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**Conflict Prevention in Bolivia and Ecuador : The Role of the
International Community**

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Bolivia and Ecuador: A Decade of Crisis

In recent years, Bolivia and Ecuador have faced so many challenges to their stability and constitutional order that many observers have wondered how these countries have avoided slipping into widespread violent conflict. This paper examines the political developments that have made these two of the most volatile nations in the region. It also highlights the role of the international community in preventing the eruption of conflict in both countries.

The two South American nations share many common problems and characteristics: they are highly divided societies where wide sectors of the population have been historically excluded from the political arena; they have weak political parties that have been unable to create national coalitions; they are fragile states that have been appropriated for the personal benefit of elites; and their political structures have been unable to effectively guarantee space for the resolution of conflict within the existing legal frameworks. The combination of these factors has contributed to the erosion of the legitimacy of both states, further exacerbating intra-institutional conflict and instability.

In this context, the 1990s saw the strengthening of social movements that acquired important political salience and that demanded a radical rethinking not only of how politics operated, but of the configuration of the polity itself.¹ In both countries, the social movements took their demands to the streets, staging massive protests that frequently paralyzed the economy by blocking roads and airports.² These contentious tactics were met with fear and disdain by the political establishment, which failed to effectively respond to their demands.

It is in this backdrop of contesting political discourses and their consequent tensions that Evo Morales and Rafael Correa won the presidential elections in Bolivia and Ecuador, respectively, in 2006. Their triumphs are part of what is being referred to as Latin America's turn to the new left, after a wave

of electoral contests clearly rejected the policies inspired by the Washington-consensus, which had prevailed in the 1990s, and brought to power left of center candidates in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. This regional turn to the left has deservedly received much attention³ and, as others have pointed out, it would be a mistake to assume that all of these governments are cut from the same mold. A tactical alliance with Venezuela has provided both Ecuador and Bolivia the resources and political support to allow their leaders to push forward radical agendas without compromising with the opposition⁴. While ideologically closer to Chávez than to the more moderate Bachelet in Chile and Lula in Brazil, Correa and Morales have made efforts to not appear as mere mimics of the Venezuelan president.

When examining the potential for conflict, significant differences in the political dynamics of these two nations must be considered. While in both cases a strong regionalism permeates social and political relations, the question of local autonomy has become a serious threat for the unity of Bolivia. The divide between the center of political power (La Paz) and economic prosperity (Santa Cruz) has called into question the strongly centralized government of Bolivia. The ethnic divide that accompanies this division has resulted in the indigenous population (who live mostly in the highlands) supporting Morales' quest to retain that centralism as a feature of the new constitution while the white and *mestizo* population of the lowland 'half moon' (*media luna*) states demand greater autonomy from the center⁵. The level of confrontation between these groups in Bolivia has been the source of violence rarely seen in Ecuador. Also important to note is the higher level of political independence of Rafael Correa, who arrived to the Presidency after a brief political career, running under a newly formed political movement. Contrary to Morales, Correa is not part of a social movement with a long tradition, and thus is free from having to respond to a set of specific demands. Morales' agenda, on the other hand, has been defined not only by the opposition, but also by the more radical sector of the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo), which is quick to remind him

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¹ The indigenous movement in Bolivia put forward an agenda that closely linked demands for ethnic recognition with the economic concerns of coca growers and other peasant populations. In Ecuador, the indigenous organization CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) and its allies pushed for the recognition of the country as a 'plurinational' state while also becoming the most prominent advocate against neo-liberal economic policies.

² For a comprehensive history of the Bolivian and Ecuadorian indigenous movements and their turn to electoral politics see, among others, Donna Lee Van Cott, *From Movements to Parties in Latin America: The Evolution of Ethnic Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Deborah Yashar *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³ See, among others, Jorge Castañeda "Latin America's Left Turn", *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2006); Matthew Cleary "Explaining the Left's Resurgence", *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 4 (2006); Teodoro Petkoff, Dos Izquierdas (Caracas: Alfadi, 2005); Alain Touraine "Entre Bachelet y Morales: existe una izquierda en América Latina" in *Nueva Sociedad* 205 (2006) and Marcelo Leiras "Latin America's Turn: Left, Right and Wrong", *Constellations*, Vol 14 no 3 (Sept 2007).

of the promises he made before and during the campaign to become their leader.

The International Community and Conflict Prevention

This paper compares the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador by examining the international and regional architecture for conflict prevention and evaluating the political obstacles and opportunities for the international community in this area. It maps multilateral preventive activities in both countries, highlighting the gaps and opportunities. Additionally, it traces the involvement of the United Nations (UN) in Bolivia and Ecuador over the past several years in order to identify opportunities for engagement and determine their outcomes. We also explore the evolving role of other major actors vis-à-vis the UN, including the Organization of American States (OAS) and Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). The paper strives to contextualize the idea of conflict prevention in the political dynamics of Ecuador and Bolivia, and the region as a whole.

While Latin America has completed a transition to democracy that has left behind the era of military dictatorships, the challenge to build fully inclusive democratic systems still remains. The emergence of constituent assemblies in several countries of the region—including Bolivia (2006-2007) and Ecuador (2007-2008) – responds to public calls for more representative and accountable governance. The region also faces an array of challenges such as issues of exclusion; political instability; inequities in wealth; widespread poverty; drug trade; energy security and climate change. Despite recent military and political victories against the FARC, Colombia remains entrenched in the hemisphere's longest civil war. Recent tensions on the border with Ecuador, and the consequent disputes with Venezuela and Nicaragua, momentarily threatened a return to inter-state conflict.

The role of the UN, the OAS and other regional organizations in Ecuador and Bolivia must be understood in the context of a continent that has been reluctant to accept preventive initia-

tives. In fact, many Latin American leaders and officials have viewed conflict prevention efforts with suspicion. In addition to a strong belief in the principle of sovereignty and non-intervention in domestic affairs for historical reasons, countries in the region are also reluctant to be seen as the next crisis case. Thus, while there has been a more open attitude towards mediation or other conflict resolution strategies, the term conflict prevention continues to be problematic.

The region faces challenges such as political instability; inequities in wealth; issues of exclusion; widespread poverty; drug trade; energy security; and climate change.

Similarly, the region perceives international organizations such as the UN and the OAS to be too closely aligned with the interests of the United States. Latin American leaders have joined other voices critical of the UN structure that gives extraordinary powers to the permanent members of the Security Council, and Brazil has actively pushed for an enlarged Security Council where they would have a permanent seat. The imbalance of power is even more critical in the case of the OAS, given the perception that the United States has historically used its weight as the hegemonic power to shape the organization's actions, starting with the endorsement of the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965. The complicated history of the 1980s and 1990s - especially in relation to Cuba, Central America and the Southern Cone - has further contributed to a legacy of distrust towards organizations perceived to be controlled by the North. Although the election of José Miguel Insulza, the first Secretary General to win without the support of the US, might have changed the political standing of the organization in the last few years, many national leaders – and especially those of the 'new left' – have not shied away from expressing their distrust of multilateral organizations that they see closely aligned with an agenda directed by the North.

⁴The influence of Venezuela has been more evident in the case of Bolivia than in Ecuador. Correa's more independent political stance with regard to Chávez responds, among other things, to his strong standing vis-à-vis the national opposition.

⁵The Media Luna states are: Santa Cruz, Pando, Benin and Tarija.

As we will explain in the case studies, the role of the international community in conflict prevention in Ecuador and Bolivia in recent years has been complicated by the reluctance of both governments to openly welcome these initiatives, mostly for the reasons explained above. This paper thus aims to highlight the political context in which the international and regional organizations have designed and implemented their conflict prevention strategies, and how this has subsequently affected the interaction between actors, the efficacy of their initiatives and the strength of their programs. The UN has the most widespread presence in the region and engages in prevention efforts ranging from persuasion and negotiation, by means of good offices or mediation, to undertaking interventions that seek to reduce fragility or build resilience by focusing more on strengthening governance and democratic institutions. The presence of many UN agencies in the region gives the organization a full spectrum of mandates on issues related to conflict prevention, but at the same time creates fertile ground for overlapping and lack of coordination among these bodies. As we explain in the Ecuador case study, the UN has proved to be most effective in conflict prevention when it has made an explicit effort to internally coordinate prior to engaging on the ground.

The international community's conflict prevention efforts in Ecuador and Bolivia have been complicated by the reluctance of both governments to openly welcome these initiatives.

The OAS is the most important regional organization, and while it does not have a specific mandate for conflict prevention, it has played an important role in mediation, crisis management and conflict resolution. In his recent paper, Andrés Serbin examines how the OAS has been able to promote some preventive strategies despite facing obstacles such as “a lack of political will and difficulties in building consensus among its member states”.⁶ The OAS, Serbin explains, has traditionally been much more effective in responding to crisis

and mediating in conflict resolution than in implementing conflict prevention plans. In that sense, it can be described as a reactive rather than a prescriptive organization.

The combination of factors described here has resulted in the OAS sharing the role of conflict manager not only with the UN, but also with other sub-regional organizations such as MERCOSUR and nonprofits such as the Carter Center. The recently heightened confrontational rhetoric between countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, on the one hand, and the US on the other, has inspired the need for alternative venues. The most direct response was the creation of a South American community of nations in 2004, renamed UNASUR in May of 2008, to support the integration of South America. Although theoretically UNASUR aims to follow the integrationist example of the European Union, its political purpose was made clear by President Evo Morales when he said: “Now we don't have to go to the United States for solving conflicts in Latin America, because political leaders who before meddled are extinct”.⁷ The creation of UNASUR responds as much to the desire to marginalize the US, and to a certain extent Mexico, from a new space of decision making, as to the desire of Brazil and Venezuela to consolidate themselves as the regional powers.

Former OAS Secretary General João Baena Soares described the division of labor between the UN and the OAS in the following way: “the UN exists first and foremost to avert war and to watch over and maintain international peace, whereas the OAS was established to strengthen hemispheric solidarity”.⁸ The following case studies will show that this distinction is not so clear cut, and in fact ignores the subtle and complex coordination required for the promotion of adequate conflict prevention and conflict resolution strategies. As we hope the empirical evidence will demonstrate, coordination and collaboration among international and regional organizations is essential when navigating political terrains that are as complex and evolving as the ones in Bolivia and Ecuador.

⁶ Serbin, Andrés. “The Organization of American States and Conflict Prevention”. CIC, pag. 1

⁷ Interview in Telesur, September 24 2008.

⁸ Quoted by Serbin (op. cit., p.8), from Secretary General João Baena Soares “Cooperation between the Organization of American States and the United Nations System”.

Bolivia

The arrival to power in 2006 of Evo Morales, the first indigenous president of Bolivia and a former peasant and *cocalero* leader, was a watershed moment in a country where the indigenous majority had historically been marginalized and the white minority held a monopoly on power.⁹ His triumph came in the wake of over six years of intense political and social conflict, which had resulted in the ousting of two presidents by popular protests and, at times, violent confrontations. While Morales' triumph arguably vindicated the indigenous people's call for inclusion after a history of oppression and exclusion, his arrival to the presidency has not resolved many of the core issues dividing Bolivia, nor addressed those that must be at the core of any strategy for conflict prevention.

Bolivia has seen widespread political and social confrontations – erupting on the national scene in 2000 with the so-called 'water wars', a series of protests staged by the inhabitants of Cochabamba after the privatization of the local water company resulted in exorbitant rises in the price of this public service.¹⁰ The water wars were significant not only because they became a symbol of popular power against private corporations, but also because they touched upon several of the most significant cleavages dividing Bolivia. The country's choice of economic model, for example, has been a central polarizing issue. In 1985, Bolivia became the paragon of neo-liberalism after President Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada, advised by Jeffrey Sachs, implemented economic shock therapy, effectively cutting hyperinflation from 25,000% to 9% in less than two months. While effective in controlling the macro-economic figures, the neo-liberal policies were blamed for the perpetuation of the dire economic situation of most Bolivians: 65% of the population lives in poverty, 40% in extreme poverty, and Bolivia is one of three countries on the continent with the most unequal distribution of wealth.

The struggle against neo-liberal policies was led by the Bolivian Workers' Central (COB) in alliance with an indigenous movement that promptly put on the national agenda the

question of ethnic recognition and the demands of the coca growers. One of their central claims was the recognition of the cultural significance of coca cultivation for traditional use. More than 50,000 families in Bolivia make their livelihood from the cultivation of coca – mostly in the Chapare region – and their union, led at one time by President Evo Morales, demanded to be exempt from the eradication demands imposed by the US. By the end of the 1990s the US became so involved in Bolivian politics that the salaries of the anti-narcotic police were paid directly by the American Embassy in La Paz. The *cocalero* movement saw this as an example of improper foreign intervention and a sign of 'imperialism'.

The most divisive issue in recent years has been the management of the immense natural gas reserves; their nationalization was a central issue of the 2005 presidential campaign and one of the first acts of government of the Morales administration. Together with the question of autonomies, it also became a central point during the National Constituent Assembly (NCA). The indigenous movement had demanded for decades that a constituent assembly be convened to rewrite the national constitution, under the assumption that their direct involvement in the drafting of a new text would correct many historical inequalities. The July 2007 election gave a majority of the seats in the NCA to Morales' party MAS,

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but not enough to control the two-thirds majority required to pass a vote. The increasing polarization between MAS and the opposition parties turned the NCA not into the space of dialogue and re-founding of the nation some hoped for, but an arena where the extreme division of the country became evident. The process came to a messy end when MAS barred opposition members from entering the session where the Assembly approved a final text that consolidated comprehen-

⁹The indigenous Aymara and Quechua peoples constitute 62% of the population of Bolivia.

¹⁰ Thousands of indigenous, peasants and urban workers took to the streets of the third largest city of Bolivia in a protest that eventually led to a confrontation with the police and the fleeing of the executives of the corporation that managed the water services, Aguas del Tunari.

sive reforms. The National Electoral Court (CNE) determined in September 2008 that a referendum to legalize the new constitution needed the approval of congress.¹¹

Fearful of its defeat in an opposition-controlled congress, President Morales declared that the referendum would move ahead regardless, triggering protests and violent confrontations. After the killing of Morales supporters in Pando, government and opposition leaders agreed - in a pact brokered by the OAS, UNASUR and the UN- to hold the referendum on 25 January 2009 and early elections on 6 December 2009. In spite of the agreement, governors (prefects) of the half moon states responded with demands for increased autonomy, an issue that is at the heart of the instability of Bolivia.

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The referendums held in May and June 2008, which were approved by a landslide, increased autonomy for the states of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija, while also putting the country in a legal quagmire after the CNE declared the referendums illegal and Morales announced he would not recognize the results. By the end of October, the two sides had reached a compromise. Morales' party agreed that new landholding limitations would not be retroactive and that presidential terms would be limited to one term (not counting his current term). Congress, the majority of which are members of the opposition, agreed to send a new constitution backed by Morales to the January 2009 national referendum.

As pointed out by numerous analysts in Bolivia, the political struggle has damaged the resilience of Bolivian institutions, leaving them open to political manipulation.¹² The continued undermining of legitimate processes and institutions has also left the country increasingly vulnerable to greater violence.

Shuttle Diplomacy

In 2003, following the resignation of Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada, Vice-President Carlos Mesa assumed the Presidency and met with former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to request help in resolving the ongoing political crisis. Annan appointed José Antonio Ocampo, then the UN's Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, as his special envoy. Ocampo made his first official visit to Bolivia in March 2004 and spent over two years shuttling between New York and Bolivia, facilitating discussions between the political parties and mediating between the social movements and the government.

Soon after his December 2005 victory, Morales began to express strong skepticism about the role of multilateral and bilateral organizations in Bolivia. However, at the request of Morales, Ocampo began advising the Government on economic planning and developed a strong partnership with the new Minister of Planning. This entry point was lost when, after Ocampo's departure, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon declined to appoint a new UN Special Envoy to Bolivia. Ban's Special Adviser, Jan Egeland, visited Bolivia from 29 May to 2 June 2007 on a mission to assess the Government's need for technical support, including the possibility of establishing the Secretary-General's good offices. The results of this visit were discussed with the Government of Bolivia, and DPA sent a consultant to follow-up on Egeland's recommendations. As mentioned, however, the Morales administration was very reluctant to welcome the international cooperation, and it never responded to the UN's initiative.

The UN Country Team and Political Mediation

As in other cases where the UN engages in preventive efforts without the benefit of a clear mandate, effective prevention relies upon the competencies and creativity of the staff – at the country level and at headquarters. The UN's preventive role in Bolivia has been inconsistent and dependent upon the personality and approach of the particular Resident Represen-

¹¹ Some critics have called the legitimacy of the National Electoral Court into question, as only two of its five members have been actively involved in decision-making processes. It has also been viewed by some as too closely aligned with the Government, a similar argument cited in regards to the Ombudsman office. While it is beyond the scope of this research to determine the validity of these allegations, the perception of institutions acting on behalf of political agendas is widespread.

¹² The lack of quorum of the Constitutional Tribunal during most of the Morales administration is an example of such manipulation of democratic institutions.

tative. The UN office in La Paz, however, has a reputation as a useful source of data-gathering and solid analysis on political, economic and social trends and issues. The UN Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Reports, and later the creation of PAPEP (Political Analysis and Political Scenarios), has formed the backbone of the office operations – the quality of which is widely recognized. PAPEP has designed a methodology for the creation of short and medium term scenarios to help the UN Country Team, the Government of Bolivia, the international community and social actors make better informed decisions.

As a result of a UN Framework Team visit in April 2007, the UN Country Team designed a strategic plan in order to provide coherence to its work on governance and social cohesion. This strategy is based on diagnosis of the main challenges to social cohesion in Bolivia: inequality; disputes over natural resources; demands for local and indigenous autonomy; illegitimacy of representative institutions; and limited capacities of the Bolivian state in designing policies that favor participation, equality and efficiency.

Some of the main initiatives to implement this strategy are: supporting the National Electoral Court; facilitating social dialogue and processes of conflict resolution; promoting political debate; and supporting the National Constituent Assembly. In relation to this last point, the UN provided the members of the Constituent Assembly with access to experts on specific issues being discussed in the constitution-making process, and facilitated lesson-learning exercises with experts from other countries in the region that had recently reformed their own constitutions. The Framework Team's recommendations centered around two characteristics of the UN Country Team that should be strengthened further: one, the production of periodic political and strategic analyses to help create a common understanding of the conflicts affecting Bolivia; and two, opening meeting spaces with relevant actors of the political and social arenas to further their participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs and projects. Given the broad objectives of this strategy, it is indispen-

able that the UN has active and focused leaders that are able to translate these into concrete and effective programming. However, in the midst of increasing political crises and turmoil, the UN office in La Paz has struggled to adapt its existing capacity to more expansive prevention efforts. The UN office was without a Resident Representative for over a year and although some officials claim it is a difficult post to fill as few people fit the required profile, it points to a deeper problem within the UN – their antiquated recruitment system in which bureaucracy becomes an obstacle. The revolving door of acting representatives eroded the UN's public profile as well as the morale of the staff and the coherence of the work. Meanwhile, the political situation in Bolivia worsened as tension between the Government and the opposition escalated. It is important to note, however, that with the installation of a new Resident Representative in August 2008, the UN's presence and capacity has received a much-needed boost.

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While many continue to view the UN as the most neutral entity in Bolivia, at times its low profile preempted attempts at facilitation. Initially the Government dismissed the UN's mediation efforts, with the Bolivian Ambassador in NY calling the UN irrelevant. However, after the violence in Pando in September 2008 the UN – with the OAS and UNASUR – became a witness to the dialogue between the Government and the opposition. That the opposition specifically requested the presence of the UN as an unbiased force in the panel speaks of its perception as an impartial actor.

The Framework Team's mission to Bolivia spurred a new round of programming funded by the UN Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR). The focus is two-fold: to advance coordination of the UN team and to target prevention pro-

grams at the local level and with indigenous communities. While it is too early to evaluate performance, at the very least the new programming seems to have resulted in more enthusiasm and coherence within the UN office. At the time of writing, UNDP in New York was considering an integrated mission to further consider how to most effectively deliver program funds for governance.

Other Actors

Although Evo Morales' remains skeptical of the international donor community and its influence on Bolivian politics, with the exception of its deteriorating relationship with the US resulting in the expulsion of USAID programs, bilateral and multilateral donors continue to work closely with the Government. This collaboration has not been without its challenges, as many members of the executive were from the rank and file of the MAS – a peasant social movement, and certainly not a traditional training ground for bureaucrats or technocrats. Meanwhile, the festering conflict – and subversion of the rule of law and institutions – complicates the implementation of economic and social programs. While new donors, such as Venezuela, are more active in providing economic assistance, the traditional international donors have been struggling with how and where to invest funds considering the rapidly eroding legitimacy of core institutions.

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In the beginning of 2008, the OAS initiated a process of facilitation, partly in response to the lack of international actors engaged with the Government in these efforts. Dante Caputo, the Secretary for Political Affairs, undertook several missions to meet with both sides of the conflict. While difficult to measure, some believe that the shuttle diplomacy succeeded

in calming both sides of the escalating conflict. However, the OAS has been viewed by others as too partial towards the agenda of the Government. The opposition was angered by statements that supported the Morales administration, issued by OAS Secretary General Insulza after a January 2008 visit, as well as those that later legitimated the outcome of the Constituent Assembly. Insiders explain Insulza's comments as an effort to establish an entry point with the Government in the face of continuous rejection to foreign mediation. Other attempts at mediation were undertaken by the European Union and the Group of Friends (Argentina, Brazil and Colombia), but such efforts were either unable to identify a neutral arbiter acceptable to both sides or faced serious challenges of coordination.

Mounting protests in the eastern states in September 2008 ended with 17 people being killed and the temporary cut-off of gas supply to Brazil and Argentina. In response, and with the political backing of Brazil's President Lula da Silva, Chile's President convened South American heads-of-state under the banner of UNASUR. The meeting concluded with a declaration of strong support for President Morales and a call for dialogue. Only four months after the establishment of UNASUR's constitutive treaty, it was hailed by some leaders as the first time that Latin America has resolved its own problems. Given the increasingly complicated relationship with the US, the OAS's space for maneuvering has been limited in spite of what appears to be the increasing independence of the organization.

Chile appointed a Special Envoy for UNASUR, Juan Gabriel Valdés, whose mandate was to coordinate dialogue between the government and opposition, which sat together in Cochabamba for two weeks and established a series of thematic working groups. In addition to UNASUR, representatives of the OAS and the UN acted as observers in the negotiations – a strategy that helped facilitate a successful outcome. The arrival of a proactive Resident Representative appears to have reinvigorated the UN's role in recent negotiations and enabled more coordination amongst the different multilateral

organizations. The UN's collaboration with the OAS, UNASUR, the EU, and the Catholic and Evangelical Churches as witnesses to the tense Dialogue Process in Bolivia was positive in many ways. During this process the UN was considered a representative of the international community, and the other international bodies witnessing the negotiations often asked the Resident Representative to speak on behalf of them all.

Ecuador

Rafael Correa was elected President of Ecuador in 2006, in the wake of a political crisis that began in 1995 when Vice-President Alberto Dahik was removed from office due to accusations of corruption. In the ten years that followed, none of the seven elected presidents were able to finish their term. As in Bolivia's recent history, popular mobilizations and protests were central to these episodes of instability. However, unlike Bolivia, the demonstrations have rarely resulted in violence or loss of life.

The crisis that Ecuador has faced in the last two decades has been aptly described by Carlos Arcos as centered around three crucial problems: 1) the impossibility of reaching a consensus on the right economic model for the country, 2) the inability to incorporate the political demands of social actors that used to be marginalized but that are now protagonists of Ecuador's political life, such as the indigenous communities and 3) the state's reluctance to institutionalize a public ethic that limited practices such as corruption and nepotism.¹³ These major cleavages divided the country in the 1990s, and were central to the political debate of the last presidential campaign. Although the triumph of the populist Rafael Correa indicates a swing of opinion away from the neoliberal minimalist state promulgated in the past, these issues are still today very much on the Ecuadorian agenda.

Correa won the presidency after a contentious electoral campaign against Álvaro Noboa, a populist millionaire with a conservative, Catholic-based discourse. Correa ran initially on a leftist platform, aligning himself with the regional turn against

the economic and political policies inspired by the Washington consensus, and issuing a severe indictment of the people and institutions responsible for the 'long neo-liberal night'. After Noboa won a slight majority in the first round, Correa moderated his stance, distancing himself from Hugo Chávez – an alliance that scared the middle and upper classes – and focusing on income redistribution, providing subsidies for the poorest sectors and the economy.

Correa, who ran on the ticket of *Alianza País*, a recently created political movement, was highly vocal in blaming the political parties, or "*partidocracia*", for many of Ecuador's political and economic problems. Consequently with its 'anti-politics' stance, Alianza País decided against participating in the congressional elections. While this proved to be a popular move that strengthened Correa's image as a different type of politician, it also left him without support in the Senate to pass his initiatives. A particularly intense confrontation between Correa, Congress and the Courts ensued after Correa tried to implement his most important campaign promise: the convening of a National Constituent Assembly (NCA).

Correa eventually moderated his stance and focused on income redistribution, the economy and providing subsidies for the poorest sectors.

Ecuador has historically called for constitutional assemblies as mechanisms for political reform. This was the 18th time such a body has been convened, the last one having taken place less than ten years earlier. Both the referendum to decide on having the NCA and to approve the resulting constitution received widespread public support. This can also be interpreted as a show of support for the political project led by President Correa, who has approval rates that surpass 60 percent. Not only is this unusual in a country where leaders consider themselves lucky with 40 percent support, it is also a testament of his political skills considering he started his mandate in a weak position.

¹³ Arcos Cabrera, Carlos. "¿Crisis en democracia o democracia en crisis?", *Iconos*, No. 1, Flaco- Ecuador, 1997.

In contrast to the Constituent Assembly of 1998 – which was convened in response to pressure from the indigenous movement but was dominated by a right-leaning coalition that enshrined neo-liberalism and a strong executive – the Assembly of 2007-2008 was clearly controlled by the party of the President, Alianza País. While some observers noted the openness of the process, especially vis-à-vis civil society and public input, the opposition members of the Assembly claimed to have been marginalized given that Alianza País already had the requisite amount of votes.

In contrast to Bolivia, there has been remarkable stability in the UN Country Team in Ecuador, allowing the office to create deep connections with political actors and members of civil society.

The transitional regime designed by the NCA has called for general elections in early 2009. As things stand, no candidate presents a credible opposition to President Correa. Correa's popularity results in part from the delivery of promised social programs, such as the '*bonos*'- subsidies to help poor sectors of the population access health, education and other social services. However, the continuation of these programs depends on oil revenues and the national budgets have been designed assuming an international price of at least US\$60 a barrel. Now that the world financial crisis has dramatically affected the price of oil, there is uncertainty regarding the continued availability of the necessary funds.

The UN's Role

There are some important differences with the UN's operations in Ecuador compared to those in Bolivia. There has been remarkable stability in the UN Country Team (UNCT), which had the same Resident Representative for over five years, allowing the office to create deep connections with political actors and members of civil society. Interviews with members of civil society, academia and political circles made it

clear that the stability of personnel in the UNCT contributed to confidence in the UN as a source of support and in its role as interlocutor.

Perhaps the UN's most important preventive initiatives have been focused on the northern border with Colombia. There have also been efforts to provide technical support to the State on governance and strengthening of democratic procedures, among other long term structural approaches. The UN has also provided support during the confrontation between different branches of government and other institutional crises, mostly through the use of UN Rapporteurs.

For the last decade, the region surrounding Ecuador's border with Colombia has faced serious political and economic challenges, many of which increase the risk of an outbreak of conflict. In recent years the border area has witnessed a drastic downturn in the local economy, caused by a combination of dollarization (which reduced the comparative advantage of Ecuadorian products) and the loss in cross-border traffic and employment; an increase in violence from the Colombian conflict; internal displacement of Ecuadorians as a result of the preceding two factors; concern about the health and environmental consequences of fumigation close to the Ecuadorian border; and fear that the production and manufacture of cocaine may in the future shift to Ecuador on a larger scale. Importantly, the northern border is the gate through which most Colombian refugees enter Ecuador -one of every ten inhabitants of the area is Colombian. As a result, the area is a main focus for UNHCR and other humanitarian and human rights agencies.

In 2003, DPA and UNDP implemented the Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention to support initiatives for early warning and other mechanisms of conflict prevention along the border. After a visit by former Secretary-General Annan to Ecuador in 2003, the Government of Ecuador requested that the UN send an inter-agency mission to assess the situation on the ground and recommend conflict prevention mechanisms.¹⁴ The mission produced a

report which presented the main challenges and priorities for action; this plan, according to some of the people interviewed, became a guide for the work of the Ecuadorian Government through its office for the region, UDENOR (Development Unit of the Northern Border) and the UN system.

Currently, the UN office in Ecuador coordinates its activities in the border through the Peace and Development Programme in the Northern Border Zone (PDP- NBZ). The PDP- NBZ is an impressive effort that focuses on strengthening conflict-sensitive interagency coordination, key national capacities and strategic public policy. It involves over 30 different projects and coordinates the work of 14 agencies of the UN system, both inside Ecuador and across the border with counterparts in Colombia. Arguably most important, has been the effort of the coordinator of the program – who is also the Peace and Development Advisor based in the Ecuador country office- to actively engage all agencies present in the region to ensure that they work in a coordinated manner, which has resulted in noticeable changes in their programmatic strategies.

The Government of Ecuador followed UN recommendations when designing its own *Plan Ecuador*, and the UN advised the Governments of both Colombia and Ecuador in their negotiations on the Bi-National Development Plan: a group of developing projects that could promote bilateral integration along the border, which became known as the '*positive agenda*'. Finally, UNDP and the Carter Center created a forum of opinion-makers from both countries, designed to promote the strengthening of bilateral relations, which proved to be useful in supporting the OAS Secretary General's good offices even though it faced opposition from the Government.

Governance

While the role of the UN along the border is widely acknowledged as a success, some of the people interviewed noted that the organization's cautious approach to issues of governance and political stability has had an ambivalent effect. On the one hand, it has diminished any fear of 'external interven-

tion', and made the UN a welcome interlocutor. On the other hand, it has limited the potential role of the UN, particularly in moments of political crisis, where it could have played a more active facilitating role (as it has in the recent Bolivia crisis).

In the realm of governance, the UN has focused on providing technical assistance on state and territorial reform and constitutional issues. While the UN's agenda has found resonance in the main governance programs designed by the Government, the constant change of Ministers and other high functionaries has slowed the development of programmatic activities. Also, the Government views members of previous administrations suspiciously (or part of the "long neo-liberal night"), and tends to be resistant to working with UNCT staff that previously held public positions.

In the realm of governance, the UN has focused on providing technical assistance on state and territorial reform and constitutional issues.

During the recent sessions of the National Constituent Assembly, Alianza País asked the UN to make experts available to the Assembly to advise them on specific issues. The UN responded with notable efficiency and provided experts to share their experiences from other countries in the region that had gone through similar processes. Also, the United Nation's Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, addressed the Constitutional Assembly on the issue of plurinationality and indigenous rights. While the UN was able to provide the experts – usually chosen because they supported the ideological position of the majority – it did not make a systematic effort to expose the Assembly to diverse opinions on the issues being discussed. Members of the opposition acknowledge that they failed to make good use of the UN as a resource to strengthen their own positions within the debates. However, it appears that the UN missed an important opportunity to provide systematic input to a public discussion that will have crucial implications for questions of governance and democratization.

¹⁴The inter-agency mission was formed by UNHCR, DPA, FAP, OPS/WHO, WFP, UNDP, UNICEF, UNODC, UNSECCORD and UNV, with technical advice from UNESCO, UNFPA and UNIFEM.

Institutional Stability

The most important role played by the UN in terms of operational prevention was its timely intervention to preserve the constitutional order during the clashes among the branches of power in 2005. The diplomatic efforts of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Leandro Despouy, were central in ameliorating serious institutional crisis after members of Congress (allied with President Lucio Gutiérrez) dismissed the Supreme Court in an attempt to halt corruption investigations against members of the Government. The closing of the Court by police resulted in massive popular protests, and eventually the ouster of President Gutiérrez.

The UN's most important operational prevention act was its timely intervention to preserve the constitutional order during the clashes among the branches of power.

The UN worked closely with the government of Vice-President Alfredo Palacio, who took over the presidency, to find ways to guarantee the political independence of the judiciary. After several visits to Ecuador, Mr. Despouy recommended that the international community should serve as an observer of the judge selection process, placing emphasis on their backgrounds and issues such as gender-equity. The UN, the OAS and the Andean Community of Nations then provided international witnesses to the choosing of a new Supreme Court, with the hope that a merit-led process observed by the international community would contribute to respect for the rule of law. The work of Mr. Despouy was supported in UN Headquarters by an intra-agency task force that included DPA, UNDP and its Resident Representative in Ecuador, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Executive Committee on Peace and Security also discussed the case.¹⁵

The OAS and Other Actors

Although Ecuador has had its own share of political instability, the international community has not played the role of mediator as in the case of Bolivia. In fact, critics have argued that regional lack of action during some of the institutional crises has contributed to the erosion of democratic institutions. In 2005, for example, when confrontations between the Supreme Court and President Lucio Gutiérrez eventually resulted in massive protests that led to his ouster, the regional organizations decided to stay on the sidelines despite numerous calls within Ecuador for a political mediator. While Special Rapporteur Despouy had called upon the nations of the Rio Group to become active in preventing a long term compromise of the division of powers, the OAS only sent its mission after Gutiérrez's ouster. The OAS did collaborate with the UN and the Andean Community of Nations to provide witnesses for the selection of a new Supreme Court. However, its role in Ecuador has mostly been focused on reporting democratic breakdowns after the fact, rather than active prevention.

This supports the notion that the OAS' involvement has been shaped by the tension between respecting the principle of sovereignty and the mandate to promote democracy. As Arceaux and Pion-Berlin argue, the OAS tends to act vigorously where there are evident violations to democratic institutions, but much less so when the situation is more ambiguous, e.g. when popular mobilizations attempt to overthrow an elected official.¹⁶ In Perú, for example, the OAS sent a high-level commission led by then Secretary General César Gaviria and the Foreign Minister of Canada Lloyd Axworthy, to create a table for negotiations that was instrumental in the transition of power between Alberto Fujimori and Valentín Paniagua. The OAS was also quick to condemn publicly the attempted coup against Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez in 2002, in spite of several signs that the United States tacitly approved interruption of the constitutional order.¹⁷ Interestingly, the OAS was much less decisive when popular protests resulted in the ousting of three Ecuadorian presidents in the span of the last decade; or when street mobilizations demanded the ouster

¹⁵ The UN was not as effective when in early 2007 the Electoral Tribunal, the Constitutional Court and Congress got into a confrontation regarding the convocation of a referendum to convene the Constituent Assembly.

¹⁶ Craig Arceaux and David Pion-Berlin, *Transforming Latin America: The International and Domestic Origins of Change* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Although Chávez and his supporters have alleged that the US was behind the coup attempt, there is no evidence to sustain this. In a joint declaration with Spain, the US refrained from calling this episode a coup and in a vaguely worded statement called for the quick normalization of the situation.

of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (2003) and Carlos Mesa (2005) in Bolivia. In the two cases that occupy us in this paper, the OAS refrained from judging the legitimacy of these protests, and opted for prioritizing national sovereignty and the lack of foreign intervention in internal affairs, instead of acting to preserve representative democracies.¹⁸

After the recent fallout from the Colombian Government's bombing of a FARC military camp in Ecuador, the OAS established a Good Offices Mission to mediate between the two countries, which have not renewed diplomatic relations.¹⁹ The OAS decided to open offices in Quito and Bogotá to support the Mission, and created a team of specialists comprised of experts on security and border issues that could be deployed in situ if necessary. Pundits in both countries called for a more active role of the OAS Secretary General to reactivate his good offices as a response to this crisis.

Conclusion

Ecuador and Bolivia are in a crucial political moment. Having concluded their constitution-making processes, the elections in 2009 will determine the balance of power in these divided societies, as well as the future of the newly drafted constitutions. As we have shown, Ecuador arrives at this moment with a more stable government, intent upon consolidating an ambitious political project, while Bolivia faces even further polarization and possibly violent conflict.

In both countries, the UN faces a delicate situation. First, the UN's mandate is more ambiguous in conflict prevention than in cases of open conflict. The multiplicity of agencies can be fertile ground for wide-ranging and ambitious work, but also uncoordinated and contradictory. Second, the political environment in which the UN must operate also complicates matters. Resistance to political intervention from international organizations perceived to be acting with an ulterior agenda can be strong. The turn to the left in many countries in Latin America has contributed to a strengthening and even radicalization of this position. As we have shown in the case studies,

the Morales and Correa administrations have been resistant to welcome foreign mediation, and the role of the international organizations must necessarily be evaluated in this difficult context.

The OAS, in turn, has also faced similar obstacles: a regional perception that the US holds much of the weight in the decision-making process has led governments to be reluctant of its interventions, while the organization itself has acted with extreme caution to avoid hurting national sensitivities or disrespect the non-interference principle. UNASUR and other sub-regional organizations may provide the most effective political leverage in bringing parties to the negotiating table, if they are viewed by all parties as honest brokers. At the same time, the case of Bolivia illustrates that joint action by international organizations – drawing on comparative diplomatic and technical strengths – could prove to be an effective strategy in resolving crises.

In both Bolivia and Ecuador, the OAS refrained from judging the legitimacy of the protests, and opted to prioritize national sovereignty and the prevention of foreign intervention in internal affairs, instead of acting to preserve representative democracies.

The role of the UN and other multilaterals in Bolivia and Ecuador illustrates both successful examples of prevention and opportunities lost. UN country offices can be an important source of solid political analysis to feed into prevention efforts and a catalyst for the production of local knowledge. While this is true for Ecuador, it has been particularly effective in La Paz where UN reports and the work of PAPEP have been useful for analysts and practitioners alike, and the timely feeding of research and data examination into the political process has been widely recognized.

¹⁸ See Ana María Bejarano "La región andina y el contexto hemisférico. O de cómo construir región en tiempos turbulentos". Unpublished, 2008.

¹⁹ Initially, Ecuador called for a meeting of the Rio Group to address the Colombian-Ecuadorian diplomatic crisis. The Rio Group met in Santo Domingo and condemned Colombia for having violated Ecuador's sovereignty.

The UN can also effectively promote conflict prevention strategies at the local level, especially when working in countries with weak institutional capacity. The UN has been able to effectively target problematic regions. The experience in the Northern Border Zone of Ecuador has led them to consider replicating the model of inter-agency cooperation in similar contexts.

Given the cycles of crisis that both Bolivia and Ecuador have gone through in recent years, it is essential to see the UN's efforts towards resolution as the basis for conflict prevention in the medium and long term.

The United Nations system was responsive to the requests of the Constituent Assemblies of Ecuador and Bolivia, and facilitated technical workshops and visits from experts that further helped inform the debate on institutional design. The UN has also been a partner of the state in conducting state reform, providing operational support to specific initiatives. However, more effective coordination would have increased the impact of these activities. Constitution-making processes are unique opportunities to advance issues high on the UN agenda, such as good governance and democratic consolidation. Experts in both Bolivia and Ecuador noted that this was a lost opportunity for the UN to provide more coherent input at a critical juncture. The coming months will be key in defining the transitional regime in Ecuador. In Bolivia, the struggle over economic power and political institutions will continue. Guidance from the international community could prove useful in addressing the challenges of the post-constituent period in both countries.

The implementation of consistent prevention strategies has been mixed. In Bolivia, the UN lost vital recognition as an effective mediator after the end of high-level engagement and with the absence of a Resident Representative for such a long time. This signaled a diminished role in its capacity to

prevent conflict. The recent arrival of a Resident Coordinator and the resulting improvement in the UN's reputation and contribution to the most recent round of negotiations, further underlines the importance of consistent attention. In contrast, the stability of the team and the frequent visits by high-level functionaries guaranteed a relevant role for the UN in Ecuador throughout recent crises. However, in both Ecuador and Bolivia the UN was cautious in their involvement in political prevention, fearing a compromise of their relations with the governments. Although understandable given the complicated political sensitivities, such caution might have negatively affected their level of initiative and the creativity of their engagement.

The cases of Bolivia and Ecuador demonstrate that, especially in countries where there is a high risk of conflict but no open violence, the line between conflict prevention and conflict management and resolution is a thin one. The UN has certainly made enormous strides towards the design of effective long term strategies and measures to prevent conflict. Given the cycles of crisis that both Bolivia and Ecuador have gone through in recent years, it is essential to see these efforts towards resolution as the basis for conflict prevention in the medium and long term. The UN has unparalleled infrastructure in the region and should not shy away from that task. At the same time, in cases where political and institutional limitations restrict their role, the best strategy will be to work closely with regional organizations, whose success in resolving momentary crises could be crucial in avoiding further escalation.

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