Impasses and challenges in the development of Latin American multilateralism[1]

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This note will focus on issues that can help to make proposals to advance the capacity of civil society and Latin American states to strengthen multilateral mechanisms to reduce different forms of violence and threats to peace on the continent.

To begin, let us briefly summarize the points of consensus among analysts on the current security situation in Latin America:

1) From Blue Globalization to Gray Globalization. The decade of the 1990s – which I am calling the period of "blue globalization" — was a period of hope related to the democratic consolidation on the continent. The agenda of the international system in general, and of US/Latin America relations in particular, were dominated by economic themes. The expectation was that globalization, as well as new forms of economic regulation, would generate a new system of international political governance grounded in multilateralism. With the new millennium the tides were quickly changing conducing to a "gray globalization". Economic globalization did not produce expressive gains for a good part of the population of developing countries. In practice, the contrary was often true and, under Bush presidency, US foreign policy assumed a more closed posture with regard to institutional arrangements and supranational treaties. Following the events of September 11, the United States redefined its strategic position as strongly unilateralist, its foreign policy polarized around the fight against terrorism. Indeed, the term terrorism has come to be applied to nearly all the organizations considered to be enemies of the US government.

2) The marginalization of Latin America in the New World Order. Latin America has the world's lowest levels of armed conflicts between states and the lowest military

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expenditures in relation to GNP. The region has consolidated borders, and is for the most part absent of intra-religious conflicts and strong ethnic hatred. Latin America is the only region in the world where all the countries adhered to an anti-nuclear weapons treaty.

In the new context of militarization of international relations, all these factors have led the United States to marginalize Latin America, to a certain degree, in its system of priorities. This marginalization has deepened due to the fact that the fight against terrorism is not seen by the region to be a priority security issue, despite the United States' efforts to polarize the world around this subject. ***The fight against terrorism has not occupied the space left by the fight against communism, which had the support of most of Latin American dominant groups, the middle classes, and the local armed forces.***

3) Impasses in foreign policy. If the strategic marginalization of Latin America is at the root of a relative abandonment by the United States, the region presents its own weaknesses in the international arena. In past decades, Latin American countries were not able to develop a shared vision of their security problems, nor a concrete agenda for action. Different countries presented perspectives and priorities that varied considerably in terms of the need to reorganize the inter-American institutional system following the anti-communist struggle, as well as defining security priorities in the region. The United States is the only country on the continent that presents a proposal for hemispheric security, while Latin American countries tend to favor local perspectives / interests and a defensive posture.

The 90s brought certain novelties and advances, such as consensus on the role of democratic order as a central factor in maintaining peace, and the creation of subregional agreements (Mercosur, Andean Area and Central America) with positive political-institutional implications. Even so, the common element of foreign policy in Latin America continues to hinge on the principle of non-intervention and on efforts to undermine or limit the capacity of the United States to impose its agenda on countries in the region. (The Resolution of the Hemispheric Security Conference this past October in

Mexico clearly reflects these impasses.) Faced with the United States' tendency to securitize the international agenda, Latin American countries have emphasized the pluri-dimensionality of the hemispheric security agenda, prioritizing problems associated with poverty, health, the environment and economic development.

4) Dissonances between policies and security system. During the anti-communist struggle, security apparatuses became more autonomous, in particular the armed forces. The armed forces developed doctrines of defense and public order centered in the notion of national security. They proposed to strengthen the armed forces, presenting themselves as representatives or defenders of the national interest in the struggle against the internal enemy – communism – and the external enemy – bordering countries. The end of communism saw the demise of what had historically been the seen as the main enemy in the region; in addition, processes of democratization have assuaged intra-national tensions (today these have been reduced to certain cases of historic "bad feelings", for example between Chile and Bolivia, but the hypothesis of war has become practically excluded.) In recent years certain important advances were made in building trust and collaboration between armed forces that had traditionally been rivals (in particular between Chile and Argentina and Brazil and Argentina).

However, the armed forces in Latin America continue to be largely immune to processes of democratization of the state (in the sense of being open to public debate and to redefining their military doctrine and strategy, which continues to be anchored in the notion of national security). Thus, there is a dissonance between the military doctrine and the dominant political discourse – which emphasizes democracy and human rights. This divorce between civil society and defense establishment is reflected even in the limited number of academic research centers and non governmental organizations in Latin American countries that focus on monitoring the armed forces and police.

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Faced with this reality, is it possible to advance multilateral proposals to confront security problems in the region from a perspective that increases Latin America's autonomy in the international plane? I believe that the answer is affirmative, that the principles of non-intervention and opposition to the United States' agenda are insufficient to confront the challenges underway. In the first place, while the United States' agenda could be neutralized to some extent, it cannot be completely controlled. Due to the political, military and economic weight that it mobilizes, the USA can only be confronted with another agenda that permits effective negotiations. That is, multilateralism at the regional level can only be constructed from an agenda that considers the problems (but not necessarily the diagnosis and solutions) posed by the United States. In the second place, although the analyses and solutions presented by the United States are questionable, the problems it raises are not irrelevant. The reality of the new forms of organization of crime and terror that explode the limits between internal and external security policies; the emergence of problematic border regions associated with drugs, criminals, guerrillas and terrorism; the constitution of territorial spaces, including urban spaces, where the state has lost effective control – these are relevant problems for the majority of the countries in the region. They demand a redefinition of the role of the armed and their relationships with other security forces and in general of the system of collective security in the region.

To affirm the relevance of problems raised by the United States does not imply agreement with its analyses and diagnostics. Concepts such as "failed states," "rogue groups rule," "collapsed states," and "terror," which are sometimes relevant in other parts of the world, do not apply to the reality of most of the region. Political institutions of many countries face serious social problems, but the stability and solidity of Latin American states has a solid historical basis. The use of inadequate concepts creates incorrect perceptions and political hysteria. On the other hand sometimes Latin American policy and opinion makers exaggerate in their perception of the United States' foreign policy, as, for example, to think military support to democratically constituted governments – like Colombia – could give way to a "Vietnamization" of the situation there. A balanced vision would demand that Latin American states develop

their own (non-reactionary) capacity to analyze and monitor the situation as well as to create the institutional tools to confront the threats to its security that the region faces.

A pro-active agenda should consider the following questions:

1) **The redefinition of the current vision of Latin American foreign policy centered in the principles of non-intervention and a pluri-dimensional agenda.** The topic of national sovereignty in a globalized world has given way to differing interpretations on the future of the nation-state. However, there is a certain consensus that security problems in the current world go beyond limits of national borders and the individual capacity of states to cope with threats to security. In practice, in recent years Latin American countries have developed an "interventionist" posture in cases of maintaining democratic institutions. The general tendency for countries in the region to assume "sovereignist" positions is a legitimate attitude, grounded in the concern for creating mechanisms that can justify unwanted interventions from the United States. The challenge now is to advance an agenda of collective security that develops mechanisms that share decisions and inter-state operational systems, in particular – but not only – in border areas, while maintaining respect for national sovereignty.

The emphasis on a pluri-demensional agenda, such as that elaborated in the hemispheric declarations, in fact reflects the adhesion to the notion of human security. This notion has an important normative value and presents an ideal horizon for international relations, but in the current stage of conceptual elaboration, it has a limited operational potential. Although it is not the objective of this short presentation to develop a criticism of the notion of human security, we cannot leave out an indication of some of its major limitations.

As various analysts have discussed, while the term unifies different dimensions of security (related to violence, health, environment and poverty), it also leads to securitize all aspects of social life or to dilute the specific problems associated with armed violence within the general context of the society as a whole. In the first case,

we have a return to the authoritarian vision of national security; and in the second, the loss of specificity of the problems associated with armed violence. Equally, the recognition of inter-relationships among problems, such as violence and poverty, do not authorize a reductionist vision of social problems. Sociological research has shown that it is not necessarily the poorest sectors of the urban population that get involved in crime and that armed violence. Once consolidated violence has a "epidemiological" dynamic that is autonomous up to a certain point. In the same way, many of the problems placed on the multi-dimensional agenda refer to problems fundamentally associated with internal politics. We cannot forget, for example, that poverty in Latin America is sustained, above all, by social inequalities, corruption, and by the inefficiency of social policies, "internal" themes that do not belong to a multilateral agenda of the region.

This is not to say that one should disregard the pluridimensionality of the problems that affect institutional stability in the region. The agenda for north-south international cooperation should treat the different socio-economic aspects that weaken and / or jeopardize democratic life. But we can not deny the specificity of the security problems associated with armed violence. The recognition of the diversity of social problems that destabilize institutions cannot be used as an alibi to neutralize or counter a specific agenda of public security. Moreover, to fuse the most diverse social problems implies losing effective operational capacity. In complex societies, the diverse areas related to human security are each treated by sub-systems that are operationally autonomous (the armed forces, public health, social policies, environmental policies).

In the specific case of an agenda centered on the specific problems of reducing armed violence and institutional stability, the concept of human security should be deepened as a normative horizon in the establishment and execution of public security policies at the national, sub-regional and hemispheric level, relating them to human rights, democratic institutions and care for the populations that are most affected by armed violence.

2) **Confront the new relationships between internal and external policies, between security forces and the constitution of problem regions.** Urban violence has increasingly taken hold of larger cities in Latin America and is becoming more and more associated with drug trafficking, weapons illegal trade and money laundering; these activities do not respect national borders and combating them depends on a cooperative effort by states in the region. At the same time, guerrilla warfare, previously in Central America and now in Colombia, has generated refugee problems and created tensions at the borders.

Although international terrorist groups in Latin America are not important overall, they do have (or had) certain significance around the triple border region. The phenomena of organized violence and international crime have the potential to further inflame inter-state conflicts and produce problem regions, such as the case of the triple border and the Amazon region. The latter, which certain authors believe has acquired its own dynamic as a space for trafficking arms and drugs, and for the activities of armed groups, presents important difficulties for the development of collective security strategies. The legitimate concern of states in the region, in particular Brazil, that the Amazon region not be internationalized, has led to defensive attitudes that may undermine the need to create multi-lateral security mechanisms.

New forms of organized violence that dilute borders between national defense and internal public security demand a redefinition of the role and increasing cooperation between armed forces and police. This necessity comes up against various difficulties. On one hand, among the political elite of the region, particularly in the southern cone region, there is the recent memory of military interventions. This generates a reasonable concern with the autonomy of the armed forces, and a tendency to want to delimit their field of action and maintain them at the margin of internal questions. Historical experience from the period of the fight against communism also indicates that when they are integrated to questions of internal security, the armed forces tend to subordinate political forces and their chain of command. (Even today, in Brazil, the main police force – the military police – is

hierarchically organized in military terms with highest post being that of colonel, making it dependent on the armed forces). There also exists a legitimate concern that the armed forces are contaminated and corrupted by the considerable financial resources of organized crime.

Even so, because internal and external problems in the region are interlinked, because the borders are key areas in actions against organized crime, and because certain regions of the borders are colonized by groups outside the law, the integration of the armed forces and police is an increasingly present demand. This collaboration doesn't mean that the armed forces should undertake police functions.

Which transformations in the doctrine and governance of the armed forces are necessary to integrate them in the struggle against new forms of violence, while at the same time, increasing public control in order to limit their tendency to political autonomization? How can the police and their intelligence services integrate with those of the armed forces guaranteeing each part autonomy? How to develop cooperation efforts subregionally and regionally between police and armed forces? How shared inter-state mechanisms of border controls can be assured? How to treat "problematic" regions while preserving the national sovereignty?

3) **Integrate civil society, hemispheric institutions and the United Nations.** The responses to these problems are filtered through governments' efforts to reform the state, including the security apparatuses. However, these efforts will only advance insofar as they find solid support in the public debate and in civil society proposals. At the same time, it is important to recognize that civil society is not immune from all criticism. Many civil society institutions have shown a defensive posture based on the affirmation of ideal principles, pitting themselves against and confronting the positions of legitimately constituted governments without offering proposals and practical solutions. In this way, they alienate themselves from government bodies. Civil society cannot simply go against or denounce state practices, but should seek to help democratize the public institutions and the security system, in an effort that requires partnership and dialogue with government bodies.

The role of civil society, including academic centers, should be expanded in its capacity to evaluate and elaborate proposals, and to analyze and monitor current transformations. Since the "revolutionary decades" – when the continent was object of analysis by local academics – Latin America researchers, with honorable exceptions, do not look to their neighbors or to the region. In particular, it is necessary to strengthen research centers conducting research on the region in each country, as well as the links between them.

A similar reinforcement should be undertaken at the level of national parliaments. Naturally, internal problems absorb the interests and concerns of the majority of the parliaments. Still, it is possible to develop a system of support and information oriented to legislators to raise their awareness to the international dimensions that do affect their countries future.

How can we create a dialogue between the government and civil society around topics of security? How can we expand the number and the quality of work of non-government organizations dedicated to the topic of reducing violence and security sector reform? How can we disseminate and exchange experiences, creating a forum of organizations in the region that work in this field?

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Finally, I would like to indicate three transversal topics. The first refers to the need to elaborate proposals within a variable geometry perspective. It is not realistic to think of proposals that will include necessarily, at least at the point of departure, all countries in the region. The second question, which is quite delicate, refers to the privileged place that Brazil (because of its demographic and economic weight and because it shares borders with the majority of countries in South America) should occupy in efforts to advance a multi-lateral agenda in the area of collective security. Without avoiding its regional responsibilities steps should be taken to avoid generating a reaction against Brazilian "hegemony." In this sense the Mercosur represents at this moment an central

tool to advance a Brazilian led agenda that can influence all of Latin American, and which can count with an important support from the European Union. And, last but not least, we must consider how to include the United Nations in the advancement of specific proposals.