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**POSTURE STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE 115<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
15 FEBRUARY 2018**



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## INTRODUCTION

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, Members of the Committee: I appreciate the opportunity to discuss U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) and our efforts in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. Every day, our men and women work to secure our southern approaches and build a regional security network of principled, inclusive partnerships. As an economy of force Combatant Command, we depend upon this network to help maintain our own security and defend our homeland in depth. It is the most important layer of our forward defense.

Yet the combined impacts of defense spending caps, nine years of continuing resolutions, and insufficient spending in the diplomacy and development arenas make it increasingly difficult to sustain this regional network. Because our global security responsibilities outpace the resources available to meet them, we have had to make a series of tough choices, resulting in compounding second and third order effects. The net result is the perception among our friends—and the palpable anticipation among our competitors—that we no longer stand by our commitments, that we are relinquishing our strategic position, and that we don't take the challenges in this region seriously. On the surface, these regional challenges may not seem directly related to the larger global challenges that dominate headlines and policymaking. They don't always fit neatly in our strategic frameworks, as they blur the line between crime and war, competition and conflict, and simmering problems and crises. Left unchecked, however, their impacts compound over time, emboldening competitors in other theaters, draining capabilities needed in other high priority missions, and taxing our economic strength.

Mr. Chairman, we must address evolving security challenges to help hold the line in this hemisphere, and ensure a crisis within it doesn't distract from our ability to address even higher

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priority global challenges elsewhere. We should not make assumptions that the future will be as generous to our interests in this region as the past, which means we need to decide how much security is acceptable in a part of the world so closely linked to the U.S. homeland. Unless we decide, we may open ourselves to exploitation by our adversaries, erode our competitive edge and, in the case of this theater, as well as expose our southern flank to a well understood range of vulnerabilities. We appreciate the support of the Congress in this matter, and I look forward to providing a detailed overview of the challenges and opportunities in this region, and our missions within it.

### **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

*Security environment.* Latin America and the Caribbean is a region of contrasts, of both positive and concerning trends. It is not one homogenous place, but many disparate

***Eight of the ten countries with the world's highest homicide rates are in the region, as are 43 of the world's 50 most violent cities.***

communities, home to modern, diverse, democratic societies,

with a growing middle class and professional, capable militaries. Yet it faces governance challenges—including political corruption, unmet development goals, and shocking levels of violent crime—that create a permissive environment for illicit and other concerning activity.

The global threat of violent extremism has gained a small foothold within Latin America's growing Muslim populations. Groups such as the Islamic State and others will likely continue recruiting fighters or inspiring others to carry out attacks in their home countries. Insecurity and economic hardship continue to drive migration; while overall trends are returning to historical norms, migration from the Northern Triangle across the US-Mexico border is once again on the rise. Natural disasters regularly impact vulnerable countries, exacerbating struggling economies, and Venezuela remains at risk for internal instability, which could have

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significant regional ramifications. Within this context, the region contains a mix of challenges from both non-state and state actors.

**Threat networks**—including drug traffickers, arms dealers, human smugglers, terrorist supporters and sympathizers, and money launderers—use common pathways and conduct operations that span the region and reach deep into our homeland. Criminal networks move drugs and engage in a wide array of illegal activity, including weapons trafficking, chemical importation, poppy and coca cultivation, fentanyl smuggling, and illegal mining. Transnational gangs like MS-13 and the 18<sup>th</sup> Street target and kill police officers in Central America, and routinely communicate with counterparts in places like Massachusetts, Virginia, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland to direct operations on U.S. soil. Human smugglers enable the transit of thousands of illegal immigrants and Special Interest Aliens (SIAs) to our borders.<sup>1</sup> Lebanese Hezbollah supporters exploit free trade zones, working with criminal groups to raise funds. Collectively, these groups create pathways and vulnerabilities that can be exploited by terrorists or proliferators, and corrode confidence in the governance of partner nations we rely on to advance regional and global security interests.

This challenge is constantly evolving. As this Committee knows, thirty years ago we focused on large cartels with designated leaders and relatively straightforward operations. Today, those cartels have diversified, decentralized, and franchised their operations. They are borderless, operating with the fluidity of a multinational corporation, but with impunity. They traffic in more illicit products, kill more Americans with illicit drugs, and earn ever-greater illicit profits. Looking beyond the immediate, however, the larger challenge posed by threat networks is far more insidious: their potential to undermine democratic progress in all its forms. Mr.

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<sup>1</sup> A Special Interest Aliens (SIA) is a foreign national originating from a country with potential or established terrorist links.

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Chairman, what these groups are really engaged in is an assault on the rule of law, and everything it stands for.

This assault comes in many forms. We see it when illicit elements attack police, judges, and innocent by-standers, violating the most fundamental human right of all: the right to citizen security. We see it in the corruption of institutions and government officials. And we see it in the slowly expanding spaces of lawlessness, alternative order, and criminal control, which creates a breeding ground for other transnational threats. The cumulative effects of these groups eats away at core democratic values. Threat networks play a major role in fostering the corruption and insecurity that erodes citizens' faith in democracy, especially in countries with the highest levels of criminal violence. When we think about attacks on democracy, I would offer to this Committee that we must consider attacks that come from *all* quarters—not just attacks from traditional, nation-states.

The stark reality, however, is that we are likewise faced with traditional nation-state challenges. China, Russia, and Iran are courting some of our most strategically important Latin American and Caribbean partners and supporting authoritarian, anti-American regimes. With every inroad they make, they enlarge competitive space to interfere with our security relationships, cancel out our interoperability with the region, undermine our efforts to reinforce international norms, and hold our interests at risk.

**China's** commercial and diplomatic advances move it closer to its larger strategic goal of reshaping global economic and governance architectures. China has pledged \$500 billion in trade with Latin American countries and \$250 billion in Chinese direct investment over the next ten years. Increased economic cooperation—such as the extension of the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative to Latin America, one of the nodes to support China's vision of a competing global

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economic initiative—and the continued provision of financing and loans that appear to have ‘no strings attached’ provide ample opportunity for China to expand its influence over key regional



*(DOD Photo) Service members from partner nation air forces work together during PANAMAX Aug. 14, 2017. The week-long exercise focused on security of the Panama Canal.*

partners and promote unfair business and labor practices. Increased reach to key global access points like Panama create commercial and security vulnerabilities for the United States, as do Chinese telecommunications and space ventures with dual-use potential, which could facilitate intelligence

collection, compromise communication networks, and ultimately constrain our ability to work with our partners.

**Russia’s** increased role in our hemisphere is particularly concerning, given its intelligence and cyber capabilities, intent to upend international stability and order, and discredit democratic institutions. Russia is a strategic competitor actively seeking to degrade U.S. partnerships and undermine U.S. interests in the region. Moscow attempts to falsely shape Latin America's information environment through its two dedicated Spanish-language news and multi-media services, and through its influence campaigns to sway public sentiment. Expanded port and logistics access in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela provide Russia with persistent, pernicious presence, including more frequent maritime intelligence collection and visible force projection in the Western Hemisphere. The sanctuary of robust relationships with these three countries provides Russia with a regional platform to target U.S. and partner nation facilities and assets, exert negative influence over undemocratic governments, and employ strategic options in

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the event of a global contingency. Left unchecked, Russian access and placement could eventually transition from a regional spoiler to a critical threat to the U.S. homeland.

Additionally, **North Korea** may use its small presence in Latin America to do us harm while also looking to develop expanded economic and diplomatic partnerships. We remain concerned that Pyongyang could use its limited footprint in the region to collect or plot against us. Given the permissive environment in the region, North Korean efforts to generate revenue, and its history of working with supporters like Cuba to circumvent sanctions, North Korea is likely to engage in some form of illicit activity in Latin America.

Post the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), **Iran** seeks to expand its diplomatic relationships and trade and investment opportunities. Having a footprint in the region also allows Iran to collect intelligence and conduct contingency planning for possible retaliatory attacks against U.S. or Western interests. Lebanese Hezbollah maintains an established logistical, facilitating, fundraising and operational presence in this region that can be quickly leveraged with little or no warning.

Challenges to U.S. interests are not limited to extra-hemispheric actors. From a national security standpoint, **Cuba** has demonstrated clear intent to target U.S. interests through collection, surveillance, and counterintelligence activities in countries throughout the region. It has also demonstrably failed in its international obligation to protect diplomatic personnel. The planned political transition this spring is unlikely to change Cuba's approach, diminish the military's position of influence, or alter continued cooperation with Russia, China, and even North Korea on a range of security, political, and economic issues. Cuba's negative influence in Venezuela—notably through its intelligence service and Armed Forces, which play key advisory roles shaping Venezuelan domestic policy—is evident in the Maduro regime's increasingly

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authoritarian tactics and human rights abuses. This relationship is symbiotic, as Cuba receives oil and financial support in exchange for keeping the Maduro regime afloat.

The future of that relationship, however, is unclear, as the political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in **Venezuela** worsens by the day. Its citizens (especially the most vulnerable) are suffering. The health care system has nearly collapsed. Child malnutrition rates are past the crisis threshold and infant mortality rates have risen sharply. Some reports suggest that 93% of Venezuelans claim they cannot afford the food they need. The government is on the brink of total default as a result of the Maduro regime's mismanagement of the economy. Given these conditions, Venezuela's neighbors face a growing influx of migrants, straining local economies, health, and education sectors around the region. Over 500,000 Venezuelans have fled to Colombia, 40,000 to Brazil, 93,000 to Ecuador, and tens of thousands more to other countries in the region. Continued out migration of Venezuelans fleeing the dire economic and humanitarian situation at home is straining many neighboring economies to the breaking point, increasing the potential for regional tensions and border conflicts as countries attempt to protect scarce resources.

Venezuela has long provided a permissive environment for narco-terrorist groups and Lebanese Hezbollah supporters, and is a transit country for the smuggling of illicit drugs and SIAs. The continued assault on democratic institutions provides increased space for illicit actors to operate with impunity, and for Russia, China, and Cuba to expand their influence over the corrupt Maduro regime. The next few months will likely prove critical, with a presidential election, continued economic deterioration, and widespread shortages of medicine, food, electricity, and consumer goods.

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While these challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable. Across the regional security network, we continue to build capability, capacity, and interoperability, expand information sharing, and deepen linkages with the many committed and capable partners we have in the region. Below are but a few examples of the significant, positive trends and increasing contributions and leadership of our partners to help us address shared challenges in our hemisphere.

**El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras** continue to make progress implementing their reform initiative, the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity despite mounting challenges from gangs like MS-13. Their security services have played key roles in contributing to internal security gains. All three have plans in place to strengthen their law enforcement capabilities so they can eventually phase their militaries out of domestic security missions. **Belize** is demonstrating willingness to cooperate, sharing information with its neighbors and with us on drug smuggling and other illicit activity. Further south, **Panama**—a critical partner in both counter-terrorism (CT) and countering transnational organized crime (CTOC)—is taking important steps to address the increasing flow of migrants and SIAs from the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa.

A NATO partner, anchor for regional stability, and emerging contributor to global security challenges, **Colombia** remains a staunch friend whose leadership is critical to addressing threat networks, SIA smuggling, and the mutation of FARC dissidents into illegally armed groups. **Peru** is expanding its role in regional maritime security and continues to provide significant contributions to international peacekeeping efforts, while also contributing to the fight against coca cultivation. This year **Chile** will assume a major leadership role in the world's largest multinational maritime exercise, the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), and is deepening maritime security cooperation throughout the Asia-Pacific region, while **Brazil** is working a

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South American security initiative to coordinate regional responses to criminal and extremist networks. Caribbean partners like **Trinidad and Tobago** and multinational organizations like the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Regional Security System (RSS), and the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) are improving sub-regional coordination to shut down drug and weapon smuggling routes, prevent the spread of extremist networks, and cooperate on disaster response.

In the year ahead, we see tremendous opportunity to deepen collaboration with these key partners and multilateral organizations, as well as reviving the mutually beneficial security partnerships with **Argentina and Ecuador**. Our regional partnerships are the cornerstone of our efforts to secure our southern approaches and the heart of everything we do in the region.

### **SECURING OUR SOUTHERN APPROACHES**

**Our mission and approach.** USSOUTHCOM's mission is to secure the southern approaches, protecting U.S. interests in Latin America and the Caribbean while reducing the threats extending from or through this region into the United States. We recognize that the region's primary challenges—criminal and extremist threat networks; vulnerabilities to natural and manmade disasters; and global competitors—are highly dependent on an integrated approach and leveraging authorities and capabilities across the joint, interagency, international, and non-governmental communities. That's why our approach has *always* been less about what we need, and more about how we better employ what we have. We seek to mobilize and organize the unique strengths of each of our partners and Allies, to expand information sharing and collaboration, and to align security, development, and capacity building activities that allow us to translate short-term successes into long-term gains, sustained by an adaptive and inclusive regional security network.

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**Countering threat networks—our main effort.** We have internally reorganized our headquarters and refined command and control relationships across the USSOUTHCOM enterprise to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our counter threat network activities, and strengthen collaboration with interagency, regional, and non-governmental efforts. Working by, with, and through our network of partners, we confront the challenge of criminal and extremist networks at their source.

*Enabling our network of partner nations.* Building partner capacity (BPC) remains the primary way we improve interoperability and enable partner nations to take the lead in countering transregional threats. Our investments in places like the Northern Tier, Colombia, Panama, Trinidad and the Dominican Republic continue to pay significant dividends, as each of these nations have significantly improved their internal security, and increasingly execute successful maritime interdiction operations, many of which are in direct support of JIATF South. Naval Special Operations Forces in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Panama are now among the most competent and responsive counternarcotic (CN) units in Central America, integrating with air assets, effectively responding to JIATF South "cues," and executing numerous joint and individual interdiction operations. In Trinidad and Tobago, we initiated a 2282 Train and Equip program—which has helped better posture their CT units to illuminate and degrade violent extremist networks and their enablers throughout the region—and are developing legal capacity through a robust Judge Advocate corps to help reinforce rule of law, a critical element in the counter threat network fight. We also supported our partners in the Dominican Republic to improve maritime interdiction in the Caribbean through the establishment of a Joint Task Force that combined SOF-trained CN units with Dominican naval aircraft.

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Beyond enabling the immediate efforts of our partners, we also build operational and institutional capacities that in turn translate into more accountable, effective, and sustainable security organizations capable of mutually supporting each other while addressing our shared security challenges in the region. In the year ahead, we are developing engagement strategies that focus on episodic training engagements to maximize the effectiveness of BPC activities, even with minimal forces.

In South America, we are partnering with Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Colombia in support of multinational operations that confront the expansion of threat networks in South America. Colombia, in particular, remains our indispensable partner in the counter network fight. Since the signing of the peace accord, security levels have dramatically improved and conflict-related killings have plummeted. At the same time, the peace process has brought with it real challenges in extending state presence and economic opportunity, dismantling illicit networks, and reversing coca growth, all of which threaten to undermine a meaningful transition out of conflict. Our partnership with Colombia remains critical at this difficult moment. Their progress is historic, but our work there is far from done. Just as we never considered walking away from our NATO allies upon the conclusion of the Cold War, it should be inconceivable that we permit any diminution in our ties with Colombia today. The Department's Section 1021 authority has been particularly valuable to our efforts in Colombia, and we look forward to working with this Committee to ensure the authority remains relevant given the evolving security environment there.

Mr. Chairman, in our view, a  
Colombia at peace can do even  
more, both regionally and globally. Supporting Colombia's efforts to address its problems and

***Since 2013, USCAP has trained 5,598 Leahy-vetted security and defense personnel. A high-demand, low-cost program, requests for USCAP events have increased eight-fold since its creation.***

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deliver on the promises of the peace accord remains in our interests, as does facilitating Colombia's continued regional leadership and role as a net security exporter. Our Colombian partners continue to willingly and usefully share hard-won security lessons with Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean through the U.S. Colombia Action Plan for Regional Security (USCAP). In the year ahead, we will remain engaged on Colombia's new riverine efforts, ongoing defense transformation, interest in pursuing trilateral cooperation with Mexico, and implementation of holistic plans to extend government presence, confront illegality, and encourage sustainable development. To further deepen linkages within the region security network, we are also offering key leadership and staff billets to both Colombia and Chile during the Marine Corps' Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF) 2018 deployment, with the goal of complementing their respective contributions in Central America through USCAP and security cooperation training teams.

*Deepening integration with the interagency network.* At our headquarters, we continue to strengthen our successful partnership with the Department of Treasury, supporting the development of targeted financial measures and sanction designations against corrupt government officials in Venezuela, international narcotics traffickers, and money launderers. We are also expanding cooperation and integrating operations and intelligence professionals with the FBI, DEA, and DHS. Our premier exchange team at Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) Miami provides intelligence fusion and collaborates on disrupting criminal and terrorist activities. Last year, this team helped the FBI disrupt an imminent threat to a U.S. Ambassador, supported an investigation into a major SIA smuggler, and provided analytic support to over two dozen law enforcement investigations. Beginning in April, we will again provide planning and analytic support to DHS' Operation CITADEL, a multinational, multiagency effort targeting

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illicit smuggling networks. We are also working closely with DHS to align DoD planning efforts with their *Southern Border and Approaches Campaign Plan*, and deepening coordination with DEA and other partners on the expansion of fentanyl smuggling networks. Earlier this month we hosted a high-level Opioid Summit, which brought together interagency and non-governmental stakeholders to further a holistic approach to counter this threat to American lives.

We are also expanding linkages with interagency partners across Latin America and the Caribbean. Through the Central American Community of Interest (COI), JTF Bravo—our task force located at Soto Cano Air base in

***The small team from JIATF South's Cyber-Container Initiative (CCI) has developed an innovative intelligence analysis methodology known as "technical network analysis." By profiling online cyber activity and detecting signs of nefarious activities, this group is able to deliver significant operational support to DHS, FBI, and other DoD and law enforcement operations aimed at targeting and disrupting narcotics trafficking, weapons smuggling, counter-proliferation, and other illicit activities undertaken by criminal and state-sponsored networks.***

Honduras charged with promoting security cooperation and disaster response in Central America—facilitates information sharing on criminal networks and violent gangs involved in drug trafficking and other illicit activity in the region. JTF-Bravo's efforts also complements efforts by the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to improve security and governance, prevent crime and violence, promote prosperity and extend state presence through its humanitarian and medical engagements. Soto Cano now hosts the Forensic Exploitation and Analysis Center (FEAC), the first of its kind in Central America. This center provides document and biometric exploitation capabilities that directly support U.S. and partner nation law enforcement efforts to dismantle transnational criminal organizations.

In the air and maritime domains, our detection and monitoring (D&M) operations and support to interdiction enable U.S. and partner nation law enforcement to successfully prosecute and dismantle criminal networks. JIATF South set a record for interdictions in FY 17, supporting the disruption of 283 metric tons of cocaine and the detention of nearly 900 suspected

members of drug trafficking organizations. Given limited U.S. government (USG) assets, we rely heavily on contributions by Canada, Central America, Colombia, Mexico, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and France. Without the support of this cooperative maritime network, an additional 77 metric tons of cocaine would have reached U.S. communities last year.



Data compiled from a variety of sources:  
 \* The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP); Consolidated Counterdrug Data Base (CCDB)  
 \*\* DOJ [Bureau of Prisons and law enforcement agencies (LEAs)]; CCDB  
 \*\*\* The UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC); World Bank; CCDB  
 \*\*\*\* JIATFS; LEAs

Persistent asset shortfalls continue to present challenges to the D&M mission, however. On any given day in the Eastern Pacific in FY 17, JIATF South had, on average, 2.9 force packages available to respond to illicit trafficking events, and was typically only able to seize or interdict only 1 in 31 of those events. The sheer volume of illicit trafficking events far outmatches the force packages available to deal with them.<sup>2</sup>

*Counter threat network operations, activities, and investments.* We see great opportunity to build on the multinational cooperation that characterizes these international interdiction efforts, especially the successful inter-institutional coordination of last year’s Operation KRAKEN, in which the United States, Colombia, Panama, and Costa Rica targeted illicit maritime pathways in the Central American littorals. This year, we will align KRAKEN’s

<sup>2</sup> A force package consists of a medium to long range ship (such as a non-ballistic missile capable US Navy Destroyer or Littoral Combat Ship, or a US Coast Guard Cutter) hosting a Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment, with an interceptor boat, and one or more day/night capable helicopters with aerial use of force capability. A force package also includes a maritime patrol aircraft equipped with wide-area maritime search radar and infrared detection set (such as Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) or a P-8). The more force packages available for employment, the more illicit events can be interrupted.

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maritime interdiction operations with land-based counter threat network activities, including ongoing and planned operations like HORNET and TOGETHER FORWARD. Operation HORNET, which illuminates threat network activity along the Guatemala-Mexico border, has led to the identification of 36 illicit organizations to date, many with linkages across Central America and Mexico. Under the umbrella of Operation TOGETHER FORWARD, U.S. soldiers work with counterparts in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to improve cross-border collaboration against threat networks.

We are also expanding collaboration with U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Marine Corps Forces North to enable combined, multinational transregional operations by Mexican, Guatemalan, and Belizean security forces. By linking these operations with our capacity building programs; development efforts by USAID, the State Department, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and tailor-made training by teams from the Marine Corps' Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF), we aim to employ a full range of threat network illumination, disruption, and prevention activities across Central America.

In the Caribbean, we are expanding ties with multilateral organizations like the RSS and CARICOM to address the growing challenge of extremist networks. Transregionally, small teams of U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) provide invaluable cross-functional support—including specialized capabilities, intelligence analysis, and targeted capacity and institution building—to deny anonymity to nefarious actors moving through the region and enable the disruption of criminal, ISIS, SIA, foreign fighter, and Lebanese Hezbollah support networks. Leveraging essential tools like Military Information Support Operations (MISO) and Civil Affairs capabilities, these teams empower regional partners by promoting good governance, amplifying moderate voices in the region's small Islamic communities, and facilitating regional

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efforts to counter radicalization and recruitment by extremist organizations. We are very appreciative of the Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC), which provides a significant portion of our persistent presence, as well as unique capabilities, cultural awareness, and skillsets that are perfectly suited for the complex challenges in this region.

**Addressing global challenges.** When it comes to addressing Russia, China, and Iran, we focus on two interrelated areas. We monitor their activities in support of the *National Defense Strategy* and broader USG efforts. We also work to enable greater regional contributions to international security, safeguard U.S. interoperability with our regional partners, support the continued professionalization of our hemisphere's defense forces, and deepen cooperation in defense innovation.

Before I discuss that second area in greater detail, I'd like to share my views on "competition" with China and Russia in this region. Mr. Chairman, allow me to offer a candid observation. The larger strategic challenge posed by China in this region is not yet a military one. It is an economic one, and a new approach may be required to compete effectively against China's coordinated efforts in the Americas. Some of the most critical elements needed in this effort are not ones that USSOUTHCOM can bring to bear. In addition to the crucial role of whole-of-government efforts, I am referring to the strength and vibrancy of the U.S. private sector, our multinational corporations, and NGOs. As for Russia, we are educating and informing our partners on the potentially detrimental and destabilizing effects of Russian activity, especially Moscow's use of active measures and disinformation. As noted in our new *National Security Strategy*, Russia has found operating space in this hemisphere. With the support of the Congress, I believe we can close this space, and prevent Russia from advancing an agenda opposed to the United States, our allies, and our partners in the region.

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More often than not, the best way to compete is to be the best possible partner to our friends and Allies. That's why the majority of our efforts in the region are focused on strengthening the partnerships that are the backbone of the regional security network, and supporting the leadership and professionalization of partner nation security forces.

*Facilitating regional contributions to international security.* As part of the State Department's Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) in our Latin American partners have demonstrated a willingness and ability to deploy effective peacekeeping capabilities—including critical enabling capabilities such as aviation, airfield support units, engineering companies, and medical units—which are persistent gaps in UN missions, especially in Africa. These partners deploy well-trained and equipped units with a reputation for strong performance in missions. Through capacity building programs such as GPOI, we help support the development and deployment of these critical mission assets, strengthening the effectiveness of the operations to which they deploy.

Similarly, with over 57 years of building interoperability with the navies of Central and South America, the UNITAS series of exercises has created a cadre of very capable maritime forces that can seamlessly incorporate themselves into not only U.S. led operations, but those of our NATO and Indo-Asia-Pacific partners as well. We are working to transition future iterations of UNITAS from a traditional scripted exercise to an actual humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HA/DR) capable force that can exercise at sea against real world, unscripted missions. This multinational capability not only encourages burden sharing, it accelerates our naval and interagency interoperability by compelling planning and execution with real world political and operational implications.

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*Building a network of accountable, professional security partners.* We actively support the efforts of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Guyana to strengthen their institutions. DIB engagement helps increase the sustainability of our security cooperation programs, encourages our partners to take ownership of their security needs, and promotes universal values of transparent oversight of security forces and the rule of law. This program complements broader International Military Education and Training (IMET), which has facilitated the attendance of nearly 16,000 students from the region at military courses at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), the Inter American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA), the Inter American Defense College (IADC), and the William J. Perry Center at National Defense University (NDU), which provide invaluable opportunities to build relationships with future civilian and military leaders. Regional demand for IMET courses remains high, and China, in particular, is increasingly aggressive in courting students from the region to attend Chinese military schools, offering to cover all expenses and salaries in return for increased student enrollment.

We also support the continued professionalization of regional militaries through our Military Imperatives, which help build four core military competencies that strengthen the operational effectiveness, cohesion, and capabilities of our hemisphere's forces. These competencies— respect for human rights, the institutionalization of jointness, development of professional non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps, and integration of effective gender perspectives—are interconnected and interdependent characteristics of capable, modern defense forces.

***In 2017, we co-hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Women in the Military Conference with Guatemala, bringing together regional force leaders to share perspectives on improving gender integration and talent management.***

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2017 also marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Human Rights Initiative, celebrating two decades of partnership in Latin America and the Caribbean to enshrine respect for human rights into the training, doctrine, and moral code of our hemisphere's security forces. As the only Combatant Command with a dedicated Human Rights Office, we work closely with our partner nations to emphasize human rights as a military imperative that cannot be an afterthought in military missions. We will continue to preserve this vital office even in the face of mandated headquarters manpower reductions. Without the consistent engagement on human rights by the U.S.—whether by the State Department, USAID, DoD, or another agency—the significant progress we have seen simply would not have happened. That engagement *must and should* continue. While our partners acknowledge their responsibility to respect and protect human rights, many lack the resources to build strong programs.

We regularly promote jointness in annual multinational exercises. Last year we supported the Dominican Republic's creation of a professional NCO Corps, South America's first-ever Senior Enlisted Conference, and continued regional leadership on effective gender integration in military and security forces and peacekeeping



(DOD Photo) U.S. Army National Guardsman with Barbados Defence Force members during a USSOUTHCOM-sponsored Tradewinds Exercise June 8, 2017.

operations. We continue to advance these imperatives within our organization as well, and we are learning from our partners as much as we are sharing our lessons learned.

*Collaboration on Innovation.* Collaboration on defense innovation offers a unique platform to engage with our network of partners. Innovation also provides an opportunity to mitigate capability gaps and support defense capabilities and concepts, including those that

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ensure the U.S. military's continued advantage over potential adversaries. I am especially proud of our collaboration with the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA) to work with

*Along with U.S. Cyber Command, we recently held an inaugural Cyber Conference, bringing together partner nations, academia, and the private sector to discuss issues related to cyber defense and innovation.*

regional partners “in the open,” combining

commercially available imagery with online tools and publicly available data that we can easily share with our partners. We are currently working with Brazil, NASA, and others on a joint small-satellite project that stands to improve our operational effectiveness during disaster response, and conducting a Long Duration/Long Dwell ISR pilot program to investigate and deploy innovative, non-traditional ISR assets that have the potential to partially mitigate our D&M shortfalls in the Eastern Pacific.

**Preparing and responding to crises.** In concert with our network of partners, we work tirelessly to improve our collective ability to respond to a range of crises. Through our capacity-building efforts and humanitarian assistance, we help build partner nation resiliency and reduce vulnerabilities at the community level. This not only reduces the need for a large-scale USG or DoD response, but also helps mitigate the kinds of poverty and extremism that can lead to larger contingencies. Nevertheless, we must be prepared to provide our unique capabilities if called upon. To improve our own preparedness, we are taking steps to increase our understanding of environmental change and predicative signals, which helps us better appreciate the effects of natural and man-made disasters on political and social structures. We are also honing our internal capacity by training and exercising against a range of real-world contingencies.

*Prepare and prevent.* Strong inter-Service relationships also help encourage greater regional response collaboration. The National Guard's State Partnership Program plays a role in the USG's efforts to enhance the region's ability to prepare and recover from natural disasters;

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regular engagements by the Florida National Guard help improve first responder tactics and civil-military cooperation in the Caribbean. Last year, the U.S. Army served as the Executive Secretariat of the Conference of the American Armies, which grew to 22 members with the addition of Jamaica and Barbados. Thanks to this persistent engagement by the Army, our region is one step closer to creating a partner-led, combined Joint Task Force for future humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HA/DR) operations.

Through our humanitarian assistance program and the superb support provided by the US Army Corps of Engineers, we provide training to thousands of U.S. service members and support

***2017's NEW HORIZON exercise, held in the Dominican Republic, trained 402 US personnel who treated 11,686 patients. Utilizing nearly \$500,000 in donated NGO goods and services, the team built three medical clinics and a vocational school for 120 students.***

our State Department and USAID partners by enabling intergovernmental and non-

governmental efforts to extend state presence; build infrastructure like schools, water wells, and fire stations; and deliver essential services like medical care and sanitation improvements. This type of resiliency building at the community level helps nations prepare for and recover quickly from natural disasters, while also reducing the influence of criminal networks and the main drivers of migration. Medical training (MEDCAPS) and annual medical engagements like NEW HORIZONS and CONTINUING PROMISE—which will soon deploy to Colombia, Panama, Honduras, and Guatemala—provide a vital platform to improve the interoperability of U.S. military personnel, partner nation forces, and NGOs. Public-private cooperation is a force-multiplier for all of these efforts, improving collaborative planning on humanitarian aid delivery, and extending the long-term impacts of our humanitarian assistance.

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Multinational exercises also improve regional interoperability and the readiness of U.S. and coalition forces. Our annual PANAMAX exercise

***With Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Peru playing major leadership roles, PANAMAX 2017 featured 249 participants representing 16 partner nations.***

showcases the leadership of Colombia, Peru, Brazil, and Chile, who form the backbone of the multinational coalition to defend the Panama Canal. Held in Guatemala, this year's FUERZAS HUMANITARIAS exercise will bring together 20 different regional partners and multinational organizations like the United Nations to strengthen disaster relief mechanisms and improve synchronization between regional military forces, NGOs, and international organizations. We also regularly exercise our countering weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities, and work with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), the Department of State, and a diverse group of nations, including Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Panama, and Peru, to develop and enable WMD crisis response capabilities for their military and civilian first responders. These partnerships demonstrate our commitment and enduring resolve to our partners in the face of the most devastating of potential disasters.

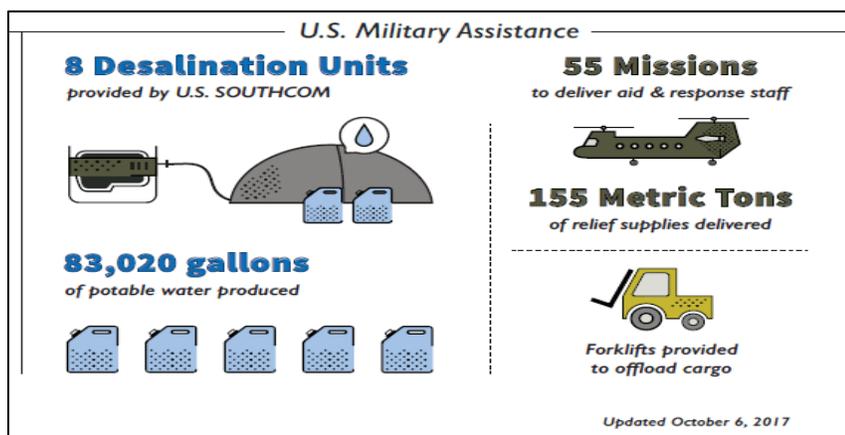
We are also growing our partnership with USAID from operations-based coordination to one that builds strategic, enduring partnerships and better aligns our regional and strategic priorities. Together, we are exploring methods to strengthen interagency accountability, develop joint metrics to measure outcomes, and utilizing and coordinating monitoring and reporting of our integrated efforts.

*Rapid Response.* Our ability to rapidly respond and provide unique capabilities also allows us to demonstrate our steadfast commitment to the region. Last year, joined by the UK, Chile, and others, we assisted Argentina in the search and recovery of the submarine ARA SAN JUAN, supporting our Argentine friends in a difficult time. This renewed relationship is

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providing new opportunities to work with Argentina for the upcoming G-20 Summit and in the areas of countering WMD, combating terrorism, strengthening interagency response, and expanding information sharing.

Over the years, USSOUTHCOM, USAID, and our regional partners have made significant investments in improving the response capacities of



*U.S. military support to Caribbean disaster response operations in 2017*

multinational organizations. The return on this investment was evident in 2017, with CDEMA, CARICOM, and the RSS playing critical roles in the regional response effort to Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and multiple nations providing assistance to their Caribbean neighbors. For our part, by leveraging flexible, dual-purpose SPMAGTF forces already in the region, we were able to



*(DOD Photo) The DOD distributes USAID relief supplies in Dominica Sept. 27, 2017.*

quickly evacuate thousands of American citizens, closely collaborate with French and Dutch Forces, and support simultaneous USAID/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) disaster response operations in St. Martin and Dominica. We continue to work closely with USAID/OFDA to ensure that future humanitarian response efforts are

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timely, effective, and well-coordinated. It's not enough that our assistance make news; it has to make a difference.

### **OUR NO-FAIL MISSION: DETENTION OPERATIONS**

The team at Joint Task Force Guantanamo (JTF-GTMO) continues to conduct detention operations with the utmost professionalism and strict adherence to international standards. Our troops take very seriously their responsibility to provide safe, humane, transparent, and legal care and custody of detainees. I could not be prouder of these young men and women. On top of this demanding mission, they support ongoing military commissions, *habeas corpus* proceedings, periodic review boards, and visits by congressional and foreign government delegations and organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross. We appreciate the support provided in the FY18 NDAA for barracks construction, and we are currently reviewing other key facilities that require replacement or upgrades to enable the JTF to sustain operations as we move forward. As relayed previously, I have concerns related to providing specialized, long-term medical care for the aging detainee population. We are working with the Department to resolve this issue and will keep this Committee informed on the way-ahead.

### **OUR REQUIREMENTS**

As I alluded to earlier, while Latin America and the Caribbean is inextricably tied to the security and prosperity of the United States, this region fares poorly in the competition for finite national resources. The ability of our interagency partners to strengthen governance, rule of law, and economic opportunities directly impacts our ability to achieve our military objectives. Persistent gaps in ISR, cyber, and analytic capacities hinder our ability to anticipate crises or adequately mitigate challenges. The paucity of our own assigned forces presents another complication; our presence and persistent engagement not only builds trust and confidence with

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partners, but is especially important to counter threats or malign influence and contain crises in the Western Hemisphere. Mr. Chairman, to put it another way, you have to be on the field to compete, understand, confront, and degrade threats and adversaries. I look forward to working with the Congress in the year ahead to help ensure we maintain our competitive advantage in this vital part of the world.

I'd like to close by providing a brief overview of our mission requirements and highlight the importance of continued support to our interagency teammates.

*Defense budget.* The Congress has provided great support to the USSOUTHCOM mission over the years. Just last year, the Congress recognized the dire need for housing for our troops at JTF-GTMO, authorizing and fully funding a barracks project that would provide that housing. We saw this need in even more stark terms with the recent passing of multiple hurricanes through the Caribbean Basin, necessitating the evacuation of personnel from the island because of inadequate housing facilities. Though this project was supported by both the House and Senate, we are unable to proceed with this much-needed project that will directly support our deployed personnel due to the lack of an FY18 Budget—a very real impact of the delay in appropriations. This is in addition to the emotional toll this takes on all our people in the way of the disruption and uncertainty they deal with every time we face a potential—or in this case actual—government shutdown, which has become an increasingly regular occurrence. Our men and women deserve better.

*Regional access.* As the only U.S. forward-operating base in the Caribbean and the gateway to the Gulf of Mexico, Naval Station Guantánamo Bay plays a critical role for USSOUTHCOM, the State Department, Navy, Coast Guard, and DHS. The Naval Station is pivotal during mass migration events, counterdrug and search and rescue operations,

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humanitarian assistance, and disaster-relief operations in the Caribbean. Similarly, Comalapa, El Salvador (home to one of our two Cooperative Security Locations that directly support the D&M mission) and Soto Cano Airbase (which houses JTF-Bravo, Special Operations Forces, and the SPMAGTF headquarters) provides the bulk of our forward presence in Central America. This access allows us to advance security cooperation efforts, initiate regional disaster response, and support law enforcement operations to disrupt threat networks. These two locations are vital to USSOUTHCOM, and we thank the Congress for its support to their continued operations.

*Operational support.* We also appreciate congressional support to our ISR program and funding for an additional Maritime Patrol Aircraft and Special Mission Ship in the FY18 NDAA. Both will significantly enhance JIATF South's current and upcoming operations like MARTILLO and KRAKEN, as well as partially mitigate persistent capability gaps in the D&M mission. As referenced earlier, in FY 2017 JIATF South had precise geo-location on 1167 targets carrying 815 metric tons of cocaine that we could not respond to due to lack of assets. Each additional force package deployment takes that number down by 31 metric tons. Resourcing for critical counter network capabilities—including information and intelligence sharing platforms, capacity-building efforts, and counter threat finance—are essential to our contributions to this fight. As we look to employ a more holistic approach in Central America, operations like TOGETHER FORWARD and HORNET would benefit from sustained engagement by Reserve and Guard forces and ISR platforms critical to illuminating threat network operations.

Sustained forward presence at sea are also essential to stemming the flow of drugs towards our borders. I'd like to go on record to express my strong support for the U.S. Coast Guard's efforts to recapitalize its fleet, especially its medium endurance cutters, which directly

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support JIATF South-led interdiction operations. As I have stated repeatedly, without U.S. Coast Guard cutters, USSOUTHCOM would have virtually no afloat maritime forces. I'd also like to express my unqualified support for the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS), which we can leverage for multiple mission sets, including D&M, SOF support, partner nation capacity building, and potentially HA/DR response and medical engagements. LCS capabilities match our mission requirements perfectly, and we are working closely with the Navy to try and field them in our region. My view is that the sooner we can deploy these ships in theater, the greater the impact we can have on interdicting the flow of illicit drugs into our country.

A broad suite of tools like information operations, MISO, and Civil Affairs teams is applicable to multiple mission sets, including CTOC, CT, and countering external state actors. These tools are especially critical to shaping the increasingly contested information domain and addressing the more fundamental challenges of the region.

Like I reported last year, we continue to monitor the impact of wind farm construction on the U.S. Navy's Relocatable Over-the-Horizon Radar (ROTHR) sites. All three construction sites have proposed projects that are under review in the Department's compatibility evaluation process. Although we continue to research new alternatives to ROTHR, it remains our only persistent, long range aerial coverage for our southern approaches. I am particularly concerned about impending encroachment on the Texas site and our position remains that proposed wind farm developments should result in no degradation to ROTHR mission performance, and we will keep the Congress informed as this initiative moves forward.

Continued resourcing of the Marine Corps' SPMAGTF provides USSOUTHCOM with increased capacity at relatively little cost and returns a more ready, more capable force back to the Marine Corps. Without the pre-mobilized reserve force resident in the SPMAGTF, we will

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be forced to rely on the Global Response Force for all major crisis response efforts, potentially draining resources from critical global missions. From a goodwill and engagement perspective, operational funding for the Navy's hospital ship COMFORT has been a proven game-changer for USSOUTHCOM. We ask for the COMFORT every other year, but the Navy has been unable to source its employment due to the ship's maintenance challenges. During disaster response, we continue to rely heavily on U.S. Transportation Command's (USTRANSCOM) Joint Enabling Capabilities Command (JECC), which provides unparalleled expertise in planning, public affairs, and communications.

Closer to home, we are working to address housing issues that impact quality of life and security for our young service members and their families, and reduce force protection and cost of living concerns resulting from having most of our military work force spread across three counties in one of our nation's largest metropolitan areas. We will keep the Congress apprised as this effort progresses.

*Support to interagency partners and whole of government efforts.* Parallel investments in our interagency partners operating in the Western Hemisphere are critical as we work to strengthen the capacities of regional military and security forces. From State Department's IMET program and public diplomacy efforts, to DEA's vetted units, DHS's Operation CITADEL, and our Embassies and USAID missions throughout the region, our interagency partners are key to advancing the security of the Western Hemisphere.

Given our limited resources, we rely heavily on the unique capabilities of key interagency partners to illuminate threat network operations and maintain ground truth on developments in the region. We directly benefit from analytic toolkits like the Joint Improvised Threat Defeat Organization's (JIDO) VOLTRON tool suite, and we strongly support continued investments to

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develop next generation of Artificial Intelligence and analytic capabilities, as well as expanded data mining of open source and publicly available information. Additionally, we support Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and the Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) efforts to enhance Intelligence Community (IC) capabilities in the exploitation of IC data and information, with the goals of identifying global transnational crime and illicit networks and improving collaboration and strategic planning across the intelligence and defense communities.

I know the situation in Venezuela weighs heavily on the minds of this Committee, as it could spark its own mass migration event, impacting economies and stability across the region and requiring a large-scale international humanitarian response. Crises of this magnitude can entail a significant, costly, and lengthy U.S. response, but are manageable with sufficient attention, prevention, and preparation. Continued support to the important work being done to plan and prepare to address humanitarian needs in Venezuela—especially by USAID's Offices of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food For Peace and the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)—is essential.

And finally, Mr. Chairman, we need to do everything we can to improve interagency integration and efficiency at home, and remove barriers to our partnerships abroad. Put simply, we need to make it easier for our partners to work with us. Conditions placed on security assistance sometimes limit our ability to fully engage on critical issues like human rights, which may ultimately fail to meet Congressional intent. When we engage, we make a real and lasting difference and advance our national interests. Engagement with our partners is the strongest tool we have to strengthen our partners' capabilities as well as our own competitive advantage. Anything that hinders engagement, hinders progress. I look forward to continuing this discussion with the Congress in the year ahead.

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**Conclusion.** Mr. Chairman, allow me to return to the theme I touched on in my introduction. Our ability to sustain the levels of engagement needed to deal with these challenges isn't for a lack of strategy or a lack of willing partners. We simply run out of resources before we run out of mission sets. Last year I told this Committee that success or failure in this region depends on us, what we stand for, and what we do. By addressing problems early through modest investment and sustained engagement, we can ultimately lower the costs associated with addressing them.

Thank you again for your support to the men and women of USSOUTHCOM.