Enter 9/11: Latin America and the Global War on Terror

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Abstract
This article offers an analysis of the transnational discursive construction processes informing Latin American security governance in the aftermath of 9/11. It demonstrates that the Global War on Terror provided an opportunity for external and aligned local knowledge producers in the security establishments throughout the Americas to reframe Latin America’s security problems through the promotion of a militarised security epistemology, and derived policies, centred on the region’s ‘convergent threats’. In tracing the discursive repercussions of this epistemic reframing, the article shows that, by tapping into these discourses, military bureaucracies throughout the Americas were able to overcome their previous institutional marginalisation vis-à-vis civilian agencies. This development contributed to the renaissance of counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism discourses and policies in the region, allowing countries such as Colombia and Brazil to reposition themselves globally by exporting their military expertise for confronting post-9/11 threats beyond the region.

Keywords: Global War on Terror; epistemic communities; counter-insurgency; counter-terrorism; Colombia; Brazil

Introduction
This article addresses the transformation of Latin America’s security environment in the aftermath of 9/11 in order to explain the resurgence of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency-related discourses and policies in the region. It argues that 9/11, together with the global revival of counter-insurgency, from the mid-2000s onwards, provided an opportunity for an ‘epistemic community’, composed out of external and aligned local actors in the security policy establishments throughout the Americas, to recast the region’s security problems. This community facilitated the movement of a Global War on Terror (GWOT)-related security epistemology to Latin America. In turn, by discursively framing the region’s contemporary security problems as ‘convergent threats’ – often understood in terms of a ‘crime–terror–insurgency nexus’ – these actors managed to adapt post-9/11 global security epistemologies to Latin American realities. In essence, this reframing allowed for connecting the region’s security problems to a GWOT-inspired vocabulary.
emphasising the terrorist/insurgent qualities of criminal actors in the region while embedding them within a global post-9/11 threat scenario. As a consequence, counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism discourses and policies, which often tend to be associated with Latin America’s past, have resurfaced, partly by enabling a reappearance of military discourses and practitioners from the ‘Global Cold War’ (GCW).\(^1\) Accordingly, by tapping into these discourses, military bureaucracies throughout the Americas were able to expand their budgets and overcome their previous institutional marginalisation vis-à-vis civilian agencies. This development, moreover, has provided Latin American countries, such as Colombia and Brazil, with an opportunity to reposition themselves globally by (re)branding and exporting their military expertise as a model for confronting ‘convergent’ post-9/11 security threats beyond the region.

In developing these arguments, the article makes three contributions to the debates on Latin America’s ‘violent’\(^2\) and ‘securitized’\(^3\) democracies. First, it assesses the impact of 9/11 on the ways security is governed and violence addressed in the region, topics that have received little attention in contemporary debates. Second, the article explores the transnational dimension of security governance in contemporary Latin America. Although much is known about national and sub-national causes and consequences of violence in the region, together with efforts to counter them,\(^4\) the debate has not yet been upscaled to the level of transnational interactions. Stated otherwise, scholars have largely ignored asking how these local processes are embedded in ongoing reconfigurations of transnational security governance – in particular after 9/11. On the flipside, the possible ways that related Latin American developments have implications beyond the region have been left uncharted. Third, the article unpacks some of the taken-for-granted epistemic underpinnings of the ideas about how to counter violence and govern security in the region, where they come from, who imports them and to what effect. In fact, scholars too often tend to assume the validity of policy vision and practitioners’ ideas regarding how to counter violence and govern security. In turn, successes or failures of particular security models are analysed without delving into the knowledge economies that make certain policies travel.\(^5\)


On the following pages, these issues will be explored through an analytical narrative that will assess the epistemological underpinnings of contemporary policy discourses gravitating around ‘convergent’ security threats in Latin America by assessing how the actors involved discursively ‘construct their policy arguments’ and to what effect. By drawing upon an analysis of government and policy documents as well as informal and formal military doctrinal publications – and without claiming to offer an exhaustive account of these processes – the narrative will zoom in on key actors and developments that facilitated Latin America’s integration into the GWOT. To this end, the narrative will follow the multi-scalar (global, national, regional) travels of the post-9/11 security epistemology and the ‘actor-network’ that created the underlying conceptual framing of crime–terror–insurgency ‘convergences’, from the battlefields of the GWOT, to the United States, Latin America and beyond.

Converging Post-9/11 Threats

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 profoundly transformed the global security environment. Today, there seem to be widespread international concerns regarding the global threat potential of Islamist terrorism, whose transnational structures, religious inspiration and increased operational lethality seem to indicate a ‘new’ quality of the contemporary terrorism landscape.

Latin America, however, is rarely perceived as a target of Islamist terrorism. As a recently published report by the US Congressional Research Service argues, ‘[c]ompared to other parts of the world, the potential threat emanating from terrorism is low in most countries in Latin America’. The acts of terrorism that are identified in the report predominantly occur in the Andean region of South America, committed by two Colombian guerrilla groups – Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC) and Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army, ELN) – and one Peruvian guerrilla group, Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path, SL). As these insurgent groups are neither Islamist nor new threats to the affected countries, the question arises how and why a region that is not home to, nor significantly targeted by, transnational Islamist terrorism became integrated into the post-9/11 security context. To answer this query, the role of epistemic communities in the rise of the ‘new

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counterinsurgency era”\(^{10}\) within the context of the GWOT needs to be assessed. These communities managed to promote a post–9/11 security worldview that discursively connects the issues of insurgency and terrorism by stressing the connections between these phenomena, on the one hand, and relating them to crime, on the other. In making this security epistemology, gravitating around concepts such as the crime–terror–insurgency nexus,\(^{11}\) travel to Latin America, these communities adapted its underlying threat scenario and policy prescriptions to the region’s realities by reframing criminal actors, such as street gangs, as terrorists and/or insurgents,\(^{12}\) as well as placing them in a global post-9/11 context.

**Travelling Epistemologies**

As with all other forms of governance, security governance – including threat perceptions as well as related prescripts on how to tackle them – is related to dominant forms of knowing, or epistemologies, which construct political reality and ways of ordering it. This construction is based on making truth claims concerning governance problems and solutions that are grounded in knowledge.\(^{13}\)

When it comes to particular policies, globally dominant epistemologies reflect the power and influence of what Peter M. Haas termed ‘epistemic communities’. These communities are composed of networks of recognised experts who share a ‘set of normative and principled beliefs’. Members of epistemic communities usually have a ‘competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area’.\(^{14}\) They also often share a common educational, institutional and/or professional background and seek to transform a current state of affairs by mobilising their acquired, collectively shared and recognised knowledge.\(^{15}\) As epistemic communities operate in a highly competitive economy, their claim to be in the exclusive possession of uniquely relevant knowledge for solving pressing governance problems is crucial for prevailing in such an environment by enabling an epistemic community to credibly uphold the claim of knowing the ‘way forward’. Accordingly, an epistemic community’s power depends upon the promotion of specific ‘success models’ and solutions to


\(^{13}\)Jan-Peter Voß and Richard Freeman (eds.), *Knowing Governance: The Epistemic Construction of Political Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).


address governance problems in a way that derived policy proposals resonate with changing global (geo)political context conditions and related preferences – normative, political and economic – of policy-makers. Other relevant factors include the authority of the knowledge producers themselves, which is related to the power/influence of the network in which they are embedded as well as the related access to dominant policy actors and institutions, both at home and abroad.16

These communities, as Haas argues, ‘are channels through which new ideas circulate from societies to governments as well as from country to country’ by articulating ‘cause-and-effect relationships of complex problems, helping states identify their interests, framing the issues for collective debate, proposing specific policies, and identifying salient points for negotiation’.17

Epistemic communities, in this regard, are important for assessing the mobility of policies as well as the multi-scalar institutional and personal networks involved in their construction.18 These communities provide for the ‘social infrastructure’ of globally mobile policies, as Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore have shown, which creates deep interconnections amongst people, institutions and places by enabling a ‘cross-referential intensity’ in and through which particular policy ideas come to express a commonly shared consensus regarding ‘models’, ‘best practices’, new governance technologies and problem framings.19 Such shared consensus, before it becomes official policy, however, is established through a more subterranean process in which new epistemologies circulate throughout expert networks, often in informal ways, and regularly through publications.20

Publications are indeed the core means for the dissemination of an epistemic community’s ‘new ideas’ and the emergence of a network-wide accepted epistemic vocabulary. The latter usually takes the form of concepts, such as the ‘crime–terror–insurgency nexus’, which form the ‘analytical backbone’ of mobile policies.21 These concepts render particular contexts legible, make them comparable and allow them to be linked, against the backdrop of analytically pre-established categories through which initially unrelated objects are grouped together ‘as instances of the same kind of thing’.22 Such concepts are brought to life through the collective work of epistemic networks and the associations of the actors involved. As Christian Bueger and Felix Bethke have put it by drawing on insights from Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory:23

16Moe and Müller, ‘Counterinsurgency’, p. 207.
Initially, a concept is an effect of a web of associations. A novel concept is an innovation brought about by such a web. Understanding the life of the concept is to investigate the work that goes into weaving this net – to study the actors who conduct this work and are part of the net. [...] The materials that make up a network giving life to a concept are mainly texts and actors producing these texts, reading these texts and adjusting their [discursive] behaviour to these texts.\textsuperscript{24}

In line with actor-network theory, focusing on the conceptual work of epistemic communities – together with the underlying dynamics of the ‘web of associations’ that connects people, institutions and places – offers a methodological roadmap for studying these processes from a relational perspective. Latour’s proposal ‘to follow the actors themselves’, which requires trying to ‘catch up with their often wild innovations’ while recognising ‘the multiplicity of agencies\textsuperscript{25} involved in rendering policies mobile, allows institutional, geographic and actor-related ‘interconnections’ to be uncovered. As Timothy Mitchell puts it, one can ‘establish the routes along which facts [and the concepts rendering them legible] can travel and be confirmed’ by examining the wider ‘political and intellectual arrangements of which they form a part’\textsuperscript{26}.

Emphasising such ‘interconnections’ calls for a focus on local interests that embrace externally provided models and concepts as well as on the wider resonances such models have in specific contexts. Such resonance and appeal usually imply a conceptual reassembling through which local actors cherry-pick the symbolic, material, discursive and/or practical elements of mobile policies that are most relevant for pursuing their own interests. This involves a transformation of the original ideas and models according to local needs.\textsuperscript{27}

By concentrating on the role of epistemic communities in the resurgence of counter-insurgency within the context of the GWOT, and by following the actors as well as travelling concepts involved – which have increasingly interwoven the issues of (counter)insurgency, (counter)terrorism and crime – the remainder of this article will demonstrate how and why Latin America ‘entered’ the global post-9/11 security context.

**The New Counter-Insurgency Era**

Around 2005–6, counter-insurgency witnessed a revival within the GWOT, notably within the United States. Faced with continuous setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US military initiated a practical and doctrinal shift from ‘conventional’ warfare towards more ‘unconventional’ counter-insurgency operations.\textsuperscript{28} The growing attention paid to counter-insurgency within the GWOT, which has been portrayed


\textsuperscript{25}Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, pp. 12, 260.


\textsuperscript{27}Peck and Theodore, *Fast Policy*, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{28}Ucko, *The New Counterinsurgency Era*. 
as a new ‘prototypical form of warfare’ marked by ‘a mutation or fusion of insurgency and terrorism’, has increasingly bound together counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism to an extent that successfully combatting terrorism also means countering insurgencies, and vice versa.

Debates on terrorism and insurgency, moreover, have increasingly focused on crime. In fact, it became more and more clear that many GWOT insurgents, notably the Taliban in Afghanistan, financed their activities through criminal activities, particularly drug trafficking. As influential policy scholar Vanda Felbab-Brown puts it:

Afghanistan has become one of the most important locations in the U.S. struggle against terrorism, along with Iraq, its main theater of counterinsurgency operations against the resurgent Taliban, which has been deeply involved in the drug trade despite first proscribing it as un-Islamic. Thus, for the United States, Afghanistan has come to epitomize the nexus of drugs and insurgency.

Such reasoning on the ‘nexus of drugs and insurgency’ was especially well received by US government officials, who, already before 9/11, had started to worry about crime-terrorism ‘convergences’. Apparently evidenced by the fact that the financing of terrorist organisations throughout the world, to varying degrees, depends upon drug trafficking, fears about such convergences also enveloped Latin America, particularly Colombia. Here, FARC’s ability to control parts of Colombian territory, in addition to its alleged ties to the Russian mafia and Mexican cartels, transformed Colombia’s security context. As Michael A. Sheehan, then-coordinator for counter-terrorism at the Department of State (DoS), expressed in 2000, Colombia became ‘the primary example of narcoterrorism in the world where the drug trade is a major factor in terrorism activities’. These worries were exacerbated by 9/11. And at a critical GWOT juncture, publications, such as the ones by Felbab-Brown, made the idea of a nexus between drugs, terrorism and insurgency so popular that in the wider US foreign policy establishment the crime–terror–insurgency nexus became part and parcel of official policy discourses.

This points towards the influence of an epistemic community within the US security establishment, which Thomas E. Ricks terms ‘COINdinistas’: a network of people whose epistemological work facilitated the resurgence of counter-insurgency in the US military and foreign policy establishment. Institutionally and personally connected by a shared professional interest, or what Haas calls a ‘common policy enterprise’, the actor-network comprising the COINdinistas can be analysed as an epistemic community because the actors involved share ‘a set

33Thomas E. Ricks, ‘The COINdinistas’, Foreign Policy, 30 Nov. 2009.
of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence. Enhancing ‘human welfare’, in this case, means promoting counter-insurgency.

This epistemic community emerged with the post-9/11 revival of the GCW-era US (counter)insurgency industry, a network of people and institutions addressing policy demands for actionable (counter)insurgency knowledge, now reborn as a ‘counterterrorism/counterinsurgency industry’. In addition to militaries and intelligence services, this industry is composed of government agencies, such as parts of the DoS, or the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), academics, journalists, think tanks, public and private research institutions, such as the Research and Development (RAND) Corporation, the National Defense University (NDU) or the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), as well as private contractors and consultants. This community, whose main activity is the production and dissemination of insurgency-related knowledge, managed to reframe the problems in Afghanistan and Iraq through the lens of counter-insurgency and provide derived policy recommendations regarding the ‘way forward’. Its most influential members, as identified by Ricks, include: General (ret.) David Petraeus, former commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and commanding general of the Multi-National Force – Iraq; Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) John A. Nagl, former CNAS vice-president; David Kilcullen, a former Australian soldier and advisor to the DoS as the chief strategist in the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism and one of the world’s leading counter-insurgency theoreticians; Janine Davidson, at that time director of stability operations capabilities within the Office for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict of the US Assistant Secretary of Defense, as well as founding director of the Consortium for Complex Operations, which later became the NDU-based Center for Complex Operations; and Dave Dilegge, founder and co-editor-in-chief of the Small Wars Journal (SWJ), which by that time ‘became a must read for people in uniform who were looking for answers to the problems they faced in Iraq and Afghanistan’.

In 2006, the epistemic work of the COINdinistas culminated in the publication of the US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual FM 3-24 (hereafter

34Haas, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.
38Ricks, ‘The COINdinistas’.
41Hodge, Armed Humanitarians, p. 150.
which moved counter-insurgency from an ‘enemy-centric’ focus. Instead of just killing adversaries, this meant stressing ‘[h]e importance of protecting the populace, gaining people’s support by assisting them, and using measured force when fighting insurgents’. Rebranding counter-insurgency as ‘population-centric’ included conceptual work that – partly by drawing on Max Weber’s understanding of political authority and Robert D. Putnam’s concept of ‘social capital’ – turned the ‘protecting the people’ mantra into military doctrine by reconceptualising counter-insurgency as a form of ‘armed social work’, seeking ‘to redress basic social and political problems while being shot at’. Part of the social and political problem that needed addressing was crime, in particular drug trafficking. As FM 3-24 puts it: ‘Sustainment requirements often drive insurgents into relationships with organized crime or into criminal activity themselves. Reaping windfall profits and avoiding the costs and difficulties involved in securing external support makes illegal activity attractive to insurgents. […]’ Drugs retain the highest potential for obtaining large profits from relatively small investments.

In many ways, this perspective revived late GCW framings regarding the connections between drug trafficking, terrorism and insurgencies. Exemplified by National Security Division Directive (NSDD) 221, signed by President Ronald Reagan in April 1986, such framings articulated national security concerns regarding ‘nations with a flourishing narcotics industry, where a combination of international criminal trafficking organizations, rural insurgents, and urban terrorists can undermine the stability of the local government’. Back then, such reasoning reflected the conservative zeitgeist, as, for many US citizens, drug trafficking was the main international concern. In turn, supporters of the militarisation of the drug war could claim both a moral high ground and popular legitimacy. Following the issuing of NSDD 221, security bureaucracies – including those working on Latin America, and specifically the US Department of Defense (DoD), which in 1988 became ‘the single lead agency for the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs into the United States’ – benefitted from this militarised reframing of ‘interconnected’ drug trafficking through enhanced budgets, new forms of interagency cooperation and the provision of new ‘opportunities to test equipment, personnel and tactics’.

The end of the GCW marked a shift from such militarisation efforts and underlying geopolitical agendas towards a more civilian-led law enforcement approach to
drug trafficking. This partly reflected civilian security agencies’ ability to capitalise on GCW framings of drug trafficking as a national security threat in their search for new post-Cold War security missions, allowing them to enhance their international presence in places now ‘vacated’ by the military. In turn, related security budgets focused on law enforcement efforts that prioritised interagency cooperation between the Department of Justice, the DoS and the Department of Treasury, thereby somewhat marginalising the DoD and its late-Cold War approach to drug trafficking – globally and in Latin America.

Accordingly, from the early to mid-1990s onwards, and in line with a broader US effort for democracy promotion in the region, counter-narcotics security assistance increasingly focused on civil police forces, rule of law promotion and law enforcement efforts, with most of the direct US involvement being coordinated by the DoS’ Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. As a derived effect, the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), responsible for Latin America – with the exception of Mexico – was turned into the weakest of the US unified combatant commands. After the GCW, the war on drugs was literally the only war left to fight in the western hemisphere, and SOUTHCOM was forced to take on a more indirect, supportive role vis-à-vis its civilian counterparts now conducting most operations on the ground in the region.

This development was reversed by 9/11. It triggered a significant shift of resources from the DoS to the DoD, giving the latter a key role in shaping US foreign policy by framing it in GWOT terms. For Latin America, this implied a strengthening of SOUTHCOM as a key agenda-setter. By jumping on Washington’s counter-terrorism agenda, SOUTHCOM has been able to secure and legitimise an expanded budget. In turn, this triggered a wider shift in perspectives on hemispheric security issues, contributing to the fact ‘policymakers elsewhere in the U.S. government have begun to approach Latin America from a disproportionately security threat-based point of view’. The rediscovery of the drug trafficking–terrorism–insurgency linkages in the region was part and parcel of this development. And, by adapting GWOT-related security epistemologies to Latin American realities, a Latin America-focused subgroup of the above-mentioned epistemic community was a key driving force behind this development.

Constructing Latin America’s Criminal Insurgencies

From the mid-2000s onwards, this subgroup – with close links to many of the previously mentioned outlets of the post-9/11 ‘counter-terrorism/counter-insurgency industry’, and often with direct work experiences regarding Latin American security issues (the actor-network includes former GCW warriors, security consultants, US law enforcement personnel and scholars working on the region, often at military research institutions) – discursively reconfigured policy framings of the region’s crime problems that fuelled the above-mentioned ‘threat-based’ policy view on Latin America. Key to this was conceptual work that culminated in the invention of a generic insurgency concept, that of ‘criminal insurgencies’, with the community connecting this reframing to post-9/11 US homeland security discourses and the GWOT. In doing so, this actor-network discursively expanded counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism logics into the realm of law enforcement while subjugating the latter to military prerogatives in order to confront the region’s ‘criminal insurgents’ and ‘convergent threats’. By drawing practical similarities between ‘classic’ and ‘criminal’ insurgents, the latter, in turn, have been elevated above the realm of ordinary ‘local’ criminality and instead portrayed as part of a global post-9/11 threat context, as they are classified as warfighting actors with the potential to connect with transnational terrorist groups.57

The core of this epistemic community – its key conceptual innovators – includes people like Robert J. Bunker. Currently an adjunct research professor of the US Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), he has published dozens of articles and books on matters of counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, gangs and drug trafficking.58 Other core members of this community include John P. Sullivan, who previously worked as a police officer. Currently a senior fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies on Terrorism, Sullivan is also an adjunct researcher at the Bogotá-based VORTEX Research Group, where he has published on issues such as drug wars and criminal insurgency.59

Another particularly influential member of this epistemic community is Max G. Manwaring. A retired research professor of military strategy at SSI, Manwaring served in SOUTHCOM’s politico-military directorate and the Defense Intelligence Agency during Latin America’s GCW endgame in El Salvador, where he had ‘conducted a quantitative study on the variables that determined (or at least were correlated with) success or failure in COIN campaigns since World War II’.60 Based at SOUTHCOM’s Small Wars Operational Requirements Division (SWORD), he

60 Kaplan, The Insurgents, p. 158.
developed what later on became known as the ‘SWORD model’, or ‘Manwaring paradigm’, in counter-insurgency.61 Manwaring’s work on the role of legitimacy in counter-insurgency also influenced FM 3-24.62 He is the author of Street Gangs: The New Urban Insurgency63 and recently published a trilogy64 that explains how Latin American street gangs, Cuban and Venezuelan popular militias, Argentine *piqueteros* (picketers) and Mexican cartels turned into actors seeking to ‘neutralize, control, depose, or replace an incumbent government’ and ‘in doing so, radically change the traditional authoritative allocation of values (governance) to the values of the reigning criminal and/or insurgent leaders’.65

This actor-network has a node that associates all of the above-mentioned people as well as other core members of this epistemic community who gave life to the criminal insurgency concept: the SWJ’s El Centro initiative, a website dedicated to the ‘analysis and discussion of Latin America’s guerrilla wars and criminal insurgencies’.66 The website presents the initiative with the following words: ‘El Centro is SWJ’s focus on small wars in Latin America. The elephant in the hemispheric room is clearly the epidemic criminal, cartel and gang threat, fueled by a drug and migration economy, rising to the level of local and national criminal insurgencies and a significant U.S. national security risk.’67

The website offers a reading list on these topics, as well as a list of El Centro fellows. These include the above-mentioned persons, as well as influential Washington-based, Latin America-focused security consultants and policy scholars, such as Douglas Farah, Vanda Felbab-Brown and Robert Killebrew, but also actors from the region. The latter comprise Mexico City-based journalist Ioan Grillo, author of El Narco: Inside Mexico’s Criminal Insurgency,68 and Robert Muggah, founder of the influential Brazilian think tank Igarapé Institute. In a recent article (co-authored with Sullivan), Muggah observed that ‘today’s warriors are just as likely to be affiliated with drug cartels, mafia groups, criminal gangs, militias, and terrorist organizations as with armies or organized rebel factions’. The resulting

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65Manwaring, The Complexity, p. 103.


‘cocktail of criminality, extremism, and insurrection’, in turn, would require a ‘comprehensive approach’ that recognises ‘crime wars as wars’.69

Such fellows are presented as people who ‘have expertise in and commitment to Latin America, support SWJ’s particular focus on the small wars in the region, and agree with SWJ’s general approach to advancing discussion and awareness in the field through community dialog and publishing’. From the analytical perspective of this article, these actors can be perceived as people who share the SWJ’s epistemic worldview. Accordingly, affiliation with El Centro can be seen as a membership card for this epistemic community and a commitment to its ‘policy enterprise’ of developing ‘a better understanding of the national and regional challenges underlying past, present, and future small wars’ in Latin America70 – particularly through conceptual work, the related adjustment of the actors’ discursive behaviour and resulting conceptual cross-referential intensity. All of this is centred on, recall, the reframing of contemporary Latin American security issues through the conceptual lens of ‘criminal insurgencies’. A widely cited SWJ article on Mexico provides the following definition:

In describing cartel operations as a criminal insurgency, we do not suggest that the cartel structures are operating a unified operation against the Mexican state. […] We also do not mean to suggest that the goal of the criminal insurgent, like that of both classical and modern political insurgents – [sic] is the removal of foreign forces, the satisfaction of discrete political demands, or regime change. The criminal insurgent is resolutely apolitical; he challenges the will of the state because he seeks to sever its regulatory arms.71

Another key feature of these criminal insurgencies, according to several El Centro fellows, is that they are potentially ‘interlocking’ with terrorism,72 thereby transforming ‘criminal networks’ into ‘a gateway for terrorists’,73 by weaving together ‘[c]rime, terrorism and insurgency’ in ‘ways that threaten not just the welfare but also the security of societies in the western hemisphere’. Accordingly, ‘[t]he United States must lead a hemisphere-wide effort to confront and defeat the cartels’ threat to civil society’.74

In order to assess the impact of this epistemic community in line with the analytical framework developed above, it is instructive to trace the reappearance of the conceptual underpinnings of this epistemology in official policy discourses as

72 See, for example, Sullivan, ‘From Drug Wars to Criminal Insurgency’; John P. Sullivan and Robert J. Bunker ‘Cartel Evolution Revisited: Third Phase Cartel Potentials and Alternative Futures in Mexico’, Small Wars and Insurgencies, 21: 1 (2010), pp. 35–6, 44.
evidence of policy actors’ discursive adjustments to the community’s worldview. In turn, this requires an assessment of policy actors’ interests in recasting Latin America’s security issues through the epistemological prism provided by this actor-network.

Epistemological Resonances

By the mid-2000s, several developments in the United States – cutting across global, regional, domestic and policy dynamics while connecting past lessons with contemporary needs – intersected, creating a nascent opportunity structure that gave increasing authority and legitimacy to this epistemic worldview in the US security and foreign policy community by recasting Latin American security problems, and possible solutions, in (counter)terrorism and (counter)insurgency terms.

First, and embedded in the DoD’s growing policy influence as well as SOUTHCOM’s post-9/11 resurgence, there was the Bush administration’s positive re-evaluation of the US ‘small footprint’ counter-insurgency effort during El Salvador’s civil war (1980–92), which increasingly became seen as a success in counter-insurgency-driven democratisation, state-building, and human rights protection that could be turned into a model for the campaigns in the GWOT.75 Stated otherwise, it was now acceptable to talk positively about Cold War counter-insurgencies in Latin America as successful militarised nation-building efforts with a democratising potential. Second, and around the same time, US domestic security issues, including immigration and border security, became reframed as terrorism-centred homeland security topics. This process was accompanied by a growing awareness of the potential dangers and opportunities the US southern border represents regarding transnational homeland security threats, such as illegal immigration, transnational gang activities, drug trafficking and their convergence with terrorism.76 Third, this awareness, in turn, overlapped with the mediatised escalation of the Mexican drug war – early on presented by Mexican President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006–10) as a fight against ‘delinquency and terrorism’77 – connected with growing fears regarding the potential risk of state failure in Mexico and elsewhere in the region.78 Fourth, there was the more general GWOT-related renaissance of counter-insurgency, including derived concepts, to which the SWJ community already contributed by establishing the journal as an authoritative source of practical guidance.

In this context, post-9/11 counter-insurgency concepts, ideas about ‘convergences’, and derived militarised solutions, for many people within the US security and foreign policy establishments, offered a promising way to recast the ways hemispheric security could be improved by countering Latin American ‘criminal insurgencies’ – in particular because of the more than meagre results of less militarised

76This argument is developed in Müller, ‘Punitive Entanglements’, pp. 711–13.
77‘Masivo envío de invitaciones a la fiesta por la toma de Calderón’, *La Jornada*, 26 Nov. 2006.
forms and framings of Latin American security governance, notwithstanding decades-long US support and growing concerns about the possible presence of transnational terrorism in Latin America. In turn, this process could build on, while also amplifying, the immediate post-9/11 framing of FARC as a drug-funded terrorist organisation by the Colombian government and the Bush administration (see below), enabling the US government to legitimise the narcoguerrilla concept and redirect counter-narcotics aid towards counter-terrorism efforts, which, in turn, took on an increasing counter-insurgency outlook.

These overlapping developments provided this epistemic community with all the previously mentioned requirements for successfully promoting their own worldview to a policy audience in search of security ‘success stories’. They popularised their perspectives and concepts in policy reports and publications, as well as testimonies in several post-9/11 related committee hearings for the US Congress and Senate. These hearings, in particular, became a platform for reiterating the community’s epistemic worldview to a broader policy audience outside the journal’s main practitioner audiences. For example, in 2014, at a hearing before the US House Foreign Affairs Committee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade, Farrah described FARC as ‘a prototype of the coming hybrid terrorist-criminal insurgencies’, whose operational environment (OE) has been created by states like ‘Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Ecuador’, which enabled ‘the FARC, Hezbollah, Iranian officials, ETA, Brazilian drug trafficking organizations and others [to] meet in safety, exchange lessons learned and build networks of convenience’.

A few years earlier, in 2011, Felbab-Brown, in a written statement for a hearing before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps and Global Narcotic Affairs, argued that ‘the penetration of the illicit economies by terrorist or insurgent groups provides an especially potent threat to states and regional stability since belligerent groups typically seek to eliminate the existing state’s presence in particular locales or countries’. To counter this threat, she proposed a population-centric counter-insurgency approach to counter drug trafficking in the region by ‘directly defeating the belligerents and protecting the population’. A few months later, Bunker was invited to give testimony at a joint hearing before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere on the Mérida Initiative. On this occasion, Bunker made a policy recommendation that reiterated the above-mentioned epistemic worldview by placing Latin America in the post-9/11 security context:

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83 Ibid., p. 33.
Due to the evolution of the cartels and gangs into new warmaking entities [...], the Merida [sic] Initiative and others like it directed at Colombia and Central America need to evolve to a more encompassing scope and scale and with a greater sense of strategic urgency than most congressional policymakers might a priori think is necessary. Following the 10-year anniversary of 9/11, the key strategic insight that I offer is this: [...] The cartels and narco-gangs of the Americas, with those in Mexico of the highest priority, must now be elevated to the number one strategic threat to the United States.84

Statements like these, together with the underlying conceptual work of the epistemic community, increasingly informed post-9/11 budgetary activities, legal initiatives and security assistance towards Latin America. For example, in 2011, Bill H.R. 3401 was proposed by the chairperson of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Connie Mack. Named the Enhanced Border Security Act, the bill reiterates the convergent threat scenario by calling for the application of ‘counterinsurgency tactics under a coordinated and targeted strategy to combat the terrorist insurgency in Mexico waged by transnational criminal organizations’.85 One year earlier, when the Obama administration had already included the crime–terror–insurgency nexus into its official strategy,86 then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that ‘we face an increasing threat from a well-organized network drug trafficking threat that is, in some cases, morphing into or making common cause with what we would consider an insurgency in Mexico and in Central America’.87 And the US embassy in Brazil posted on its website a White House statement on the topic, which argued that ‘[t]errorists and insurgents increasingly are turning to TOC [transnational organised crime] to generate funding and acquire logistical support to carry out their violent acts’, thereby contributing to ‘the convergence of threats that were once distinct and today have explosive and destabilizing effects’.88

By that time, and despite the fact that the empirical evidence for the scope and actual impact of these convergences seems rather weak – with publications often being speculative, under-referenced, and heavily reliant on media reports as well as official sources pointing towards ‘possible’ or ‘alleged’ connections89 – the

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post-9/11 security epistemology also started to appear in US security assistance programmes towards the region. For example, the DoD-funded Haiti Stabilization Initiative implemented a ‘community counterinsurgency’ programme in support of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which made efforts to confront the ‘criminal insurgency’ waged by local street gangs and other non-state, armed actors, who were also framed as terrorists by the Haitian government and the UN bureaucracy.

Another example of this is USAID’s incorporation of FM 3-24 concepts, such as the clear-hold-build (C-H-B) approach, into community policing schemes of the Central American Security Initiative (CARSI). In fact, many post-9/11, US-driven security cooperation programmes with Latin America through initiatives such as CARSI, the Mexico-centred Mérida Initiative, Plan Colombia or the Andean Regional Initiative, the latter of which is an expanded version of Plan Colombia, are marked by the growing recognition that, in the words of a former advisor to the Bush administration, ‘the U.S. cannot continue to make a false distinction between counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics efforts’. Accordingly, US security aid channelled through these initiatives includes a strong counter-insurgency focus, often framed as ‘stabilisation’ (see below).

These initiatives are an integral element of a worldwide expansion of post-9/11 US security assistance programmes that aim at capacity building of local partner forces, notably in the realms of ‘counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and defense institution building’. Accordingly, US security assistance programmes doubled

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92C-H-B first aims at destroying/expulsing insurgents, followed by the permanent deployment of a security force, and, ultimately, the improvement of living conditions through social-service delivery, see FM 3-24, 5-51–5-80.
93Hochmüller and Müller, ‘Locating Guatemala’, p. 103.
from 57 in 2001 to 117 in 2017, totalling US$20 billion. While the majority of this money is earmarked for initiatives in Africa, the Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan, 78 of these programmes can operate in Latin America and the region received US$20.5 billion in security assistance during this period. Nearly US$3.6 billion of this assistance has been provided by the DoD through Section 1004 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 1998 and Section 1033 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1998, both of which provide the DoD with a counter-narcotics budget that can be used for equipping, training and supporting other countries’ counter-narcotic activities. Additionally, and specifically targeting Colombia, Section 1021 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2005 provides the DoD with funds ‘to support a unified campaign by the Government of Colombia against narcotics trafficking and against activities by organizations designated as terrorist organizations’, which include insurgent groups like FARC and ELN, as well as Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia).

Likewise, the DoD’s counter-narcotics strategy acknowledges that ‘the potential nexus among illegal traffickers, terrorists, and insurgents is becoming a commonly recognized national security threat’. For confronting such ‘hybrid criminal-terror-insurgent threats’, the DoD seeks to link its fight against TOC to ‘other national security priorities’, such as ‘counterterrorism’. This includes Latin America. Reflecting the placement of the region within the GWOT, the DoD’s counter-narcotics efforts explicitly seek to ‘disrupt the nexus between illicit drugs and foreign terrorist organizations operating in and from South and Central America, focusing on linkages with the Middle East and Africa’.

Although these developments demonstrate how much the crime–terror–insurgency nexus epistemology is shaping contemporary US security assistance programmes towards Latin America, in order to fully uncover the southwards travel of this security epistemology, Latin American actors and their interests in incorporating this epistemology into local security discourses and policies need to be assessed.

Embracing the Nexus

After the issuing of National Security Council Resolution 5432/1 in 1954, which called for ‘[t]he ultimate standardization of Latin American military organization, training, doctrine and equipment along U.S. lines’, the GCW produced deep
entanglements between the United States and most Latin American militaries through doctrinal input and practical advice, specifically in the area of counter-insurgency. These entanglements survived the end of the GCW and they were revived with the increasing militarisation of the war on drugs by the administration of George Bush Sr., and, in particular, 9/11.

Examining currently valid Latin American military doctrine is particularly instructive for understanding the ongoing relevance of such entanglements as well as for following the travels of the ‘convergence’-centred security epistemology ‘down south’ by tracing the reappearance of related concepts in Latin American military doctrine.

**Doctrinal Entanglements**

Military doctrine is the medium through which military knowledge production as well as the concepts informing it get translated into practice. Doctrine defines an ‘approved set of principles and methods, intended to provide large military organizations with a common outlook and a uniform basis for action’. Doctrinal publications are shaped by internal stimuli, such as institutional cultures and previous military experiences, as well as by external influences. Regarding the latter, it is important to recognise that militaries are inherently transnational institutions, embedded in the circulation of personnel, doctrine and practices across countries and regions. Military doctrine, in this regard, is a prime example of global policy mobility and the simultaneity of transfer and translation processes regarding the localisation of externally provided epistemologies.

In order to understand why Latin American militaries translated the convergence-centred security epistemology into local military doctrine, it has to be recalled that while most of the region’s armed forces have decades-long counter-insurgency experience, their leading role in the region’s GCW fight against ‘subversion’, as well as the resulting human rights violations, was also the main source for international and domestic criticisms. Accordingly, the return to civilian rule implied efforts to demilitarise security governance and downsize military budgets, as well as enhance civilian control over the militaries.

Tapping into the post-Cold War drug war discourse during the 1990s offered some kind of substitute for ‘weakened’ militaries in the Americas by providing ongoing material support as well as a ‘visceral image of an utterly evil adversary’

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designating the drug cartels. While this also allowed for some counter-insurgency practices to survive under drug war frameworks and specially trained counter-narcotics units, overall counter-insurgency was marginalised, although it never disappeared, in post-Cold War Latin America.

Against this background, strategically harnessing the post-9/11 security epistemology can be seen as a way of countering this marginalisation through an upgrading recycling, or ‘upcycling’, of already-existing counter-insurgency capacities. As the crime–terror–insurgency nexus discourse elevates criminal actors beyond the realm of ordinary lawlessness by portraying them as a military/terrorist threat, embracing this epistemology allows for a rebranding of law enforcement/public security issues as military/national security problems. In turn, in adjusting their discursive behaviour, Latin American militaries can strengthen/regain their legitimacy as domestic security actors by portraying themselves as the institutions capable of confronting the region’s ‘crime wars’ and their potential convergence with terrorism. Following from this, the rebranding calls for ‘new rules of engagement’, justifies increased military expenditures to confront threats from gangs, insurgents and drug cartels, and requires more counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism-focused domestic security responses and expertise. The latter is not only deemed necessary due to the potential links between criminals, insurgents and transnational terrorists, but also because the violence of the former is increasingly framed by Latin American security analysts and practitioners through a terrorism lens.

Taking a closer look at newly issued military doctrine from Brazil and Colombia – the two countries with the highest military expenditures in the region – illustrates

110 Carpenter, Bad Neighbor Policy, p. 49.
112 According to the Stockholm Institute for Peace Research (SIPRI)’s Military Expenditure Database, the region’s military budgets (for South America, Central America and the Caribbean), measured by constant 2017 exchange rates, only ‘modestly’ increased from US$33.9 billion in 1990 to US$36.5 billion in 2000. This trend reversed after 9/11, with region-wide military expenditures increasing from US$44.6 billion in 2001 to US$68.1 billion in 2018. See www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20world%20regions%20from%201988-2018%20%28pdf%29.pdf, last access 15 Jan. 2020.
114 This includes in particular the region’s Special Operation Forces that, since 2004, have been regularly participating in joint training exercises within the Fuerzas Comando military competition framework, sponsored by SOUTHCOM, in order to enhance their counter-terrorism capacities by practicing GWOT tactics and methods. ‘Colombia, Ecuador y Costa Rica ganan competencia contra terrorismo’, La Prensa, 28 June 2007. See also www.southcom.mil/Media/Special-Coverage/Fuerzas-Comando-2017/, last access 15 Jan. 2020.
116 A 2019 SIPRI study ranks Brazil and Colombia as having the world’s 12th.highest and 25th.highest military expenditures respectively. See www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2018. After 9/11, Brazil’s military expenditures, measured by constant 2017 US$, increased from
this ‘upcycling’ of local military doctrine through a re-articulation of domestic counter-insurgency experiences with the post-9/11 security epistemologies and concepts discussed above.

From the mid-2000s onwards, Brazil sought to adapt its defence strategy to the realities of a GWOT-shaped global OE. For example, in 2005, the Brazilian Defence Ministry stated that ‘non-governmental actors, new threats and the opposition between nationalism and transnationalism [sic] permeate international affairs and the security arrangements of States’. Accordingly, ‘transnational crimes of different nature and international terrorism’ have turned into ‘menaces to peace, to security and democratic order’.117 In order to adapt to these changes, Brazil’s military embarked on a doctrinal renewal process. In line with the ‘improvement’ and deepening of US–Brazil defence cooperation under the Lula da Silva (2003–11) and Rousseff (2011–16) governments,118 post-9/11 US doctrine was a key reference in this process for Brazil. A 2013 presentation by the Centro de Doutrina do Exercito (Brazilian Army Doctrine Centre, CeDoutEx), for instance, opened with quoting parts of a West Point speech by then-US Minister of Defence Robert Gates. In his speech, Gates laid out the future panorama facing the US Army by stating that ‘[w]hat we can expect in the future is that potential adversaries – be they terrorists, insurgents, militia groups, rogue states, or emerging powers – will seek to frustrate America’s traditional advantages […] From the look of things, the Army will not repeat the mistakes of the past, where irregular warfare was shunted to the side after Vietnam.’ Accordingly, preparedness for such missions is crucial, as ‘from the Mayaguez to Grenada, Panama, Somalia, the Balkans, Haiti, Kuwait, Iraq, and more – we had no idea a year before any of these missions that we would be so engaged’.119 To avoid having ‘no idea’ about such engagements, the CeDoutEx presentation outlined the new OE for Brazil’s armed forces. In addition to presenting a continuum of the spectres of possible contemporary conflicts, ranging from a ‘stable peace’ to an ‘unstable peace’, ‘insurgency’ and ‘total warfare’, it portrays the current OE in GWOT terms. For example, by stressing the role of the ‘human terrain’,120 the presence of ‘new actors’, and its ‘selective lethality’.121

One year later, with the publication of the Brazilian Army’s Land Warfare Manual (EB20-MF.10.102), these reflections were turned into military doctrine. EB20-MF.10.102 lays out the country’s post-9/11 threat scenario, both domestic

117See www.oas.org/csh/english/documents/Brazil_English%202005.doc, last access 4 March 2020.
118Luis Bitencourt, Brazilian Military Culture 2018 (Miami, FL: Florida International University, Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy and Kimberly Green Latin American and Caribbean Center, 2018), p. 25. For US–Brazilian military cooperation in Haiti, see also Müller and Steinke, ‘Geopolitics’.
and international, in the following way: ‘The growing significance of transnational groups or insurgents, with or without political and material support from other countries, amplifies the diffuse nature of the threats to be countered by the use of the defence forces.’ And in defining the OE to be navigated by a Força Terrestre Componente (Land Force Component, FTC), it states:

The complex environment in which a FTC operates contains a multiplicity of actors which, in an integrated way and under certain conditions, can constitute a hybrid threat. This type of threat unites the underlying dynamics of, even if diverse, regular and irregular forces, searching to attain mutually beneficial goals. In some cases, this type of threat can include terrorist cells and/or criminals.

Moreover, the Brazilian military’s recently published *Pacification Field Manual (EB-20-MC-10.217)* – which defines and formalises the military’s role in international and domestic pacification operations and whose reference materials include *FM 3-24* and the controversial *Human Terrain Handbook*, as well as several NDU and *Military Review* publications on counter-insurgency and stability operations – introduces key post-9/11 counter-insurgency ideas. These include the ‘protecting the people’ mantra, the C-H-B approach, and the centrality of knowing, navigating and controlling the ‘human terrain’. By integrating these concepts derived from post-9/11 US military doctrine, the manual explicitly seeks to upgrade Brazil’s long domestic experience with pacification, which, as is rightly stressed, dates back to the nineteenth century, to the ‘complexities of the contemporary operational environment’. These complexities, as the preceding quote from *EB20-MF-10.102* makes clear, are marked by ‘hybrid’ threats that echo the crime–terror–insurgency nexus.

The Colombian military’s recently published *Damascus Doctrine* is even more explicit. Even though no new counter-insurgency manual has been published due to the negative attention the country’s military has received because of its counter-insurgency outlook, ideas of ‘convergences’ as well as the crime–terror–insurgency nexus loom large in Colombia’s ‘post-conflict’ military doctrine, which, again, has been greatly influenced by post-9/11 US doctrine and underlying epistemologies. In fact, as Colonel Pedro Javier Rojas Guevara, the director of the Centro de Doctrina del Ejército Nacional stated, currently valid post-9/11 US doctrine ‘has been the model for the “Damascus” project, with which the Colombian Army seeks to generate and adapt its doctrine to the contemporary and future

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123Ibid., 7.5.4.
125*EB-20-MC-10.217*, 2.5.5.1.
126Renamed ‘Intervention-Stabilisation-Normalisation’, *ibid.*, 2.5.5.5.
127Ibid., 3.4.3.7, 4.3.10.1.
128Ibid., 1.2.1.
129Ibid., 1.2.2.
social, economic, political and geostrategic conditions, until 2030.\textsuperscript{131} Colombia’s stabilisation manual (MFRE 3-07 Estabilidad)\textsuperscript{132} is even numerically named after FM 3-07 Stability Operations,\textsuperscript{133} which can be seen as an updated version of FM 3-24 for the ‘small footprint’ era (see below).\textsuperscript{134}

MFRE 3-07 considers stability operations as being inherently related to counter-insurgency. It advises counter-insurgents to ‘take into account the history of [Colombia’s] internal conflict that has demonstrated that insurgent groups show a strong tendency to associate with and execute delinquent activities (including transnational crimes, such as drug trafficking, illegal arms trafficking, and illegal mining) […] This, in general, has the consequence that these groups convert themselves into hybrid threats with a higher warfighting capacity.’\textsuperscript{135} Echoing Brazil’s EB20-MF-10.102, a ‘hybrid threat’ is defined as ‘the dynamic and diverse combination of regular and irregular forces, terrorist forces and/or criminal elements united to achieve mutual benefits’.\textsuperscript{136} In order to counter such ‘irregular threats’, the following five operations, either ‘as a sequence, in parallel or in combination’, need to be executed:

- Counterterrorism.
- Unconventional Warfare.
- Foreign Internal Defence (for external operations).
- Counterinsurgency.
- Stabilisation Tasks.\textsuperscript{137}

While Brazilian and Colombian military doctrine thus incorporated basic post-9/11 security epistemologies and concepts, this did not happen through a simple doctrinal transfer from the United States. Rather, it resulted from an upcycling process that combined epistemological borrowings from abroad with long-standing domestic counter-insurgency experiences (for example, the references to Brazil’s long pacification experience and Colombia’s internal conflict) – experiences that were the product of earlier forms of epistemological transfer and translation.\textsuperscript{138}

The strong local interests behind this development can be further illustrated with regards to the third of the above-mentioned operations – ‘Foreign Internal Defence’, another conceptual borrowing from US doctrine.\textsuperscript{139} This term indicates

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{131}Ibid., p. 101, emphasis added.
  \item \textsuperscript{132}Ejército Nacional de Colombia, Manual Fundamental de Referencia del Ejército, MFRE 3-07 Estabilidad (Bogotá, 2017).
  \item \textsuperscript{133}US Army, FM 3-07 Stability Operations (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of Army, 2008).
  \item \textsuperscript{134}Hodge, Armed Humanitarians, pp. 14-17.
  \item \textsuperscript{135}MFRE 3-07, 3.8 [3-133].
  \item \textsuperscript{136}Ejército Nacional de Colombia, Manual Fundamental de Referencia del Ejército, MFRE 3-0 Operaciones (Bogotá, 2017), 1.1.2 [1-14] (original emphasis).
  \item \textsuperscript{137}Ibid., 2.3 [2-18].
  \item \textsuperscript{139}FM 3-24, 6-5, 6-12.
\end{itemize}
that, far from being exclusively situated at the receiving end of GWOT-related epistemic ‘transfers’, countries such as Colombia and Brazil are actively involved in the global circulation of the latter via the export of their upcycled counter-insurgency expertise.

The Import-Export Business of Counter-Insurgency

After 9/11, Andrés Pastrana Arango’s government (1998–2002) successfully managed to ‘invite’ the United States to intervene in Colombia. This was achieved by linking up with the Bush administration’s declaration of a ‘war against terrorism’: on the one hand, by reframing FARC as a terrorist organisation financed through drug trafficking140 – which also provided the Bush administration with an opportunity to demonstrate that its war on terror was not specifically about Islamic terrorism but terrorism in general141 – and, on the other hand, by engaging in what Arlene B. Tickner calls a strategic ‘self-orientalisation’, which presented Colombia as lacking sufficient military and state capacity to tackle this criminal-terrorist-insurgency threat in the western hemisphere. The Bush administration ‘accepted’ this invitation and removed ‘the (fuzzy) line between counternarcotics and counterinsurgency/counterterrorism’. In turn, US assistance under a GWOT-revamped Plan Colombia was now used ‘to professionalize and modernize the armed forces in their battle against leftist insurgents’ – especially under the banner of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez’s (2002–10) domestic ‘democratic security’ policy.142 Colombia’s military success in weakening FARC after the mid-2000s, culminating in the 2016 peace accord, coincided with a shift in US preferences from ‘big footprint’ counter-insurgency campaigns towards leaner ‘small footprint’ stabilisation approaches centred on cooperating with local counter-insurgents, notably Special Operations Forces. Likewise, Colombia was turned into a global model for confronting the crime–terror–insurgency nexus through ‘locally owned’ counter-insurgency. Notwithstanding substantial human rights violations, as well as the subjugation of police and basic governance functions under counter-insurgency logics,143 this model became increasingly promoted by key COINdinistas,144 the Obama administration,145 and the Colombian government, which sought to exploit the opportunity to reposition itself as a global security exporter. As Uribe’s successor Juan Manuel Santos (2010–18) stated in 2015 at a UN peacekeeping conference: ‘Colombia has a successful experience in the fight against terrorism, drug-trafficking, insurgency, [and] transnational crime and we are ready to share this

141Rosen, The Losing War, p. 50.
144Dickie Davis, David Kilcullen, Greg Mills and David Spencer (eds.), A Great Perhaps? Colombia: Conflict and Convergence (London: Hurst, 2016); Moe and Müller, ‘Counterinsurgency’.
In addition to increasing Colombia’s international visibility, this export strategy has also provided a solution to the somewhat inevitable downsizing of Colombia’s military in the ‘post-conflict’ context. Sharing Colombian security expertise ‘with the world’, in this regard, also allows ‘for putting this surplus capacity to effective use abroad’, thereby avoiding potential military resistance against post-conflict restructuring.

The means of choice for exporting Colombia’s counter-insurgency experience has become the country’s ‘democratic security diplomacy’ as well as its ‘International Cooperation Strategy for Integral Security’. Under these labels, Colombia started exporting its expertise in confronting ‘terrorism, drug-trafficking, insurgency, [and] transnational crime’ abroad, notably to Africa and Latin America, where, since 2010, Colombian advisors started training security personnel in Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Panama and Peru.

Colombia’s success on the counter-insurgency front also inspired Brazil. In fact, Rio de Janeiro’s pacification programme, in operation since 2008, was initially influenced by the Uribe government’s first urban counter-insurgency campaign, Operación Orión, launched in Medellín in 2002. Insights from Medellín travelled back to Rio de Janeiro and from there onwards to Haiti, where – under the umbrella of MINUSTAH and within Brazil’s overall strategy of carving out a more visible and influential position in the UN system – Brazilian soldiers, in their fight against the ‘criminal insurgency’ waged by street gangs, experimented for the first time with the C-H-B approach.

The results of this experience not only travelled back to Brazil, where they fed into doctrinal revision processes and the framing of local gangs as ‘insurgents’ with potential ties to terrorist groups like Hezbollah and FARC by MINUSTAH veterans such as Brigadier General Roberto Escoto (a 1982 graduate of the Agulhas Negras Military Academy who was also involved in the pacification of the favela Maré and, after he went into reserve ranks in 2016, founded Brazil’s ...
first private military company, Áquila Internacional) or Colonel Allessandro Visacro (for whom "high-intensity criminality" in Brazil would acquire the characteristics of 'what many call "criminal insurgency")'. These MINUSTAH results also spread globally. For example, Brazil is involved in confronting the crime–terror–insurgency nexus in West Africa. In 2013, when the United Nations Office on Drugs and Organized Crime (UNODC) started worrying whether ‘insurgents and extremists throughout the region [West Africa] would be in a position to facilitate [cocaine] trafficking, thus drawing resources to their cause and increasing the potential for violence’, Brazil started exporting its pacification expertise westwards. Under the umbrella of a UNODC initiative, Brazil became involved in the creation of a training centre in Guinea-Bissau to ‘improve security forces capacities to counter narcotics and organized crime’, with the long-term goal of transforming the centre into a ‘Regional Training Academy for Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa’.154

Brazil also participates in the UN’s post-9/11 interventionism. MINUSTAH’s Force Commander (2007–09) Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz (a GCW veteran who joined the Brazilian Army four years after the coup of 1964) was assigned to take over the command of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in 2013 in recognition of his achievements in stabilising Haiti by, as he put it, showing ‘no tolerance for the kidnappings, harassment and terror carried out by criminal gangs’.155 Under his leadership, MONUSCO’s Force Intervention Brigade was set up, which has been replicating several of the counter-insurgency practices – including drone operations and the use of special forces – used for suppressing Haiti’s ‘criminal insurgency’, thereby transforming MONUSCO into the most violent UN mission so far.156

Brazil’s counter-insurgency efforts abroad have also had more recent domestic repercussions. Within the context of interim President Michel Temer’s (2016–18) federal intervention between February and December 2018 – the first since the end of military rule – in Rio de Janeiro, which placed the military in control of public security, several key actors and discourses from Brazil’s overseas pacification efforts travelled home.157

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157Steinke and Müller, ‘Geopolitics’, p. 76.
The federal intervention, in fact, has frequently been justified with the successful participation of the Brazilian military in stabilising Haiti. By applying the above-analysed discursive logic that elevates local crime problems to the level of military conflict, Brazil’s current President Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019–present), shortly after his election in 2018, stated: ‘We are at war. Haiti was also at war. [In Haiti] you found an element with a firearm, you shoot, and then you see what happened. You solve the problem.’ Likewise, the troops involved in the federal intervention, many of which participated in MINUSTAH, trained the local police forces based on a course that was similar to the training that MINUSTAH troops received prior to their deployment, thereby deepening the counter-insurgency outlook of local security governance by familiarising police officers with the post-9/11 security epistemology that informed EB-20-MC-10.217 and MINUSTAH’s anti-gang operations in Port-au-Prince.

Conclusion

Latin American militaries are usually portrayed as inherently national institutions. The findings of this article challenge this perspective, and instead show that Latin American militaries are deeply embedded in transnational relations. This has been demonstrated through an analysis of the epistemological work of a transnational ‘actor-network’ involved in reframing the region’s security problems in GWOT terms, and by following the circulation of the underlying concepts and derived policies to the region and beyond. In and through the resulting transnational embedding, globally dominant security epistemologies are reaffirmed, brought into circulation, translated, incorporated into Latin American military doctrine – and exported. While the latter development is a more recent phenomenon, the transnational epistemological aspects and geopolitical dynamics that permeate the former have been a constant feature of Latin American military development throughout the twentieth century, if not earlier. Latin American militaries have always had a predominantly inward-looking perspective. Officially, however, they were supposed to counter external enemies. In this context, the alignment of local military doctrine and practice with globally dominant security epistemologies, by recasting internal security problems in light of global threat perceptions, provides for otherwise hard-to-find legitimating narratives as well as locally and externally provided resources to combat domestic foes.

The alleged recent return of the region’s militaries, in this regard, is not a return at all. In many ways, militaries were never gone. They were only marginalised as internal coercion wielders for the relatively short period between the end of the GCW and the GWOT. What was gone, however, was a global epistemological frame of military reference that could tie local security problems to globally envisioned battle spaces, with domestic theatres of operation turning into ‘glocal’

158 Quoted in ‘General behind deadly Haiti raid takes aim at Brazil’s gangs’, Reuters, 29 Nov. 2018.
159 Steinke and Müller, ‘Geopolitics’, p. 76.
battle grounds in the militaries’ fights against internal security threats with alleged external connections.

Following 9/11 and the related recasting of local crime problems through a GWOT-oriented militarised security epistemology, this globality has been restored. Accordingly, the region’s military institutions, particularly in highly violent contexts such as those of Brazil and Colombia, have been able to tap into this reframing, contributing to enhanced domestic influence, international legitimacy, growing budgets and external deployments. This highlights the resilience of Latin American militaries, including their capacity to update their long-standing ‘professionalism of internal warfare’ as well as the resulting ability of ‘military role expansion’ according to the strategic embrace of globally dominant threat perceptions, underlying epistemologies and concepts. Recognising this calls for a new research agenda on the region’s militaries beyond formal-institutionalist approaches of civil-military relations or simplifying understandings of ‘militarisation’, which often, due to their built-in methodological nationalism and lack of deeper engagements with the transnational epistemological bases of military vision and practice, are unable to capture these dynamics.

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Spanish abstract
Este artículo ofrece un análisis de los procesos de construcción discursiva transnacional que permearon a la gobernanza de seguridad latinoamericana en las postrimerías del 9/11. Demuestra que la Guerra Global contra el Terror fue una oportunidad para los productores externos de seguridad y los productores locales alineados con éstos en las Américas para redefinir los problemas latinoamericanos de seguridad a través de la promoción de una epistemología de seguridad militarizada, y sus políticas derivadas, que se centró en las ‘amenazas convergentes’ de la región. Al rastrear las repercusiones discursivas de este replanteamiento epistémico, el artículo muestra que al aprovechar tales discursos, las burocracias militares a lo largo del continente pudieron superar su previa marginación institucional vis-à-vis las agencias civiles. Tal desarrollo contribuyó al renacimiento de los discursos y políticas de contra-insurgencia y contra-terrorismo en la región, permitiendo a países como Colombia y Brasil reposicionarse globalmente al exportar su conocimiento militar para enfrentar las amenazas post 9/11 más allá de la región.

Spanish keywords: Guerra Global contra o Terror; comunidades epistêmicas; contra-insurgência; contra-terrorismo; Colômbia; Brasil

Portuguese abstract
Este artigo oferece uma análise dos processos de construção discursivos transnacionais que informaram a governança de segurança da América Latina após os atentados de 11 de Setembro. O artigo demonstra que a Guerra Global contra o Terror providenciou uma oportunidade de alinhamento entre inteligências internacionais e locais nas seguranças internas em grande parte das Américas. Isso se deu com o intuito de re-enquadrar os problemas de segurança da América Latina através da promoção de epistemologia de segurança militarizada e suas políticas derivadas, centrada nas ‘ameaças convergentes’ da região. Ao traçar as repercussões discursivas desse re-enquadramento epistêmico, este artigo mostra que ao acessar estes discursos, burocracias militares em todas as Américas foram capazes de superar sua marginalização institucional anterior em comparação às agências civis. Este desenvolvimento contribuiu para o renascimento de discursos e política de contra-insurgência e contra-terrorismo na região, o que permitiu que países como Brasil e Colômbia se reposicionassem no cenário global através da exportação de seus conhecimentos militares usados para combater ameaças pós 11 de Setembro na região.

Portuguese keywords: Guerra Global contra el Terror; comunidades epistémicas; contra-insurgencia; contra-terrorismo; Colombia; Brasil