

1990

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Recommended Citation

Jarpa, Sergio G. (1990) "The Defense of Shipping off South America," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 43 : No. 3 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol43/iss3/6>

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The Defense of Shipping off South America

Rear Admiral Sergio G. Jarpa, Chilean Navy

The United States and the Latin American countries are all dependent on shipping to sustain their economies, both in peace and in war. Because of this common interest, it is imperative that all these countries seek a mutually beneficial agreement for wartime defense of that shipping. Therefore, I propose a realistic approach for the defense of the inter-American shipping routes inside the security zone, as defined by the Rio de Janeiro Pact.

Because political circumstances in the Americas have changed since the signing in 1947 of the Rio de Janeiro Pact, which provides the mechanism for collective defense of the continent against external aggression should global war occur, it will be very difficult to reach regional agreements. Latin American foreign policy has become much more independent than it was 43 years ago. Each country now looks first to its own interests before becoming involved in regional agreements. This independence results primarily from a general maturing of their foreign policies and secondly from the declining share of U.S.-produced weapons and equipment in their arsenals.

While the Rio de Janeiro Pact provides the mechanism for collective defense, it does not provide for the creation of a suitable military command organization to control that defense. Military advice, which is provided by the Inter-American Defense Board, is implemented individually by the member states, if they agree upon it, through their own internal chains of command.

Since the Rio Pact does not provide for a unified command in charge of the defense of the security zone, what is its function? It is to stress the individual responsibility of each member state to defend its own maritime jurisdictional area. (In contrast, U.S. unified commands not only have

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responsibility over U.S. jurisdictional areas, but also over areas included in the Rio de Janeiro Pact.)

Rather than a system wherein each participant defends shipping in its own area, or a system with the agreed upon collective participation of *all* the members' states, perhaps it would be beneficial to divide and organize the security zone, as defined in the Rio de Janeiro Treaty, into "common interest areas." Defense of these areas could be arranged by the United States and interested Latin American countries independently of what happens elsewhere.

Within this concept, there would be no need to develop defensive plans for the area as a whole. Neither would it be necessary to establish a unified command. What would be needed is a common doctrine for naval control of shipping—mutual support agreements between the authorities of the different areas and a suitable communications network for coordination and exchange of information.

The Importance of Shipping

In a protracted global war the United States may be denied its current supply sources from abroad. Import-dependent for almost 30 percent of its oil, a shift of suppliers from the Persian Gulf to Latin American oil-producing countries such as Mexico, Venezuela, or Ecuador may well be necessary before the U.S. strategic petroleum reserve is depleted—approximately 90 days after the start of a war. With the exception of chromium and the platinum-group metals which are exclusively South African exports, the vital flow of raw materials to the United States can be sustained through Latin American-produced oil, copper, coal, aluminum, bauxite and manganese.

At the same time, the Latin American countries are heavily dependent on their seaborne trade to sustain their economies. Although individual requirements vary with each case, generally the Latin American countries export raw materials and require finished goods from abroad. Thus, if the sea routes are restricted due to the effect of a global war, the United States will be required to provide to Latin American countries the machinery, special tools and base chemicals no longer available to them from European and Asian suppliers.

This interchange of materials and goods inside the continent would depend on safe passage of shipping along the Americas' east and west coasts as well as those criss-crossing the Caribbean. For this reason, among others, the Panama Canal would continue to be an important artery for commodity exchange. Should it be closed, most of the traffic would have to be rerouted through the Drake Passage or the Strait of Magellan. This would greatly enhance the importance of the coastal routes around South America and create a new chokepoint in the Southern Passages.

The Threat

Although a global conflict is unlikely, we need to consider the possibility of such a war and its most likely characteristics. Probably it would be both conventional and long. Shipping importance would increase as the conflict progressed.

Soviet submarines and mine-layers of all sorts are the most likely means of sinking ships, especially in the chokepoints of the Caribbean, the approaches to the Panama Canal, the Southern Passages, and the approaches to the most important ports of the region. But the threat is not only external. The Marxist-terrorist groups inside the region are a critical concern. These, supported and directed through communist parties, are a very significant opposition against pro-Western political policies, and they present an imposing threat against those installations which support shipping activities and communications networks.

International Agreements and Political Considerations

The participation of the Latin American countries in a global conflict would depend on the nature of international agreements and political issues.

International Agreements. The Act of Chapultepec, signed in 1945, was the first in a series of treaties developed between the United States and the Latin American countries to enhance mutual support in times of aggression. "This act declared that if any aggression across boundaries established by the treaty occurs, or threatens, the signatories will consult to agree upon measures up to and including the use of armed force to prevent or repel it."¹

The Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, universally known as the Rio de Janeiro Treaty, signed in 1947, "provides for collective self-defense should any member be subject to external attack."² Cuba was excluded from the Rio Treaty in 1960.

The Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS) was signed in Bogotá, Colombia, in April 1948. One purpose of the organization is "to provide for common action on the part of those States in the event of an aggression."³ Article 25 states that "If the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any American State should be affected by an armed attack or by an act of aggression that is not an armed attack, or by an extra-continental conflict, or by a conflict between two or more American States, or by any other factor or situation that may endanger the peace of America, the American States in furtherance of the principles of continental solidarity or collective self-defense, shall apply the measures and procedures established in the special treaties on the subject. . . ."⁴

The OAS has a permanent council empowered to call meetings of the foreign ministers to deal with emergencies. Further, Article 43 states: "In case of an armed attack within the territory of an American state or within the region of security delimited by treaties in force, a Meeting of Consultation [of Ministers of Foreign Affairs] shall be held without delay. Such Meeting shall be called immediately by the Chairman of the Council of the Organization, who shall at the same time call a meeting of the Council itself."⁵

The Rio Treaty was modified in 1975 in San José, Republic of Costa Rica, by the Protocol of Amendment to the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance. The ratification is still pending for most subscriber countries.⁶ The revision of the treaty was part of a comprehensive study made by a special committee of the Inter-American System to enable the system to respond adequately to updated regional and world circumstances.

The most important amendments were made to: Article 3, which establishes the obligation to assist an attacked state *only* if the state is a party of the Rio Treaty; Article 9, which incorporates the United Nation's definition of aggression, but does not include as a case of aggression the attack on civilian aircraft and merchant ships of a state; and Article 4, which describes the new geographical area of application (which excludes Greenland because it is not geographically American territory), and reduces the width of the zone bordering the United States and Canada in the Pacific Ocean.

There are also some regional agreements related to security and common defense against external aggression. Most of these agreements were signed between the United States and the Central American countries and the eastern Caribbean states. Three of these regional agreements are related to this study:

- The treaty between the United States and the Republic of Panama, which addresses the defense and neutrality of the Panama Canal.
- The Central American Democratic Community, signed by Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador, and by observers Colombia, the United States and Venezuela, to provide mutual aid in case of external aggression.
- The Regional Security System, signed by the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States and supported by the United States, which promotes the defense of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence among the members.⁷

Therefore, we can say that although treaties and agreements between Latin America and the United States provide the legal framework for military intervention in the defense of the region, none of these agreements provide for the organization of a unified implementation of military operations. The Rio de Janeiro Treaty, in particular, stresses the individual right (choice) of each country to implement the recommendations of the Meeting of Consultation and the individual responsibility for the defense of national shipping.

Political Considerations. Although everyone agrees that the defense of American shipping is important, the implementation of military measures to carry out that defense will depend ultimately on the political considerations of each country.

For example, in accordance with the Charter of the American States, a member state could request that a meeting of consultation be called in order to obtain the support of the remaining members of the O.A.S. to fight a war against an external foe. However, the Rio de Janeiro Treaty stipulates that defensive measures apply only if armed attack against the state takes place within the region described in the treaty. Therefore, a war that starts in Europe or Asia, even if affecting the interests of the United States—or becomes global—might not constitute an obligation for Latin American countries to participate.

In considered retrospect of what happened during the First and Second World Wars, the initial choice of the Latin American countries at the beginning of such a conflict might be to remain neutral. It is generally agreed, however, that with the exception of Cuba and other possible Marxist states, the Latin American countries would ultimately support the United States and the Western alliance. The moment when each country, or the O.A.S. as a block, changes from neutrality to a belligerent status would depend on the state of their relations with the United States—but mainly on how the war is affecting their particular interests.

Latin American countries in general are so interdependent that it is almost certain that the interchange of raw materials and goods between them and the rest of the world would be seriously affected, giving them cause to abandon their neutrality. Because of the strategic importance of the Caribbean, the first countries to change from neutrality to a pro-Western belligerent policy would probably be the Caribbean and Central American states, as well as Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela.

Naval Control of Shipping

Plans. The Organization of American States provides for the constitution of the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB) to offer advice and recommendations regarding the collective self-defense of the American continent against external aggression. In peacetime this advice is given through the permanent council to each member state, but it is the choice of each state to accept or reject such recommendations.

To control shipping, the IADB developed the “Plan Para la Coordinacion de la Defensa del Trafico Maritimo Interamericano” (PLANDEFTRAMI). This is not an operational plan. It is a recommended way for signatory countries to organize and coordinate the control of inter-American shipping. The PLANDEFTRAMI manual provides common doctrine for the

organization, coordination and control of merchant shipping. But it does not provide either an organization or a plan to develop joint military operations for the defense of this shipping.



- PLANDEFTRAMI suggested zones.
- - - - - Division between Atlantic and Pacific areas of responsibility 92°W).
- ➔ Air bases.
- ⚓ Naval bases.

For the control of shipping, the PLANDEFTRAMI suggests the division of the security zone, as defined in the Rio de Janeiro Pact, into five areas: North, Central, South Atlantic, Peru and Chile, as was advised by the Interamerican Naval Committee for the Defense of Naval Shipping in 1965. The PLANDEFTRAMI also suggests a regional approach for the naval control of shipping through local agreements between the countries included in each area. This suggestion was implemented in 1965 by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. They created the organization of Area Maritima Atlantico Sur (AMAS) to coordinate shipping in the South Atlantic area.

Acknowledging the absence of any inter-American unified command, the plan modestly recommends nothing but the creation of an office to originate, relay and receive all information concerning control of shipping between the higher authorities of each of the areas covered. Additionally, it considers the

employment of the existing Inter-American Naval Communications Network. This network, operated by the U.S. Navy from Farfan, Panama, presents several limitations since participating navies cannot communicate directly with each other. They must go through Farfan to relay to other countries.

In case of an armed attack of extra-hemispheric origin against one or more American states, a meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs must be called, and a defense committee must be established to advise the ministers. In turn, this newly established defense committee could request advice from the IADB regarding the application of collective security measures to fulfill the existing treaties. However, since the IADB is employed only in the context of an advisory board, its recommendations, and those of the defense committee, are not mandatory for member states. Therefore, each country must decide for itself what it will do about the defense of merchant shipping. At the same time, the U.S. government, in accordance with its own defense policy, has divided the world into areas of responsibility which are assigned to unified commands.

The U.S. commands that have responsibilities in areas under the Rio de Janeiro Pact are: The U.S. Atlantic Command, covering the Atlantic Ocean from the North Pole to the South Pole and the Pacific Ocean east of 92 degrees west; the U.S. Pacific Command, which is responsible for everything in that ocean westward of 92 degrees west; and the Southern Command, responsible for the defense of the Panama Canal. For this reason, CINCLANTFLT, which has responsibility over almost 75 percent of the area considered in the Rio de Janeiro Treaty, has developed an Oporder for naval control of shipping, which establishes the organization and protection of U.S. and Nato allied shipping in the area. The Oporder also assumes that CINCLANTFLT will retain the responsibility for naval control and defense of shipping in the area until other allied arrangements are made.

So, in keeping with this arrangement, and to gain close cooperation and coordination with the Latin American navies in the control of shipping, CINCLANT has established an agreement with the Latin American naval authorities to develop plans and conduct exercises for the control of shipping. In this way, a few Latin American navies are participating in the U.S. Atlantic Fleet's control-of-shipping exercises, such as the "Export Gold" series which is conducted biennially and the "Expanded Sea" series which is carried out in even years and linked to Nato Shipping & Control exercises "Trade Dagger" or "Sea Supply." The exercises are limited to the practice of naval control of shipping and include communication procedures and messages for the ships. However, the defense of merchant ships against a threat, or the assignment of escort forces to convoys, is not played. The tactical publications and Oporders for these exercises are provided by CINCLANTFLT and are Nato publications. This requires authorization for release to the Latin

American navies and results in non-familiarity problems for participating non-Nato nations.

The only occasion when the protection of shipping is practiced is during the Inter-American War Games, sponsored by the Latin American naval war colleges on a yearly basis. Each game is directed by the navy hosting that year's game. These games, however, are educational in nature only. They were not devised to fulfill the requirements of the IADB plan—to serve as a complement to CINCLANTFLT exercises, or to exercise real forces. Therefore, they contribute little to the protection of merchant ships.

Means. The Latin American navies are designed primarily to provide security against threats originating in the region, especially from neighboring states. Because the countries of the region do not have the resources to purchase the most advanced systems, the assets of these navies generally are older and less capable than those of the United States.

The greatest hindrance to an effective collective defense against external aggression is a lack of consensus about the threat itself and the necessity to form a mutual defense force. There are also bilateral problems which promote distrust between some of the countries. Because their arms come from many sources, there is little standardization. This in turn leads to the absence of common doctrine for the efficient and effective employment of the various types of weapon systems at the operational and tactical level, especially in the maritime environment.

Because of the variety of their systems, origin, manufacturers, types, and age, logistical standardization in Latin America is also very difficult to achieve. The problem is so acute that even within the Armed Forces of a single country there is no standardization. It is not even possible to develop this in the short term because each government is driven by its particular political, economical and military interests when determining the source for and the types of weapons it is going to buy. Very importantly, the weapon systems are chosen not in a global context, but with regional situations in mind, with regard especially to potential conflicts with neighbors.

However, all is not dark: through participation in the *Unitas* Operation, which has been conducted for the last 29 years, the American navies have taken the first steps toward operational standardization.

In a global war, with the U.S. Navy almost entirely committed in the North Atlantic and other strategic areas, the Latin American navies would have the main responsibility for dealing with the Soviet threat to strategic shipping in their waters. Their greatest limitations lie in their modest ASW capability and their lack of mine warfare assets. Some Latin American air forces could support the navies while they are operating near the coast or in close range to air force bases.

The Latin American navies do not have undersea surveillance systems, aircraft, or attack submarines capable of detecting hostile submarines before they are within attack range of merchant traffic. This would leave the defense of the convoys in the hands of surface ships which, in turn, are severely limited in the employment of their ASW weapons because their sonar detection capabilities are short-range. The best antisubmarine assets of the Latin American navies are the *Oberon* and German-type diesel submarines, but since they do not have either the speed or the endurance to provide escort for convoys, they can be used only to protect the approaches to vital chokepoints. Furthermore, Latin American mine countermeasure ships are few and old, and they lack the capability to hunt and neutralize the advanced mines which a powerful opponent could sow in their waters.

Latin American countries have, however, suitable bases to sustain naval operations against an external threat, and if the monetary resources are available, new bases can be prepared in a reasonable period of time. Galapagos Island, Easter Island, Juan Fernandez Island and Dawson Island in the Magellan Strait are especially well-situated to serve as advance bases for ASW forces in the Pacific coast and Drake Passage. On the Atlantic coast, apart from continental bases in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, the Falkland/Malvinas Islands could be important for ASW operations.

Nevertheless, because the Latin American countries have a great variety of European weapon systems, and only a small stock of spare parts and ammunition, it would be difficult to sustain operations for long. The destruction of the European industrial base in war would further limit the availability of such items. Hence, Latin American countries must acquire the capability to manufacture or obtain the required weapon systems through the United States.

An Alternative Approach

In accordance with the Rio de Janeiro Pact and as established in PLANDEFTRAMI, each country is responsible for the control and protection of shipping in its own national maritime area. But this does not allow for the best employment of scarce available means. Without a concentration of forces (and an economy of means), the protection of chokepoints and convoys is left to the scarce assets of each country. That won't work. A solution to this would be the integration of all the forces of the Pact under a unified command for the defense of shipping inside the security zone. However, we have already discussed the problems associated with such a plan and have concluded that it is not feasible. The best solution for the defense of shipping inside the security zone would be to divide the zone into six independent areas.

Latin American Naval Forces

Countries	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Colombia	Ecuador	Mexico	Peru	Uruguay	Venezuela
Attack Carrier (Med.)	1	1							
Destroyer Missile	6	6	6				2		
Frigates Missile	9	10	2	4			4		6
Corvettes Missile					6				
Submarines	7	9	4	4	2		10		3
Cruiser							2		
Fast Attack Craft Missile			4		6		6		6
Destroyers Gun		9	1		1	3	4	3	
Mine Warfare	6	6							
A/S Aircraft	9	6 ¹					7	6	6
Maritime Patrol Aircraft	16	10 ¹	6			21	6	1	3
A/S Helos	18	35	11	4			17		13
Attack Aircraft (Air- to-Surface Missiles)	13								

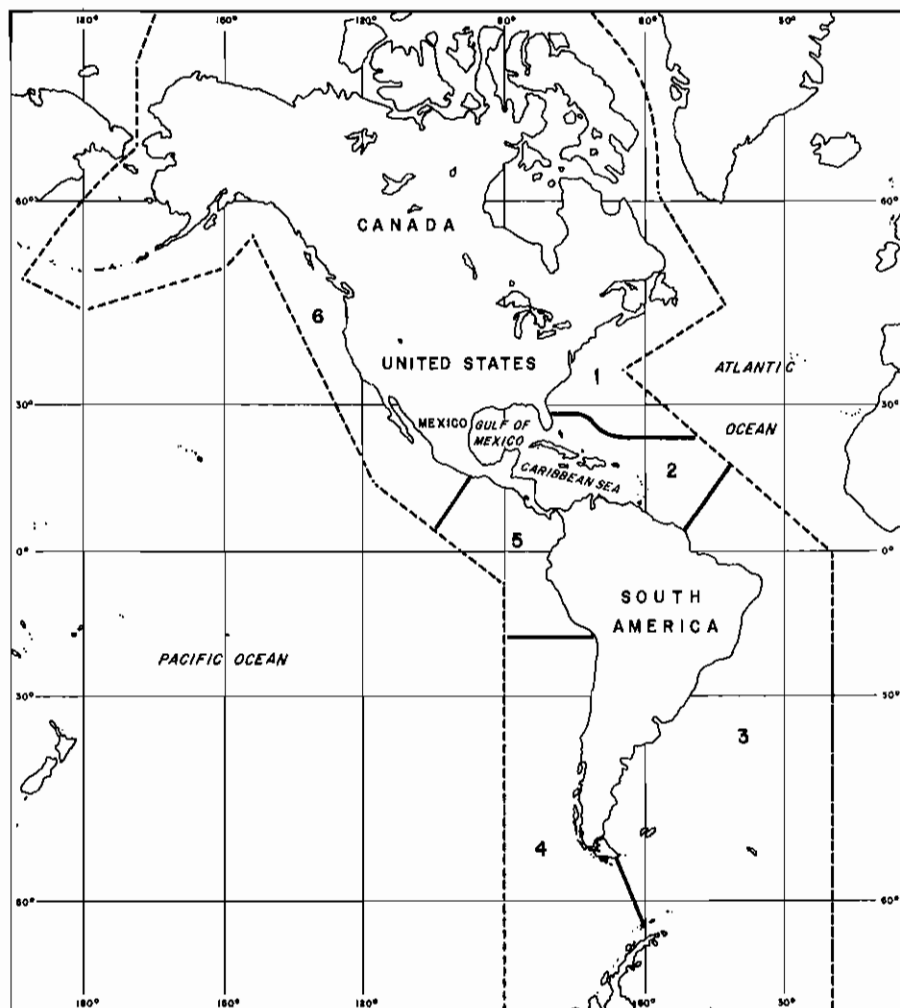
Table I

¹These aircraft belong to the Brazilian Air Force.

This division would modify the areas recommended in PLANDEFTRAMI and take into consideration common political and geographical issues of the countries within the region, as well as the capabilities of the various Latin American navies:

Area 1. The east coast of North America, north of the area of responsibility of COMNAVFORCARIB. The defense of this area would be the responsibility of CINCLANT, in accordance with Nato agreement, without the participation of Latin American countries.

Area 2. The northern border follows the area of responsibility of COMNAVFORCARIB when Nato control of shipping is in effect; the southern border follows the oceanic border between Brazil and French Guiana and the extension of that line as far as the border of the security zone. The defense of this area would be the responsibility of COMNAVFORCARIB with the participation of all the Caribbean states and the navies of Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela.



----- **Current Inter-American Security Zone.**
 ————— **Boundaries of the six proposed areas of responsibility.**

Area 3. The security zone east of South America down to the oceanic border between Argentina and Chile in the Drake Passage. The area corresponds to the existing Area Maritimo Atlantico Sur and would continue under the responsibility of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. The Argentine Navy would have the main duty in the defense of the Atlantic approaches to the Southern Passages.

Area 4. The Pacific south of the border between Chile and Peru out to 90 degrees west would be the responsibility of Chile. The Chilean Navy's main

function would be the defense of the Strait of Magellan, the Pacific approaches to the Drake Passage, and the interior channels south of Puerto Montt.

Area 5. The waters between area 4 and the south westward extension of the border between Guatemala and Mexico would be the joint responsibility of COMNAVFORCARIB, Ecuador, and Peru.

Area 6. The west coast of North America, Mexico, the United States, and Canada would be the responsibility of CINPAC with the cooperation of Mexican and Canadian forces.

It would be necessary to make a small adjustment in the borders between the areas of responsibility of the U.S. Atlantic and Pacific commands in order to make the border of the security zone coincident with the border between CINCLANT and CINCPAC. It is recommended that the border follow the line proposed between areas 5 and 6 up to the border of the security zone, and from this point coincide with the border of the security zone to the south.

With this arrangement, each Latin American country would participate in the defense of areas which are important for their own purpose as well as provide for collective security. The U.S. Forces would have the primary responsibility for defense of areas which are the most important to the United States.

Should the Panama Canal be closed, the Ecuadorian and Peruvian navies would need to shift their area of responsibility and reorient their efforts to the defense of shipping bound for, or from, the Southern Passages. It would be important to know to what extent British forces would participate in the defense of the Southern Approaches. Sufficient British goodwill to authorize Argentines and other Latin Americans the use of the Falkland/Malvinas facilities for ASW operations would be convenient if the British are not going to be involved.

For reasons just discussed, it will be necessary to develop an agreement for the deployment and participation of U.S. ASW aircraft and minesweepers under the orders of local Latin American military authorities in areas 3 and 4. Alternatively, the U.S. government might wish to provide the countries involved in the defense of those areas with the required ships and aircraft through, perhaps, a lend-lease arrangement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance and the Organization of American States Charter only provide juridical mechanisms for the collective self-defense in the event of aggression against any one of the signatory nations within a geographical area of application or against territories under the full sovereignty of a member State.

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Latin American Naval Forces by Areas

Areas	2	3	4	5
Aircraft Carriers (Medium)		2		
Cruiser				2
Destroyer Missile		12	6	2
Frigates Missile	10	19	2	4
Corvetts Missile				6
Submarines	7	16	4	12
Fast Attack Crafts (Missiles)	6		4	12
DDs	3	13	1	5
Minesweepers		12		
A/S Aircraft	6	21		7
MP Aircrafts	24	27	6	6
A/S Helos	17	53	11	17
Attack Aircraft (Air-to-Surface Missiles)		13		

Table II

Based on previous world wars, the Latin American countries would probably remain neutral at the beginning of a global conflict, as long as no physical aggression against their properties takes place. However, the war would affect the life of each country differently, therefore, it is to be assumed that they would alter their status during the war in accordance with their own best interests.

The anticipated difficulty in forming a collective defense against an external aggression, inside the framework of the Rio de Janeiro Treaty, would arise from the inability to reach a consensus at the political level about the nature of the threat and an appropriate response. That deficiency has been an obstacle to the creation of the suitable military command organization in charge of the collective defense.

In a global war against the Soviet Union—despite the economic crises which allowed the growth and strengthening of the communist and socialist parties in Latin America—the pro-Western institutions and the armed forces, which are anticommunist, are going to prevail in most of the countries. As a result, most Latin American countries will become pro-Western belligerents.

At the military level, the lack of a common doctrine and tactical procedures, as well as the lack of standardization in logistical support and weapons, are the main obstacles to a joint defense force. The Latin American Armed Forces

have a conventional warfare capability oriented to solve the requirements for a regional conflict originated by the confrontation of local opposing interests. The lack of sophisticated weapons and the limited resources to develop the appropriate training create a severe handicap in the event of a war against the Soviet Union. Although the armament industry in Latin America is increasing the production of less sophisticated weapons, the acquisition of major weapon systems is still dependent on overseas suppliers.

In order to take into consideration the political reality of Latin America and avoid the difficulties of a unified collective defense under a pact which does not match the actual international situation in the continent, the best alternative for the defense of the American SLOCs is the creation of areas of responsibility in which a limited number of countries, with similar interests, join their forces to achieve their common objective.

With this purpose in mind, the division of the security zone into six independent areas is recommended. The interested countries must reach an agreement regarding the suitable organization and the mechanisms required to defend the SLOCs against any external threat.

An organization similar to AMAS, but expanded to include the defense of shipping is recommended for each area. The coordination between areas could be done via a permanent committee created inside the CINCLANTFLT organization and managed by representatives of each of the areas defined. Although a single unified command for the defense of shipping within the security zone would be desirable, local agreements between the interested countries outside of the Rio de Janeiro Pact is a more realistic approach because the nations of the continent are not going to act as a block, as they did in 1947. The recommended alternative also takes into consideration the capabilities of the Latin American navies and presents a realistic alternative for the employment of scarce assets.

In a global war, if Latin American countries cannot get logistical support for their weapon systems from Europe, or if they cannot build them, utilizing their own armament industry, it will be necessary for the United States to provide the logistical support or to replace the weapon systems with American ones. In order to strengthen the capabilities of the Latin American navies, it will be judicious to resume the delivery of ships and aircraft under some type of military pact, especially to those navies in charge of the defense of the Caribbean, the approaches to the Panama Canal, and the Southern Passages.

Finally, it is necessary to provide a modern and suitable communications network, not only to support naval control of shipping organization, but also to defend the ships coming under the control of that organization.

Notes

1. *The Military Balance 1986-87* (London: I.I.S.S., 23 Tavistock Street).

2. Robert N. Burr and Ronald D. Hussey, *Documents on Inter-American Cooperation, Vol. II, 1881-1948* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1955).
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *The Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance Applications, Vol. III, 1973-76* (Washington, D.C.: General Secretariat OAS, 1977).
7. *The Military Balance, 1986-87.*

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy or the Chilean Navy.



... for seaports position—situation—is the first in importance of the elements of strategic value.

Naval Strategy

A. T. Mahan (1911)

Little, Brown (1918), p. 160

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