States as a major regional actor and not a hegemon. The first step would be for Biden to not just attend the next Summit of the Americas gathering in 2022 (considering it is being hosted by the United States), but also to present a broader regional vision.⁴⁴ Former President Trump chose not to attend the last summit in 2018 in Lima, Peru, sending Vice President Mike Pence in his place. This caused other nations not to send their presidents, significantly impacting the relevancy of the summit process. At the 2022 summit, Biden could present a blueprint for a reimagined OAS, which would include a new Security Council comprised of six permanent member states, relegating the United States to co-equal leadership with Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, and Mexico. Rather than following the United Nations model of each permanent member having veto power, each permanent and non-permanent member state would have equal voting power, which would prevent one nation (such as the United States) from blocking action on critical issues of peace and security in the hemisphere.⁴⁵

The second step would be for the Biden administration to propose the moving of the OAS headquarters from Washington, D.C., to Panama City, Panama, which would place the organization more centrally within the region and make it more accessible to member states.⁴⁶ The former bases of the U.S. Southern Command in the Canal Zone could serve as a logistics support hub for the OAS to take on more security functions in the region and facilitate counterdrug efforts, disaster response, and humanitarian and civic assistance support missions. Such a proposal is not completely unheard of. When the United States was withdrawing from Panama in 1999 as a result of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties of 1977, the former Commander of the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), General Wesley Clark, suggested a post-2000 U.S. presence in Panama to turn some of the SOUTHCOM facilities into a multinational counterdrug center.⁴⁷

The third step would involve fiscal policy proposals that would be supported by both political parties in the U.S. Congress. Republicans under the former Trump administration pushed for more cost sharing by NATO member states to contribute to the cost of that alliance. Although Trump alienated many U.S. allies in NATO, he was able to get more member states to follow through on their commitment of spending 2% of their GDP on NATO defense.⁴⁸ Democrats could make a similar proposal for member funding of the OAS to help increase support for its expanded security role and mission, which would not be dependent on the U.S. military. Cost sharing could also be tied to the nation's public safety and security/defense budget, for example, rather than overall GDP.

A final step would be for the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM), which is responsible for security assistance programs with Mexico and Canada, to support more multilateral security cooperation through the OAS in the Western Hemisphere, in conjunction with the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), which has responsibility for security assistance with all other countries in the hemisphere. Currently both commands mostly conduct security assistance programs bilaterally with countries in the region. Multilateral exercises

and training do occur through programs such as the Conference of American Armies (CAA). There are also UNITAS naval exercises run by SOUTHCOM and Amalgam Eagle, an air force exercise run by NORTHCOM.⁴⁹ However, working through the existing security structures of the OAS—including the Committee on Hemispheric Security and programs such as the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, the Inter-American Defense Board, and various working groups that tackle issues like demining, arms trafficking, natural disasters, and reducing crime and violence—can foster greater ownership by member states in these processes and decision-making, and less dependence on the United States.

Conclusion

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, along with his foreign minister, Marcel Ebrard, has been one of the region’s most prolific critics of the OAS. Ebrard has even criticized the current OAS secretary general, former Uruguayan Foreign Minister Luis Almagro, as “one of the worst in history due to his excessive rapprochement with Washington and his interventionism in electoral processes such as that of Bolivia and Venezuela.”⁵⁰ While Mexico’s calls for CELAC to replace the OAS are unlikely to gain much traction in the region, it should serve as a wake-up call for the Biden administration to recognize that U.S. influence in Latin America is waning. In some cases, U.S. influence is being replaced by that of China and Russia—particularly in areas that directly impact U.S. security interests. After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, legislators from Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s MORENA party joined in creating a congressional “Mexico-Russia Friendship Committee.” Even more legislators from MORENA and Mexico’s Labor Party applauded Russian Ambassador Viktor Koronelli’s address to Mexico’s Congress, stating that for Russia, “this is a sign of support, of friendship, of solidarity in these complicated times, in which my country is not just facing a special military operation in Ukraine, but a tremendous media war ... Russia didn't start this war, it is finishing it.”⁵¹

A reimagined OAS with the significant reforms suggested in this paper could help to foster a new regional security relationship between states in the Western Hemisphere, particularly Mexico and the United States. Having Mexico take on a more constructive leadership role in helping to reform the OAS (rather than promoting CELAC as its alternative) and addressing some of López Obrador’s criticisms would be a more positive response from the United States. It would also demonstrate that the “Colossus of the North” is willing to accept the fact that hegemony is no longer a viable future for the Americas.

Endnotes

- ¹ Brendan O’Boyle, “Explainer: What Is CELAC?” AS/COA, January 27, 2015, <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/explainer-what-celac>.
- ² “Remarks by the President of México, Andrés Manuel López Obrador Celac 2021,” Gobierno de Mexico, September 18, 2021, <https://www.gob.mx/presidencia/es/articulos/remarks-by-the-president-of-mexico-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-celac-2021?idiom=es>.
- ³ A supranational organization is defined as “a multinational union or association in which member countries cede authority and sovereignty on at least some internal matters to the group, whose decisions are binding on its members. In short, member states share in decision-making on matters that will affect each country’s citizens.” Michael Hargrave, “Supranational Organization,” *Investopedia*, December 23, 2020, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/supranational.asp>.
- ⁴ The headquarters of the OAS is located in Washington, D.C., which contributes to its perception as a U.S.-dominated regional organization.
- ⁵ “Hemispheric Security,” U.S. Mission to the Organization of American States, n.d., <https://usoas.usmission.gov/our-relationship/policy-programs/hemispheric-security/>.
- ⁶ Andy Hines and Peter C. Bishop, “Framework foresight: Exploring futures the Houston way,” *Futures*, 51 (July 2013): 31-49, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2013.05.002>.
- ⁷ Robert H. Holden and Eric Zolov, *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- ⁸ The term “Colossus of the North” emerged in the early 20th century by Latin American intellectuals to describe the United States, as a result of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and U.S. military intervention in Central America and the Caribbean. See George W. Hinman Jr., “The Colossus of the North,” *The North American Review* 226, no. 3 (September 1928): 273-280.
- ⁹ Elizabeth Waugh, *Simón Bolívar: A Story of Courage* (London: Collins, 1944), 230.
- ¹⁰ The largest contingent came from Brazil, in the form of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, which saw action in North Africa and Italy. Mexico contributed a fighter squadron (201) that flew combat missions in the Pacific. See Gregory Weeks, *U.S. and Latin American Relations* (New Jersey: Pearson, 2007).
- ¹¹ Francisco Cuevas, “The Bogota Conference and Recent Developments in Pan-American Relations: A Mexican View,” *International Affairs* 24, no. 4 (October 1948): 524-533.
- ¹² See Jack Davis, “The Bogotazo,” *Studies in Intelligence* 13, no. 4, Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 1996, <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/studies-in-intelligence/archives/vol-13-no-4/the-bogotazo/>.
- ¹³ Over 200,000 died in the fighting that followed (called *La Violencia*), leading to Colombia’s long civil war of the 1960s-2010s. The fact that a young Fidel Castro was in Bogotá that day and was reported to have met with Gaitán shortly before his assassination, further fueled U.S. perceptions that all revolutionary movements in the region were communist-inspired and supported by the Soviet COMINTERN. See Davis, “The Bogotazo.”
- ¹⁴ Nicholas Cullather, “Operation PB Success: The United States and Guatemala: 1952-1954,” Center for the Study of Intelligence (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1994).
- ¹⁵ The term “hardening of the categories” refers to the closing of the mind to alternative explanations for phenomenon, evidenced by confirmation bias within the intelligence community. See Richards

Heuer Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, Center for the Study of Intelligence (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1999).

¹⁶ Johanna Mendelson-Forman, "South American Defense Council: What it Means for Regional Security?" *Western Hemisphere Security Analysis Center*, Florida International University, 2010, 8, <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=whemsac>.

¹⁷ Daniela Segovia, "Latin America and the Caribbean: Between the OAS and CELAC," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, no. 95 (October 2013): 100.

¹⁸ Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, n.d., <https://celacinternational.org/celac-2-2/>.

¹⁹ Organization of American States Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty), n.d., <https://www.oas.org/juridico/english/sigs/b-29.html>.

²⁰ Hines and Bishop, "Framework foresight."

²¹ Andy Hines, "Evolution of framework foresight," *Foresight* 22, no. 5/6 (June 26, 2020): 643-651, <https://doi.org/10.1108/FS-03-2020-0018>.

²² Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2003).

²³ Holden and Zolov, *Latin America and the United States*.

²⁴ Global Security, "War Plan Rainbow," n.d., <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/war-plan-rainbow.htm>.

²⁵ Even within South America there is further differentiation between regions, such as the Andean Ridge, Southern Cone, Tri-Border Area (or Triple Frontier), etc.

²⁶ See Richard J. Kilroy Jr., Abelardo Rodríguez Sumano, and Todd Hataley, *La Seguridad en América del Norte: Una Relación Impugnada* (Mexico City, Mexico: Universidad Iberoamerica Press, 2021).

²⁷ Anecdotal evidence from the author's attendance at the Defense Ministerial of the Americas in 1995 and discussions with Secretary Perry's staff.

²⁸ Associated Press, "Trump threatens Mexico over 'bad hombres'" *Politico*, February 1, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/02/trump-threatens-mexico-over-bad-hombres-234524>.

²⁹ Hines and Bishop, "Framework foresight."

³⁰ Heuer, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*.

³¹ Richards Heuer Jr., *Tradecraft Primer: Structured Analytical Techniques for Intelligence Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2009).

³² Richards Heuer Jr. and Randy Pherson, *Structured Analytical Techniques for Intelligence Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2016).

³³ "Most of the active volcanoes on Earth are located underwater, along the aptly named 'Ring of Fire' in the Pacific Ocean. Made up of more than 450 volcanoes, the Ring of Fire stretches for nearly 40,250 kilometers (25,000 miles), running in the shape of a horseshoe (as opposed to an actual ring) from the southern tip of South America, along the west coast of North America, across the Bering Strait, down through Japan, and into New Zealand." "What is the Ring of Fire?" National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, n.d., <https://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/facts/rof.html>.

³⁴ "Terremoto de la Ciudad de México 1985," *El Financiero en línea*, n.d., <https://web.archive.org/web/20080923181539/http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/ElFinanciero/Portal/cfpages/contentmgr.cfm?docId=144567&docTipo=1&orderby=docid&sortby=ASC>.

³⁵ Comisión Interamericana para el Control del Abuso de Drogas, "Informe Sobre el Consumo de Drogas en las Americas" (Washington, D.C.: Organization of American States, 2019).

³⁶ The Rio Protocol was signed in 1942, after a conflict between Ecuador and Peru over disputed territorial issues. Peru gained considerably from the conflict, while Ecuador lost territory. Both countries signed the 1942 treaty, which was to be "guaranteed" by the four countries involved in negotiating the treaty (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the United States). However, Ecuador never fully accepted the outcome. See Richard J. Kilroy Jr., "Guaranteeing Peace in Latin America: A Case Study in Conflict Resolution Involving the Peru and Ecuador Border Dispute of 1995," in *Colonial History and Territorial Issues in Africa and Latin America*, eds. Mi Yung Yoon and Richard J. Kilroy Jr. (Seoul, South Korea: Northeast Asian History Foundation, 2010) and Glenn Weidner, "Operation Safe Border: The Ecuador-Peru Crisis," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (Spring 1996): 52-56.

³⁷ Heuer and Pherson, *Structured Analytical Techniques*.

³⁸ Richard J. Kilroy Jr., "Forging New Security Institutions: Mexico's National Guard and the Challenges of Identity and New Nationalisms," July 2021, Center for the United States and Mexico, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, <https://doi.org/10.25613/ekvm-yq56>.

³⁹ Also called the Federal Republic of Central America, it lasted from 1823-1840. "Federal Republic of Central America," World Atlas, n.d., <https://www.worldatlas.com/geography/federal-republic-of-central-america.html>.

⁴⁰ Such a scenario was actually proposed by researchers at the National Defense University in 2005, leading to a number of new "action communities" in the region, with Mexico and Brazil emerging as the dominant regional security actors. See John Cope, "Strategic Opportunities: Today's Strategic Environment in the Americas," Panel Presentation, Institute for National Security Studies, National Defense University, March 10, 2005.

⁴¹ Heuer and Pherson, *Structured Analytical Techniques*, 193.

⁴² The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) includes the 38 leading nations for economic development in the world. Western Hemisphere members include Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, "OECD welcomes Costa Rica as its 38th member," May 25, 2021, <https://www.oecd.org/newsroom/oecd-welcomes-costa-rica-as-its-38th-member.htm>. Under President Bolsonaro's lack of leadership and denial of COVID-19 as a real threat, Brazil had the third highest death rate globally during the early part of the pandemic. Recently, the change in Brazil's policies to promote vaccinations has led to a vaccination rate of 78% in the nation, exceeding the United States at 74% as of January 4, 2022. "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations," Our World in Data, 2022, <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>.

⁴³ Andrea Scott, "Here are the names of the 13 service members killed in Afghanistan," *Military Times*, August 28, 2021, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2021/08/28/here-are-the-names-of-the-13-service-members-who-died-in-afghanistan-attack/>.

⁴⁴ When he was president, Trump suggested hosting the next summit at his personal compound at Mar-a-Lago, in Miami, Florida. The first summit took place in 1994 in Miami, hosted by President Bill Clinton.

⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the Biden administration sent the wrong signals to the region by precluding the attendance of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela at the 2022 Summit of the Americas hosted by the United States. President López Obrador stated publicly that no nation should be excluded from the summit, regardless of their political leanings. See "Mexico president says no country should be excluded from Americas Summit," *Reuters*, May 8, 2021,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-president-says-no-country-should-be-excluded-americas-summit-2022-05-08/>.

⁴⁶ This would require a significant investment in upgrading Tocúmen International Airport in Panama City to accommodate direct flights from countries throughout the region. Currently major airlines must fly from many South American countries to Miami and then to Panama (author's anecdotal evidence from living in Panama and trying to coordinate visits by Latin American military leaders to U.S. Southern Command in Panama. A major security conference was hosted in Miami in 1996, rather than Panama, due to the lack of direct flights available at the time).

⁴⁷ Anecdotal evidence based on the author's position as a special assistant to General Clark and the author's work on the proposal for a multinational counterdrug center in Panama with U.S. Department of Defense and State Department officials (it was not supported by either).

⁴⁸ "NATO Summit: What does the US contribute?" BBC, June 14, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-44717074>.

⁴⁹ The CAA is administered by the U.S. Army South, a component command of SOUTHCOM. UNITAS is a multinational naval exercise administered by U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet, which involves Latin American navies and marine forces. Amalgam Eagle is a joint U.S.-Mexico-Canada Air Force exercise program run by NORTHCOM and NORAD.

⁵⁰ "Latin America viewing Celac as a substitute for OAS during Summit starting in Mexico City," *MercoPress*, September 18, 2021, <https://en.mercopress.com/2021/09/18/latin-america-viewing-celac-as-a-substitute-for-oas-during-summit-starting-in-mexico-city>.

⁵¹ Thus far, Mexico has not sent any aid to Ukraine or imposed sanctions on Russia. It did vote in favor of condemning the invasion in the United Nations. López Obrador has publicly declared that Mexico was neutral in the conflict. Yet, the MORENA Youth of the Mexican State wrote a letter stating, "We reaffirm our moral and political support for the difficult decision that forced the Russian government and President Vladimir Putin to engage in the legitimate defense of his people and, seeking to avoid a larger military conflict and preserve world peace, militarily intervene in Ukrainian territory to weaken the neo-Nazi, coup-led forces." Mark Stevenson, "Mexico's ruling party boosts Russia 'friendship' committee," *AP/ABC News*, March 24, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/mexicos-ruling-party-boosts-russia-friendship-committee-83631523>.