

**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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**Abstract:**

In September 2021, Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) 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 US dominance in that regional organization. As current president of CELAC, AMLO is pushing a separatist agenda, proposing that CELAC model the European Union, with its political, economic, and social integration as a supranational organization thus eliminating the need for the continuing alliance of the OAS. While few observers of the Americas gave much credence to AMLO's declaration that CELAC could become a replacement for the OAS, the purpose of using Future Foresight is to assess scenarios of what might happen. Combining that methodology with structured analytical techniques (SATs) employed by intelligence analysts, a number of potential scenarios are assessed and drivers determined which could explain how such scenarios may 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 Future Foresight methodology and SATs used in developing scenarios and determining drivers. Four futures for regional security in the Western Hemisphere are then assessed, focusing on the implications for U.S.-Mexico security relations. The paper concludes with an assessment of policy choices the United States may implement, to include the role of the U.S. Northern Command, which would support the preferred future scenario.

**Key words:** Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC); Structured Analytical Techniques (SAT); Organization of American States (OAS); Mexico; United States; Western Hemisphere; U.S. Northern Command

## **Introduction and Framework**

In September 2021, Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) 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 United States (US) dominance in that regional organization (O'Boyle 2015). As current president of CELAC, AMLO continued to push the separatist agenda established by Chávez, proposing that CELAC model the European Union, with its political, economic, and social integration as a supranational organization (GOB 2021), thus eliminating the need for the continuing alliance of the OAS.<sup>1</sup>

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 as 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 (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. In fact, on September 11, 2001, the OAS foreign ministers were meeting in Lima, Peru, condemning Chavez's anti-democratic policies, signing the Inter-American Democratic Charter. They quickly transitioned to condemning terrorism (the first international organization do so) and shortly after on September 21<sup>st</sup> in Washington, D.C. signed a resolution, Strengthening Hemispheric Cooperation to Prevent, Combat, and Eliminate Terrorism (US Mission n.d.).

While few observers of Latin America gave much credence to AMLO's declaration that CELAC could become a replacement for the OAS, much less a political and economic union like the European Union (EU), the purpose of using Future Foresight (Hines and Bishop 2013) is to assess scenarios of what might happen. Combining that methodology with structured analytical techniques (SATs) employed by intelligence analysts, a number of potential scenarios can be assessed and drivers determined which could explain how such scenarios may 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 Future Foresight methodology and SATs used in developing scenarios and determining drivers. Four futures for regional security in the Western Hemisphere are then assessed using these analytical tools focusing on the implications for U.S.-Mexico security relations. The paper concludes with an assessment of policy choices which the United States may implement which would 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 18<sup>th</sup> Congress in December 1823, the United States declared that the Western Hemisphere should be free from foreign intervention, yet also that European powers recognize the region as falling under the U.S. sphere of influence (Holden and Zolov 2000). The Monroe Doctrine was actually more a statement of principle, rather 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.<sup>3</sup> 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" (Waugh 1944, 230).

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, were 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 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, influencing the agendas which were pursued at the subsequent Conferences. The U.S. occupation of Panama and U.S. military interventions in Mexico prior to WWI, as well as 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 Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) and 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.<sup>4</sup>

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 (Rio Treaty) was signed by 23 nations. What is not well known, is 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 (Cuevas 1948).

The culmination of the Act of Chapultepec and 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 pitting conservative and liberal political factions against each other, following the assassination of liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (Davis 1996). The United States viewed the confrontation as being communist inspired, solidifying its views of the threat of communism in the region as the primary focus of the newly formed OAS.<sup>5</sup> 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 (Cullather 1994).

Throughout the Cold War, the OAS was viewed by most Latin American nations as a tool of American foreign policy, advancing an anti-communist agenda, while at the same time supporting military dictatorships which were supportive of U.S. policies. After the Cuban Revolution in 1959, following 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.<sup>6</sup> Due to the 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 (Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela), eventually leading 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 (socialist vs communist) 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 US-proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas, ALBA grew into a pseudo-alternative to the OAS, with member states headed by leftist, populist leaders like Chavez (Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Honduras). Its political and social agenda was to challenge U.S. hegemony in the region. Similarly, the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) countries of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay began as a trade union in 1991, but have since given rise to the South American Union (UNASUR) in 2008. It went beyond economic to political and social integration and even military coordination with the creation of the South American Defense Council (CSD) in 2009 (Mendelson-Forman 2010). In 2011, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) was inaugurated by Hugo Chávez and headquartered in Caracas. 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 (CALC) (Segovia 2013, 100). CELAC has since grown to thirty-three member states (sans United States). Its agenda has been couched in the same Bolivarian solidarity rhetoric as ALBA, clearly challenging the OAS and US hegemony. While UNASUR is languishing due to the political changes in the region, CELAC is growing, bringing in many outside nations as affiliates, such as China, Russia, Turkey, and many Arab states (CELAC n.d.).

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 US invasion of Iraq. Under Chavez's

influence, Venezuela denounced the treaty in 2012, along with other ALBA members: Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua (OAS n.d.).

## **Organization and Methodology**

Following the Framework Foresight model provided by Hines and Bishop (2013), this paper addresses each of the eight steps: Domain description; Current assessment; Baseline future; Alternative futures; Preferred future; Implications analysis; Futures to plans; and Leading indicators.

### *Domain Description*

While the focus of this chapter is on security relations in the Western Hemisphere, the concept of security can mean different things to different people, as well as countries. For example, the Copenhagen School (Buzan, Waever and deJaap 1998) defined 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 frame security, often outside of traditional public safety and defense functions, for the purpose of this chapter the focus is on hemispheric security and how national security and defense are developed within the context of the institutions which primarily provide these functions for the state, as well as the region. Institutions are important to differentiate interests in international cooperation and/or boundaries. Furthermore, institutions help to define what is considered a security perimeter and 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, as well the newly independent Latin American states, 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), did one state actually possess the means to provide some semblance of regional security in the hemisphere; albeit, it was enforced in Central America and the Caribbean primarily (Holden and Zolov 2000). Even during WW II when the United States developed its Rainbow Plans for the defense of the Americas against the Axis nations, its focus was still North America (Global Security n.d.). Thus, while the geographic scope of the chapter is the Western Hemisphere, defense and security have been viewed by states primarily within a sub-regional context (e.g. North America, Central America, Caribbean, and South America).<sup>7</sup>

The power differentiation between states in the Western Hemisphere also impacts threat perceptions. The United States is still a global super power, geopolitically, and has very broad security interests which impact the larger international system of states, while countries such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile view themselves as regional powers militarily, but also in terms of trade and natural resources. Thus, while the discussion focuses on activities internal to each country and their respective regional relations, it is important to take into account 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 the chapter. In addition to the STEEP (social, technological, economic, environmental, and political) variables, other key variables for this analysis include identity, interests and institutions. Identity includes how each country views issues related to sovereignty, nationalism, and sub-regionalism. Institutions include the roles of the military, police, national guard, and international governmental organizations (like the OAS and CELAC) that impact security, and defense. Interests include trade, tourism, and public safety (Kilroy, Rodríguez, and Hataley 2021). Another key variable is that of threat perception by countries. This includes topics such: pandemics, terrorism, crime and drugs, migration, natural disasters, and other states. However, there are disagreements within countries, as well, 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, VA 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.<sup>8</sup> More recently, the previous Trump administration in the United States viewed undocumented migration coming from Mexico and Central American nations as a serious threat, necessitating the building of a border wall along the southern border with Mexico (Associated Press 2017).

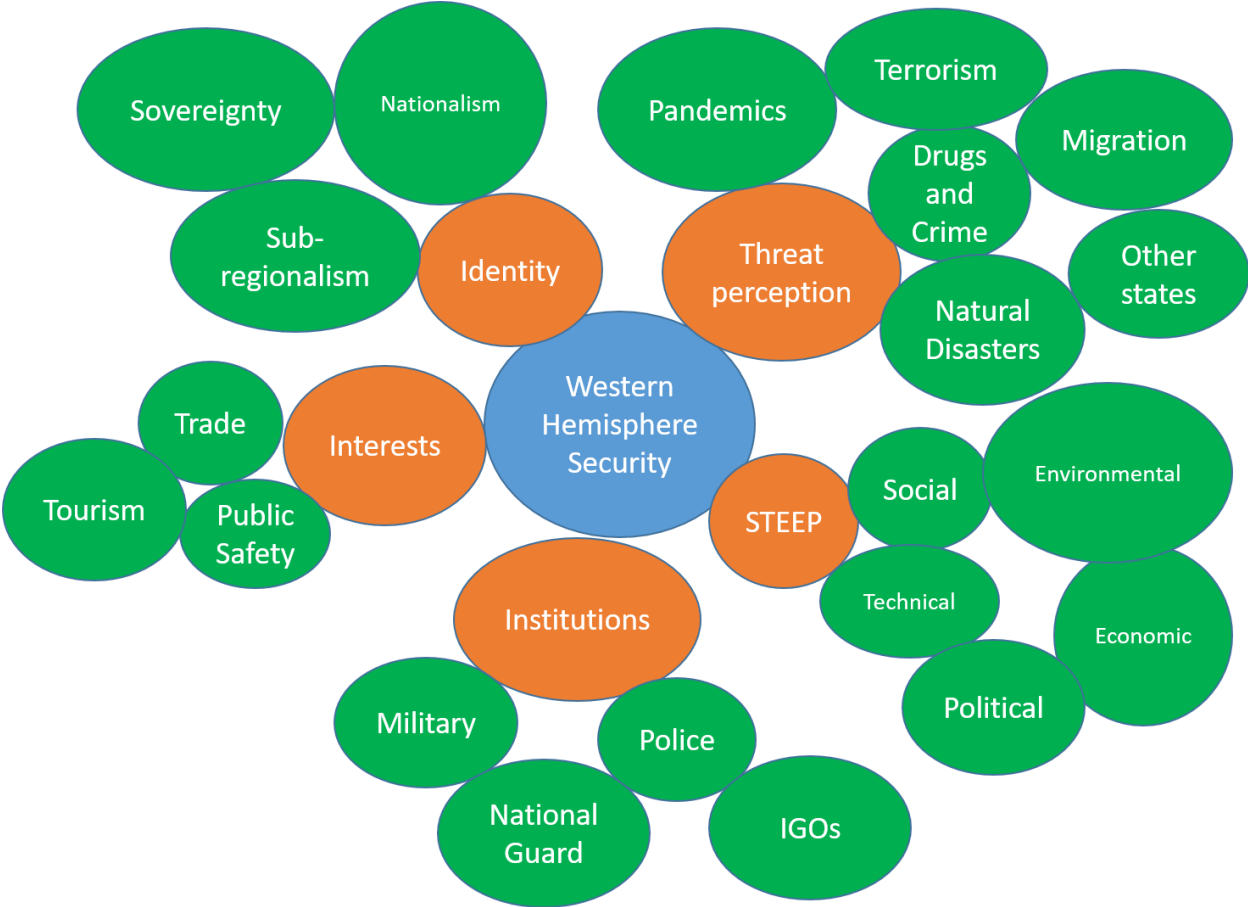


Figure 1 – Domain Map

### *Analytical Methodology*

The methodology in this paper follows the Framework Foresight model (Hines and Bishop 2013), evaluating Social, Technological, Economical, 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. It also employs analytical methodologies used in the U.S. intelligence community (IC), since the Framework Foresight model can be supported by using various structured analytical techniques (SATs) which intelligence analysts use in making strategic forecasts while avoiding a number of cognitive biases which 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 (CIA), first addressed the problems of cognitive bias in his pioneering work, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* (1999) and later developed analytical tools to confront these biases in his *Tradecraft Primer: Structured Analytical Techniques to Improve Intelligence Analysis* (2009), which first addressed the use of SATs. Along with Randy Pherson, Heuer developed a textbook, *Structured Analytical Techniques for Intelligence Analysis* (2015). This chapter utilizes two of the SATs developed by Heuer and McPherson: Argument Mapping and What If analysis, to test the futures analysis utilizing 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 US hegemony in the Americas. Alternative Future 2 is the breakdown of the existing regional security system with multiple sub-regional 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 the variables of interests, institutions, and identity play in shaping a new regional security relationship between states in the Americas. The OAS would be empowered to function as a collective security organization, with shared leadership and responsibility, much like the Security Council function within the United Nations.



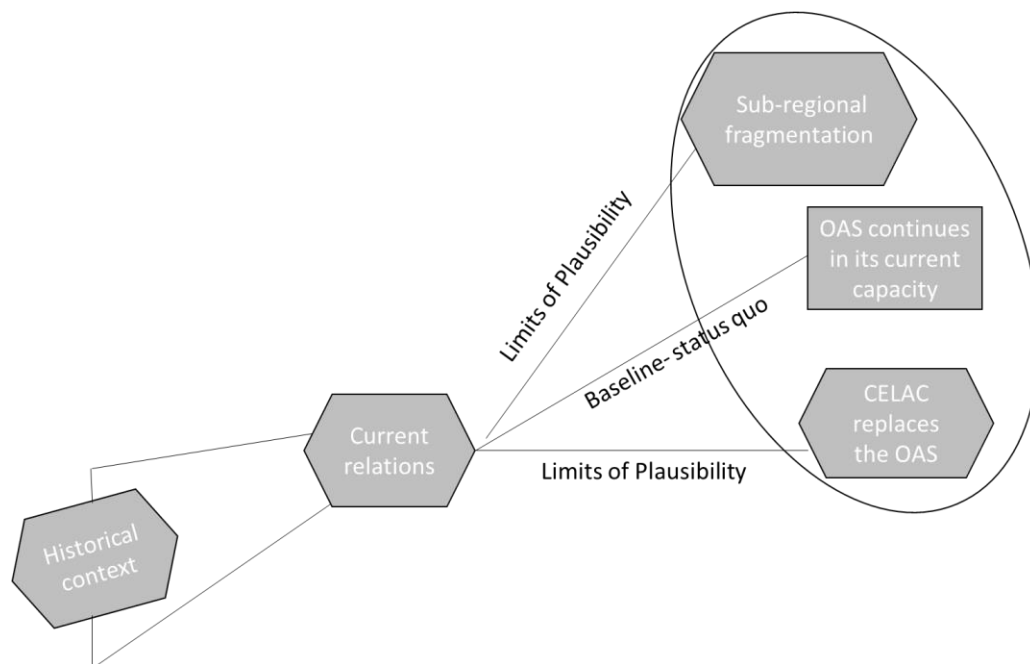


Figure 2 – Cone of Plausibility

### *Baseline – Status Quo*

The baseline future for security relations in the Western Hemisphere is that despite the political changes occurring in the region, it is likely 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, but also due to the pandemic, the incentive for communication and coordination remains high. Also increasing climate-driven natural disasters will 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. Also the impact of the Ring of Fire on nations within the region will likely evidence increased earthquakes and volcanoes on Pacific nations, which can have devastating impacts on both rural and urban centers in the Americas.<sup>9</sup> The earthquake in Mexico City in 1985 recorded 8.1 on the Richter Scale, causing 40,000 casualties, overloading Mexico's disaster response capabilities. Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid then welcomed international assistance from throughout the world (El Financiero n.d.).

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; increasing cross-border threats, such as crime, drug and human trafficking, pandemics, and natural disasters which exceed the capacities of states. The OAS has provided security assistance, such as: disaster response, counterdrug, 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. State Department's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), in conjunction with the OAS. The OAS's Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) "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" (CICAD n.d. i). The OAS is also the coordinating body for the Summit of the Americas Implementation Working Group which promotes increased dialog 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) peace enforcement mission of Latin American countries that helped depose the military junta and restore President Jean Bertrand Aristide to power. The MNF later became the UN Multinational Force in Haiti (UNMIH) and then the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), 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, Military Observer Mission – Ecuador and 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 which led to 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 (Weidner 1996).<sup>10</sup>

### *Alternate Future 1 – CELAC replaces the OAS*

One of the scenarios offered as an alternative future is the possibility that AMLO's leadership of CELAC increases Mexico's role as a regional power, due to his successful efforts to elevate CELAC to the Western Hemisphere's preeminent intergovernmental organization, replacing the OAS. Using the structured analytic technique of What If analysis (Heuer and Pherson 2015) allows for the assessment of criteria and phenomenon which would contribute to creating the conditions for such a scenario to occur.

After decades of US control of the OAS agenda, and Mexico's growing disillusionment with the United States in general, AMLO 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 (SPF), the Guardia Nacional,<sup>11</sup> 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 more of 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 relic of Hugo Chavez's failed ALBA movement of leftist leaders in the Americas, mainstreaming CELAC 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 manufactures. Russia and Cuba also create military assistance advisory groups (MAAGs) to replace US 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 2<sup>nd</sup> Trump administration's renegeing on key USMCA commitments, moving to shore up bilateral relations with Mexico over trade, as well as 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 US allies, particularly Mexico and Canada; the OAS becoming more irrelevant as a regional actor due to loss of US funding; political changes in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile with leaders who are less tied to the United States or in need of US or IMF support; China and Russia forming a more cooperative foreign policy challenging US hegemony in the Americas (and US relevancy globally); and AMLO's ability to mobilize Mexican nationalism, as well as grow its 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 on the first. Mexico's efforts to empower CELAC as a replacement to the OAS actually leads to a fragmentation of the existing regional security system into sub-regional 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 amongst 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 (PARLCEN) 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.<sup>12</sup> 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 US Northern Command, joining with Canada and the United States in the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD).<sup>13</sup>

Key drivers for this scenario would include: AMLO's loss of domestic support for his foreign policy agenda; fiscal concerns, along with an increased ambivalence in the United States to the continued need for funding of international governmental organizations like the OAS and the United Nations; empowered political leadership throughout Latin America that is less reliant on US support to confront threats; and increasing regional identity amongst Latin American and Caribbean nations to forge sub-regional 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 effectively controlled the OAS agenda since its creation during the Cold War and after, to include the threats of terrorism and transnational criminal organizations today. However, all states in the Americas do not share the same threat perceptions of the United States. Nor does the United States have the political or economic capital it once had globally, much less regionally in the Americas. Today, the United States is also challenged militarily by a rising China and a more belligerent Russia. Both countries do not consider 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 to address the concerns of its member states. AMLO'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, to include 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 sub-regions (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, to include disaster response, pandemics, and responding to 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 trans-regional threats, to include climate change and environmental security.

### *Leading Indicators and Analytical Conclusions*

Using Argument Mapping, in Table 2 the three scenarios other than the baseline scenario presented in the chapter (CELAC Replaces the OAS; Breakdown of the Regional Security System; and a Reimagined OAS) are evaluated. The main argument for each scenario is offered as a contention. It is followed with a reason which 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 (Heuer and Pherson 2015, 193). Since the focus of this chapter is on strategic forecasting and future foresight, the evidence in these cases would also be considered key indicators of future events which would support the contention or the objection. The value of using an Argument Map is that it can provide insight on how policy choices can shape events and possibly prevent future conflict.

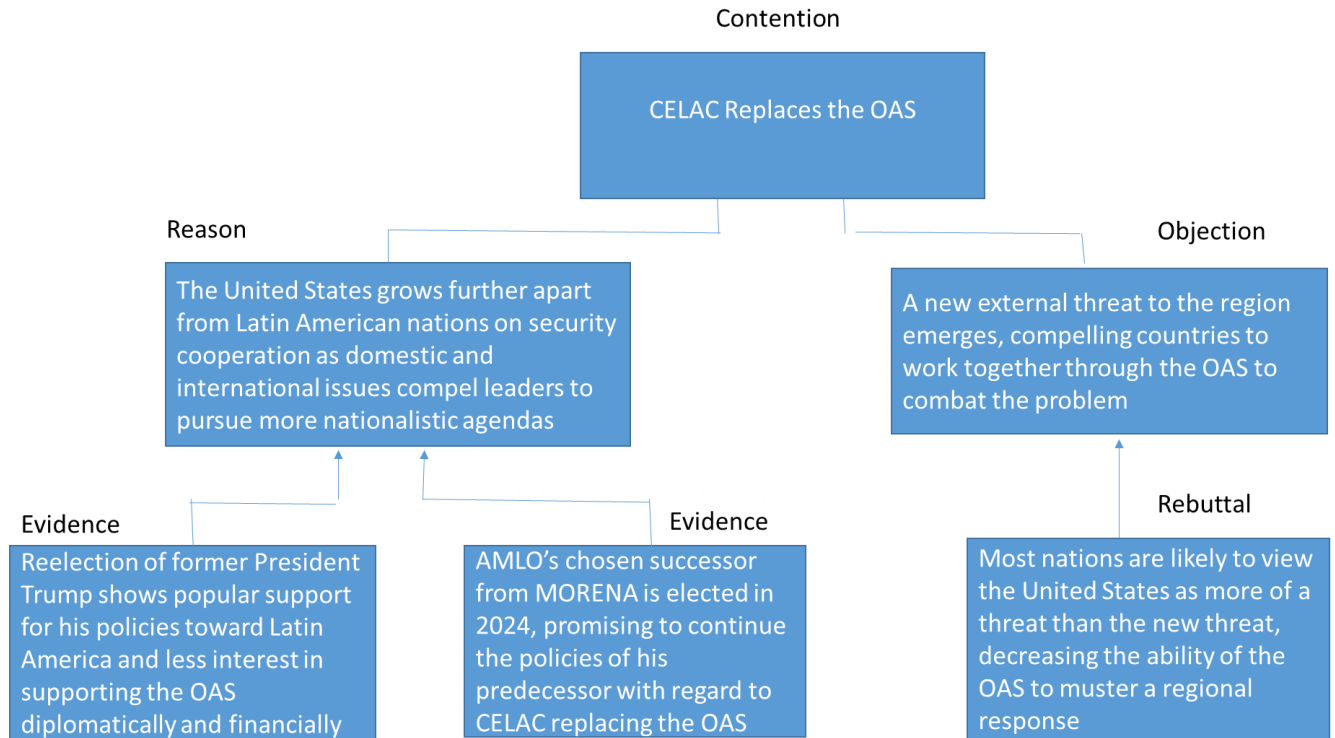


Table 2.1—Argument Mapping. Alternative Future 1. Source: Author.

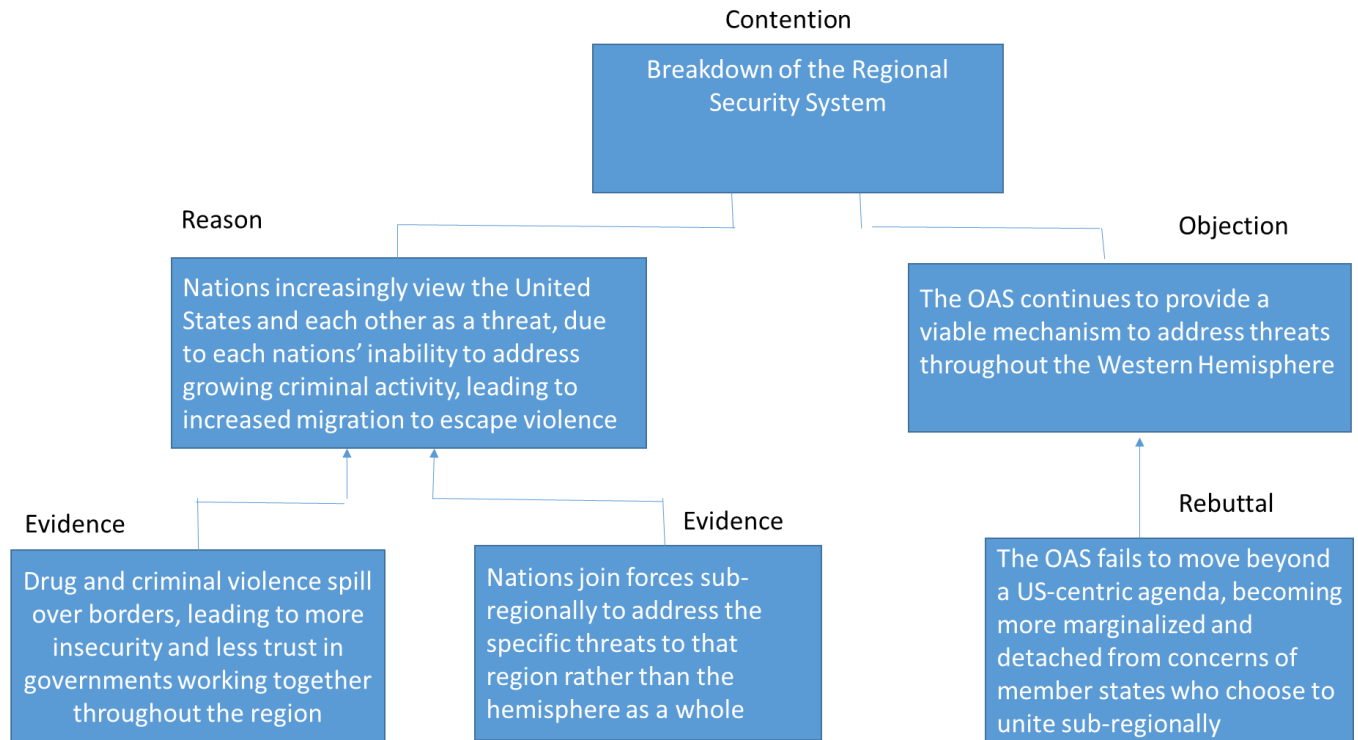


Table 2.2—Argument Mapping. Alternative Future 2. Source: Author.

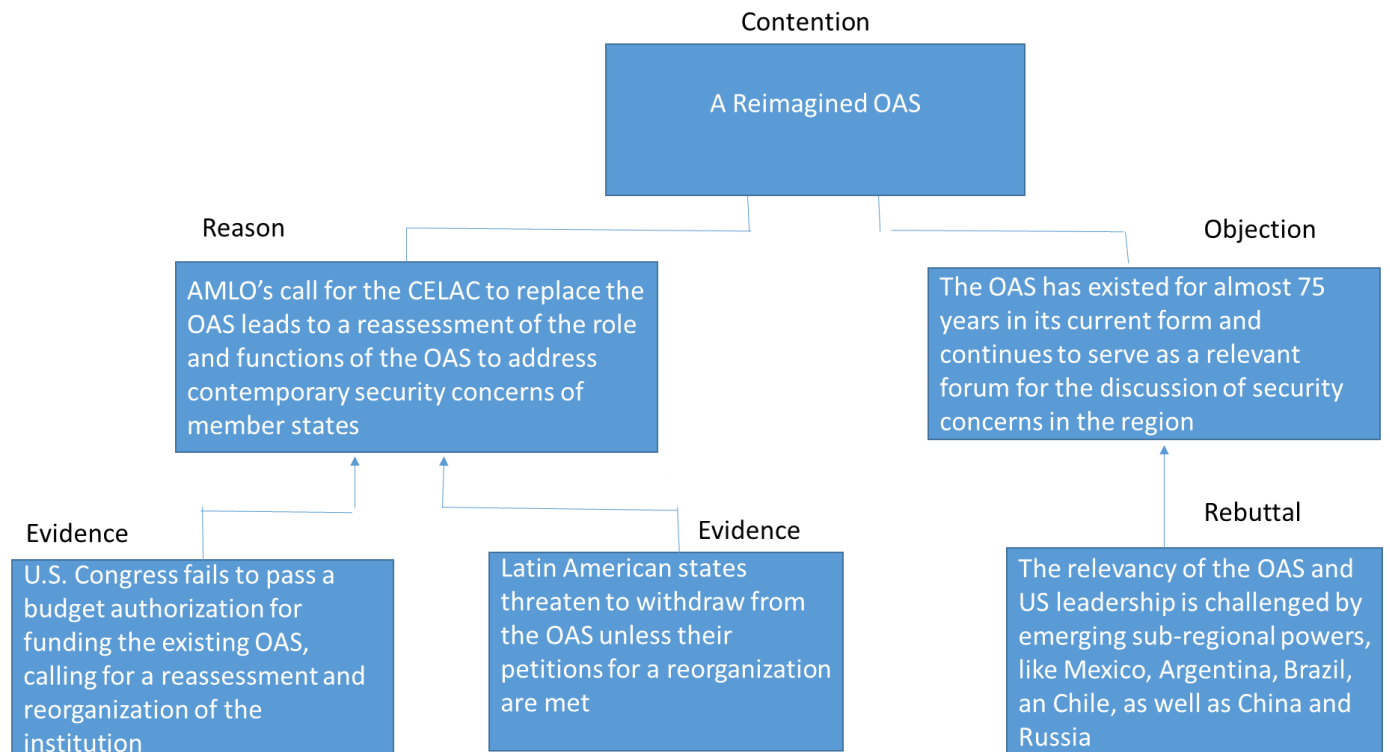


Table 2.3—Argument Mapping. Preferred Future. Source: Author.

## **Futures to Plans**

Two years into President Joe Biden's administration, there are already signs that the 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 the 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 can be expected to 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, just below the United States.<sup>14</sup> Confusing information coming from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding the new Omicron variant have further decreased the administration's credibility. The fiasco in Afghanistan, with a hasty withdrawal of U.S. forces, leading the Taliban attack and death of 13 US service members assisting with the evacuation, further eroded global confidence in the United States, drawing comparisons to the U.S. retreat from Vietnam in 1975 (Scott 2021).

President Biden has a very short window of opportunity to address the issues raised in the chapter, 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 attend the next Summit of the Americas gathering in 2022, considering it is being hosted by the United States.<sup>15</sup> 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 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 preventing the OAS from taking action on critical issues of peace and security in the hemisphere.

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, thus placing the organization more centrally within the region and more accessible to member states.<sup>16</sup> 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 counter-drug, 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 Carter-Torrijos-Carter Treaties of 1977, the former Commander of the U.S.

Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), General Wesley Clark suggested a post-2000 US presence in Panama turning some of the SOUTHCOM facilities into a multinational counterdrug center.<sup>17</sup>

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 (BBC 2021). Democrats could make a similar proposal to member funding of the OAS in its redefined role, to help increase support for an expanded security role and mission, which would not be dependent on the US military. Cost sharing could be done on a similar formulaic, 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 conduct mostly security assistance programs bilaterally with countries in the region. There are multilateral exercises and training that does occur, through programs such as the Conference of American Armies (CAA) and the UNITAS naval exercises which are run by SOUTHCOM and Amalgam Eagle, an air forces exercise, which is run by NORTHCOM.<sup>18</sup> However, working through the security structures of the OAS, such as the Committee on Hemispheric Security and programs such as: the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD); the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB); 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.

## Summary

Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador's (AMLO), along with his Foreign Minister Marcel Ebrad, have been one of the region's most prolific critics of the OAS. Ebrad 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" (Mercopress 2021). While Mexico's calls for CELAC to replace the OAS are not likely to gain much traction in the region, it should serve as a wake-up call to the Biden administration, that US influence in Latin America is waning. And in some cases, it is being replaced by China and Russia, particularly in areas that directly impact US 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." (Stevenson 2022).<sup>19</sup>



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 address some of AMLO'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.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Supranational organizations are 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” (Hargrave 2020).

<sup>2</sup> The Headquarters of the OAS is located in Washington, D.C., which contributes to its perception as a U.S. dominated regional organization.

<sup>3</sup> The term Colossus of the North emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 Hinman (1928).

<sup>4</sup> The largest contingent came from Brazil, in the form of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (BEF) which saw action in North Africa and Italy. Mexico contributed a fighter squadron (201) which flew combat missions in the Pacific. (Weeks 2007).

<sup>5</sup> 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 US perceptions that all revolutionary movements in the region were communist inspired and supported by the Soviet COMINTERN (Davis 1996).

<sup>6</sup> 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 Heuer (1999).

<sup>7</sup> Even within South America there is further differentiation between regions, such as the Andean Ridge, Southern Cone, Tri-Border Area (or Triple Frontier), etc.

<sup>8</sup> Anecdotal evidence from the author's attendance at the Defense Ministerial of the Americas in 1995 and discussions with Secretary Perry's staff.

<sup>9</sup> “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” (NOAA n.d.).

<sup>10</sup> 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 (Kilroy 2010).

<sup>11</sup> See Kilroy (2021).

<sup>12</sup> Also called the Federal Republic of Central America, it lasted from 1823-1840 (World Atlas n.d.).

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<sup>13</sup> Such as 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 (Cope 2005).

<sup>14</sup> The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are the 38 leading nations for economic development in the world. Western Hemisphere members include Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico (OECD n.d.). Under President Bolsonaro’s lack of leadership and denial of COVID-19 as a real threat, Brazil had the third highest death rates globally early on during 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 (Our World in Data, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> When he was President, Trump suggesting 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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).

<sup>17</sup> Anecdotal evidence based on the author’s having worked as a Special Assistant to General Clark and working the proposal for a multinational counterdrug center in Panama with US Department of Defense and State Department officials (it was not supported by either).

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> 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. AMLO has publically 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-lead forces,” (Stevenson 2022).

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