

# America's New "Defense Concept"

## The Western Hemisphere Defense Policy Statement

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*The USA has come up with a new Americas defense concept. On October 4 the Western Hemisphere Defense Policy Statement saw light outlining the major security vision for the next decade or longer. It makes precise how the January 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance will shape the US Department of Defense engagement in the region.*

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said "a remarkable transformation has taken place in the Western Hemisphere" and "the United States is provided with a historic opportunity to renew and strengthen its defense partnerships in the region." The 11-page statement describes US defense policy goals of promoting mature, professional national defense institutions, fostering integration and interoperability among partners and promoting hemispheric defense institutions. The strategy seeks to renew U.S. military ties with [Latin America](#) after a decade of neglect when Washington was focused on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During the October visits to Peru and Uruguay, Panetta took steps to implement the Concept. He agreed to begin work with each country to update their 60-year-old defense cooperation accords to move them beyond Cold War agenda and accommodate changes in the laws. The Secretary also chaired the Conference of Defense Ministers of the Americas in Punta Del Este (Uruguay) on October 8, an event that takes place every two years. The issues of the conference include defense and security, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The secretary called these issues a central part of efforts to enhance regional security and increase cooperation between military forces in the hemisphere. He stressed the region is going through significant changes. The countries apply great efforts to enhance their security and the USA sees it as a historic opportunity to boost defense partnership.

According to the new policy, the United States will reinvigorate its defense partnerships and pursue new ones, consistent with President Barack Obama's approach to the region.

The statement defines three core objectives the USA is to promote accordingly:

- Strong national government institutions that allow all nations in the region to address legitimate threats to the state and their citizens.
- Shared action against shared threats through more effectively and efficiently coordinating defense forces.
- Multilateral mechanisms and institutions, like the current conference and the Inter-American Defense Board, to achieve consensus on the direction of hemispheric defense

collaboration.

On humanitarian assistance and disaster relief the United States supports the Chilean initiative to accelerate and coordinate support for civilian-led relief efforts. On peacekeeping, countries in the Western Hemisphere have assumed an impressive leadership role by engaging, addressing and improving United Nations efforts. In a new era of defense cooperation in the hemisphere, Panetta said, "Our goal is to work with those nations that want us to help them to develop their capabilities so that they can defend and secure themselves. Our interest is to work with you, not against you."

Since the new century started Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chili, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay have taken part in UN peacekeeping missions throughout the world. To unite the joint military and defense efforts president Obama launched a new counterdrugs and security initiative in April 2009: the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), a multiyear, multifaceted effort by the U.S. government and Caribbean partners to develop a joint regional citizen safety strategy to tackle the full range of security and criminal threats to the Caribbean Basin. There is also the Central American Integration System that integrates seven Central American states, all of them get significant support from Washington, that acts in accordance with the U.S. Central American Regional Security Initiative - CARSI.

The new period of intensifying US-led cooperation is taking place along with the emergence of new growing threats. The statement says law is not always prevalent in the countries of the continent and lack of transparency is still a specific feature of many elections. Corruption is still strong and the top officials decisions not always meet the interests of grassroots but rather ruling elites. Over 30% of the continent's population live in misery, the distribution of wealth is the most unfair in the world. Racial and national divisions stand in the way of equal rights and fair participation in politics. Leon Panetta thinks all these things weaken the military potentials because the issues are intertwined. The military materiel storage is not protected well enough to prevent conventional proliferation. The arms destined to protect the governments may jolly well get into the hands of those who aspire to overthrow them.

According to US vision the threats used to come from intergovernment conflicts, destabilizing activities of right wing militants and the left wing extremist organizations. At present something new comes to the fore. It's smugglers, illegal drug traffickers who steal the show. Their activities exacerbated by nature emergencies and cyber threats. The Pentagon finds it expedient to unite so that the traditional and newly emerged threats could be countered.

The statement stresses an ability to react immediately whatever the threat is and keep up the balance between the military and civilian agencies in case of emergencies.

The USA plans to launch professional military and civilian personnel education programs. The military training will focus on interoperability issues based on US-made weapons, equipment and logistics. The statement envisages joint efforts devoted to countering drug trafficking, fighting terrorist and extremist organizations and WMD non- proliferation. The US Department of Defense Strategy for Operating in Cyberspace also mentions joint operations aimed at countering cyberattacks.

The statement and other documents actually presuppose significant increase of financial expenditure on the part of the USA against the backdrop of financial woes and fiscal restraint. Despite budget cuts that are taking place in the United States, including in the military, Panetta said the Department of Defense has an array of programs to be paid for that can help develop capabilities in Latin America.

There is a certain background the Concept came out against.

While the murder of American diplomats and violent anti-American riots across the Islamic world dominate the news cycle, the slow burn of anti-Americanism takes place in the Western Hemisphere. In the post-Cold War era anti-Americanism has staged a substantial comeback owing to US persistent efforts to interfere into the countries internal affairs and impose its will.

With a long, complicated history of interventions and meddling in Latin America, the United States will have to overcome deep suspicions as it works to build broader military ties in a region where stable democracies have taken root in recent decades. American President James Monroe launched the “Monroe Doctrine” as far back as 1823 establishing American protection for the nations of the Western Hemisphere and insisting the Europeans limit their commercial interests, their conflicts and their wars to their own continent. Captain A. T. Mahan of the U.S. navy, a popular propagandist for expansion, greatly influenced Theodore Roosevelt and other American leaders. In his famous work *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* published in 1890 he stressed the fact that the countries with the biggest navies capable of intervention in different parts of the world would inherit the earth. Since 1890 to 2009 the USA has intervened militarily 56 times, ending up with supporting the coup that toppled the president of Honduras Manuel Zelaya in 2009.

The US intelligence is making systematic efforts to energize the political opposition in Latin American countries deemed unfriendly in Washington. The US influenced media in [Ecuador](#), [Bolivia](#), [Nicaragua](#), and [Venezuela](#) are full of acrimonious anti-government propaganda. [The USAID](#), the agency told to leave Russia this month for meddling into the country’s internal affairs, is notorious for serving as a cover for intelligence efforts many a time aimed at undermining legitimate governments in a number of Latin American countries...

The suspicions and apprehensions concerning the USA are going strong on the continent today. In 2005 in Argentina, at a continent-wide summit meeting, the US friendly Free Trade Area of the Americas project was buried to be substituted with the Union of South American Nations formed in 2008. It is joined by 12 states now to undertake joint defense, economic development, and infrastructure projects. The 21 years old MERCOSUR is a six-nation organization expanding South American customs union and common market. Cuba and Venezuela initiated the now nine-nation Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Our America, known as ALBA in 2004. That organization organizes cooperative ventures ranging from health care, education, communications, and banking to regional commercial and economic development initiatives, all organized on the basis of solidarity exchanges.

In December 2011 thirty-three Latin American leaders have come together and formed a new regional bloc, pledging closer economic and political ties. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) pointedly excludes the US and Canada. The foundation of the bloc has been praised as the realization of the two-centuries-old idea of Latin American independence envisioned by Simon Bolivar. Analysts view CELAC as an alternative to the Washington-based Organization of American States (OAS) and as an

attempt by Latin American countries to reduce US influence in the region. As the president of Venezuela said back then, "No more interference. Enough is enough! We have to take shape as a center of the world power and demand respect for all of us as community and for each one of our countries." The countries of CELAC have a combined population of nearly 600 million people, and a combined GDP of about US\$6 trillion, a force to reckon with on the international arena.

The last Summit of the Americas in April 2012 brought to light serious discords on many core issues and failed to adopt a joint declaration. Many nations expressed their discontent with the US policies in the region.

The newly adopted Concept shows the US intent to preserve the world supremacy at any cost. It's almost a tall order to make it a success against the background of strong and growing anti-US sentiments spread on the continent and strive for taking the fate of the America's nations into their own hands.

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