

The United States and Latin Relations After the Gulf War

By Eric Arturo Delvalle

While the world watched with amazement, the last year and a half brought about dramatic changes then considered close to impossible: the falling of the hated Berlin Wall and a move to a pluralistic system by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, in the middle of this great progress toward democracy, an evolution that brought hopes for a lasting world peace, a new and perhaps more dangerous specter of war was being cast in the Persian Gulf.

Today, the global threat that the dangerous situation in the Middle East created has been controlled, through a remarkably united and successful political and military coalition, bringing about the hope for a "New World Order." History has also proved once again that aggression must be met with force, and that a decisive military victory creates a window of opportunity for increased prospects of peace and stability.

Today, while we may gloat over the thrill of victory, and savor the defeat of Saddam Hussein's aggression and the fall of communism, we must shake the danger of complacency and face the tough challenges imposed by the realities that Eastern Europe faces in their effort to transform their political and economic systems; and in a Middle East that faces the dangers of instability, where religious, cultural, economic, military, and political differences threaten to make peace a tougher challenge than war.

The Persian Gulf war has thrust the United States again into the forefront as the leader of freedom and democracy. But as the people of this great nation know very well, leadership brings about responsibilities, sometimes too difficult and painful to accept, evident in the many lives lost in the world wars, Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, and, more recently, the Persian Gulf.

Unique Opportunity. While the problems of the Middle East and Eastern Europe certainly deserve attention, the respect and position of leadership of the United States of America offer a unique opportunity to begin addressing the enormous problems that exist in our own hemisphere, which are threatening the security of the region itself.

In the last few years, the political scenario of Latin America has greatly improved. Today, with the exception of Cuba, the flag of democracy, despite its imperfections, flies high above the continent. Latin America's founding fathers like Bolivar, San Martin, Juarez, Marti and others, and Americans like Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln would have been proud today with the winds of freedom that are becoming so evident in our hemisphere.

Unfortunately, this hard-earned freedom is threatening to create false perceptions that the hemispheric problems are solved, or very much on the way to being solved. The democracy existing today is only the first step, albeit important, in creating a framework in which the inter-American system is in a position to respond to the challenges of the 1990s and enter the new century with faith and confidence that the land of hope and opportunity

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that exists in the United States for millions of immigrants who come looking for peace and prosperity can be duplicated in an equally rich and beautiful land in the rest of the Americas.

To succeed in this endeavor, we must confront the issues that the Western Hemisphere faces and find out ways of dealing effectively with them. We must ask ourselves:

- ◆ Can the democracies of the hemisphere survive with the burden of a massive foreign debt? The answer is no.
- ◆ Will the people of Latin America remain silent and quiet in the face of rising unemployment and lack of opportunities? The answer is no.
- ◆ Can democratic governments survive in the face of the corruption that incredible amounts of drug money brings about? The answer is no.
- ◆ Will local and international private investors respond to the need to invest in the present and future of Latin America, in the face of the threat of instability? The answer is no.
- ◆ Will the armies of the hemisphere be able, under the circumstances, to avoid the temptations and pressures that encourage them to take over democratic governments elected by the people? The answer is no.

Also we must ask ourselves, why is Latin America still struggling to find the formula for economic progress, a progress which would virtually guarantee the strengthening of democratic institutions and the security of the area? While there may be many answers to these questions, probably the most sensible is that Latin America is a continent at war. For the last few decades it has been at war against dictatorships, against poverty, against subversion, against greed, against human rights abuses. Before we can look with confidence to the future of the hemisphere, we must deal effectively with these wars. While we might apparently be winning the battle for democracy, we have a long way to travel before we win the war.

New Framework. I do not pretend to offer foolproof solutions to a problem that has complex roots of a cultural, political, and economic nature. But I do believe that it is critical for the community of nations of the hemisphere to accept that the problems and the challenges have become too great to be solved by individual countries. In a world where we can see and hear on television the overthrow of political systems, and even the destruction of war, we certainly cannot expect that the problems of the hemisphere will be dealt with effectively unless we accept that the window of opportunity we have today will quickly disappear. So we must act intelligently, decisively, with leadership and courage, to bring about the structural changes that are urgently needed, and implement them so we can move forward to achieve tangible results.

Allow me to explore some ideas that I believe are important in the creation of a new framework:

- ◆ The problems of the regions must be faced with realism; leaders of Latin America must understand that the era of empty populist demagoguery is gone. That as people become more informed through the technology of communications which brings vivid images into the living room, governments cannot fool the people with vague and unfulfilled promises. The concept of accountability must become the cornerstone between governments and the people.

- ◆ **Relations between Latin America and the United States were heavily influenced by the East-West conflict. As the two superpowers work into a new relationship, so must Latin American nations view their relationship with the United States under a different and more dynamic concept: a partnership built upon the principles of respect and mutual honest understanding.**
- ◆ **The lessons of economic development and prosperity achieved by a United Europe should serve as an example, that a united hemisphere offers the best opportunity to fight the ills caused by crumbling economies, unemployment, poverty, and lack of opportunities. But it must be accepted that petty rivalries, jealousies, lack of trust, and indifference among member states have no place in a united hemisphere.**
- ◆ **Latin America must wrestle with concepts that over the years have muddled its vision and made it impossible to deal with the real issues of freedom, democracy, economic development, and security. When the regional political organization of the hemisphere, the Organization of American States, cannot reconcile the concepts of intervention and self-determination; when our countries cannot deal with the concept of sovereignty within a world in which borders are shrinking and even disappearing; when security concerns go untouched even in the midst of covert foreign aggression against constitutional governments, then it is time for deep and honest soul searching, so we can find who we are, where we come from, where we want to go, and what we want to make of our lives and the lives of half a billion people who live south of the Rio Grande.**

How do we translate this vision of a new hemisphere into action? How do we deal with these atavisms that impede real progress toward a mature and enlightened society? How do we focus on a blueprint for freedom, democracy, and economic development for the hemisphere, when most governments face a day-to-day fight for survival, which has made them short-term problem solvers and not long-term visionaries?

I will in the next few minutes offer ideas for what I believe could be the framework for a new partnership in the Americas where the United States, with its prestige and resources, and Latin America, with its population and natural resources, become a united entity in a new "world order."

1) To forge a new partnership, the deep suspicions that have mutually existed between Latin America and the United States in the past must come to an end. We must accept that a hemisphere that will surpass one billion people by the year 2000, rich in natural resources, can become an incomparable force only if united. I believe that President Bush has done a great deal toward erasing suspicions and lack of trust, developing a close relationship with a number of Latin American leaders. It is a good start that should be institutionalized.

2) The hemisphere must look seriously into the liberalization of trade. In this course of action, it is encouraging to see Mexico, under the able leadership of President Salinas de Gortari embark on a free trade negotiation with the United States, in what must gradually become a hemispheric policy. In regard to this, the Congress of the United States must understand that although they have responsibilities to their own constituencies that elected them, they also should share the interest of a strong hemisphere. One way of accomplishing this is creating a strong trade base, by opening U.S. markets to imports from Latin America which would bolster their economies.

3) The Enterprise of the Americas initiative of President Bush and the Brady plan to deal with the problems of the external debt are a welcome beginning. However, additional formulas to promote economic development must be sought, because this has become a serious problem.

4) We must strengthen the role and capabilities of the Organization of American States. True, there is criticism against the OAS and its lack of resolve. But the OAS, as former Secretary General Lleras Camargo said, "is and will be what the governments of the hemisphere want it to be," and our countries would be well served to give to this organization the clout it should have to deal with the political problems of the hemisphere.

5) Today the hemisphere must look through the glass of a myriad of organizations: the OAS, as the political arm; SELA, as the economic arm; the Inter-American Defense Board, as the security arm; the Rio Treaty; the Group of Eight; the Inter-American Development Bank with its resources and management capabilities to effect change and promote development. We must structure the logical integration of these institutions so that they follow the same objectives instead of their own agendas.

6) The vision of the hemisphere must have a strong democratic foundation in which countries not only respect other governments but use their resources and strength to support democratic processes and institutions.

7) Economic freedom must go along with political freedom. The system of free enterprise, accessible to everybody, is the only guarantee that the people of Latin America will work to preserve their own freedom. But this free enterprise system must have a human face, especially in a hemisphere in which hunger, poor health, illiteracy, injustice, and violation of human rights have been realities for too long.

The challenges are great. But Latin America is blessed today with leaders like Carlos Menem of Argentina, who is bringing his country out of the isolation it has lived in for too long and erasing the obsolete economic models of statism; like Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who has brought the prestige and heritage of the great country of Mexico into a new and enlightened political and economical relationship with the United States of America, paving the way for a new partnership in the hemisphere. And like Enrique Iglesias, the President of the Inter-American Development Bank, who is destined to play a leading role in molding the concepts of the Enterprise of the Americas into a workable and effective plan of action.

In closing, I would like to stress that the window of opportunity we have is a small one. And it is imperative that the government of the United States, together with those of the industrialized countries of Europe and Japan, provide the seed capital that has been pledged, so the Enterprise of the Americas can have an auspicious beginning.

The time to act and build a new partnership is now; the time to win the war in which the region has been submerged for decades is now. And in fighting and winning this war we will not only build a better world, we will be laying the foundations for a sustained peace, prosperity, and the security of our hemisphere.

