



# Conference Brief

Strategic Studies Institute



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*U.S. Army War College, and the  
Latin American and Caribbean Center,  
Florida International University*

## STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES: CHARTING NEW APPROACHES TO DEFENSE AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

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### Key Points and Recommendations:

- The major trend in the conference dialogue involved a move away from the previously dominant traditional-legal concept of national security toward a “full spectrum” of closely-related nation-state, subnational, individual, and global political-military and socio-economic threats.
- These threats can lead to radical political change, or the failure of the traditional nation-state.
  - The first involves the possibility of interstate war. For example, although remote, an undeniable possibility of a clash exists between Venezuela and Colombia. Moreover, Venezuelan support to radical populist movements in the Andean region is generating bilateral tensions.
  - Second, subnational threats to stability and sovereignty involve nontraditional nonstate actors intent on either politically controlling or radically changing or destroying targeted governments. The corollary focuses on the weakness and/or legitimacy of a given state.
  - Next is a logical progression from the problems of institutional and state weaknesses. It involves the personal security and socio-economic well-being of individual citizens. The corollary, in this instance, takes us directly to the processes of state failure.
  - Last, much of the international community is involved in securing the benefits of global economic integration. The key to those benefits is stability. Thus, those who expect the benefits of global stability must think outside the hemispheric “box” and make a contribution.
- The conference dialogue stressed the need to provide individual security and national, regional, and global stability. This requires civilian and military leaders to learn to think and act strategically and cooperatively within the global threat environment.
- In this context, U.S. efforts should focus on small, tangible steps that systematically and holistically address strategic thinking and national and international cooperation.

## Report Documentation Page

*Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188*

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1. REPORT DATE <b>MAR 2005</b>	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED -			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Strategic Opportunities: Charting new Approaches to Defense and Security Challenges in the Western Hemisphere</b>		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 122 Forbes Ave, Carlisle, PA, 17013-5244</b>		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES <b>The original document contains color images.</b>					
14. ABSTRACT <b>see report</b>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>4</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

The Latin American and Caribbean Center of Florida International University, the U.S. Southern Command, and the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College held the eighth in a series of major annual conferences dealing with security matters in the Western Hemisphere in Coral Gables, Florida, on March 9-11, 2005. The conference brought together over 180 participants representing ten countries, to include the Ministers of Defense of Chile, Guatemala, and Honduras, and the Secretary of the Interior and Police of the Dominican Republic. Additionally, other high- and mid-ranking representatives of government, the military, academia, the private sector, and the media participated in a robust program of panels, discussions, and work shops to exchange perspectives and evaluate today's strategic environment, review internal and external defense and security challenges, and examine hemispheric leadership and cooperation. At base, the dialogue centered on the contemporary threat environment and need for flexible response and imagination in dealing with a full spectrum of nontraditional security threats.

### **Toward a More Realistic Concept of the Threat Environment.**

The major trend that permeated the conference dialogue involved a generalized move away from the previously dominant traditional-legal concept of national security. That concept stressed the military protection of the nation-state against conventional cross-border military aggression by another country. The associated themes of that security dialogue focused primarily on variable perceptions of a "full spectrum" of closely-related national, subnational, individual, and global political-military and socio-economic threats. These threats can lead to radical political change, or the failure of the traditional nation-state. The recognized interdependence of each component of the threat spectrum provides the point from which to develop the strategic vision necessary to escape the intellectual vice-lock of the traditional-legal definition of national security. An understanding of the close relationship among the elements within each threat also provides points from which to develop the strategic-political vision that is necessary to underpin more effective multilateral

coordination and cooperation. Thus, the conference demonstrated considerable progress in gaining a common understanding of the meaning of security in the contemporary global threat environment.

### **Variable Perspectives on a "Full Spectrum" of Threats within the Threat Environment—All of Which Are Probably Right.**

We should consider the complex contemporary national security threat environment with reference to four different levels of analysis—each with a corollary. The first is a more or less traditional-legal level of analysis at the nation-state level that involves the potential threat of interstate war. For example, although remote, an undeniable possibility of interstate war exists between Venezuela and Colombia. Venezuelan support to radical populist movements in some of the Andean states of South America also generates bilateral tensions. At the same time, hemispheric and global tensions are created by Venezuelan rhetoric and support for regimes antithetical to U.S. interests. The corollary concerns the traditional principle of "nonintervention" and the resultant ineffectual multilateralism. The question, simply and practically, is what to do about a democratically elected president who governs at the edge of democracy and undermines the democratic principle by helping to destabilize neighbors?

The second level of analysis is that of subnational threats to stability and sovereignty (i.e., effective control over what occurs within the national territory). It involves nontraditional nonstate actors (e.g., terrorists, insurgents, narco-traffickers and other organized criminals, populists, warlords, and gangs) intent on either politically controlling targeted governments, or radically changing or destroying the nation-state. Over half the countries of the world are engaged in subnational conflicts in which they are struggling to maintain their political, economic, and territorial integrity in the face of diverse direct and indirect nonstate challenges. In these terms, we can see that a criminal nonstate actor can quietly and subtly co-opt individual politicians and bureaucrats. Such corruption and distortion can lead to a series of networked enclaves that could then become a dominant political actor within a state or group of states. Thus, rather than violently competing with a nation-state, a nonstate

attacker can criminally co-opt and seize control of the state. The corollary, in this instance, has to do with political-military relations and the weakness and/or legitimacy of the state. The question is the most effective means of using limited resources to protect the state and to help strengthen and legitimize state sovereignty.

The third level of analysis is a logical progression from the problems of institutional and state weaknesses. It moves the threat spectrum from state to nonstate (subnational) actors, as the strength and legitimacy of the state declines. It involves the personal security and well-being of the individual citizen. Perhaps the most fundamental societal requirement for acceptance and approval of state authority (sovereignty) is that a government must ensure individual and collective security. Security, then, extends to democratic governance, and social and economic development—with equity and in freedom. In these terms, it is helpful to think of human perpetrators of insecurity and violence as third-level threats to individual security. Root causes—such as poverty, lack of basic human services, institutional corruption, and underperforming or nonexistent government institutions within the national territory—must be recognized as second-level threats. The inability or unwillingness of government to address second and third level threats must be understood as first-level (i.e., the most fundamental) threat. As a result, strategic planners and decisionmakers must contemplate all three levels of threat in dealing with individual security matters. The corollary takes us directly to the processes of state failure. The associated question involves the circular nature of the interdependent relationship among security, stability, development, peace, and democracy, and how to respond to these core human security issues.

Finally, at the fourth global level, much of the international community is involved in securing the benefits of global economic integration. The key to those benefits is stability. A multipolar world, in which one or a hundred state and nonstate actors are exerting differing types and levels of power within a set of cross-cutting alliances is volatile and dangerous. Thus, the countries and peoples that expect the benefits of global stability must understand and cope with the threats imposed by the new global security environment, think outside

the traditional hemispheric “box,” and make a contribution—however small—to world stability. The corollary at this level must address questions associated with “peace-keeping,” “stability operations,” and “state failure.”

### **Implications.**

- Under the traditional-legal concept of national security, multilateralism was allowed to degenerate into a synonym for “doing nothing.” Now, we understand that an aggressor may not necessarily be a recognizable military entity. The enemy now becomes the state or nonstate actor that plans and implements the kind of violence and instability that subverts national well-being and exploits the root causes of instability in other countries. The associated question is how to operationalize a rule-based system and make multilateral security a reality.
- Given the interrelated, multidimensional, and circular nature of contemporary conflict, security is too big and too important to relegate to either the military or the police. It is a nation-state problem, and must be addressed in a unified manner by all the instruments of state power. At the same time, most threats to national security are caused by transnational actions. Thus, a targeted nation’s security is also a problem for the global community. The immediate question, then, is the most effective ways of using limited resources to assist the various state institutions in addressing threats.
- In the view of many conference participants, the greatest strategic challenge the countries of the hemisphere will face is achieving a balanced socio-economic development in freedom and security. Many of the associated problems have their origins in weak or inadequate institutions that result in poor or thuggish responses to issues ranging from poverty to organized crime. Thus, the question here is how institutions related to social welfare on one hand and to the judiciary, police, and military on the other can be strengthened.
- In the contemporary security environment, international organizations, such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States, and individual national powers increasingly are

being called on to respond to conflict generated by all kinds of material instabilities and human destabilizers. Likewise, the global community increasingly is being called on to respond to failing and failed states. In these terms, it is important to remember that state failure is a process, not an outcome. It is a process by which a state loses the capacity and/or the will to perform its essential governance and security functions. In either case, the associated question is how to address the processes of state failure before they run their courses and achieve conflict and/or crisis proportions.

## **Conclusions.**

The conference dialogue stressed the necessity of providing individual security and national, regional, and global instability. This requires civilian and military leaders to learn to think and act strategically and cooperatively within the contemporary global security environment. That, in turn, requires: (1) Professional Military Education and Leader Development that stresses the fundamental nature of conflict in general and nontraditional politically-oriented conflict in particular; and (2) organizational management structures that will enable the application of the instruments of national and international power to a given situation in a unified and integrated fashion. More specifically, U.S. efforts should focus on small, tangible steps that systematically and holistically address strategic thinking and national and international cooperation.

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