Challenged National Sovereignty, Regional Coordination, and the Reality of Global Influence

Security Policies and Global Dependence in Central America

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Central America is seen as nearing crisis point as its homicide rates top world charts. Central American national governments have responded with the inauguration of a coordinated regional security strategy involving member states and a "Group of Friends" comprised of donor bodies and foreign states; committing to "revise and harmonize national security strategies with a view to adapting and strengthening them with respect to the Regional Strategy[.]" Participants have touted the integrated security strategy as an exciting, unique effort which allows Central American governments to dictate policy and programme requirements to external funding partners, turning traditional funding mechanisms upside down. In this challenging security context, regionalism appears to be deployed as a tool to address tensions between national and international proposed policy directions for combatting insecurity and organized crime. This paper traces security collaborations in Central America and discusses the reality of sovereign national security decisions in a globalizing context where power and influence often stems from those foreign governments who provide the funds to run operations. It concludes that donor opinions maintain considerable influence over security integration initiatives despite newly asserted directions of participant nations and parses both the contradictions and opportunities which have emerged through new policy dialogues.

Introduction

In Latin America, the dominance of the nation-state as the primary actor in the political, economic and social arenas rarely has been negated. A history of military-led regimes concerned with territorial control, in conjunction a socio-political positioning of the state as the main actor in crafting its own trajectory, has led to a conceptual consistency less evident in other world regions (Lopez-Alves 2012). Latin American literature is rife with references to the structural weakness of state institutions as well as their inability to maintain the basic monopoly on the use of force but, as Lopez-Alves argues, "states have never been too weakened or shrunken to completely lose control of political power or policymaking" (Lopez-Alves 2012, 174). The state is accorded responsibility, directly or through informal activity, for much which takes place within its borders.

At the same time, no part of the world matches Latin America for the number and diversity of integration efforts including common markets, security communities and diplomatic institutions (Mosinger 2012). These efforts are often accompanied by vast pronouncements of unity by domestic political leaders like that of Ricardo Patino, Ecuador's foreign minister who stated on the formation of South America's UNASUR that "the history of South America is no longer the same, it is a history of permanent engagement...I feel that we are a single country, a regional citizenship" (cited in Mosinger 2012, 164). Or, as the Secretary General of the Central American Integration System (SICA) argued upon the inauguration of the new Central American Security Strategy (ESCA), "The decisions that we have adopted can determine the Central America of the future" (SG-SICA 2011). The ESCA is further promoted as an example of

security cooperation through coordinated implementation which "follows, with respect, the path and spirit of security, a security with regional character as structured through its projects" (SICA 2012b). On the surface, this coordinated, seven-country approach appears to renew discussions of Central American regional integration. After all, the ESCA addresses security issues typically and traditionally existing solely under the purview of the territorial state.

The role of a regional forum for security and the formation of security communities follows a Latin American trend of integration efforts which emerged with the end of the Cold War. The whole of Latin America was taken with greater coordinating security arrangements given, argue Tickner and Herz (2012, 98) "that cooperation and integration were deemed crucial to hemispheric stability". Central American cooperation on persisting regional insecurity, which continues to surpass traditional defence threats, is positioned by countries as a 'transformational' opportunity – given the chance for its implementation (SICA, 2012b). Participation in a successful coordinated strategy, it is implied, in turn strengthens the pursuit of closer Central American ties on traditionally state-centric issues.

This also appears to follow global trends where regional governance has become an increasingly popular tool to address growing global complexity (Fioramonti 2012). A control on internal discord is achieved by security communities which represent a "fundamental example" of region building as well pursing their more obvious function as means to address common threats (Deutsch 1957). Dominant theories of regionalism point to a form of supranational governance as the eventual outcome of such projects with multilevel governance taking on authoritative decision-making function (Hooghes and Marks 2001, i; cited in Mosinger 2012, 165). Yet, in Latin

America this multileveled governance, not just with regards to security communities but those with political and economic goals, have not manifest on the same scale. Indeed, regional institutions such as the Central American Integration System (SICA) have not seen a significant delegation of state authority in any capacity. As such, and contrasted with the pre-disposition to state-centric solutioning,

Central American states are quick to emphasise their collective ownership of the ESCA, its projects and priorities as well as the coordination required to make it thus far in the security strategy's development. Participant parties present it as "something new" because of the way in which they came together for its conception, elaboration and presentation (Vilchez Ascher 2012). Evidence for this is found in their emphasis on multilateral programme-building and the acknowledgement through the establishment of four pillars of thematic risks which all face. The efforts could further hinge on what Caballero identifies as the Central American "binary identity" [...]:

> a national and regional identity in which the latter is activated once
> national problems cannot be dealt with domestically [...where] the inability
> of a country to find solutions to an issue at the national level may trigger
> the regional identity and thus lead it to search for answers at the bilateral
> or regional level. (Caballero 2009, 56)

In other words, collaboration on a set of issues or challenges becomes feasible where the situation of crime, violence, and security *necessitates* joint action in the face of individual state weakness or impotence. This potential diversity of motivation in the formation of regional institutions, in both their multilevel and multi-sectoral elaborations, further complicates analysis (Fawcett 1995). Concepts of cooperation, collaboration and integration – a range of potential activities from the "structured collaboration among governments in a given geographic area" to the

"supranationalization of authority in a given policy field" – muddy assessment of the authority of individual states in global context (Fioramonti 2012, 4).

In this context, it becomes necessary to dissect the process of the ESCA in order to assess whether, as SICA discourse emphasises, the strategy is a step in the direction of greater integration of the region on key state functions. Detractors of the ESCA argue that, rather than a step on the regionalisation continuum, the ESCA is a state-driven enterprise which finds value in coordinating with others on targeted issues whilst remaining fully independent. Security is a politically charged issue in the region and one upon which elections are lost. It would follow that politicians within the state would therefore only endorse security-addressing programmes at the regional level if they were unable to gain traction at the national level in a forum where they could take credit for successes. By engaging in an a regional strategy, they might thus be considering that failures to address entrenched security issues will be one level removed from their responsibility whilst successes can always be claimed as part of a collaborative effort. Further indications that the ESCA is ultimately a state-derived initiative are found in the Latin American-specific focus on Democratic Security, a concept which operates within a state-centric tradition (Tickner and Herz 2012) and in the themes of the four pillars which continue to address security issues from a state-centric bias.

Central America has been presented over the course of the twenty-first century as a region nearing a security crisis point; crucible of organised crime, narco-trafficking, and gang violence impacting on an institutionally and socio-economically weak society. The narco- and transnational criminal organisations (TCOs) focus of this narrative was highlighted in the VI Summit of the Americas (SOA) in April 2012 after Guatemalan

President Otto Molina Perez proposed to legalise drugs as one step in the solution addressing criminal violence in the region. Regional leaders pounced on the opportunity to re-debate the lack of success in the current continental 'War on Drugs'. Not only was this 'the first time we've seen sitting governments openly discussing ending the war on drugs in a diplomatic setting' (Haddow, 2012), but as Youngers of the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) stated, '[f]or the first time, there is widespread recognition that present policies have failed and there need to be new alternatives' (Ross, 2012). However, this is not the only challenge to the international system to emerge from Latin America. The concept of a democratic security, where security was linked with participatory governance structures and the inclusion of non-traditional security threats like criminal activity, gangs, and migration in state security models have facilitated the emergence of a region-specific approach. Nevertheless, Central American states have a history of cooperation breakdown due to inter-state disagreements which initiates the ESCA on a weak footing.

The key to this analysis lies with the participation of the international community. Mindful of both the positive and negative influences that international interested parties have had in the region the ESCA is no less dependent on the external than previous state and regional efforts. After having agreed upon the set of thematic pillars, programmes and projects which would comprise the ESCA, the enterprise was presented to the international community as an immutable plan for actualisation with funds from donors and lenders. This paper traces security collaboration potential in Central America and discusses the reality of sovereign national security decisions in a globalizing context where power and influence often stems from those foreign governments who provide the funds to run operations. To this end, this paper will first elaborate on the reality of collaborative efforts with regards to the ESCA in the context

of sovereign national security. It will then examine to what extent this collective exhibits agency in driving the programmes and policies associated with security. Building on this, the paper will contrast the reality of the international donor community in the context of collaborative regional efforts by presenting two examples: that of European participation as represented by German participation; and second, that of Canadian project funding as representative of North American. The goal is to assess whether degree of commitment to collaborative actions, projects, and programmes or whether this, like so many other "integration-driven" initiatives, proves to continue along the historic trajectory of state-focused security and what role the international community plays in influencing these outcomes. The paper concludes that, whilst beneficial to member states and empowering in its premise, the ESCA's dependence on global donors and susceptibility to their pressures limits the collaborative power of the strategy. However, the final responsibility for the failure to progress along the traditional regionalisation continuum rests with the member-states themselves. Individual member states continue to produce the regional agenda, to limit collaboration based on bilateral disagreements and, ultimately, cling to a security paradigm that ensures collaborative efforts only realise a limited influence.

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