

**STATEMENT OF**  
**GENERAL LAURA J. RICHARDSON**  
**COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SOUTHERN COMMAND**  
**BEFORE THE 117<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**  
**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**MARCH 8, 2022**



## **Introduction**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, and distinguished members of the committee, it is my great honor to serve and lead the incredible team of patriots at U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM). As current national strategic direction states: “Today, more than ever, America’s fate is inextricably linked to events beyond our shores.” Nowhere is this more evident than right here in the Western Hemisphere. This region—our shared neighborhood—is under assault from a host of cross-cutting, transboundary challenges that directly threaten our own homeland. Countering these threats requires greater U.S. attention, commitment, and investments to reverse the current disturbing trends.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are facing insecurity and instability exacerbated by COVID-19, the climate crisis and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The PRC continues its relentless march to expand its economic, diplomatic, technological, informational, and military influence in LAC and challenges U.S. influence in all these areas. Without continued modest investment, negative PRC influence in this region could soon resemble the self-serving, predatory influence it now holds in Africa.

Meanwhile, Russia intensifies instability through its ties with Venezuela, entrenchment in Cuba and Nicaragua, and extensive disinformation operations. Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), which operate nearly uncontested, and blaze a trail of corruption and violence that create conditions that allow the PRC and Russia to exploit, threaten citizen security, and undermine public confidence in government institutions. These threats, along with Iran, corruption, irregular migration, and climate change, all overwhelm the region’s fragile state institutions, springing unrest and increasingly frustrated populations. This combination of factors pushes many political leaders to seek resources and support from all sources, including our adversaries who are very eager to undermine U.S. presence and public image.

USSOUTHCOM is putting integrated deterrence into action, using innovative methods to work seamlessly with other Combatant Commands (CCMDs), the Joint Force, allies and partner nations, Congress, the U.S. interagency (IA), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector to help build a shared neighborhood that is free, secure, and prosperous for our generation, and generations to come.

## **Security Environment**

In USSOUTHCOM's area of responsibility (AOR), 28 of 31 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean are democracies that share our values such as the rule of law, human rights, and gender equality. We refer to this theater as our "neighborhood" because of physical proximity and interrelated familial, economic, and cultural ties. The region accounts for \$740 billion in annual trade with the U.S.; contains 60% of the world's lithium and 31% of the world's fresh water; has the world's largest oil reserves; and is home to the environmentally crucial Amazon rainforest. However, transboundary threats facing our neighborhood erode peace and security, weaken fragile democratic institutions, hinder economic prosperity, and create "wedges" for malign actors to expand their influence in our own hemisphere.

**The People's Republic of China (PRC):** The PRC's ambition to fundamentally revise the world order to serve its authoritarian goals and expand its global influence has triggered a new era of strategic competition with the United States. Our AOR is another front of this strategic competition. Over the past year the PRC and its state-owned enterprises (SOEs) continued to target, recruit, and bribe officials at all levels in the AOR to expand their economic, political, and military influence throughout the region. PRC activities include investments in strategic infrastructure, systematic technology and intellectual property theft, disinformation and propaganda campaigns, and malicious cyber activity – all with the goal of expanding long-term access and influence in this hemisphere.

As in other regions of the world, the PRC uses its economic might to co-opt and coerce countries to fulfill its strategic goals. To date, 21 regional countries participate in the PRC's One Belt One Road (OBOR), which provides PRC-backed loans for key infrastructure such as ports, telecommunications, roads and bridges, agriculture cultivation, and mining projects to satisfy the PRC's own growing domestic demand and pursuit of a continued monopoly of critical minerals. But all too often, burdensome OBOR loans come with clauses hidden from the public that give SOEs undue advantages, such as requiring countries to use PRC construction companies and labor to build projects, agreements for the host nation to offer natural resources as collateral, and even the potential for the PRC company to take over the projects when the debtor nation cannot repay the loan. In addition, several of these PRC-funded infrastructure projects lack due diligence, involve corruption, ignore

indigenous rights, and completely disregard environmental protections. More importantly, these projects give the PRC access to sensitive sectors and critical infrastructure in ways that expose these countries to national security and data privacy threats.

Several LAC governments are beginning to realize the very real risks that engaging with PRC entities can bring. For instance, Ecuador sued a PRC company for a poorly constructed dam that is now causing erosion along a major river. The erosion resulted in the rupture of an oil pipeline, spilling over 15,000 gallons of crude, which polluted the waters, destroyed wildlife, and negatively impacted over 150,000 people.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is now working with Ecuador to mitigate the effects of the erosion. This is just one of several examples of how PRC firms often over promise and under deliver in this region, and where the U.S. leverages our strength and reliable relationships to provide immediate support and effectively compete.

As COVID-19 ravaged the region, the PRC sold millions of vaccines and provided medical assistance and loans to pay for vaccines to several LAC countries. However, the PRC also pressured partner nations to adopt PRC-made 5G technology or switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan in exchange for those vaccines.<sup>2</sup> Of the 14 governments (including the Vatican) that currently recognize Taiwan, eight are in the USSOUTHCOM AOR. In December of 2021, Nicaragua switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the PRC – another clear sign of the PRC’s growing influence in the region.

PRC SOEs are increasingly involved in developing facilities and other infrastructure near strategic maritime chokepoints such as the Panama Canal and the Strait of Magellan. In Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, the PRC has abused commercial agreements at host country ports for military functions<sup>3</sup>; our concern is that they are attempting to do the same right here in this region, close to our homeland. For example, in Panama, PRC-based companies are engaged in or bidding for several projects related to the Panama Canal, a global strategic chokepoint, including port operations on both ends of the canal, water management, and a logistics park.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.tearline.mil/public\\_page/china-bri-in-ecuador-hydropower/](https://www.tearline.mil/public_page/china-bri-in-ecuador-hydropower/)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/15/world/americas/brazil-vaccine-china.html>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56661303>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-china-uae-military-11637274224>

In Argentina, the PRC-run space research facility in Neuquén could track and target U.S. satellites.<sup>4</sup> A PRC SOE is securing rights to build installations near the port of Ushuaia, which would provide the PRC presence at the Strait of Magellan and improve access to Antarctica. In El Salvador, a Chinese investor with ties to the Chinese Communist Party is using bribes and corruption to expand and operate the La Union port, a \$3 billion project encompassing 1,700 square miles, strategically located at the intersection of Salvadoran, Honduran, and Nicaraguan territory.<sup>5</sup> These are just some of the dozens of PRC-funded port projects throughout the region that could be leveraged for military purposes.

The PRC engages in an aggressive information operations campaign that attempts to depict the PRC as a more trustworthy partner than the U.S., amplifies its vaccine distribution and OBOR projects, and spreads disinformation about the U.S. in the region. More LAC countries are adopting Huawei's 5G technology, which could give the PRC a back door into sensitive information on our partner nations and even the U.S. Several LAC countries are using PRC-created Safe City programs, causing a potential counterintelligence threat to U.S. and allied personnel. PRC-linked space observation projects are ongoing in Brazil and Chile as well, increasing the PRC's situational awareness in space.

In the military sphere, the PRC increasingly pays for members of LAC security forces to travel to Beijing and receive Spanish and Portuguese-language military education modeled after U.S. professional military education programs. In addition, more partner nation military personnel are traveling to the PRC to receive training in Mandarin, cybersecurity, and PRC military doctrine. The PRC also "gifts" security supplies and telecommunications equipment to gain access and win favor with regional security forces, in addition to selling military vehicles and aircraft to LAC countries.

PRC-based firms and individuals engage in illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing along the outer limits of South American Exclusive Economic Zones. Many of these fishing vessels are directly subsidized by the PRC central government. Each year, over 600 PRC-flagged vessels operate in international

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-space-argentina-china-insight/chinas-military-run-space-station-in-argentina-is-a-black-box-idUSKCN1PP0I2>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/project-el-salvador-shows-how-china-exerting-growing-power-america-n1278464>

waters off the coast of South America.<sup>6</sup> They severely deplete fish stocks and leave plastics and other pollutants in the Galapagos Marine Reserve near Ecuador, costing the region almost \$3 billion in lost annual revenue. Such illicit activities not only drain partner nations' already scarce natural resources, but they also destroy the environment, threaten marine life, and deprive local workers of their livelihood, driving some those workers to join TCOs to supplement lost income.

**Russia:** Russia continues to destabilize the region and undermine democracy by flooding the region with disinformation, to include hundreds of articles distorting U.S. security actions. In 2020, Russia Today (RT)'s Spanish-language media outlets more than doubled their social media followers from 7 million to over 18 million. These disinformation campaigns are just one part of Russia's broader efforts to influence national elections throughout the region this year. Russia's relationship with its key regional partners— Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua—allow Moscow to expand its air and sea access to project military power throughout the region. Agreements with Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Brazil allow Russian warships to make port calls on short notice. Russia doubled its naval deployments in this region, increasing from five (2008-2014), to 11 (2015-2020). Russia seeks inroads in the hemisphere by providing security training through \$2.3 billion in weapons and military equipment sales in the last 10 years, to include direct sales to Venezuela

**Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs):** At the end of 2021, the Biden administration established the U.S. Council on Transnational Organized Crime (CTOC), an interagency mechanism charged with countering TCOs.<sup>7</sup> On December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the Treasury Department issued new sanctions on 15 entities and 10 individuals involved in global illicit drug trade; this included two TCOs from our AOR: Primeiro Comando Da Capital in Brazil and Clan del Golfo in Colombia.<sup>8</sup> It was a clear acknowledgement of the very direct threat TCOs pose to the U.S. homeland. They are trafficking opioids, cocaine, and other deadly drugs into U.S. neighborhoods, fueling both the drug overdose epidemic and drug-related violence. Tragically, more than 100,000 Americans died from drug overdoses within a 12-month

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://projects.voanews.com/fishing/galapagos/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/15/fact-sheet-the-biden-administration-launches-new-efforts-to-counter-transnational-criminal-organizations-and-illicit-drugs/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0535>

period, representing an almost 30% increase over the same period the previous year. The Central American corridor remains the primary vector for Colombia-based networks to supply Mexico-based cartels with cocaine destined for our nation's streets.

Beyond drugs, TCOs traffic in humans (some "coyotes" charge between \$15,000 and \$20,000 per person to get illegal migrants to the U.S.<sup>9</sup>), arms, illegal logging and mining, and other illicit products. Because of their murderous tactics, 43 of the world's 50 most violent cities are in our hemisphere, largely due to conflict between warring TCOs and gangs. This violence causes further irregular migration into the United States. Many TCOs have larger budgets and more personnel than the security forces trying to stop them. They generate more than \$300 billion in profits that further degrade security in the region; that is 10 times the \$30 billion annual budget of the region's militaries combined.

Regional VEOs such as The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – Segunda Marquetalia (FARC-SM), and the National Liberation Army (ELN) use Venezuela as a haven to conduct attacks and weaken political stability in Colombia. They also pose a severe threat to U.S. and partner nation military forces. In June 2021, the FARC-EP used a car bomb to attack a Colombian army base and claimed that the target of the attack were U.S. military personnel deployed there. The attack injured 36 Colombian military personnel and two U.S. service members.<sup>10</sup> This is one of three attacks on a base with collocated U.S. service members in the last 18 months, demonstrating the increasing threat to U.S. persons within Colombia. These VEOs attack security forces, carry out targeted assassinations against political advocates, and terrorize the civilian population. The lines between TCOs and VEOs are increasingly blurred as TCOs like Clan del Golfo use terrorist tactics and regional VEOs use illicit trafficking to fund their operations.

Both al-Qaida and ISIS have supporters across the region who could act as facilitators. Several foreign terrorist fighters who traveled from nations in our AOR to join ISIS remain detained in Syria. Several dozen

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.telemundo20.com/noticias/frontera/pollero-se-gana-la-vida-cruzando-migrantes/2114697/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/farc-dissidents-say-they-carried-out-colombia-bombing-target-was-us-advisors-2021-09-23/>

family members who accompanied them remain in Syria as well, residing in displaced persons camps and are seeking to return to the region, challenging the region's security services who do not prioritize counterterrorism, and are now overstretched due to the pandemic.<sup>11</sup> We continue to support U.S. and partner nation law enforcement efforts to disrupt human smuggling networks involved in moving non-U.S. citizens from countries with pronounced violent extremist activity through Latin America who could pose a national security risk to the U.S. or its interests. Lebanese Hizballah (LH) leverages the region's Lebanese diaspora throughout Latin America and the Caribbean for fundraising, recruiting, and logistical support.<sup>12</sup>

**Iran:** In the past year, Iran expanded economic and security cooperation with Venezuela, Cuba, and Bolivia through fuel transfers, bartering, food staples, and military assistance, reducing the effects of U.S. sanctions. The Iranian regime purchased gold from illegal gold mines in Venezuela, allowing the Maduro regime to evade sanctions and finance its oppressive activities against its citizens. Last year, two Iranian warships were bound for Venezuela, potentially carrying weapons and missile attack boats.<sup>13</sup> In this instance, U.S. diplomatic efforts thwarted Iran's intentions, which would have directly threatened our homeland, allies, and partners. Tehran also leverages Iranian state-sponsored and non-state media outlets to generate empathy for Iran and Shia Islam and diminish Western influence in the hemisphere. Tehran continues to maintain a Spanish-language channel that reaches 17 countries in the region, spreading disinformation and attempting to sow mistrust of the U.S.

**Venezuela:** Not long ago, Venezuela was a Latin American beacon of democracy, with democratic values and free-market principles and was the wealthiest nation in the region. Today, after the crushing authoritarian rules of Nicolas Maduro and Hugo Chavez before him, Venezuela has become one of the worst humanitarian crises this hemisphere has ever seen and poses a significant security threat to the region. As a result of the regime's rampant corruption and gross mismanagement, the Venezuelan people lack basic services

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/node/149336>; <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/trinidad-woman-syria-refugee-camp-al-hol-writes-prime-minister>; [https://trinidadexpress.com/newsextra/70-trini-children-24-women-in-syrian-refugee-camp/article\\_91668618-a829-11eb-8ad2-b79061c61e5d.html](https://trinidadexpress.com/newsextra/70-trini-children-24-women-in-syrian-refugee-camp/article_91668618-a829-11eb-8ad2-b79061c61e5d.html)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-maduro-hezbollah-nexus-how-iran-backed-networks-prop-up-the-venezuelan-regime/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/06/03/politics/us-iran-ships-venezuela/index.html>



like clean water, food, and health care. COVID-19, gas shortages, increasing levels of unemployment and inflation, and human rights violations are also adding to Venezuela's instability and insecurity. As of November 2021, more than six million Venezuelan refugees and migrants were displaced globally (more than 20% of the overall population). Venezuela has become the primary access point in the region for external state actors, and a refuge for TCOs and VEOs. The regime actively engages in narcotrafficking and harbors regional terrorist groups like the ELN, FARC-EP, and FARC-SM within its borders. The tragedy that has occurred in Venezuela serves as a dire warning of what can be expected when a partner nation backslides into authoritarianism.

**Cuba:** Cuba remains a regional corrosive influence, providing political, military, and intelligence support to prop up the illegitimate Maduro regime. In July 2021, thousands of people across Cuba participated in the largest protest since Fidel Castro took power in 1959, angered by the lack of food, basic products, medicine, and vaccines to combat COVID-19. In response, the Cuban regime cracked down hard, jailing protesters and cutting off internet access. PRC companies have played a key part in building Cuba's telecommunications infrastructure, a system the Cuban regime uses to control its people, just as the PRC does within its own borders.<sup>14</sup>

**Nicaragua:** President Daniel Ortega, a former Marxist guerilla leader, continues to strengthen his authoritarian grip in Nicaragua. More than 50 countries and regional institutions have denounced his regime and recent reelection, echoing Secretary of State Blinken's recent comments that Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, were "preparing a sham election devoid of credibility, by silencing and arresting political opponents, and ultimately by attempting to establish an authoritarian dynasty unaccountable to the Nicaraguan people."<sup>15</sup> As mentioned previously, Nicaragua continues to cozy up to and court the PRC, recently switching diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the PRC. Nicaragua also maintains close ties with Russia, whose security assistance to Nicaragua focuses on professional military education, donations, and the provision of humanitarian support in a strategy to increase its influence over the Nicaraguan government and counter U.S. regional goals. Over the past decade, Nicaragua has played host to a Russian-built joint counternarcotics

---

<sup>14</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/how-china-helps-the-cuban-regime-stay-afloat-and-shut-down-protests/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/blinken-accuses-nicaraguas-ortega-preparing-sham-election-2021-10-22/>

training center where over 500 Latin American and Caribbean officers have been trained and welcomed multiple Russian maritime and air deployments.

**COVID-19 and State Fragility:** The impacts of COVID-19 continue to change the geopolitical landscape of the AOR. LAC countries are still reeling from the public health and economic fallout of the pandemic, rolling back much of the progress this region has experienced over the past several decades. The AOR and Mexico have just 8% of the world's population but approximately 30% of the world's COVID deaths.<sup>16</sup> The region's economy contracted 8% during the pandemic, plunging 22 million people into poverty.<sup>17</sup> More than half of the region's school-age children are out of school, making them vulnerable to TCO and gang recruitment and stunting their long-term development.<sup>18</sup> Our partner nation military and security forces have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 response in their countries, but their budgets are facing extreme pressure as governments use their limited resources to address the pandemic. Security forces are increasingly focused on the very near-term need for items such as vaccines, fuel, food, and personal protective equipment at the expense of security operations. While the PRC immediately capitalized on our partners' needs during the pandemic by selling or trading its vaccine, the U.S. Government has now surpassed the number of vaccines the PRC provided by donating over 122 million doses to the region, free of charge, and no strings attached – as good neighbors do. While more U.S. COVID-19 aid is planned, our partners remain concerned that the PRC and Russia will continue to use the pandemic to increase their influence. Consequently, this enables an environment where TCOs gain even more freedom of action as conditions for corruption and illicit activity grow.

Corruption corrodes fragile institutions, scares off much needed foreign investment, and creates conditions for all other threats in the region to weaken our allies and partners. In June 2021, President Biden stated that fighting corruption is a core U.S. national security interest.<sup>19</sup> It affects people in every aspect of their daily lives, draining resources from the state that could be dedicated to security, education, healthcare, and

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/growth-latin-america-and-caribbean-2021-will-not-manage-reverse-adverse-effects>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/latin-americas-long-school-shutdown-is-leading-to-crisis-11625396400>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/06/03/memorandum-on-establishing-the-fight-against-corruption-as-a-core-united-states-national-security-interest/>

infrastructure. A recent study by Transparency International (TI) showed that 22 countries in the region have shown no statistically significant changes in their corruption levels over the past decade. In particular, Central America is at an all-time low on TI's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index, and Venezuela, Haiti, and Nicaragua scored the lowest in the region.<sup>20</sup> Coupled with accusations against local governments for COVID mismanagement, corruption has dampened citizen faith in democratic institutions; a recent opinion poll in 18 Latin American countries showed that just 49% of those surveyed believe in their democratic systems.<sup>21</sup> Such discontent has caused protests in several countries around the region, and will likely impact elections in key partner nations in 2022 and beyond. Corruption also allows malign state actors like the PRC and Russia, and non-state actors like TCOs and VEOs to expand their influence in the region.

**Climate Change and Natural Disasters:** Hurricanes, rising sea levels, flooding and drought are worsening economic and food security and contributing to irregular migration in the region. In August 2021, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, killing more than 2,000 people and damaging thousands of homes. Communities in Central America are still recovering from the Category 4 hurricanes Eta and Iota that made landfall in 2020, destroying thousands of homes, decimating livestock and essential crops like rice, corn, and beans, and displacing nearly 600,000 people in Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.<sup>22</sup> About 8 million people suffer from food insecurity due to drought in the Dry Corridor—a 1,000-mile-long geographic zone that runs through Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.<sup>23</sup> Hurricanes and drought also further exacerbate an already difficult malnutrition context and food insecurity, with Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua having a combined 1.3 million children under 5 years old experiencing stunting which is a prevalence of 43, 20, and 14 percent, respectively, in each of those countries.<sup>24</sup> South America is suffering extreme drought not seen since the 1940s, hampering the flow of hydroelectric dams and river transport for

---

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2021-americas-a-region-in-crisis>

<sup>21</sup> <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2021/10/08/latinobarometro-2021-uruguay-venezuela-apoyan-democracia-orix/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/climate-change-migration-central-america/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/story/covid-19-and-climate-shocks-driving-dramatic-increase-hunger-latin-america-new-studies-find>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/2021/en/>

Paraguay and Brazil.<sup>25</sup> In April 2021, a volcano erupted in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, displacing thousands. These natural disasters, along with the economic fallout of COVID-19, violence fueled by TCOs and VEOs, corruption, and a perceived change in U.S. immigration policy, have driven thousands of migrants to embark on long and dangerous journeys to the U.S. border.

### **Plan of Action—What We’re Doing to Address the Threats**

Over the past several years, U.S. Southern Command has used three lines of effort to address cross-cutting, transboundary challenges: strengthen partnerships, counter threats, and build our team. These lines of effort remain valid, but we must execute them more aggressively, understanding that we achieve our most enduring effects through integrated deterrence with fellow CCMDs, the Joint Force, our allies, and partners, the IA, NGOs, and private industry. While USSOUTHCOM is committed to using all possible “levers” at our disposal to build partner capacity to address those cross-cutting challenges, many of the programs and processes in place are not designed to move swiftly enough to outcompete the PRC – an adversary that has no concern for transparency, oversight, or the rule of law.

### **Strengthen Partnerships—Build Trust**

**Integrated Deterrence with Interagency, Allies, and Partners:** In the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, President Biden stated: “when we strengthen our alliances, we amplify our power and our ability to disrupt threats before they can reach our shores.” At USSOUTHCOM we’re doing just that, putting integrated deterrence into action. We have representatives from 15 U.S. government agencies and 11 allied and partner nations working in our headquarters and component commands, each bringing unique perspectives, capabilities, and authorities to help us accomplish our mission. USSOUTHCOM members participate in venues such as the Global Engagement Center, Venezuela Task Force, The Interdiction Committee, and the Joint Interagency Coordination Group to share best practices and align initiatives with IA counterparts on countering the PRC, Russia, TCOs, and other malign actors.

---

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/severe-drought-hits-south-america-11635240602>

We continue to strengthen relationships with our NATO allies that have presence in the region through operations and exercises. We coordinate with the UK, Canada, France, and the Netherlands on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR). The recent response to the earthquake in Haiti is a shining example of the U.S.-NATO relationship in this AOR. The immediate response and our ability to seamlessly leverage each other's ships, aircraft, forces, and local contacts are lauded by our partners and unmatched by our adversaries. We will continue to welcome IA and NATO participation in our annual HA/DR exercises. We also plan to host an annual senior-level IA conference to ensure whole-of-government alignment on outcompeting the PRC and Russia, countering TCOs and VEOs, addressing corruption and responding to climate disasters.

USSOUTHCOM is also integrated with regional NGOs like Global Fishing Watch to better understand IUU fishing and share this information with our regional partners to counter this illegal activity. Through our strategic partnerships with private sector entities like the Business Executives for National Security and corporate members of the Council of the Americas, we're increasing public awareness of our adversaries' malign activities in a range of areas and amplifying success stories from the U.S. private sector. For instance, USSOUTHCOM continues to amplify the great work by the U.S. Development Finance Corporation that finances infrastructure projects in the areas of climate, health and global health security, digital connectivity, and gender equity and equality.

**Professional Military Education (PME):** Through the Department of State's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, USSOUTHCOM offers high-quality education that emphasizes professionalism and values like human rights, the rule of law, and gender equality. Our courses also stress the importance of a strong non-commissioned officer corps as a core element of legitimacy and professionalism across militaries. Each year, approximately 800 foreign military students from 27 countries participate in the IMET program. To date, 17 Chiefs of Defense and six Ministers of Defense have attended IMET-funded courses at U.S. institutions. USSOUTHCOM's portion of the State Department's IMET funding for the region has remained steady at approximate \$11-12M per year, which is about 10% of the global IMET budget.

**Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and Foreign Military Sales (FMS):** FMF is an important foreign policy tool funded by the State Department and carried out by DoD. Via Foreign Military Sales, FMF assists partner nation militaries in procuring U.S. defense articles such as vehicles, aircraft, arms, and equipment to bolster their defense capabilities. Each year, the Department of State obligates \$75 million in FMF funding, with 40-50% allocated to Colombia, our closest regional military partner. FMF and FMS success stories can be found throughout the AOR: Caribbean partners have used FMF-funded refurbished Coast Guard vessels to better interdict drug traffickers; Panama has used its FMF-funded vessel and aircraft for maritime patrols and search and rescue missions; and the Costa Rican Coast Guard has used its FMF-funded Metal Shark boat to conduct joint drug interdiction operations with Colombia and Panama. The levers that USSOUTHCOM uses must be responsive enough to outcompete in our area of responsibility.

**Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR):** USSOUTHCOM's HA/DR projects show how we can leverage flexible, responsive funding to save lives. Since the start of the pandemic, USSOUTHCOM used CARES Act funding to make over 500 humanitarian assistance donations valued at over \$74 million to 28 countries. These donations included field hospitals, personal protective equipment, ventilators, and medical supplies and immediately offset the delivery of substandard vaccines from the PRC and Russia. When a devastating earthquake struck Haiti last year, USSOUTHCOM supported the U.S. Agency for International Development's humanitarian response to save lives. After 21 days of around the clock teamwork with all our Component Commands, the National Security Council, the Department of State, NGOs, and Haitian authorities, our team assisted and rescued 477 people and delivered nearly 590,000 pounds of food, water, medical equipment, and other supplies. As we continue to provide HA/DR support, we will work more closely with regional emergency management organizations to coordinate our HA/DR responses

**Medical-related Assistance:** In 2021, Air Force - Southern (AFSOUTH) conducted Resolute Sentinel, where dozens of service members provided medical, surgical, dental, and veterinary care to thousands of people in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This year, U.S. military medical personnel will deploy during the Health Engagement Assistance Response Team (HEART) surgical mission to Central America and the USNS

COMFORT medical mission to improve their own medical skills and readiness, save lives, alleviate overburdened hospitals, and earn goodwill from our partners.

**Climate Defense:** USSOUTHCOM has been working with partners to help mitigate some of the effects of climate change. As mentioned previously, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) continues to provide vital support to the USSOUTHCOM AOR, primarily through the Department of State's Foreign Military Sales Program. In addition to helping Ecuador assess and mitigate the erosion caused by the faulty PRC-built dam, USACE is also providing technical support to the Panama Canal Authority's multi-billion-dollar water management project; assisting Honduras with flood control; working on port and watershed development projects in the Dominican Republic and Brazil; and helping Colombia and Peru build critical military base infrastructure. These USACE projects are aligned with our theater strategy and directly support a range of our mission areas to include countering PRC efforts and illicit traffic as well as humanitarian assistance and security cooperation. Through these USACE projects, USSOUTHCOM is offering viable alternatives to PRC-funded infrastructure projects; and they represent the highest standards of transparency and anticorruption, financial sustainability, labor protections, and environmental preservation.

**Women, Peace, and Security (WPS):** At USSOUTHCOM, we are committed to integrating gender perspectives into all our activities, and we encourage our partners to create structural changes in their militaries to allow for the same through our WPS program. Our main objective is to maximize the talents of the force through recruitment, retention, training, and advancement. We consistently encourage our partner nation militaries to provide more opportunities for the women in their ranks, because doubling the talent pool will vastly improve that military's competitiveness and professionalism. No nation can afford to ignore half its population, especially given the crosscutting threats we're all facing. We must remain adaptable, innovative, and human-centric. When we look at the factors that influence prosperity and stability, incorporating concepts of WPS in strategic design and operational employment across the region is paramount.

**Human Rights Training:** USSOUTHCOM is the only Combatant Command that has a Human Rights Office, commemorating 25 years this year, which actively promotes building stronger military human rights programs within partner nation militaries. Emphasizing respect for human rights is an integral component of

military professionalism and a common value that unites military forces serving the democracies of the Western Hemisphere. Human rights are our guiding principle – our North Star – in all security cooperation with our partners. Several partner nation military personnel, especially those in Central America, attend the Defense Institute of International Legal Studies, where respect for rule of law and human rights feature prominently in the curriculum.

### **Counter Threats—Be Aggressive**

In the same way that we rely on the IA, allies, and partners to strengthen partnerships in our AOR, we are using that same integrated deterrence approach to illuminate, disrupt, degrade, neutralize, and defeat our adversaries. Our number one pacing threat is the PRC, our secondary threats are Russia, TCOs, and Iran. USSOUTHCOM is also deploying innovative methods in cyber, space, information operations, artificial intelligence, and machine learning to counter these cross-cutting threats.

**Understanding the Threat:** Our senior defense officials, defense attaches, and security cooperation officials downrange must serve as the “scouts” and “sensors,” feeding key information about malign activities in their countries up to our intelligence analysts and component commands. By developing a more effective, flatter means of communication, their insight and information enables senior leaders to maintain a common intelligence picture and drive operations with clear impact. As we gather intelligence and information about our adversaries’ activities, we must also share it quickly and broadly with the IA, allies, partners, and other Combatant Commands. This will help us all expose our adversaries’ malign practices, narrow any seams and gaps that our adversaries try to exploit, and glean key insights and trends about our adversaries’ playbook throughout the AOR.

**Competing in the Information Space:** Our adversaries are aggressive in the information operation space, amplifying their assistance to partners in the region and spreading disinformation to diminish U.S. credibility. We must more effectively pierce the information space, using all the tools available to us—traditional media, radio, TV, social media, and podcasts—to amplify our own story, shape local perceptions, and expose malign actors and their disinformation. We must highlight the value of our neighborhood in defense



of our homeland and the role it plays in the global campaign for integrated deterrence. USSOUTHCOM and our components execute activities to counter threats and compete against our adversaries in the information space bringing to the attention of foreign audiences our steadfast commitment, through Military Information Support Operations (MISO) and Operations, Activities, and Investments (OAI) throughout the AOR. MISO and Information Operations are two of the best tools in achieving our objectives and our support to USG efforts. Our Special Operations Command-South (SOCSOUTH) is currently carrying out MISO in Guyana and developing similar operations for Central and South America, and the Caribbean. We have a great story to tell: the U.S. is the region's trusted partner because of the values we share and the alignment of our activities to create mutual gains toward greater resilience, peace, and prosperity in the AOR. We tell the truth.

**Cybersecurity:** USSOUTHCOM helps prepare our partner nations to defend themselves against a variety of threats in the cyber domain including from malign state and non-state actors, hackers, criminal groups, and terrorist organizations. Our Joint Cyber Center continues to conduct security cooperation through our Joint Combatant Command Cyber Assistance Teams and Subject Matter Expert Exchanges to share expertise, best practices, and cyber threat indicators to assist partner nations with incident response to cyberattacks, and to further harden and secure their networks. Separately, the USSOUTHCOM Network Operations & Security Center (NOSC) monitors for malicious cyber activity in the AOR 24/7.

**Space Cooperation:** USSOUTHCOM is working with U.S. Space Command and the U.S. Space Force to expand military space engagement with LAC countries. Our partners in the AOR are quickly becoming space-faring nations and USSOUTHCOM is engaged to increase future opportunities for combined operations to counter regional threats. For instance, we've increased Space Domain Awareness data sharing partnerships with Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Chile. Air Forces-Southern (AFSOUTH), our air component, works with these same partners throughout the year to advance combined space operations. In November 2021, USSOUTHCOM worked with Joint Task Force Space Defense (JTF-SD) and the Chilean Air Force on the U.S. – Chile Sprint Advanced Concept Training (SACT) Space Domain Awareness (SDA) experiment, the first of its kind in South America. The SACT connected the US Air Force Academy Falcon Telescope located at the University of La

Serena in Chile with JTF-SD's commercial SDA operation at Catalyst Campus in Colorado Springs, to improve safety of orbital flight for all countries.

We are standing up a Space Component Command for USSOUTHCOM, with personnel focused on space cooperation, sharing open-source satellite data to help partners better track and target illegal activity happening within their borders, and signing more space cooperation agreements with partner nations.

**Counternarcotics Successes:** Our Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-S) in Key West conducts our statutorily directed mission to detect and monitor illicit drugs, delivering a high return on modest investments. In 2021, JIATF-S enabled the disruption of a total of 364 illegal "events," including a total of 324,000 kilograms of cocaine and 118,000 pounds of marijuana with a combined U.S. wholesale value of over \$8 billion. JIATF-S also enabled the detention of 1,017 persons through seizure operations conducted in maritime, land, and air operations; resulting in an estimated 3,200 American lives saved.

The Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) has enabled us to support our partners to counter threats and respond to natural disasters. Last year, the USS Sioux City, USS Wichita, and USS Billings all deployed to support counter-illicit drug missions in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific. In the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake, USSOUTHCOM used the LCS to deliver 113,200 lbs of aid to the Haitian people.

**Partners in the TCO Fight:** TCOs and VEOs wage war against our partner nations every day, which directly impacts Americans. Our regional partners are actively in the counter-TCO fight with us. Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Guatemala, El Salvador, and others have been involved in more than 60 percent of drug disruptions. Years of sustained security cooperation with our partners throughout our hemisphere is really paying dividends – we have helped build the capability of these nations to operate with us to disrupt drug shipments before those loads enter the homeland. In 2021, Colombia led Operation Orion, which encompassed two multi-national, all-domain, operations that disrupted 217 metric tons of cocaine and captured 7 aircraft, 106 vessels, and 8 low profile vessels. The U.S. provided maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) and analyst support to these operations. This is just one example of the large return on investment gained by combining a willing and able partner with a committed U.S. presence in the Western Hemisphere. Another example is Operation Kraken, conducted in coordination with Colombia, Panama, SOCSOUTH, and interagency partners. Due to this joint

and combined effort, the U.S. and partners seized 65 metric tons of cocaine, 22,000 pounds of marijuana, and 43 illegal vessels; destroyed 42 cocaine labs; and detained 129 drug traffickers.

**Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR):** One of the core ways we support our partners in their fight against TCOs is by providing ISR, a mix of traditional platforms, purpose-built sensors, and increasingly non-standard collection methods. USSOUTHCOM employs less than 2% of DoD ISR resources to counter malign state and nonstate actors. To meet the mission, we are pushing the envelope with innovative techniques, integrating publicly available information, advanced analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning, and open collaboration with allies and partners to disrupt threats. These advanced ISR tools offer persistent, AOR-wide coverage without risk to personnel at a relatively low cost and puts us in a position to better compete against adversaries. Our Technical Network Analysis Cell (TNAC) at JIATF-S has demonstrated tremendous return on investment; at a cost of \$1.4 million, the TNAC denied TCOs of \$921.7 million in revenue by providing actionable intelligence to IA and partner nations, leading to numerous disruptions. SOCSOUTH is supporting law enforcement and partner nation efforts to counter TCOs and PRC malign activities by very quickly gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information to the interagency and partner nations for action. We also work with academic institutions like Florida International University and University of Miami as force multipliers, that can gather open-source information that can be quickly and easily shared with partners for action.

Last year, USSOUTHCOM used P-8 multi-mission maritime aircraft to detect and monitor illicit drug flows. They were the only DoD assets with sufficient range and dwell time to conduct detection and monitoring (D&M) in the far reaches of the Eastern Pacific, detecting low-profile go-fast and self-propelled fully or semi-submersible (“drug sub”) vessels. These drug subs are becoming more prevalent and, when interdicted, yield higher payloads of cocaine. Since April 2020, the P-8s assisted in the disruption of nearly 115 metric tons of cocaine (23% of our overall disruptions) worth \$2.85 billion. During the Haiti earthquake, the P-8s gathered real time video, and damage and threat assessments for disaster relief planning and distribution.

**Maintaining the Innovative Edge:** As these P-8s are now being deployed to address higher priority missions in other CCMDs, USSOUTHCOM will continue to find other innovative ways to gather actionable

intelligence and information. We currently use three contractor-owned/contractor-operated (COCO) aircraft for aircraft overland ISR, one COCO for D&M, and four government-owned/contractor-operated (GOCO) aircraft also for D&M. These aircraft target TCOs and VEOs and provide mapping for mission planning. These tools help us support our IA colleagues and partner nations to counter the TCO/VEO threat.

USSOUTHCOM serves as an innovative test bed for DoD, interagency, private industry, and academia to develop new technologies to maintain our innovative edge over the PRC, Russia, and other adversaries. The Western Hemisphere is a permissive environment with a higher tolerance for technology failure, and a diverse climate, geography, and topology. USSOUTHCOM leverages over \$150 million worth of technology prototypes, most of which are green energy compatible, ranging from the development of the first unmanned persistent solar powered aircraft with a 300-pound payload to an expeditionary 3D concrete printer that significantly reduces the carbon footprint. USSOUTHCOM is leaning forward when it comes to operationalizing resilient, energy efficient platforms that reduce emissions and enhance the mission through the innovative use of high-altitude balloons, stratosphere platforms, hydrogen fuel cells, and solar powered technology. We have submitted a Rapid Defense Experiment Reserve (RDER) joint proposal with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command that will run operational tests to counter the PRC's capabilities.

USSOUTHCOM also leverages a Data-Driven Decision-Making (D3M) Cell to produce baseline analyses on malign actors, TCOs, partner nation security force risk, and Women, Peace, and Security measures. The D3M equips military leadership with trends, comparative analyses, and effects models to maximize efforts across the AOR. Further, this data will be aggregated and consolidated into a database to serve as a foundation for future artificial intelligence and machine learning integration.

**Annual Exercises:** Our exercises such as PANAMAX (defense of the Panama Canal), UNITAS (maritime security), and TRADEWINDS (Caribbean disaster response) build readiness and enhance our partners' capabilities, interoperability, and domain awareness. This is a vital component of our strategy to improve our collective ability to secure the region. USSOUTHCOM personnel also frequently participate in our partner nations' annual exercises, including Salitre in Chile, Angel de los Andes in Colombia, and CRUZEX in Brazil.

**Security Cooperation:** Our security cooperation program focuses on building our partners' capacity to conduct ground and maritime interdiction, defend their cyber networks, secure their borders and sovereignty, and maintain domain awareness. The Near Coastal Patrol Vessel (NCPV) program is a USSOUTHCOM initiative to address selected Caribbean and Central American partners' requirements for a maritime patrol vessel with the capacity to conduct sustained Maritime Interdiction Operations. To date, we have fielded an NCPV in the Dominican Republic, Panama, El Salvador, and Honduras to increase interoperability and counter regional threats. Panama deployed its NCPV in December and in one month used it to conduct two successful search and rescue operations near the Gulf of Panama. We are also working closely with partners in Guatemala to strengthen their professional military intelligence capabilities, and Colombia to help them establish a secure communication network that is interoperable with the DoD.

USSOUTHCOM also offers partner nation militaries specialized riverine and littoral training through the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS). In the Amazon Basin, rivers allow our partner nation military and security forces to extend their operational reach, provide security for their population against emerging threats, and stop narcotraffickers who pollute the rivers with precursor chemicals. Rivers are also a source of fresh water for our partners and crucial for the region's environmental health, particularly in the Amazon, the lungs of the earth. Brazilian, Colombian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian military personnel have all received training from NAVSCIATTS Mobile Training Teams (MTTs), and they're producing clear results. For example, the Colombian Marines, which maintain five Riverine Brigades and 16 Riverine Battalions covering over 15,000 km of navigable rivers, depends on NAVSCIATTS MTTs to receive instruction in doctrine, exercises, material maintenance, logistics, and other specialized training. NAVSCIATTS MTTs train large groups of students at once, and the instruction is in Spanish, which dramatically increases the number of eligible students.

USSOUTHCOM has partnered with U.S. Africa Command and Brazil to develop a multi-nation maritime task force including South American and African partner nations, as well as the U.S. Coast Guard and allies. This initiative will seek to counter IUU fishing, piracy, and other malign influence from state actors and TCOs operating in the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Guinea.

**U.S. Coast Guard:** U.S. Coast Guard assets provide USSOUTHCOM with unique capabilities and authorities which, when used in conjunction with the U.S. Navy and Allied platforms, maximize the effectiveness of USSOUTHCOM missions. The Coast Guard is in the midst of executing its largest fleet recapitalization since World War II and deployments of the Service's National Security Cutters and Fast Response Cutters continue to provide the bulk of USSOUTHCOM's counter drug forces. The continued recapitalization effort will provide capabilities that support USSOUTHCOM's strategic initiatives to include enhancing Theater Security Cooperation (TSC), countering IUU Fishing, and combating TCOs. Additionally, the Coast Guard provides valuable humanitarian mission support across the region. Within just a few hours of the Haiti earthquake, USCG rescue helicopters were at the forefront of USSOUTHCOM's humanitarian effort, saving lives and delivering much needed aid.

**Counterterrorism (CT) and DoD Rewards Program:** SOCSOUTH maintains persistent presence in several countries in the region, working and training with partner militaries. Our focus is on improving partner nation CT response capabilities, interoperability, and information sharing through training and exercises. In December 2021, the Treasury Department designated three individuals of a Brazil-based network affiliated with al-Qaida and their companies as Specially Designated Global Terrorists for supporting the terrorist group.<sup>26</sup> SOCSOUTH has continually monitored the al-Qaida threat in Brazil and provided actionable intelligence for our partners at Treasury to utilize their authorities to act against this threat.<sup>27</sup>

The DoD Rewards Program has again provided tremendous return on investment in the fight against terrorism. In FY21, USSOUTHCOM paid \$1.3M in rewards to 54 informants that provided information resulting in 63 partner nation operations that neutralized 209 individuals who were terrorist or force protection threats, an increase of 100% compared to 2020. Although DoD Rewards is a counterterror and force protection program, it yields significant counternarcotic effects that included the seizure of over 10 tons of cocaine valued at \$239.2M; 5.5 tons of marijuana valued at \$11.1M; \$1.04M in bulk cash; and explosives and weapons valued

---

<sup>26</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0546>

<sup>27</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0546>

at \$1.2M. The program also led to the destruction of four drug labs with a monthly production output of 3400kg of cocaine valued at \$88.4M per month or about \$1.06B per year.

**Counter-Threat Finance:** We also continue to focus efforts on assessing the financial underpinnings of national security threats in the region and have deepened our counter-threat finance related collaboration with the U.S. Treasury Department, interagency, and international partners. This includes providing direct analytic support to law enforcement agencies to deny, degrade, or disrupt the illicit financial networks that malign state and nonstate actors use to launder money, traffic drugs and people, and co-opt government officials in the region. An area requiring more emphasis is TCO network mapping, exploitation, and holistic interagency, allied, and partner nation efforts to dismantle key TCO centers of gravity such as logistics and finances.

**Total Force:** Our National Guard and Reserve Component personnel and resources provide a low cost, high-return force multiplier to outcompete threats in this hemisphere. The Reserve Components are embedded in all our major exercises, and through a combination of part-time and full-time support, provide 30% of our headquarters staff, 20% of our Security Cooperation mission, 63% of our Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay (JTF-GTMO), 25% of JTF-Bravo, and 25% of SOCSOUTH.

The National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) has helped us build relationships with Caribbean and Central and South America nations since 1996. We have Guardsmen from 18 U.S. states, as well as Puerto Rico and DC, working with 24 partner nations—more than any other Combatant Command. Last year in Brazil, the New York National Guard exchanged counterterrorism lessons from 9/11 and took part in the Brazilian-led exercise TAPIO. In September 2021, South Carolina National Guard medical personnel, working with its state partner, Colombia, provided care to remote villagers in Tamana, and deployed F-16s to participate in the Colombian-led exercise Angel de los Andes. This past August, following the Haiti earthquake, the Puerto Rico NG flew aid to those in the most affected areas.

Our Coronet Oak mission is the longest airlift mission in the history of the National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command where we have active component, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve C-130s providing critical intra/inter airlift support to our theater for all missions. Additionally, we greatly appreciate

the mutually beneficial cost savings when Guard and Reserve C-5 & C17s provide inter theater airlift support to our Counter Drug and Denton Humanitarian Assistance missions.

**Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay (JTF-GTMO):** JTF-GTMO continues to conduct safe, legal, and humane detention operations. To do so in a more efficient manner, the JTF has taken steps to right-size its force and consolidate operations. To date, we have safely reduced military personnel by over 30 percent. This is part of an ongoing effort to continually assess all USSOUTHCOM operations to ensure we are maximizing use of resources.

### **Build our Team—Don't Settle**

**People First:** People are our #1 resource, and we cannot successfully strengthen partnerships, counter threats, or outcompete our adversaries without the best team. However, we must never settle in providing our people with the tools and training they need to get the mission done. We are fostering a climate in which individuals have sufficient time for self-development and preparation. We will continue to look for ways to improve our own processes and efficiency while eliminating silos within our Command. This begins with looking at our own structure, roles, and responsibilities to ensure we retain the flexibility to maneuver physically and intellectually in response to emergent operations, opportunities, and challenges.

**Expanding the Definition of “Team:”** The broad nature of threats in this AOR, ranging from military, to diplomatic, to economic, and law enforcement problem sets, requires that we truly put integrated deterrence into action. USSOUTHCOM must ensure we are in lock step with the intelligence community, the State Department, law enforcement, and the rest of the interagency. We work in each other's command centers, we share information and intelligence, and we bring our unique authorities and resources to bear on these challenges. We will continue to deepen this integration. That means including the Cyberspace Operations Planning Element, the Joint Integrated Space Team, the Joint Military Information Support Operations Center, and other similar entities into USSOUTHCOM battle rhythm events. This ensures the whole USSOUTHCOM team has a better understanding of what resources we have available and what our expanded teammates across DoD and the IA can contribute. This is what integrated deterrence looks like.



Ultimately, we want our partners to continue to associate USSOUTHCOM with professionalism, competence, and high standards worth emulating. As with any large organization, there are areas for improvement, and we will constantly look for unity of effort and alignment in everything we do.

**Quality of Life:** Our families are our strength and foundation, and we must take family members' concerns into account. While having our headquarters and two component commands in South Florida offers a great synergy with our AOR, it is also a very expensive place to live. The housing market is so competitive and volatile that personnel are faced with limited inventory of homes and extremely high up-front costs, with landlords requiring up to \$10,000 to secure a rental unit. Some USSOUTHCOM families were also forced to make sudden moves as landlords raised rents or broke leases. We are working with the supportive local community to find immediate relief options for our service members and civilians on housing. We are also working with the Department of the Army and OSD to secure a permanent housing solution in Miami-Dade County that would allow the Army to divest of high-cost leases, reliably house junior enlisted Service Members, and meet documented family housing requirements.

**Congressional Support:** We appreciate the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)'s recognition that our AOR matters and is critical to the security of our homeland. The challenges posed by the PRC, Russia, and TCOs are global, and we look forward to working closely with Congress to ensure adequate attention and resourcing in this region, specifically through your continued support of our Budget requests. We also appreciate your support of our security cooperation program in the USSOUTHCOM AOR as a continued recognition of the importance of these programs in our hemisphere. We have very willing partners, who with our commitment and some equipment and training, multiply our efforts to keep this region secure.

I often say we must be on the field to compete, and our ability to be on the field is hindered when we are forced to operate under continuing resolutions. Budget uncertainty is disruptive to our operations and to the lives of our people. Our inability to plan and execute programs and operations on time also impact our partner nations, who also end up having to delay or cancel engagements with us. I ask for congressional support in passing a budget this year. To be on the field, it is also critical to have confirmed Chiefs of Mission to employ the full spectrum of U.S. capabilities, particularly given the many security challenges we face in our region.

ISR is critical to our ability to defend against threats in our neighborhood before they impact the homeland. With the loss of the ISR Transfer Fund in FY21, which the Congress had appropriated to meet CCMD ISR unfunded requirements, we lost almost half of our ISR funding. To mitigate some of this loss, we are exploring enhanced ISR solutions coupled with advanced analytics and commercially available data to help us generate more threat targeting at reduced costs. Such tools are essential for our partners to counter TCOs and VEOs, and thwart malign actor interference in domestic elections. As mentioned previously, our P-8 aircraft have been crucial in gathering ISR to disrupt TCOs' illicit activities; without them, we will be unable to detect or monitor threats in the far reaches of the Eastern Pacific, the area through which 80% of drugs destined for the United States flow. Continued Congressional support to USSOUTHCOM's ISR program will allow us to mitigate for the loss of these aircraft and increase our domain awareness and ability to stop threats bound for our homeland.

Finally, we appreciate that the NDAA provides a temporary authority that will enable Colombia to continue its role as a security exporter through the U.S.-Colombia Action Plan.

### **Conclusion**

The safety of our homeland is directly linked to resilience, stability, and security of our Latin American and Caribbean partners. The U.S. and our regional partners are on the frontline of strategic competition, and we share crosscutting threats that we must confront together. As Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated, "our allies and partners are a force multiplier and one of the greatest strategic assets we have in protecting our nation...we will act together...making us stronger as a team than the sum of our individual parts." We at USSOUTHCOM believe this wholeheartedly, and we are committed to work shoulder to shoulder with our partners, maximizing our efforts where their priorities align with our own national interests. To meet these challenges, we are putting integrated deterrence into action, using all available levers—assets, resources, and authorities—across the DoD, interagency, allies, partners, NGOs, and private industry to fulfill our *Enduring Promise* to be the region's trusted partner—today, tomorrow, and always.