

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY, THE SOUTH AMERICAN INTEGRATION, AND THE CASE OF THE MILITARY BASES IN COLOMBIA

LA POLÍTICA EXTERIOR DE LOS EE.UU., LA INTEGRACIÓN SURAMERICANA Y EL CASO DE LAS BASES MILITARES EN COLOMBIA

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ABSTRACT. This article analyzes the nature of the conflict generated in South America by the adoption of the new military agreement between the U.S. and Colombia. The article will evaluate the political and the geostrategic implications of this agreement, especially its repercussions for the regional integration process of South America. It will also analyze the stances of the local actors in order to consider prospective scenarios, and will assess the U.S. approach to South American integration under the Obama administration.

RESUMEN. Este artículo pretende analizar la naturaleza del conflicto generado en América del Sur por la adopción del nuevo acuerdo militar entre los EE.UU. y Colombia. El artículo evaluará las implicaciones políticas y geoestratégicas de este acuerdo, especialmente su repercusión para el proceso de integración regional suramericano. Asimismo, analizará las posiciones de los distintos actores locales para considerar posibles escenarios y valorará la aproximación de los EE.UU. a la integración suramericana bajo la Administración Obama.

KEYWORDS: U.S. Foreign Policy, military bases in Colombia, U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), South American integration, UNASUR.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Política exterior de los EE.UU., bases militares en Colombia, Acuerdo para la cooperación en defensa entre EE.UU. y Colombia, integración suramericana, UNASUR.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The signing of a bilateral treaty between the U.S. and Colombia that allows Washington to use seven military bases on Colombian soil¹ has provoked a political earthquake across South America.² Indeed, this issue has practically hijacked the political and security agenda of South American relations in the second semester of 2009 and there is no doubt that the discussion about it has just begun.

The US-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) poses a series of important issues that this article seeks to analyze. Thus, it will deal with the most controversial aspects of the agreement regarding its content and its negotiation process. Likewise, this article will consider the aims pursued by the DCA's signatory parties within the framework of their respective foreign policies and it will study the reaction to the agreement of the involved actors in South America.

Furthermore, this military agreement has an unquestionable impact on the political integration process of South America embodied by the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). In this respect, it will be also necessary to pay a special attention to how the foreign policy of a major external actor such as the U.S. affects the sub-regional integration.

The article will finish with several recommendations for a U.S. foreign policy which promotes a climate of regional cooperation in South America and seeks to neutralize the conflict generated by the DCA.

II. CONTROVERSY OVER THE MILITARY AGREEMENT

The perspective of a permanent and enhanced presence of American armed forces in Colombia has unleashed a sharp controversy in the subcontinent. The Colombian government in turn insists that the only goal of the new agreement is to facilitate the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking in Colombia. As such, President Álvaro Uribe maintains that all the U.S. operations will be strictly circumscribed to Colombian

¹ "Supplemental Agreement for Cooperation and Technical Assistance in Defense and Security between the Governments of the United States of America and the Republic of Colombia", done at Bogotá on October 30, 2009, informally known as "U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement" (DCA). In accordance with the Article IV.1 of the DCA, "The Government of Colombia, consistent with its domestic law, shall cooperate with the United States to carry out mutually agreed activities within the framework of this Agreement by continuing to allow access to and use of its facilities at: Germán Olano Moreno Air Base, Palanquero; Alberto Pawells Rodríguez Air Base, Malambo; Tolemaida Military Fort, Nilo; Larandia Military Fort, Florencia; Capitán Luis Fernando Gómez Niño Air Base, Apiay; ARC Bolívar Naval Base in Cartagena; and ARC Málaga Naval Base in Bahía Málaga; and by allowing access to and use of other facilities and locations as may be agreed by the Parties or their Executive Agents". Available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/131654.pdf> (date accessed: 4 May 2009)

² NEWMAN, A., "U.S.-Colombia Military Agreement Stirs Tension", *The New American*, 17 August 2009. Available at <http://www.thenewamerican.com/index.php/world-mainmenu-26/south-america-mainmenu-37/1669> (date accessed: 4 May 2010)

national territory.³ Likewise, the U.S. government has said that it just wants to replace its Forward Operating Location (FOL) of Manta (Ecuador) by having permanent access to these Colombian bases.⁴ President Barack Obama was compelled to declare himself expressly in favor of the agreement, arguing that

"We have had a security agreement with Colombia for many years now. We have updated that agreement. We have no intent in establishing a U.S. military base in Colombia. This is continuation of assistance that we had been providing them. We have no intention of sending large numbers of additional troops into Colombia, and we have every interest in seeing Colombia and its neighbors operate peacefully".⁵

In a similar way, the U.S. Department of State asserted that

"The DCA does not permit the establishment of any U.S. base in Colombia. It ensures continued U.S. access to specific agreed Colombian facilities in order to undertake mutually agreed upon activities within Colombia. (...) All these military installations are, and will remain, under Colombian control. Command and control, administration, and security will continue to be handled by the Colombian armed forces. All activities conducted at or from these Colombian bases by the United States will take place only with the express prior approval of the Colombian government.(...) The DCA does not signal, anticipate, or authorize an increase in the presence of U.S. military or civilian personnel in Colombia".⁶

In sum, according to Colombia and the U.S., this new military agreement would just be an improved continuation of the preexisting *Plan Colombia* and therefore not affect the sovereignty of other South American countries.⁷

Nevertheless, the content of a U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) document reveals that Washington pursues a deeper strategic aim by the means of this agreement.

³ "Colombia: Uribe culmina en Brasil su gira para explicar el acuerdo militar con EE.UU.", *Infolatam*, 6 August 2009. Available at http://www.infolatam.com/entrada/colombia_uribe_culmina_en_brasil_su_gira-15345.html (date accessed: 4 May 2010)

⁴ Ecuadorian Government decided not to renew its military agreement with Washington and therefore U.S. armed forces had to withdraw from Manta on September 18, 2009. See BENASSI, R., "EE.UU. deja la base de Manta", *BBC Mundo*, 18 September 2009. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/america_latina/2009/09/090917_0238_ecuador_manta_rb.shtml (date accessed: 5 May 2010)

⁵ "Obama denies the U.S. plans to set military bases in Colombia", *Merco Press*, 8 August 2009. Available at <http://en.mercopress.com/2009/08/08/obama-denies-the-us-plans-to-set-military-bases-in-colombia> (date accessed: 5 May 2010)

⁶ U.S. Department of State, Office of Spokesman, "Statement on U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement", 30 October 2009. Available at <http://www.america.gov/st/texttransenglish/2009/November/20091102160346eafas0.3026806.html> (date accessed: 6 May 2010)

⁷ The *Plan Colombia* is fundamentally a program of counternarcotics and military assistance for the Colombian government launched in 1999 by President Andrés Pastrana and, since then, strongly supported by the different U.S. administrations. The *Plan Colombia* shows the increasing militarization of the U.S. policy towards Colombia in the last decades. In a similar sense, see DÍAZ RIVILLAS, B., "Política exterior de los EE.UU. hacia Colombia: el paquete de apoyo de 1.300 millones de dólares de apoyo al Plan Colombia y la región andina", *América Latina Hoy*, Vol. 31, 2002, pp. 152-157.

According to this document, the bases may be used for regional surveillance missions. This implies that they could serve hegemonic purposes⁸:

“Recently, USSOUTHCOM has become interested in establishing a location on the South American continent that could be used both for counter-narcotics operations and as a location from which mobility operations could be executed. Consequently, with the assistance of AMC and USTRANSCOM, USSOUTHCOM has identified Palanquero, Colombia (German Olano Airfield (SKPQ)), as a cooperative security location (CSL). From this location, nearly half of the continent can be covered by a C-17 without refueling. Should suitable fuel be available at the destination, a C-17 could cover the entire continent, with the exception of the Cape Horn region in Chile and Argentina. Until such time that USSOUTHCOM establishes a more robust theater engagement plan, the strategy to place a CSL at Palanquero should be sufficient for air mobility reach on the South American continent”.⁹

In addition, the negotiation process was relatively opaque. The Colombian government has practically hidden the text of the treaty to the Parliament for four months, revealing it only in the last moment.¹⁰ The Parliament expressed its disagreement with this action and claimed to be competent in the signing process of this agreement. In fact, the Colombian Council of State considered in a consultive report that the agreement had to be processed by the Parliament.¹¹ Likewise, this lack of transparency has increased the worry of Colombia’s neighbors, who are suspicious of the official arguments provided by the Colombian and the U.S. governments. As such, it is not surprising that the DCA has revived the specter of U.S. interventionism in regional historical narratives.¹²

III. IMPLICATED ACTORS

What does Colombia expect of this agreement? Colombia is looking to deepen and strengthen its strategic ties with the U.S. In this respect, it is evident that President Uribe seeks to market his country as the main ally of the U.S. in South America. Colombia looks to the U.S. as its essential partner regarding security issues, and in doing so, it has turned its back on the South American political integration process and

⁸ See POLAND, J. L., “New Military Base in Colombia Would Spread Pentagon Reach Throughout Latin America”, *Americas Program, CIP*, 1 June 2009. Available at <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/6148> (date accessed: 18 February 2010); and POLAND, J. L. “Obama's Choice: New Documents Show United States Seeks Colombian Bases for Training and Operations”, *Americas Program, CIP*, 13 August 2009. Available at <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/6351> (date accessed: 7 May 2010)

⁹ U.S. Air Mobility Command, *White Paper, Global En Route Strategy*, 1 March 2009, p. 21-22. Available at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/documents/show/46> (date accessed: 6 May 2010)

¹⁰ “Colombia: Gobierno entrega al Congreso texto del acuerdo firmado con EE.UU.”, *Infolatam*, 3 November 2009. Available at <http://www.infolatam.com/entrada.jsp?id=17014> (date accessed: 7 May 2010)

¹¹ “Gobierno colombiano no llevará al Congreso acuerdo militar con EE.UU.”, *El Comercio*, 26 October 2009, Available at http://ww1.elcomercio.com/noticiaEC.asp?id_noticia=312793&id_seccion=4 (date accessed: 8 May 2010)

¹² PLANAS, R. “South America Wary of U.S. Colombia Base Deal”, *World Politics Review*, 2 September 2009. Available at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article.aspx?id=4244> (date accessed: 8 May 2010)

the UNASUR. This unbalanced policy is leading Colombia to marginalization in its natural political environment. Although enhancing relations with the U.S. may be an attractive foreign policy goal, it does not seem rational to do so at the expense of damaging relations with its closer neighbors. The priority given to the relationship with the U.S. is a personal political gamble of Álvaro Uribe. Indeed, he has decided to build an enhanced relationship with the U.S. without seeking a consensus with the opposition parties. As the handling of this new military agreement shows, Colombia's foreign policy reflects President Uribe's high level of unilateralism in the decision-making process.

As far as the U.S. is concerned, if we believe the Pentagon's document, it seems to be pursuing three interrelated goals by this agreement: reaffirming its strategic position in the region; checking the expansionist ambitions of Caracas and its allies; and, last but not least, limiting the Brazilian leadership in the subcontinent. Thus, the DCA would lay the foundations for a U.S. hegemonic policy in South America.

With the exception of Peru, the U.S.-Colombia military agreement has been received with deep distrust in all South America.¹³ Even in Colombia the agreement has encountered serious resistance, as indicated by the public opinion.¹⁴ Moreover, the opposition has strongly criticized the agreement arguing that it constitutes a violation of Colombia's sovereignty.¹⁵ Very significantly, former President Ernesto Samper has publicly argued that the DCA is harmful to both parties.¹⁶

Colombia shares with its South American neighbors a set of deep ties (cultural, commercial, migratory, and security-related) which generate a strong interdependence. South America is thus the most important area for Colombian interests and Bogotá should not ignore this fact when it comes to assessing the relationship with the U.S. Although the U.S. is an important ally for Colombia, it cannot replace South America as

¹³ FORERO, J., "South American Leaders Assail U.S. Access to Colombian Military Bases", *The Washington Post*, 29 August 2009. Available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2009/08/28/AR2009082803768.html> (date accessed: 8 May 2010)

¹⁴ In this sense, several Colombian NGOs and labor unions are campaigning against the military agreement, see MATIZ, G., "1.030 organizaciones sociales y políticas convocan al pueblo colombiano", *Kaosenlared.net*, 24 August 2009, Available at <http://www.kaosenlared.net/noticia/1.030-organizaciones-sociales-politicas-convocan-pueblo-colombiano> (date accessed: 8 May 2010).

¹⁵ The opposition is also against the immunity status that the agreement gives to the U.S. armed forces operating in Colombia. See "Genera incertidumbre firma de acuerdo entre Colombia y EU", *El Financiero*, 31 October 2009. Available at <http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/ElFinanciero/Portal/cfpages/contentmgr.cfm?docId=225474&docTipo=1&orderby=docid&sortby=ASC> (date accessed: 9 May 2010); and "Rechaza oposición colombiana acuerdo militar con EU", *El Financiero*, 29 October 2009. Available at <http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/ElFinanciero/Portal/cfpages/contentmgr.cfm?docId=225102&docTipo=1&orderby=docid&sortby=ASC> (date accessed: 9 May 2010).

¹⁶ SAMPER PIZANO, E., "Bases militares estadounidenses en Colombia", *El País*, 12 November 2009. Available at http://www.elpais.com/articulo/opinion/Bases/militares/estadounidenses/Colombia/elpepiopi/20091112elpepiopi_5/Tes (date accessed: 9 May 2010).

the cornerstone of Colombian foreign policy. Therefore the Andean country needs to reconsider its foreign and security policy in order to implement a more balanced one between its alliance with the U.S. and its natural South American ties. Colombian self-exclusion from the South American integration process is negative for Colombia and for the rest of the region.

In the region prevails a widespread feeling that it is time for South America to emancipate from U.S. influence and to become a new and independent pole of power in the international system.¹⁷ In this sense, it seems that the majority of Southern American leaders have understood that their region needs to be politically united to make its voice heard¹⁸. So, given this regional context, it is easy to understand why the DCA has been perceived as an illegitimate interference in domestic South American issues and as an attempt to hinder South American integration process.

Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia consider the new U.S.-Colombian military agreement to constitute a direct threat to their national security and to South American regional security as a whole. For the so-called "Bolivarian axis" this agreement is a new expression of the historical interventionist policy of Washington towards Latin America. According to these countries, this policy has not changed despite the arrival of Obama to the White House. Caracas and its allies in the region demand a fully sovereign South America free of foreign troops and therefore hope the agreement never comes into force. This maximalist stance is also based on ideological foundations. Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa and Evo Morales have seized this agreement to exacerbate their anti-American rhetoric, stating that there is a serious risk of war in the region.¹⁹ Thus, it turns out that the DCA has provided anti-American leaders with new arguments to be used as a tool of domestic policy inside their own countries.

On the other hand, Brazil's stance is driven more by material concerns than ideological ones. In a milder way than Caracas, Brazil is also opposed to the use of Colombian bases by the U.S. armed forces. Luis Inácio Lula da Silva's government considers that the strategic balance of the region has been broken by the DCA. In this respect, it is essential to remember that Brazil has a clear vocation of leadership in the region and it is firmly betting to make progress in the political integration of the subcontinent. Given this context, Brasilia asserts that this agreement disrupts this political process. Brazil plays an essential role in the South American integration process. Thus, Brazil needs South America to consolidate itself as an international power and South America needs Brazil to become a new pole of power in the new multipolar world of the 21st century. Furthermore, only Brasilia's leadership can conciliate ideological divergences in the

¹⁷ In this sense, see TOKATLIAN, J. G., "Suramérica y las bases en Colombia", *El País*, 21 August 2009, p. 23.

¹⁸ See SANAHUJA, J. A., "Regionalismo e integración en América Latina: balances y perspectivas", *Pensamiento Iberoamericano*, N° 0, 2007, pp. 75-76.

¹⁹ So, Chávez, using his typical grandiloquent and demagogic style, said "winds of war have begun to blow in South America". See MENA, P., "Suramérica se pone en estado de alerta", *El País*, 10 August 2009. Internet,

http://www.elpais.com/articulo/internacional/Suramerica/pone/estado/alerta/elpepuint/20090810elpepuint_2/Tes (date accessed: 9 May 2010)

region, making possible a détente with the US which in turn opens the way for a more cooperative relationship. In recent years, Brazil has been the driving force of South American integration, and so its integration initiatives, such as the South American Council of Defense, have received a solid backing by the rest of the countries of the region.

Finally, there is an interstate actor concerned in this crisis: UNASUR and its recently created Council of Defense. UNASUR embodies the newest integration process in South America and it is an intergovernmental organization which is undergoing a phase of institutional development and consolidation. In the second semester of 2009, the U.S.-Colombian agreement has practically monopolized UNASUR summits.²⁰ Consequently, Bogotá has warned that it is willing to withdraw from UNASUR in the case that this organization becomes a forum to criticize its sovereign foreign and security policy decisions.²¹ Indeed, the Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs Jaime Bermúdez did not assist to the UNASUR summit held in Quito on November 27, 2009.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION

We are faced with an issue that directly concerns the regional security and the geopolitical balance of South America. The permanent military presence of a world superpower determines the strategies of the countries of the region as it represents a clear limit to their projects. Furthermore, the DCA threatens the political integration process of South America in three ways.

First, it exacerbates the border tensions between Colombia and its neighbors Venezuela and Ecuador, introducing a new element of friction in their complex border relationship. For this reason, in fighting narcoterrorism in Colombia, the U.S. must avoid getting involved in operations in proximity to the borders of these countries. Moreover, the agreement poisons the political debate and arouses nationalist feelings. As such, the reaction against the treaty has intensified the populist discourse regarding the threat posed by an external enemy, which is used as a way to distract attention from domestic problems. It is evident that these dynamics are notoriously harmful to a climate of integration. In short, U.S. military permanent presence in Colombia generates worry and tension in the region and puts at risk the political integration process represented by UNASUR.

Secondly, this controversy highlights the present limits of the regional political integration in South America. UNASUR is a new organization of intergovernmental nature which has neither the competences nor the mechanisms to solve these kinds of

²⁰ U.S.-Colombia military agreement has been the most important issue in the following UNASUR Summits: Quito (Ecuador), August 10, 2009; Bariloche (Argentina), August 28, 2009; Quito, September 16, 2009; Quito, November 27, 2009.

²¹ “Colombia no descarta abandonar la Unasur”, *Infolatam*, 16 September 2009. Available at http://www.infolatam.com/entrada/colombia_no_descarta_abandonar_la_unasur-16084.html (date accessed: 9 May 2010)

differences. Therefore, this institution becomes a scenario of confrontation, which exacerbates differences instead of solving them.²² The risk that this situation entails is that South American presidents lose their patience with this organization, finally considering it as a useless forum and carrying it into a deadlock.²³

Thirdly, the generalized rejection of a stable and enhanced U.S. military presence in Colombia reveals that there is a deep mistrust towards the U.S. in the region. Despite Obama's good image in Latin America, one must not forget that anti-Americanism is a deeply-rooted trend in the Latin American political culture which represents a serious barrier to a relationship based on mutual trust. The DCA only further damages U.S. image in the region. It is true that it enhances American hard power (*potestas*) in South America but at the expense of its moral authority (*auctoritas*). This imbalance leads to a loss of normative power and generates rejection of U.S. global leadership.

South American integration has enough endogenous problems yet (such as a strong nationalism in all the implied countries; a sacralization of sovereignty and a consequent rejection of supranationality; institutional weakness; ideological divisions; and old border conflicts) to add an exogenous obstacle represented by an obstructionist U.S. policy. Hence, the U.S. should enact a policy change in favor of South American integration.

V. PROSPECTS: TOWARDS A NEW U.S. POLICY

The DCA was signed on October 30, 2009 and it is in force since then.²⁴ It is clear that neither Colombia nor the U.S. are willing to renounce its implementation because that would be interpreted as a sign of political weakness by the other concerned countries. Consequently, the U.S. should take the following steps in order to deactivate the negative implications of the agreement. First, it must give formal guarantees that the Colombian bases will be used only to deal with internal affairs of Colombia. In fact, the actual use of the bases will determine the evolution of the situation. If the U.S. ultimately decides to use the bases for hegemonic purposes, the prospects for instability will inexorably increase.

Second, the U.S. must offset the negative repercussion of this agreement with a new political boost which prioritizes a more comprehensive approach over a narrow national interest one. Although a war seems actually an almost impossible scenario, one cannot ignore that the U.S. bases represent a new factor of instability in the region that hampers a cooperative climate among South American countries. On the contrary, it is clear that if the U.S. carries on with its hard power approach towards the subcontinent, it will be acting as an external spoiler of South American integration. In effect, this kind of

²² BASTENIER, M. A., "Unasur: segunda vuelta", *El País*, 26 August 2009, p. 6.

²³ "Unasur: pacto militar de Colombia y EE.UU. frena avances en medidas de confianza", *Infolatam*, 16 September 2009. Available at <http://www.infolatam.com/entrada.jsp?id=16085> (date accessed: 10 May 2010)

²⁴ U.S. Department of State, Office of Spokesman, op. cit.

approach to Latin America is politically counterproductive because it exacerbates ideological divisions and revives border conflicts in the region. Therefore, the U.S. needs to minimize the militaristic feature of its Latin American policy subordinating it always to a wider political-diplomatic approach.

The presidential election of Barack Obama created hope for the opening of a new era in the U.S.-Latin America relations, remarkably improving the image of the U.S. in the region.²⁵ This opportunity should not be wasted. Although it is obvious that Latin America in general, and South America in particular, is not a political priority for the White House in this term, the U.S. cannot allow itself to continue ignoring the region or by approaching it mainly in military terms. It is to be hoped that the delayed appointment of the new Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Professor Arturo Valenzuela, a prominent expert on Latin American affairs, will enhance the diplomatic attention of the U.S. to the region.

The Bush administration's doctrinal unilateralism together with its neglect to Latin America seriously damaged U.S. prestige in the subcontinent. In order to reverse this situation, during the 2008 presidential campaign, Obama promised to create a partnership with Latin America.²⁶ A review of his first year in office shows that progress has not been made in this sense.²⁷ In fact, in 2009, Obama's Latin American policy has run into several problems, including the coup in Honduras and the Cuban embargo at OAS Summit.

The creation of a partnership requires that the U.S. support political integration in the region. In this respect, it is necessary to dismantle the idea that South American integration is contrary to U.S. national interests. This argument is based on an iron unipolarist vision of international relations that considers emergent powers as a threat for U.S. global primacy. This vision stubbornly ignores the constant evolution of the international system towards multipolarity. In this respect, the U.S. should not see an increasingly powerful Brazil as a rival, but as a partner to cooperate with in the solution of the present challenges of the hemisphere.

Therefore, it is essential to show that successful South American integration, far from being negative, would have a beneficial impact for the U.S. in a multidimensional way. As Council on Foreign Relations expert Shannon O'Neill has remarked:

²⁵ Corporación Latinobarómetro, *Informe Latinobarómetro 2009*, November 2009, p. 98-99. Available at <http://www.latinobarometro.org/> (date accessed: 22 February 2010)

²⁶ See "A New Partnership for the Americas", *BarackObama.com*, 2008. Available at http://obama.3cdn.net/f579b3802a3d35c8d5_9aymvyqpo.pdf (date accessed: 22 February 2010); and OBAMA, B., "Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: Renewing U.S. Leadership in the Americas", *BarackObama.com*, Miami, Florida, 23 May 2008. Available at http://www.barackobama.com/2008/05/23/remarks_of_senator_barack_obam_68.php (date accessed: 10 May 2010)

²⁷ PADGETT, T., "Obama's Latin American Policy Looks Like Bush's", *Time*, 3 December 2009. Available at <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1945440,00.html> (date accessed: 10 May 2010)

“A European Union-style community would improve security, stability and prosperity for its members. On a most basic level, greater wealth and economic growth would benefit U.S. economic interests. But South American integration would also bring new diplomatic dividends, creating a stronger counterpart with which the United States might tackle areas of mutual concern in the Western Hemisphere, including natural disasters, climate change, illegal networks, and economic growth and cooperation”.²⁸

The U.S. must take into account this fact and design a strategy which decidedly favors South American integration. In this sense, the U.S. should commit itself to support regional integration in South America as it did in Europe after the Second World War. As is known, in the 40's and 50's, the U.S. acted as an external federator for Europe and should act in a similar way with regard to South America. Thus, Washington should recognize UNASUR as the primary interlocutor in the region, creating an institutionalized dialogue at the highest political level.²⁹ Bilateral military agreements by themselves are inadequate and even counterproductive tools for building a true partnership. So, in order to favor integration, it is necessary to create a dynamic of cooperation which needs a regional and multilateral approach.

²⁸ O'NEILL, S., “The Promise and Perils of South American Integration”, *World Politics Review*, 12 January 2009. Available at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article.aspx?id=3148> (date accessed: 10 May 2010) Furthermore, regional integration reduces ideological differences among the implied countries and contributes decisively to create a structural peace. This would be clearly beneficial for South America and for the U.S.

²⁹ The letter sent on January 19, 2010 by the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to UNASUR Pro-Tempore President Rafael Correa seems to go in this sense. See Embassy of Ecuador, Washington, DC, “U.S. agrees to open dialogue with South American nations”, 21 January 2010. Available at <http://www.ecuador.org/blog/?p=613> (date accessed: 10 May 2010).