

Western Hemisphere Perspective on Maritime Strategy

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There are challenges and opportunities for an international strategy in the Western Hemisphere. The challenges in the hemisphere can be summarized as: Transnational Criminal Organizations (TOC), Illegal Trafficking, Terrorism/Gangs, and Instability in some countries.

Challenges

TOC are in some ways the result of a successful – but illegal – international business, known today as narco-trafficking, and many multiple-related criminal activities. Perhaps their biggest advantage is that they use all of the instruments of power available to them in a comprehensive, coordinated and synchronized long-term strategy, without ethics or respect for human dignity. Their power is growing so much, that many times they are more powerful than law enforcement institutions and in some instances more powerful than nation-states.

Illegal Trafficking includes that of humans, narcotics, weapons, money, and smuggling of goods. These illegal businesses are generating corruption, extortion via kidnapping and assassination, and in some cases reducing governability, as is the case in some countries in Central America. And once narco-traffickers acquire fully-submersible vehicles – which they will – only naval vessels equipped with submarine detection systems will be able to locate them. The connection between law enforcement and security will have to be stronger.

Terrorism/Gangs: Colombia and Peru are still fighting terrorist organizations, but gangs continue to exert influence in Central America, Mexico, Brazil, and other countries in the region.

Instability remains a problem in some countries of Central America which are transit countries for narco-traffickers, and are also affected by TOC and Gangs. Another source of instability is illegal migrations, a lucrative business for TOC which creates refugees and illegal immigrants, not only from the south, but also from Africa and Asia, through South and Central American corridors.

Many times, these illegal activities present threats to the security of countries, and in some cases, turn them into failing states.

Another factor to consider is the fact that China is the first, second or third largest commercial partner to most of the countries in Latin America. For example, Brazil – the largest economy in South America, and 22nd largest in the world – shares 41.2% of its trade with China and only 26.7% with the US.

Other challenges to cooperation at sea in the hemisphere there are three main tendencies: first, those that want to have cooperation in the hemisphere without the US; second, those that want to have a good and healthy cooperation with the US based on common challenges and opportunities as partners; and third, those that would like to have freedom of choice on whether or not to cooperate. Sovereignty, politics and ideologies play a large role in these matters.

During the 2007 International Seapower Symposium (ISS-19), at which *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (CS-21) was introduced to 104 heads of maritime services around the world, the theme of narco-trafficking in the Americas was presented as a threat to the security of the states in the Americas. Chiefs of Coast Guards showed interest, but not Chiefs of navies. Since then, narco-trafficking has permeated deeply into countries of the region, affecting the stability and security of some. Since 2007, Brazil became the second-largest consumer of cocaine in the world, and is a transit country for cocaine to West Africa. Mexico is now the largest producer of amphetamines in the world, and is the fourth-highest country in homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, after Venezuela, Honduras and El Salvador; these two last countries are cocaine transit countries in the Central American Corridor. And with regard to cocaine-producing countries, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia remain the largest producers in the world.

Opportunities for Cooperation

Since the annual UNITAS exercise started in the 1950's, the navies of the Americas have acquired concepts of interoperability that could be the basis for coalition operations at sea against the common challenges in the Western Hemisphere. After 2007, navies began to recognize that to differing degrees, TOC, narco-trafficking, and terrorism/gangs, were affecting the stability and security of the region. Today, there is a recognition among navies of the serious threat of these challenges to the security and stability of their countries. Through their respective Congresses, the US, Brazil, Mexico, Peru and Colombia (to name a few) have made important changes to their laws, which have advanced legislation to empower the military to successfully combat the threats, both individually or in coordination with other agencies and countries.

From the first to the last page, the 2015 “refresh” of CS-21 (referred to as CS-21R) refers to TOC, illegal trafficking, and terrorism/gangs – as opposed to the National Interests of the US – and all have been declared matters of national security. Because all are common challenges for all countries in the Western Hemisphere, it is a logical starting point for successful cooperation. In accordance with CS-21R, *three* of the five essential functions of the maritime services are related to these challenges: *Sea control, power projection and maritime security, and all*

domain access. But also, CS-21R stresses the idea that “naval forces are stronger when we operate jointly and together with allies and partners... working together in formal and informal networks, we can address the threats to our mutual maritime security interest.”¹

Section II of CS-21R specifically mentions the Western Hemisphere, and the need to “strengthen partnership and capacity ... (in order) to protect the homeland and counter illicit trafficking and transnational criminal organizations ... (and the three maritime services provide the means, training and engagement to) ... increase interoperability with regional partners and strengthen their capacity to interdict transnational criminal organizations.”² Some countries are already working in this direction with the US, particularly Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Chile, in support of Central American and Caribbean nations. Some regional initiatives are starting to flourish.

Since the 1990s, and through bilateral agreements, maritime countries in the Western Hemisphere have acquired interdiction capabilities and capacities. The individual and bilateral efforts had been partially successful, but TOC, illegal trafficking and terrorists/gangs have not been defeated, and in some instances they had been very successful. *Is this because of the lack of a “Western Hemisphere International and Comprehensive Strategy?”* Perhaps it is time to speed up the tempo and be more effective in combating these threats, just as ADM John M. Richardson is proposing to the U.S. Navy: the continuous evaluation of the changing environment, and “designing” common objectives to be achieved in the short and medium term, which in turn is the basis to create the conditions for “working together.”

In order to facilitate “working together,” the United Nations *Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances*, as well as the *Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*, and various Conventions on Terrorism (and other interrelated themes), are great frameworks to empower countries to create the legal structure for cooperation and partnership, because no one country acting alone can be successful. Countries can and need to help one another as each makes advances in the fight against these challenges. But the most important asset needed is *the will* of each country to work together. Not addressing and meeting the challenges to the region will continue to degrade the well-being of millions of human beings, as well as the loss of life. Therefore, countries cannot afford to wait for consensus to attack these threats. We need to find a starting point which at least some the nations of the regions can agree on. Once the train starts moving, other nations will jump on board.

¹ A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power, p. 2

² A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power, p. 18

What are the conditions that will facilitate the gathering of the capacities and capabilities of the countries of the Western Hemisphere to face the challenges outlined above?

What would an international maritime strategy to address these challenges look like?

What can be done in the short term to increase both maritime cooperation and interoperability successfully?

How do we overcome political and ideological differences in order to protect millions of human beings who are affected by the threats on a daily basis?