

## DEF

Thinking Ahead on UNASUR,  
Joseph S. Tulchin, Visiting Fellow, David Rockefeller Center for Latin  
American Studies, Harvard University

It took a long time for Unasur to get off the ground. For the most part, the formation of the South American group of nations was greeted by skepticism from observers. The cautious, even careful way in which most of the major countries in the region, especially Brazil and Chile, treated the new organization was taken to indicate that this was just one more rhetorical flourish about the supposed ties that bind the nations of the region together. After all, there have been several efforts to integrate the nations into a single market or a single trading bloc – even a single nation! - with very little to show for it. This time, however, the new organization was going to focus on security questions, foreign policy, and shared values in governance, not on trade issues or economics more broadly. It is worth noting that the BID has been trying to get its own infrastructure project going in South America, with very meager results to show for the amount of money it has given to the project and the amount of bureaucratic energy it has exerted. More progress has been made in bilateral, private sector infrastructure efforts, as in the recent work in Peru on a trans-Amazon highway by Brazilian private capital, than has been made at the regional level with clear regional leadership.

As other notes in this issue explain in detail, there have been some significant signs of progress in Unasur over the past few months – the election of a president, the creation of a permanent secretariat, and the efforts to respond as an organization to the constitutional crises in Ecuador and the ongoing frontier dispute between Venezuela and Colombia. Curiously, long term planning and academic thinking have not kept pace with events. This note is intended as a beginning.

The key to making Unasur work is to think BIG and small at the same time. First, how to think small to get ahead in the process? It is necessary to build confidence and to make integration easier without stirring political or strategic controversies. The way to do this is to follow the example of earlier efforts at integration by setting up commissions to deal with the least controversial subjects, so that you begin to construct a fabric of cooperation and a broader and broader pattern of cooperation and similarity at the level of regulations, legal norms, standards, tending toward a less heterogeneous mosaic. It is best to do this with commissions or committees of technocrats who work on customs regulations, bringing legal rules into conformity across national cases, and establishing the basis for common statistical information. Good examples of how this is done are Mercosur, the Andean Region, and, in the case of legal norms, the Caribbean Common Market. Even the Central American Common Market has had some success in this area. Little has been done to date among the South American countries.

At the same time, there is a need for serious thinking about the foundation for integration. Is there a consensus among the countries of the region concerning democratic governance and basic values? Yes, and No. The Declaration of Santiago provides the basis for a consensus and makes hortatory statements about how the members of the OAS should behave. On the other hand, the experience of the OAS in Honduras suggests the limits of that consensus as well as the heavy legacy of U.S. dominance. Secretary General Insulza was undermined by that legacy even though the new Obama administration kept its hands off the situation. Senator James DeMint did not keep his hands off Honduras and that was a demonstration of the kind of penetrated polities that makes the countries of Central America and the Caribbean so fragile. The countries of South America are less affected by that legacy. Still, whether they feel they have been dominated by the U.S. or not, they have a similar historical aversion to playing an active, protagonistic role in world affairs. With very few exceptions, foreign policies in South America have been formulated over the years since independence with a view to how that policy will play in Washington. Are the member of Unasur prepared to play a protagonistic role in regional affairs? We can wait and see.

There are three basic elements in the building of long-term integration among the states of Unasur. The first, as I have said, is to focus on shared values and concepts of strategic security. This requires explicit comparison with existing communities of nations. Most of the basic values shared already among the Unasur states are values shared by the wider global community, especially the nations of the European Community and the United States. That means that Unasur carries the starting premise that its community will share values with the wider world community.

The second element that will effect the future of Unasur will depend on the success of its leaders in creating a coalition for foreign policy for the region within the region and for the region outside the region that demonstrates a certain autonomy of the U.S. without being against the United States. The community's foreign policy, like that of the European Union, can be independent or autonomous and be effective, either at the regional or at the international level, so long as it does not set as a goal of that policy to undermine the interests of any member nor deliberately (again, as a goal of that policy, not because of the content of the policy) run counter to the strategic interests of the United States. To accomplish this will require serious examination of how the community might fit into the global community and what role Unasur might or can play in that broader community. Thus far, the evidence that the group can do this is slim. Thinking about the unthinkable is crucial.

The third element in long term planning or in thinking BIG is to take into account the current strategic goals of the principal countries of the community. For example, Brazil aspires to play a dominant role in Unasur, as it has in South America since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, today, Brazil has made it clear that it deserves an important role in global affairs. How does this new global protagonism fit into the growing structure of Unasur? The other principal country whose strategic concerns must be accommodated is Chile. Chile for the past two decades has been the model country in Latin America for its respect for human values and the internationally recognized virtues

of democratic governance (sometimes referred to as soft power). As a consequence, Chile has played a role in the OAS and the UN far beyond its geographic size or its economic importance. Chile has a leadership role to play in building consensus on basic values within Unasur.

Argentina and Venezuela are two other countries that must be brought into the long term discussion. To date, Argentina has placed domestic politics before foreign policy and, as a consequence, has achieved irrelevance in world affairs. It has to settle down to become a reliable partner. Venezuela over the past decade has played the role of spoiler – it will define the limits of the consensus within Unasur in the short term. So long as Lula was president of Brazil, Venezuela's anti-U.S. rhetoric and its pretensions within Unasur were kept in check. It remains to be seen how the new government in Brasilia will handle Chavez.