

PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
COMMITTEE ON HEMISPHERIC SECURITY

OEA/Ser.G
CP/CSH/INF. 51/06
19 October 2006
Original: Spanish

ADDRESS BY THE OAS SECRETARY GENERAL, JOSÉ MIGUEL INSULZA
AT THE SEVENTH CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF DEFENSE OF THE AMERICAS

(October 2, 2006 - Managua, Nicaragua)

ADDRESS BY THE OAS SECRETARY GENERAL, JOSÉ MIGUEL INSULZA
AT THE SEVENTH CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF DEFENSE OF THE AMERICAS

(October 2, 2006 - Managua, Nicaragua)

I am greatly honored to address you as Secretary General of the Organization of American States, the hemispheric political institution that groups together all the countries attending this Seventh Meeting of Ministers of Defense of the Americas.

In recent years, our region has entered a new, promising political era. All the countries here represented share a common form of governance: democracy. You represent here the democracies of our Hemisphere, which grow larger and stronger by the day.

Between December 2005 and December 2006, there will have been 13 presidential elections in the region—the largest 12-month figure in the history of the Hemisphere. In the same period, there will have been general congressional elections in a similar number of countries, along with countless municipal and local elections and a number of nationwide plebiscites. Over the past 10 months, the OAS has observed 16 electoral processes in member countries. It has several more electoral observation missions ahead, including three presidential elections before year's end.

In short, the American Hemisphere has fully instituted the democratic form of governance, the practice of which is strengthened every day. Our concern centers more on the capacity of the democratic governments to better address the major challenges of governance. The peoples of the Americas today expect from their democracies what they have been denied until now: continuous and sustainable economic growth, much more equitable distribution of wealth, elimination of poverty and discrimination, greater access to justice, full respect for human rights, better social services for all, and increased security for them and their children. Latin America and the Caribbean have grown, in the past three years, at a quicker pace than in the past 25 years. People expect to personally see this growth expressed in the form of transparent action by honest and effective governments. We are not a poor Hemisphere; but we are the most unjust Hemisphere on Earth. The stability of our democracies will depend upon our ability to correct this.

Security issues are an integral part of the agenda of the Americas. As our 2003 hemispheric security conference in Mexico recognized, the sources of insecurity in our nations are multiple and diverse. These include not only potential conflicts between countries—which are increasingly unlikely—or the severe modern-day threat of terrorism, but also, fundamentally, the risks posed by increasing crime in our cities, drug trafficking, organized crime, the proliferation of gangs, and other problems, such as repeated natural disasters, which threaten our nations year after year. The concept of multidimensional security arose from the Special Conference on Security as a way to refer to these multiple factors.

We should employ this concept in our approach to hemispheric action on matters of security; but we must do so without committing two common mistakes that could jeopardize our democratic stability.

The first mistake would be to identify all the problems of our region as threats to security. Certainly we should attach priority to the social and economic problems affecting our peoples, which are at the root of many security issues. But to say that these issues threaten our security is not just an unwarranted exaggeration. It could also lead to a reincarnation of the national security doctrine that did so much harm to democracy in the last decades of the 20th century, when it was invoked to justify the worst dictatorships in our history.

We must, therefore, judiciously restrict our ideas of multidimensional security to genuine military threats or threats to public security and then act accordingly. We should not attempt to extend the concept of security to every arena of our political and social problems; these can be addressed in other ways, by civilian democratic authorities.

Likewise, we should be clear about the different ways we use the concepts of public security and defense, which have sometimes engendered arguments among us. These differences simply reflect the different security situations facing our countries and the different structures of their armed and security forces. At this meeting, representatives of ministries of national defense sit side by side with representatives of ministries of public security—some from countries that do not have armed forces, and some which perform both functions, defense and security, through the same structure.

The way each country deals with its security issues, and whether it links them to the activities of its military institutions, is a strictly internal matter. Let us be clear among ourselves, however, that defense and public security are distinct government functions that should be performed professionally, with distinct training, in different spheres of competence. Starting from a shared acceptance of this conceptual diversity, each country will address its security and defense needs in the way it deems most appropriate to its interests; at the same time, we can design the appropriate hemispheric cooperation policy for each of these areas.

Our peoples also want the region to develop in an atmosphere of peace, national harmony, and regional and subregional integration. We have faced great problems, and continue to do so, but peace among us has not been an issue. This is no small achievement, considering the developing conflicts in today's global arena—conflicts that could escalate in the coming years. Averting conflict among us, resolving our problems through dialogue and reconciliation, always employing legal means of settling disputes, and broadening our integration processes are a priority task for our nations today. This means we must jointly define certain tasks in the area of regional defense.

We must continue to work toward increasingly broader mechanisms of mutual trust among our nations. We must be entirely transparent and inform each other of every upgrade, to avoid unintended sensitive situations that could set off an arms race. The publication of white papers explicitly outlining national defense policies, as many of our countries have done, is another transparency measure we should strengthen.

Other mutual confidence measures are under way as well. Antipersonnel mine removal, undertaken in many of our countries with OAS cooperation, has improved safety for civilian populations threatened by these devices; it has also made our border areas genuine zones of peace and integration, rather than hindrances in the daily lives of our peoples. From this podium, I urge all countries of the Hemisphere to meet their obligations in this regard and eradicate antipersonnel mines from our Hemisphere within the agreed timeframes.

In a global context of renewed threats of nuclear proliferation, it is also important to reassert, unambiguously, the commitments of Tlatelolco and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which declare Latin America and the Caribbean to be a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

Our nations' contribution to multilateral peacekeeping efforts under way in different parts of the world has increased substantially in recent years. Particularly notable has been the unprecedented joint undertaking by seven countries in this Hemisphere—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, and Uruguay—in Haiti. Their work has played a key part in peacekeeping and in the restoration of democracy in this sister nation, while demonstrating the enormous potential of regional military cooperation in joint, multilateral, and participatory efforts to address problems that may arise in our Hemisphere.

Peacekeeping operations afford unique opportunities, not only to contribute to international peace and security, which would be justification enough, but also to give the armed forces involved a chance to upgrade themselves and to act in international cooperation with more professional armed forces.

Other fertile ground for cooperation is afforded by joint actions against international terrorism. Such cooperation has borne fruit in recent years, especially since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, in the United States. I believe all of us are prepared to reinforce counterterrorist activities, in a framework of effective multilateralism, with the data and actions our armed forces and security forces can provide, according to fundamental notions of cooperation and reciprocity.

Ministers:

The effective exercise of republican principles and of the democratic rule of law has had a profound impact on changing notions of national defense and, as a necessary consequence, of regional defense. We must accept that both have evolved with extraordinary intensity over the past 20 years.

The sovereign power of peoples is exercised by democratically elected governments. These legitimate authorities devise each country's strategy; determine the national interest to be preserved; establish, if need be, eventual conflict scenarios; and, under graver circumstances, might be called upon to determine whether those scenarios amount to hypotheses of war.

The restoration of democracy in countries that endured long dictatorships had other important consequences, both in the improvement of their armed forces as a military instrument and in the forging of true regional integration as a means of reinforcing national independence.

Subordination of our armed forces to democratic political authority, and their clear willingness to submit to it, has given them a more legitimate role in a democratic society. These developments have also been reflected in our inter-American system. A few months ago, at a special session of the General Assembly, our governments agreed that the Inter-American Defense Board would henceforth cease to be an independent body and would form an integral part of the Organization of American States. The presence at this meeting of Major General Jorge Armando de Almeida Ribeiro, a general in the Brazilian Army and first head of the Inter-American Defense Board elected by all the governments in the Hemisphere, also testifies, at the hemispheric level, to the

doctrine of democratic subordination that today governs our military's relations with our governments.

Our armed forces have once again assumed their specific role and are now in a position to improve their professional qualifications, by forsaking a confrontational approach that undermined the very nature of their national defense function. The armed forces should be the military arm of the nation, defending the independence and freedom of all its people.

The challenge facing us in the inter-American system is to respond effectively to the dangers lurking in an increasingly complex world, while at the same time preserving the freedom, independence, and rule of law we have acquired at such enormous cost.