

**POSTURE STATEMENT OF  
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**BEFORE THE 116<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE**

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***Strategic Environment.*** Thank you for your support to United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM). As our *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) directs, we are focused on sustaining our advantages in the Western Hemisphere—the most important of which are strong partnerships founded on shared democratic values. Recent trends illustrate that the Western Hemisphere – our shared neighborhood – is critical space in the global competition—and global challenges—posed by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Russia. As the NDS notes, the U.S. derives immense benefit from a stable, peaceful hemisphere, and keeping our partnerships in the Western Hemisphere strong and vibrant will allow us to achieve the NDS objective of maintaining a favorable regional balance of power that reduces security threats to the homeland.

Beyond like-minded democracies throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, the region is home to ~25% of all U.S. exports and key global infrastructure like the Panama Canal, sea lanes, and deep water ports that provide access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It is directly connected to our homeland in every domain—land, sea, air, space, cyber, and most importantly values—which makes any threat or encroachment in this region particularly concerning. Latin America’s strategic importance lies in its unique potential as both a vulnerability and an opportunity for our own security, prosperity, and efforts to address global challenges.<sup>1</sup>

***Concerning Trends.*** Last year, the Chinese government absorbed three more Latin American countries into its One Belt One Road Initiative, bringing the regional total to 19 – more than half of all countries in the region. Beijing now has 29 government exchange programs with Latin America and the Caribbean, and continues to expand offers of professional military education, equipment donations, and funding for infrastructure projects. Russia once again projected power in our neighborhood, establishing a military footprint in Venezuela; deploying (for the first time) its most advanced nuclear-capable

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<sup>1</sup> R. Evan Ellis (2016). “Thinking Strategically About Latin America and the Caribbean.”

warship; and sending a research ship capable of mapping and cutting undersea cables, as well as two other naval research vessels to operate near our homeland. Under Russian and Cuban tutelage, oppression in Venezuela is ever-increasing. The illegitimate former Maduro regime arbitrarily arrested for political reasons more than 2,000 individuals in 2019. Between January 2018 and May 2019, regime-aligned security forces killed more than 7,000 people, and many of these killings may constitute extrajudicial killings.

These malign state actors are part of a **vicious circle of threats** that deliberately erode stability and security in the region. This **vicious circle** is framed by systemic issues of young democracies, often with weak governance and porous legal frameworks, exacerbated by a propensity towards patronage and corruption that is deliberately exploited by transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), external state actors (such as the PRC and Russia), and violent extremist organizations (VEOs) to advance their own ends at the expense of U.S. and partner nation security. This vicious circle continues to negatively impact our homeland, most acutely in the form of illegal immigration and illicit drug flows, but also in other, more harmful ways. Due to high levels of insecurity and frustration with government corruption, support for democracy and democratic institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean is at its lowest levels in 15 years,<sup>2</sup> providing further openings for malign state actors to increase their influence. A number of countries are experiencing democratic backsliding, with others sliding towards outright authoritarianism.

***Positive Trends.*** These threats are real, and they demand a sense of urgency. But so do the opportunities. Protests in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, and Peru demonstrate that, while democracy may be troubled, citizens are exercising democratic rights to uphold their constitutions.

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<sup>2</sup>2018/2019 AmericasBarometer report, funded by USAID. Available at: <https://news.vanderbilt.edu/2019/10/14/support-for-democracy-in-a-slump-across-americas-according-to-new-survey/>

Brazil, Bolivia, and Ecuador now recognize the Cuban threat to freedom, expelling thousands of Cuban officials, some even accused of instigating social unrest. Guatemala, Costa Rica, and El Salvador are doing more to stop the flow of drugs and irregular migration towards our border; Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago regularly deploy to regional disaster response efforts, to include supporting the Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian; and Colombia, Brazil, and Chile continue to grow their contributions to global security.

***Improving Performance & Accountability.*** The men and women of USSOUTHCOM are moving out to break the vicious circle of threats and sustain our security advantages in the Western Hemisphere. While doing so, we remain committed to making good use of every taxpayer dollar Congress entrusts to us. Over the past year we undertook a detailed review of all aspects of our organization to gain efficiencies and support the Department's reform efforts. I look forward to discussing how we are freeing up time, money, and manpower to invest back into our top priorities: strengthening our strategic partnerships, countering threats, and building the readiness of our team.

***Our Approach.*** The NDS highlights the importance of alliances and partnerships—which is exactly right for USSOUTHCOM, where strengthening partnerships is the best way to counter threats, enhance our collective readiness and capability to meet global challenges, and maintain the regional balance of power in favor of the United States. We also support the interagency, including the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Homeland Security, and the intelligence and law enforcement communities, reinforcing the importance of leveraging all tools of national security.

We break the vicious circle and outcompete Beijing and other competitors by playing to our strengths of shared values, professionalism, and equipment built to last, and by investing in education, intelligence sharing, personnel exchanges, exercises, joint operations, and security cooperation. More

than anything else, persistent presence matters in this fight. Like athletes, we have to be present on the field to compete, and we have to compete to win.

*Threats to our Neighborhood: Malign State Actors.* As the Department of Defense has prioritized the Indo-Pacific region, Beijing has aggressively turned its attention to the Western Hemisphere, exporting corrupt business practices and disregard for international law and standards to countries already struggling with government corruption and weak governance. The competitive space is truly global and all-domain as SOUTHCOM plays a vital role in the effort to outcompete the PRC and Russia. Nine nations in the Western Hemisphere (out of 15 worldwide) still recognize Taiwan—a fact that has not gone unnoticed by Beijing, which is engaging in persistent (and successful) dollar diplomacy to lower that number to zero. With 19 Latin American and Caribbean nations now participating in the One Belt One Road Initiative and pledges of at least \$150 billion in loans, the PRC is now the region’s largest investor and creditor, practicing the same type of predatory financing and “no strings attached” largesse it has wielded in other parts of the world. On the defense side, this includes “gifts” of equipment to regional militaries and aiming to copy our successful military education program.

Beyond One Belt One Road, 25 out of 31 countries in the region host Chinese infrastructure projects. Most concerning, certain investments have strategic value for future military uses. Chinese investment in numerous deep water ports and infrastructure on both sides of the Panama Canal could enable the Chinese military to threaten sea lanes vital to global commerce and the movement of U.S. forces. Fleets of Chinese-flagged fishing vessels routinely violate the sovereign rights of coastal states to conduct illegal fishing in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of Latin American countries, while Chinese mining and infrastructure projects have created lasting environmental damage. Beijing sees immense value in South America’s strategic location for space activity and is actively pursuing

additional access to regional space infrastructure. With telecommunication projects in 16 countries, Huawei and ZTE provide the backbone of commercial and government communication systems, providing a backdoor for the Chinese government to monitor or intercept official information we share with our partners. Beijing is also gaining real-time, street-level situational awareness by selling surveillance technology through its “Smart Cities” initiative—the same technology the Chinese Communist Party uses to monitor and repress its citizens.<sup>3</sup>

Russia continues to play the role of “spoiler,” seeking to sow disunity and discredit the United States within our own hemisphere. As it does across the world, Russia meddles in regional affairs by spreading false information on its media platforms and engaging in malicious cyber activity. Russia’s ability to disseminate disinformation is considerable; videos posted on Russia Today (RT) En Español’s social media platforms received more views in 2019 than any other Spanish-language news source. While Moscow denies having a military presence in the region, Russian “advisors” continue to prop up the former Maduro regime. Beyond Venezuela, the sanctuary of cozy relationships with authoritarian governments in Cuba and Nicaragua provide Russia with footholds close to our homeland, giving Putin strategic options. Cuba in particular is the gateway for Russia’s access to the Western Hemisphere, allowing Russia to collect intelligence in close proximity to the United States.

Iran, which has exported its state-sponsored terrorism to the Americas in the past, maintains facilitation networks and raises funds through its proxy, Lebanese Hezbollah. Some Hezbollah supporters cache weapons and raise funds, often via charitable donations, remittances, and sometimes through illicit means, such as drug trafficking and money laundering. Having a footprint in the region also allows Iran to collect intelligence and conduct contingency planning for possible retaliatory attacks

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<sup>3</sup> Because of the intimate relationship between Chinese businesses and China’s National Intelligence Law, citizens living in democracies in the Western Hemisphere could have their entire digital identity under the surveillance of the Chinese Communist Party.

against U.S. and/or Western interests.

After more than six decades, Cuba remains a bastion for authoritarianism, an exporter of malign ideology, and an underlying driver of instability in the region. Cuban intelligence personnel support and counsel non-democratic leaders, including directly propping up the illegitimate Maduro regime in Venezuela. Cuba, Russia, and the PRC all collect intelligence against the United States and seek to undercut U.S. initiatives region wide. Although Cuba portrays the thousands of Cuban medical personnel it sends as humanitarian, such aid routinely includes intelligence collection, propagation of Cuba's failed ideology, and advancing a distinctly anti-U.S. agenda.

The final malign actors—Maduro and his cronies in Venezuela—pose one of the most direct threats to peace and security in the Western Hemisphere. Emboldened by Russian, Chinese, Iranian, and Cuban protection and patronage, Maduro has allowed Venezuela to become a safe haven for the ELN, FARC dissidents, and drug traffickers while the Venezuelan people starve. If UN projections for 2020 hold, the number of Venezuelans fleeing their country could soon surpass the Syrian exodus. To date, nearly 4.8 million have fled, placing significant strain on Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and other host countries in the region. Colombia bears the brunt of this crisis and has generously stepped up to support the over 1.6 million refugees while at the same time having 7.8 million internally displaced persons of their own, the largest IDP population in the world. The consequences of the Venezuelan crisis will last generations; a post-Maduro Venezuela will require significant support to help Venezuelans address the decades of mismanagement, widespread insecurity, and corruption of defense and other institutions in order to realize the natural richness of their resources.

***What We're Doing.*** As I mentioned earlier, we have to be on the field to compete. And when we are on the field, our impacts are positive and long-lasting. In the absence of an enduring U.S. military presence, recurring rotations of small teams of Special Operations Forces, Soldiers, Sailors,

Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and National Guard personnel help us strengthen partnerships and exchange critical expertise. The National Guard through the State Partnership Program (SPP) is uniquely positioned based on its dual military experience to provide a persistent and sustained presence to our partner nations by means of senior leader visits, exchanges, and cooperative training and exercises in areas ranging from humanitarian assistance to cyber. In Central America, our Joint Task Force-Bravo (JTF-B) and Marine Corps Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF) build collective response and security capability and readiness in Army and Marine Corps Reserve Forces and partner militaries. Expanding on the 2018 deployment, Brazil, Colombia, and Peru integrated into the SPMAGTF last year, building interoperability for expeditionary operations. Once again, these three partners also formed part of the hospital ship USNS COMFORT's multinational team. The 2019 COMFORT mission delivered significant returns, providing world-class medical care to nearly 68,000 patients in 12 countries, reducing suffering caused by the man-made crisis in Venezuela, and enhancing medical readiness in the U.S. Navy, our partners, and allies. JTF-B facilitates strategic access to Central America, builds enduring relationships with partner nations, and response to contingencies to create regional stability and security. JTF-B provided medical care to over 20,000 partner nation patients, rapid response capability for a wide range of contingencies, and assigned forces to participate in exercises.

As directed by the NDS, we're deepening relations with "regional countries that export military capabilities to priority regional and global security challenges." Recently designated a Major Non-NATO ally and the newest partner in the State Partnership Program (SPP), we work closely with Brazil on a range of priority missions. Chile exports its security expertise to both the Asia-Indo-Pacific region and Central America, and is actively partnering with us and U.S. Army South to develop a concept for a combined, large-scale, combat-focused exercise later this year. Colombia—NATO's only global partner



in the region—seeks to share its humanitarian demining and counter IED expertise with NATO allies while also serving in South Korea as part of the United Nations Command, a legacy that stems from its participation in the Korean War. Panama has been a particularly strong supporter of U.S. efforts to hold global malign actors accountable, de-flagging numerous vessels suspected of carrying cargo in violation of U.S. and international sanctions. El Salvador punches well above its weight having supported coalition operations with 12 rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan and applying training and equipment received via the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) in their current deployments to the UN Mission in Mali.

In the face of the PRC's and Russia's global assault on international norms, engagement on shared values is more important than ever before. As I told this Committee last year, education, training, and security cooperation efforts like the SPP and the Combatant Commanders Exercise Engagement and Training Transformation (CE2T2) Program and the Department of State's International Military Education and Training (IMET), Foreign Military Sales (FMS), and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) are game changers for us. With modest investments of time and money, these programs are helping us reinforce mutual understanding, shared values and culture, and doctrine. Along with IMET; our Human Rights Initiative; noncommissioned officer development; and Women, Peace, and Security programs enhance the professionalism of the region's militaries and security forces. In particular, USSOUTHCOM's decades-long commitment to promoting respect for human rights has become a cornerstone of our strong partnerships with like-minded militaries. These efforts are among the most effective ways we can expand competitive space and outcompete any malign state actors, and encourage our partners to hold the PRC, Russia, and others accountable to the Inter-American values of peace, democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights.

Another way we blunt malign influence is by sharing information about Beijing's predatory

economic practices, the security risks associated with Chinese technology, and activities by Russia, Iran, and their authoritarian allies that undermine regional sovereignty and security. In addition to expanding our information sharing efforts throughout the hemisphere, we are also working multilaterally with partners in the region to enhance our understanding of the security threats posed by the Venezuelan crisis, which in turn assists with multinational efforts to plan for longer term recovery and stability once free and fair democratic elections are held.

We also support the NDS' focus on developing operational concepts to enhance Joint Force lethality while building interoperability with allied and partner forces. We leverage our science and technology portfolio in high-end multinational exercises like UNITAS and PANAMAX, providing opportunities for the Services to test new warfighting capabilities in a low-risk coalition environment. Through our Caribbean-focused TRADEWINDS exercise, we are now laying the groundwork for a combined task force that can counter a range of threats and enable sea control and denial operations. We conduct cyber training and capacity building with partners like Chile, Argentina, and Brazil in an effort to build defensive cyber capabilities and establish shared cyber situational awareness in the region. We continue to work closely with other U.S. combatant commands and the Joint Staff to ensure globally integrated plans, operations, and exercises reflect the threats and opportunities in this hemisphere.

***Threats to Our Neighborhood: TCOs and VEOs.*** As the NDS recognizes, “non-state actors also threaten the security environment with increasingly sophisticated capabilities.” TCOs engage in a wide array of illegal activities that generate approximately two trillion dollars in illicit proceeds annually, including drug and weapons trafficking, human smuggling, money laundering, and illegal mining. We see these impacts directly in our homeland; drugs have killed 700,000 Americans since 1999,<sup>4</sup> costing

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>. From 1999 to 2017, more than 700,000 people have died from a drug overdose.

our nation billions in criminal justice, healthcare, and productivity costs – in addition to the suffering caused by shattered and lost lives. Through corruption and violence, TCOs also challenge and erode the governance of partners that we rely on to advance regional and global security, threatening to reverse decades of successful U.S. policies and security investments.

Collectively TCOs exacerbate the already insecure environment facilitating opportunities for malign actors to expand influence, and VEOs leverage to move people and weapons through our hemisphere. This latter vulnerability is particularly troublesome; there is an interconnected system of pathways that spans our neighborhood, running through the Caribbean, and up and down North, South, and Central America. Many of these pathways lead directly into our homeland, and anything can move on them—for the right price. This ongoing threat was illustrated in 2019 by several successful U.S. law enforcement operations against human smuggling networks, which continue to enable the movement of individuals with terrorist links, many of whom attempt to enter the U.S. homeland illegally.

***What We're Doing.*** We're strengthening partnerships with countries that contribute military capabilities to regional security and beyond, with a focus on enabling combined operations and building interoperability to stop the flow of drugs to the U.S. homeland, reduce the effectiveness of priority TCOs, and prevent VEOs from leveraging regional vulnerabilities to do us, or our partners, harm.

Colombia sees the fight against cocaine trafficking as a shared responsibility, and one in which they are sacrificing blood and treasure to meet their commitment to halve cocaine production by 2023. Last year Colombia built a 20-nation coalition to conduct maritime counterdrug operations while working closely with Panama and Costa Rica to seize drugs headed to the U.S. In 2019, Colombia also manually eradicated 82,000 hectares of coca plants, at the cost of almost 600 police and military killed or wounded, largely due to IEDs emplaced to protect the coca fields. Inside of Colombia, their security forces also disrupted and destroyed over 300 cocaine-producing labs, preventing over 400 metric tons of

cocaine from ever leaving the country. Colombia continues assisting us with Central America's security challenges, training 5,700 military and police from six Central American countries through the U.S. Colombia Action Plan program since the program's inception in FY13. We continue to enable Colombian operations against priority narco-terrorist organizations like the ELN and FARC dissidents, yielding significant returns on security in Colombia and the United States.

In the Caribbean and Central America, we continue to focus our capacity-building efforts on improving border security, drug interdiction rates, and institutional effectiveness. Jamaica has now integrated its self-funded maritime patrol aircraft into Joint Interagency Task Force South counterdrug operations, enhancing our operational reach and effectiveness. After receiving sustained training by Naval Special Warfare teams, Guatemala's Fuerzas Especiales Navales (FEN) is now entirely self-sufficient and responsible for more than 80% of Guatemala's drug seizures. Like Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama and El Salvador are applying U.S.-provided training and equipment to regularly interdict drug shipments more than 100 miles from shore, keeping those drugs off the streets of cities across America from LA, to Tulsa and Providence. Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador are leveraging our Civil Affairs support and Humanitarian Assistance Program to better address factors driving violence and migration to our doorstep. Additionally, the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies is a force multiplier across the hemisphere, helping us deliver the right, focused support at the strategic level and reinforce accountability and transparency in defense institutions.

In the counterdrug mission, we continue to deliver high returns on modest investment. Last year, the international and interagency "team of teams" at JIATF-South helped keep 280 metric tons of cocaine off U.S. streets. JIATF-South-led interdictions at sea account for almost four times the cocaine seized by all domestic and border enforcement efforts combined. In an operating area that is 11 times larger than the United States: the Coast Guard and JIATF-South continue to be among

the best investments in the U.S. government.

In FY20, thanks to congressional support, we are filling detection and monitoring (D&M) capability gaps through innovative solutions like the Multi Mission Support Vessel (MMSV). Having only recently deployed, the MMSV already has supported the disruption of over 3000 kilograms of cocaine, nearly 8,000 pounds of marijuana, and the detention of 17 drug traffickers, while also keeping a low profile vessel from reaching our shores. It also served as a capacity-building platform in the Dominican Republic, a key transit point for cocaine trafficking into major U.S. cities like Washington D.C., Miami, and Philadelphia. We are also applying commercially-available technology like unmanned aircraft systems to increase the MMSV's ability to conduct D&M and provide information to partner nations who are conducting the interceptions. In addition to the MMSV, we now have one Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) deployed in the region that will provide needed naval capabilities and technological advantage. We look forward to future U.S. Navy ship deployments – these will be game changers.

On the counterterrorism front, we continue to partner with SOCOM, and support the work of our interagency partners to stop individuals with known or suspected ties to terrorism who are attempting to exploit the region's weak border security to move into the U.S. homeland. We deepened counter threat finance collaboration with the Treasury Department, supporting the designation of a Brazil-based member of al-Qa'ida last year. Additionally, our successful track record leveraging the DOD Rewards Program continues to deliver meaningful returns for minimal investment; in 2019, we paid \$1.2 million for 72 rewards (information) that led to the neutralization of 97 terrorists, the seizure of 80 weapons caches, and the destruction of 22 drug labs.

In the region, our strong partnership with Trinidad and Tobago continues to pay dividends for international efforts targeting extremist networks supporting ISIS and other dangerous groups. Our

biometrics cooperation enabled Panama to identify and stop known or suspected terrorists last year, while we deepened collaboration with Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and Paraguay to expose malicious activities by supporters of terrorist groups like Lebanese Hezbollah.

Detention operations at Joint Task Force Guantanamo (JTF-GTMO) support the global fight against violent extremism by keeping enemy combatants off the battlefield. As we take proactive steps to address infrastructure issues associated with continued detention operations, the JTF-GTMO team remains the epitome of professionalism, conducting safe, legal, and humane detention operations that protect our homeland and U.S. troops serving in harm's way.

***Building Our Team.*** To deliver meaningful results for our homeland's defense, we are focused on building an effective, efficient, and resilient team.

For decades, USSOUTHCOM's modest budget and small footprint have encouraged us to embrace innovative, low-cost/high-return approaches. Over the last five years, we absorbed 25% cuts to our personnel, a 10% reduction to our Exercise program, and a steady decline in available assets and forces needed to support our mission. We've tried to absorb these cuts as smartly as possible to minimize operational impacts, and we continue to look internally to gain efficiencies, improve performance, and get the most from every taxpayer dollar.

With this mindset, we are leaning forward to support the Department's current reform efforts. Our revised campaign plan drove a review of all FY20 operations, activities, and investments. We eliminated over 200 lower priority events and are refocusing on priority threats and strategic partners. We've also revised our joint exercise program to make it more effective and more relevant. In 2019, we sharpened our emphasis on building readiness of U.S. forces and supporting Joint Force experimentation. We are now reforming our other major exercises to more directly support the global competition with the PRC and Russia. Other areas we are examining for efficiencies include JTF-

GTMO manning, contracts, and theater posture.

At our headquarters, we streamlined internal processes, improved support to military and civilian families, and enhanced our training and professional development programs to build a more ready, results-oriented organization. We continue to work closely with the Department of the Army and local South Florida community to address housing and high living costs impacting our men and women. At JTF-GTMO, we undertook a comprehensive review of existing facilities to determine long-term requirements for mission success, the safety of our forces, and operational efficiency. We are also taking steps to improve quality of life and resiliency of JIATF-South's headquarters building at Naval Air Station Key West. As the southernmost base in the continental United States, NAS Key West has significant strategic value in defending against a wide range of threats to U.S. national security. I look forward to working with the Congress on our housing issues in the year ahead to ensure our men and women get the support they need.

***Congressional Support.*** I'd like to repeat last year's invitation to members of this Committee to visit our neighbors and reinforce the message that we value this region and the role our partners play in keeping our neighborhood safe. Your presence, attention, and engagement, along with that of other key leaders, matters. I also want to thank Congress for passing a defense appropriation bill. Operating under a continuing resolution is disruptive to mission and personnel. Confidence in stable, predictable budgets will reassure friendly nations that we are reliable security partners.

Broadly speaking, we need tools that allow us to maintain our competitive edge: persistent presence and engagement. We appreciate congressional support for initiatives that have streamlined security cooperation processes and help ensure we remain the security partner of choice. Your continued support to these security cooperation programs and capabilities like IMET and the Perry Center allow us to build trust and long-term relationships that strengthen partnerships and grow

contributions to address regional and global threats. Similarly, support for analytic initiatives focused on open source/publicly available information helps mitigate reduced intelligence resources and provides a steady stream of useful information (especially about malign state actors) that we can share with partners.

As this Committee is aware, while improving efficiency in the counterdrug mission, we still only enabled the successful interdiction of about nine percent of known drug movement. That is a small increase over previous years, but still significantly below where we need to be. We appreciate your continued support to creative solutions like the MMSV. As the U.S Coast Guard provides the bulk of our counterdrug forces, the acquisition and deployment of their Offshore Patrol Cutter will be critical to keeping drugs off our streets and ensuring the security of the Western Hemisphere. Each additional force package (maritime patrol aircraft, flight deck capable ship, embarked helicopter, and law enforcement detachment) enables the disruption of 35 more metric tons of cocaine.<sup>5</sup> Grey hulls, in particular, still serve as a powerful deterrent, sending a clear message to our competitors, and a reassuring one to our friends. They can also yield multiple cross cutting returns. For example, while participating in our UNITAS exercise last year, the USS MICHAEL MURPHY supported the interdiction of a low-profile submersible vessel carrying more than 2,000 pounds of cocaine, simultaneously yielding a treasure trove of intelligence, demonstrating rules-based maritime behavior, and providing coalition training opportunities for the U.S. Navy.

***Conclusion.*** I'd like to close as I began: with a note of caution, and one of hope.

Our ability to address global challenges at manageable cost depends on the security of our borders and the stability of our hemisphere – both of which are under assault. Likewise, our ability to

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<sup>5</sup> USCG National Security Cutters, Offshore Patrol Cutters, and/or the Navy's LITTORAL Combat Ship could fill this requirement, providing us with a game-changing edge, providing unique capabilities to engage drug traffickers where they are most vulnerable.



advance diplomatic and economic goals depends on the strength of both our partnerships and our shared values. We've seen what happens when we ignore security challenges in the Western Hemisphere. In the past decade, we've seen migration crises, the influx of deadly drugs, increased presence of malign actors, and negative trends in democracy.

We're now in 2020. We need to be clear-eyed about both the security threats we face now and in the near future, and the significant opportunities that await only with our initiative and engagement in the hemisphere. There is no other region we depend upon more for our prosperity and security, and with which we are more closely tied through bonds of family, trade, and geographic proximity, than Latin America and the Caribbean. Our partners want to stand with us, and for our shared values. As I hope I've conveyed, the right, focused attention and modest investments go a long way in this part of the world, paying significant security dividends to both our global efforts and to our homeland's defense. When we don't engage in our neighborhood, our competitors benefit, and our homeland security pays the price. When we do engage, we reduce threats to the homeland and limit opportunities for adversaries to operate in close proximity to us. And there is no better return on investment than that.

Thank you for your continued support to the men and women of the USSOUTHCOM team and their families. I look forward to your questions.