

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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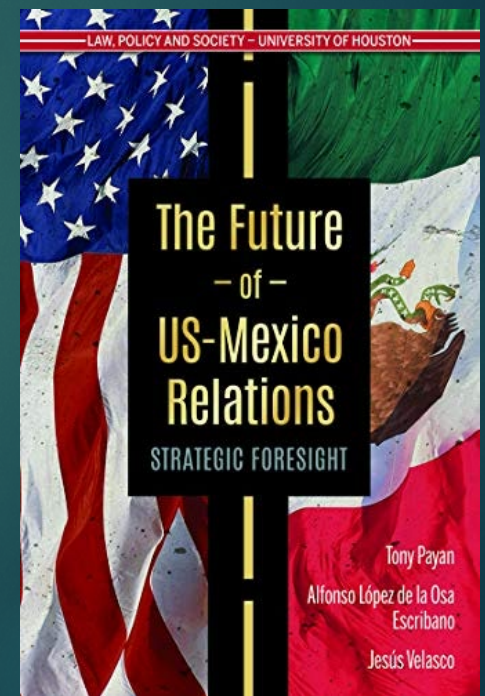
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Research Project Background

- ▶ Collaborative book project between Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, Center for the United States and Mexico and Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City
- ▶ Proposed Title: *Forecasting the U.S.-Mexico Relationship: Global and Regional Scenarios*
- ▶ Follow-up to previous book project published in 2020 by University of Houston
- ▶ Mexican and US academics and practitioners
- ▶ New book scheduled for completion in 2023 – Publisher TBD



Paper Background

- ▶ Change of focus from just US-Mexico security relations to broader Hemispheric security relations with the impact on US-Mexico relations in particular
- ▶ Spent spring 2022 on scholarly reassignment at Rice University conducting research and interviews on this project as well as another paper on Mexico's Guardia Nacional
- ▶ Published as a research paper by the Baker Institute for Public Policy Center for the US and Mexico in May prior to the Summit of the Americas in June



Topic Background

- ▶ 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 dominance in that regional organization
- ▶ As current president of CELAC, AMLO continues 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, thus eliminating the need for the continuing alliance of the OAS

Research Format

- ▶ 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 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) such as What If Analysis and Argument Mapping (employed by intelligence analysts), four potential scenarios are assessed and drivers determined which could explain how such scenarios may come about

Four Scenarios

▶ **Baseline Status Quo – OAS remains as is**

- ▶ Despite political changes in the Hemisphere, it is likely that traditional multilateral security relations will continue, with the OAS remaining in its current state

▶ Key Drivers

- ▶ 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 member states

Four Scenarios

▶ **Alternative Future #1 – CELAC Replaces OAS**

- ▶ 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

▶ Key Drivers

- ▶ 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)
- ▶ 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 leadership over the regional security agenda

Four Scenarios

- ▶ **Alternative Future #2 – Breakdown of the Regional Security System**
 - ▶ 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
- ▶ Key Drivers
 - ▶ 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
 - ▶ Increasing regional identity amongst Latin American and Caribbean nations to forge sub-regional alliances with less dependence on the United States for both security and economic assistance

Four Scenarios



▶ Preferred Future: A Reimagined OAS

- ▶ The OAS and the United States adapt to address the concerns of its member states with a new bureaucracy to reimagine its future in the Western Hemisphere

▶ Key Drivers

- ▶ 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
- ▶ 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
- ▶ 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

Argument Mapping

Contention

CELAC Replaces the OAS

Reason

The United States grows further apart from Latin American nations on security cooperation as domestic and international issues compel leaders to pursue more nationalistic agendas

Objection

A new external threat to the region emerges, compelling countries to work together through the OAS to combat the problem

Rebuttal

Most nations are likely to view the United States as more of a threat than the new threat, decreasing the ability of the OAS to muster a regional response

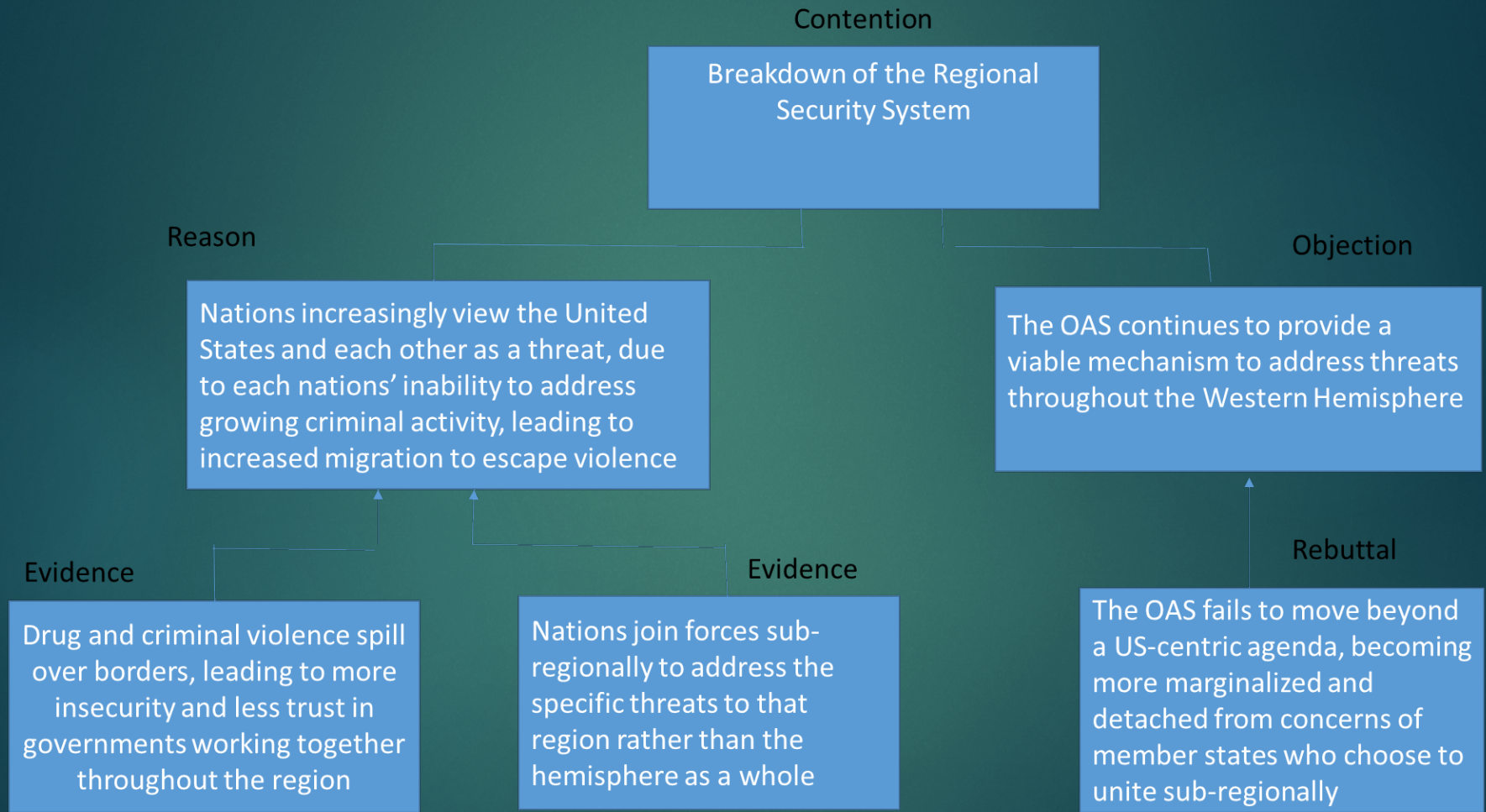
Evidence

López Obrador's chosen successor from MORENA is elected in 2024, promising to continue the policies of his predecessor with regard to CELAC replacing the OAS

Evidence

Reelection of former President Trump shows popular support for his policies toward Latin America and less interest in supporting the OAS diplomatically and financially

Argument Mapping



Argument Mapping



Policy Recommendations

- ▶ At the 2022 Summit of the Americas, President Biden could have presented a blueprint for a reimagined OAS, which would include a new Security Council comprised of six permanent member states, with co-equal leadership and voting power, with no one nation having veto authority
- ▶ Move the OAS headquarters from Washington, D.C., to Panama City, Panama, which would place the organization more centrally within the region and make it more accessible to member states
- ▶ Promote fiscal policy proposals that would be supported by both political parties in the U.S. Congress for member funding of the OAS to help increase support for its expanded security role and mission, which would not be dependent on the U.S.

Policy Recommendations

- ▶ A final step would be for the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) to support more multilateral security cooperation through the OAS in the Western Hemisphere, in conjunction with the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM)
- ▶ Work through the existing 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
- ▶ Foster greater ownership by member states in these processes and decision-making, and less dependence on the United States

Conclusion

- ▶ A reimagined OAS with the significant reforms suggested in this paper could help to foster a new regional security relationship between states in the Western Hemisphere, particularly Mexico and the United States
- ▶ Having Mexico take on a more constructive leadership role in helping to reform the OAS (rather than promoting CELAC as its alternative) and addressing some of 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