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2011-01

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## UAPI Hosts Inaugural Continental Security Conference

Thirty-five leading homeland security academics and practitioners gathered Dec. 7-8 in Colorado Springs, Colo., to explore a relatively untapped topic of homeland security: Research on issues encompassing concerns among Canada, Mexico and the United States.

The inaugural Continental Security Conference was hosted by the University and Agency Partnership Initiative (UAPI), one of several educational programs conducted by the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS). The event was a milestone for the 5-year-old UAPI program in that it brought together scholars from each country to begin considering mutual homeland security education and research.



From left, UAPI Deputy Director Steve Recca, Andrés Rozental, formerly Mexico's Deputy Foreign Minister, UAPI Director Stan Supinski.

Established in 2005, UAPI seeks share expertise of the CHDS by exporting homeland security curriculum to campuses and agencies across the country to further the study of homeland security as an academic discipline. Some 220 schools and agencies have joined the initiative since its inception.

Attendees to the conference sought to define just what continental security means, the value of scholarly study to the topic, and how academics can contribute to the security of the three geographically linked nations.

Reaching consensus among professors and practitioners is no easy feat, especially when it comes to a tri-lateral relationship with a certain amount of historical mistrust. Yet there was some general agreement on the value of educational research.

"I think the non-governmental community, especially academics and think tanks, are able to think a little more broadly," said Andrés Rozental, formerly Mexico's Deputy Foreign Minister, who delivered the keynote address for the conference. "I have found that when you push issues in non-governmental spheres, you get people to think outside the box."

The conference addressed an aspect of the homeland security academic discipline that has been sparsely researched and rarely broached. Nonetheless there was agreement that increased tri-lateral cooperation regarding security was well worth pursuing.

"I don't think there is any doubt in anybody's mind that when it comes to disasters, they don't respect borders," said UAPI Director Stan Supinski.

Attendees were able to focus on issues currently challenging all the three countries, allowing for a sort of comparative government seminar.

Participants said studying security relations among the North American nations was sorely needed.

"It's long overdue," said Jeff Burkett, a 2005 CHDS graduate who authored his thesis on Mexican-United States defense relations. "We're in the infancy of creating the momentum that is required to make a difference for all three nations."

As with most CHDS offerings, the opportunity for professionals in the field to network was one of the goals of the conference. Carole Cameron, Director of International Affairs for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said she benefitted from networking with members of academia and learning their perspectives on security issues.

"Education provides academic rigor to the policy decisions made not only at FEMA but with the federal government at large," Cameron said. "Academics can raise issues that people in Washington may not always see as an issue. Academics look at things through a different lens."

### Common Issues

While each of the three nations comprising North America face unique challenges, all three have shared concerns that represent new fronts in homeland security.

"While our countries are sovereign and independent, in a globalized and interconnected world we are increasingly dependent on each other, particularly with our North American allies," said Pamela Matthews, a manager with Public Safety Canada. "We each have a mutual objective of prosperity for our people, our countries."

Fueled by demand in the United States, drug trafficking was often mentioned as the cause of raging violence in Mexico. Meanwhile, the British Columbia province of Canada has become renowned for its marijuana production and exporting across its border to the United States.

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### Related Information

[Special Report on the Continental Security Conference](#)

[More information on the Continental Security Conference](#)

[More information on the CHDS University and Agency Partnership Initiative \(UAPI\)](#)

Other issues that were identified included pandemic disease, critical infrastructure protection, transportation security and counter-terrorism as well as trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans.

Former Mexican Ambassador Andrés Rozental noted that, in a post-Cold War era, the threats faced on the continent come not from other nations but from cartels, terrorists and other non-government actors.

Davis Schanzer of Duke University cautioned against creating new continental security institutions that could overlap and compete with existing bi-national and regional entities.

"We have robust bilateral relations on a huge number of issues and dialogue takes place through those channels," he said. "I think the threshold should be high for developing a new concept in thinking about security threats."

For an issue to fall within the concept of "continental security," Schanzer postulated that there needs to be a genuine, common threat posed against all three nations that can be best addressed through coordinated action by all three nations.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) implemented in 1994 shows that the three nations have a common interest in teaming together to compete economically with the rest of the world, several participants noted. And, there are many instances of bi-national and regional cooperation among the North American nations and cooperative frameworks, such as NAFTA and the Organization of American States. Some participants noted post-9/11 cooperation by the three countries on issues that range from border security to intelligence gathering and sharing.

### The Role of Scholars

When it comes to contributing to Canada-Mexico-United States security, academics should be careful to stick with what they can do best, said Stéphane Roussel of the University of Quebec at Montreal. He noted that university researchers are not good at predictions, decisions and implementation of strategies.

What they do excel in is documenting, providing arguments, critical analysis, identifying options, and education.

"After giving a general opinion, we need to let those people do their work," he said, referring to homeland security professionals in the field.

Scholars can offer "systematic frameworks for analysis" and the ability to "think outside the box," said Harold Trinkunas of the Naval Postgraduate School's Department of National Security Affairs.

"There is definitely the risk of an 'echo chamber' effect in Washington where everyone eventually starts agreeing with each other,"

Trinkunas said. "It's good to bring outsiders in to provide a different perspective."

He suggested research in this field could be furthered by coordinated panels at professional conferences, sponsored research on continental security and, in the long term, creating a forum for continental security research and education based on the model provided by the Summer Workshop in the Analysis of Military Operations at Cornell University.

Academics can contribute to research in the mid- to long-term, but generally not with the immediacy often demanded by practitioners, he noted.

### Words Matter

In a glimpse into why cooperation among even friendly nations can be a daunting endeavor, the first afternoon of the conference futilely sought to define "continental security."

While there is consensus on what issues all three nations have in common, debate about the term produced no clear answer.

Part of the reason is that focusing on homeland security issues germane to the three North American nations is a fairly new academic and policy concept. Examples abound regarding bi-national cooperation among the countries, but not so many exist for efforts that encompass all three.

David MacIntyre of the Homeland Security and Analysis Institute said the concept suffers from "conceptual immaturity."

There are cultural and political distinctions each among the nations that can make terminology topically controversial.

Words such as "tri-lateral" or "North America" raise concerns among a segment of conservative citizens in the United States. And in Mexico, "continental" has a different connotation than it would in the other two nations.

Rozental suggested a more straightforward label, "Canadian-Mexican-United States Security," and encouraged academics not to lose sight of the bigger goal by getting bogged down in terminology.

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