

**STATEMENT OF**

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**BEFORE THE 117<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

**SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

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Over two years ago, you entrusted me with the great responsibility of leading the men and women of the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) in working with our partners to secure our hemisphere. At the time, our region faced a seemingly insurmountable crisis of illicit drugs killing tens of thousands of Americans every year, institutional instability and corruption in the region, and external state actors (ESA), like the People's Republic of China (PRC), looking to exploit the conditions posed by these threats. I committed to tackling these challenges by building trust with the nations of this region and within our own interagency – by being the best partner we can be and by strengthening and complementing U.S interagency and partner nation capabilities to address these threats together. With your support, we have made notable strides, but much work remains to be done. I welcome this opportunity to discuss the significant national security challenges and opportunities we still face in Latin America and the Caribbean. This region is our neighborhood, directly tied to us in every domain. A threat to our neighbors is a threat to the United States; and an opportunity for our neighbors is an opportunity for us to make our neighborhood stronger together.

In fact, after two years in this position, I feel an incredible sense of urgency. This Hemisphere in which we live is under assault. The very democratic principles and values that bind us together are being actively undermined by violent transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and the PRC and Russia. We are losing our positional advantage in this Hemisphere and immediate action is needed to reverse this trend. The intervention goes well beyond economic influence, the PRC's strategic outlook with over 40 ports in progress, significant loans that are used as political leverage and predatory practices demonstrated in illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing are weakening democratic institutions and leveraging the future of this Hemisphere. We have seen many of these same tactics in Asia and Africa over the last few

decades and we are well aware of the results. We must act now to avoid those same results in our own hemisphere.

### **Strategic Environment**

The National Defense Strategy (NDS) identifies defending the homeland as a critical defense objective and recognizes that our homeland cannot be safe without a stable and secure Western Hemisphere. USSOUTHCOM's primary mission is to keep our neighborhood safe from those seeking to do us harm so that our home remains secure. The threats in the Western Hemisphere are persistent, they're real, and they represent a formidable risk to our national security. Perhaps most urgently, this region has been one of the hardest hit by COVID-19; the health, economic, and social impacts of which will alter the hemisphere for years to come. In the midst of this pandemic, two back-to-back major hurricanes devastated Central America creating even greater economic strain. The pandemic and these unprecedented storms struck on top of an already challenging vicious circle of threats that jeopardize a secure, stable, and democratic Western Hemisphere. These threats include ESAs like the PRC, Russia, and Iran that actively seek to take advantage of the nascent, fragile democracies in this region and look to exploit the region's resources and proximity to the United States; TCOs that run all forms of illicit activities to turn a profit, at the expense of the rule of law, and more importantly, of the lives of all who are impacted along the way; and malign regional state actors – those countries within our own neighborhood, like Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, that perpetuate corruption and challenge freedom and democracy by opening the door to ESAs and TCOs at the expense of their own people. TCOs are a direct threat to the U.S. homeland. We cannot face such daunting challenges on our own. The only way to counter these threats is to strengthen our partners in the

region – we must build OUR team to win this strategic competition. If our neighbors are stronger, we're all stronger.

### **Threats and Opportunities**

**COVID-19 and Fragility in the Hemisphere.** There is an accelerating spiral of instability gripping the region as the pandemic has increased the region's fragility. Latin America and the Caribbean have suffered among the highest COVID-19 death rates in the world, and during my trips to the region, I witnessed the profound physical and emotional strain nations are experiencing. With only about 8 percent of the world's population, Latin America and the Caribbean are disproportionately impacted with nearly one fifth of global cases. Though nothing compares to the toll on human life, there will also be a significant socioeconomic impact on our neighbors for years to come. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), per capita income in Latin America will not recover from the pandemic until 2025 – later than any other region in the world. Coming on the heels of widespread public protests against governments throughout the region at the end of 2019, these COVID-19 losses coupled with longstanding socioeconomic grievances and corruption have created the conditions for even greater instability and unrest among our partner nations. These conditions create a more fragile region that serves as fertile ground for our competitors to advance their own interests, both malign and legitimate, making this challenge even more complex. Even some of our strongest partners are at risk of instability due to this confluence of factors.

Our partners' military and security force budgets are facing extreme pressure as governments use their limited resources to address the pandemic. Security forces are increasingly focused on the very near-term need for tactical items such as fuel, food, personal protective equipment (PPE), and vaccines at the expense of security operations. They are

concerned that TCOs will gain even more freedom of action in their countries as conditions for corruption and illicit activity grow.

In order to gain more access, presence, and influence in the region, the PRC and Russia are taking advantage of the pandemic, deploying medical diplomacy and disinformation campaigns – often overpromising and under delivering. The PRC is offering \$1 billion in loans to the region for their COVID-19 vaccine and improvements to medical infrastructure, securing agreements with Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela. This will further indebt the region to the PRC, which already holds \$165B in loans. The PRC aims to enhance medical exchange programs, exploiting the pandemic to advance its One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative in trade, technology, and infrastructure. Beijing is also using COVID-19 as a pretext to donate Huawei technology that integrates with its 5G networks and Safe City programs – touting its social monitoring model as an effective and inexpensive contact tracing solution.

Russia, too, is seizing the pandemic as an opportunity to increase its influence in countries where it previously had limited access. COVID-19 has also provided Russia with another avenue by which to expand its campaign to outcompete the U.S. in the information domain, pushing narratives about U.S. mismanagement of COVID-19 and claiming U.S. government sanctions are choking the Venezuelan people at their most vulnerable time.

***What we're doing about it:*** Good friends are consistent and committed. While maintaining force health protection as a priority, USSOUTHCOM immediately responded to the needs of our partners in this crisis by providing humanitarian assistance to alleviate the burden on health systems throughout the region. Since April 2020, USSOUTHCOM has executed over 485 of these projects in 28 countries, with a total investment of more than \$56M, in addition to

the humanitarian assistance delivered by State and USAID. Our efforts range from deploying field hospitals to providing critical PPE.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. government has delivered \$226 million worth of aid, with an additional \$35 million on its way, which is more than double what the PRC has donated. As part of overall U.S. government humanitarian efforts, DoD's humanitarian assistance program is making an important difference in these nations and helping to build trust and bring stability to the region. In every conversation with my counterparts in the region, they lead with "your assistance has been critical as we face COVID-19." If the U.S. wants to be the partner of choice – that means being first to respond in a crisis. Missions like the 2019 deployment of the USNS COMFORT provided world-class medical care to over 68,000 people in 12 countries and enhanced the medical readiness of our US and partner medical personnel. We work closely with State and USAID to find innovative ways to deliver this kind of relevant and timely support to our partners and demonstrate our commitment to the region.

**External State Actors (ESAs) and Malign Regional Actors.**

**People's Republic of China.** The NDS's central idea of "expanding the competitive space" must be applied globally, not only in the Pacific, but also in our own neighborhood. The NDS requires us to "sustain our advantages in the Western Hemisphere" and maintain a favorable balance of power in this region, while bolstering partners against coercion.

The PRC continues to increase its self-serving activities to gain global influence and leverage across all domains in the USSOUTHCOM AOR: cyber, space, extractive and energy industries, transportation hubs, roads, infrastructure, telecommunications, legal and illegal fishing, agriculture, and military training – Spanish and Portuguese-language military education

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<sup>1</sup> Only PPE that was available within the partner nation or for purchase from a third party were donated due to the simultaneous shortage we faced in the United States.

modeled after U.S. professional military education. The PRC is also “gifting” security supplies and equipment as a way to gain access and win favor with regional security forces. As already discussed, COVID-19 has brought on a new era of medical diplomacy that the PRC seeks to leverage to its advantage. All of these overtures, to include the OBOR initiative, are part of a concerted effort by Beijing to indebt fragile countries in the region, impinge on our partners’ and allies’ sovereignty, and use its influence to extract concessions when needed. The PRC also thrives on and enables the corruption and lack of transparency in business and political deals exhibited in some of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Beijing pairs these engagements with aggressive information operations that spread disinformation – emblematic of how the PRC’s actions are guided by different values than those of the U.S. and our regional partners.

The PRC is rapidly advancing toward their goal of economic dominance in the region within the next ten years. In 2019, the PRC surpassed the U.S. as the leading trade partner with Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay and is now the region’s second-largest trading partner behind the U.S. From 2002 to 2019, PRC trade with Latin America soared from \$17 billion to over \$315 billion, with plans to reach \$500 billion in trade by 2025.

The PRC is also seeking to establish global logistics and basing infrastructure in our hemisphere in order to project and sustain military power at greater distances. Outside our region, Beijing consistently abuses commercial arrangements at host country ports to support military functions and obfuscate the true purpose of its overseas installations.

Chinese Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing just outside or within the outer limits of South American Economic Exclusion Zones (EEZ) is another predatory practice

that poses a threat to the livelihood of coastal nations. The Chinese government admittedly subsidizes this activity and is reluctant to curtail it because of its importance to PRC's food security and economy, with IUU fishing costing the region about \$2.7 billion in lost revenue annually. In August, activity of a fleet of approximately 350 Chinese operated vessels posed a threat to the Galapagos Marine Reserve and endangered species resulting in an international outcry, exposing this malign activity.

**Russia.** Russia is increasingly asserting itself in Latin America and the Caribbean, pursuing a strategy intended to grow Moscow's influence and undermine U.S. leadership in the region over the long term. Russia is actively engaging in this region to counter what it views as the U.S. meddling in its near-abroad. Expanding air and sea access to project military power, it has agreements with Venezuela and Nicaragua that allow Russian warships to visit on short notice. Moscow has executed three strategic bomber deployments to the region since 2008 and made more than 40 port calls since 2010. Russia doubled its naval deployments in this region, going from five (2008-2014), to 11 (2015-2020). Russia is trying to make inroads in the hemisphere by providing security training and has conducted \$2.3 billion in weapons and military equipment sales in the last 10 years. At the same time, Moscow is working to discredit the U.S. by flooding the region's information space with disinformation, to include hundreds of articles distorting U.S. security actions. In 2020, Russian Spanish-language media outlets more than doubled their social media followers from 7 million to over 18 million.

**Iran.** Iran uses both formal and informal instruments to expand its influence in Latin America and the Caribbean and prepare for any potential contingencies. Tehran seeks to expand its economic ties to the region, and leverages its security expertise and well-established diaspora in the region to expand trade and its overall influence. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-



Qods Force, Tehran's primary external operations unit for exporting the Islamic Revolution, maintains operatives in foreign embassies, charities, and religious and cultural institutions to enhance ties globally. In the past year, Iran has expanded economic and security cooperation with Venezuela on fuel transfers, food staples, and military assistance, possibly expanding the Qods Force's presence in the region. Tehran also relies on a system of Iranian state-sponsored and non-state facilitated media outlets to shape the information domain to generate empathy for Iran and Shia Islam and diminish Western influence in the hemisphere. Tehran maintains a Spanish-language channel that reaches 17 countries in the region.

**Venezuela.** The Venezuelan people continue to suffer under the illegitimate Maduro regime. They lack basic services, clean water, food, and health care. The impacts of COVID-19, gas shortages, increasing levels of unemployment and inflation (at over 3000%), and human rights violations all compound one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the history of this hemisphere. The illegitimate regime is even struggling to provide basic services within Caracas, to which it previously diverted most of its resources to avoid threats to its control. Venezuelan migration continues to destabilize the region, straining the health systems and economies of Venezuela's neighboring countries. As of December 2020, approximately 5.5 million refugees and migrants from Venezuela were displaced globally, with some 4.6 million remaining in Latin America and the Caribbean. Venezuela is also the primary foothold and access point in the region for ESAs, enables TCO activities, and gives refuge to regional terrorist groups.

**Cuba.** Cuba remains a regional corrosive influence that enables and inspires autocratic regimes in the hemisphere and is the primary supporter of the illegitimate Maduro regime in Venezuela. Cuba is the entry point for ESA influence in the region and its reach extends beyond this hemisphere. Like the PRC, Cuba uses medical diplomacy to build international goodwill

and gain back door access to undermine fragile democracies. Havana has fully exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to reinvigorate its medical outreach, a key revenue generator for the island at a time when it is desperate for income.

**Nicaragua.** Nicaragua's current political crisis that began in 2018 continues, with President Ortega's policies still leading to calls for his resignation. We are already seeing a concerning suppression of the opposition, in advance of this year's election. Managua maintains close ties with Moscow, whose security assistance to Nicaragua focuses on Professional Military Education, donations, and the provision of humanitarian assistance in a strategy to subjugate the Nicaraguan government and counter U.S. regional goals. Over the past decade Russia built a joint counternarcotic training center in Nicaragua, trained at least 500 Latin American and Caribbean officers, and conducted multiple maritime and air deployments to the country.

***What we're doing about it.*** We work to effectively posture U.S. forces to ensure we can achieve NDS objectives. USSOUTHCOM remains committed to maintaining our advantage and to our allies and partners to protect and advance mutual security interests. We, along with State do this through a wide range of security cooperation and assistance activities aimed at building partner capacity such as DOD's Joint Exercise and Humanitarian Assurances Programs and State's Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education Training (IMET) programs, as well as information and intelligence sharing. To put it simply, we outcompete bad guys by being the good guys. While our adversaries look for opportunities to extract, we look for ways to build up. We work with partners to understand where their capability gaps are and how we can help fill those in – stronger partners are better equipped to secure our hemisphere, our neighborhood. Our training is responsive to the needs of our partners, it's the highest possible quality, and includes emphasis on professionalism to include values like respect for

human rights and the rule of law as an inherent element of professional military and security forces. It emphasizes the importance of a strong non-commissioned officer corps and empowering women as part of the entire force. At USSOUTHCOM, we are committed to integrating gender perspectives into all of our activities, and we encourage our partners to create structural changes in their militaries to allow for the same through our Women, Peace and Security in the Western Hemisphere Initiative. For a nation's defense and security forces to be sustainable, legitimate, and respected, the meaningful inclusion of women is imperative. Our Human Rights Office, the only such program at any Combatant Command, actively promotes building stronger military human rights programs with partner nation militaries.

Our exercise program is designed to counter threats, build readiness, and enhance our partners' capabilities, interoperability, and domain awareness. This is a vital component of our strategy, allowing us to conduct multi-domain exercises with our partners and build interoperability and readiness that improve our collective ability to secure the region.

Being on the field, with a presence at Cooperative Security Locations in El Salvador, Colombia, and Curacao, and a Forward Operating Site in Honduras, home of Joint Task Force Bravo (JTF-Bravo), enables us to answer the call and build trust, when our neighbors ask for help in a crisis, as they did following the back-to-back major hurricanes that devastated Central America late last year. In the aftermath of **Hurricanes Eta and Iota**, our forces at JTF-Bravo, with support from our components and allies, responded immediately, conducting search and rescue operations and delivering lifesaving aid to areas isolated by the storms, delivering over 1.2 million pounds of life-saving humanitarian aid and rescuing 852 people. There is no better way to demonstrate U.S. commitment to the region than to respond to our neighbors' needs in times of crisis.

Through our security cooperation program, we focus on building our partners' capacity to conduct ground and maritime interdiction, defend their cyber networks, secure their borders and sovereignty, and maintain domain awareness. The Near Coastal Patrol Vessel (NCPV) program is a USSOUTHCOM initiative to address selected Caribbean and Central American partners' requirements for a maritime patrol vessel with the capacity to conduct sustained Maritime Interdiction Operations. Fielding these vessels in key partner nations will increase interoperability and regional ability to counter regional threats, the nefarious activities of which pose an existential threat to many of our partners.

Another important capability to outcompete our adversaries in the region is intelligence-driven – we must gather information across all domains and share it as widely as possible with our partners. We shine a light on the PRC's predatory and corrupt actions so our partners can recognize the PRC's malign activities and make well-informed decisions on engaging Beijing. We continue to convey to our partners and allies that Beijing and Moscow seek to undermine their national sovereignty and fosters instability that allows TCOs a foothold within their borders. We also highlight that partnering with the PRC requires turning a blind eye to malign behavior that ranges from corruption and human rights abuses to environmental degradation and natural resource depletion.

**Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs).**

**TCOs.** TCOs are violent and they pose a national security threat to the United States homeland. They share the goal of PRC, Russia, and other malign actors to advance their self-interests at the expense of our partners' sovereignty. TCOs engage in a wide array of illegal activities including drug and weapons trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, and money

laundering. TCOs make up an approximately \$90 billion a year life-threatening enterprise through cocaine profits alone and are responsible for thousands of deaths in the United States each year, forging a trail of violence, corruption, and instability through our region in route to our homeland. In many cases, TCOs are better funded than partner nation security forces. In 2020, drug traffickers likely attempted to move an estimated 2,300 metric tons of cocaine, departing from the source zone toward the United States, Europe, and other markets. Their efforts persist despite combined security operations and COVID quarantine measures (such as border and port closures), indicating these traffickers are bent on undermining security and prosperity for us, our allies, and partner nations all for the sake of profit. The COVID-19 environment has caused some traffickers to stockpile cocaine, and complicated coca eradication operations in the Andean Ridge. Traffickers have adapted to the COVID environment, cocaine flow has increased and rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. We must remain ready with increased U.S. and partner nation presence and pressure to stem this flood.

Narcotrafficking is a scourge throughout the hemisphere and TCOs aren't the only ones who benefit – the Maduro regime is heavily involved in trafficking narcotics, overtly supporting narcoterrorism while the innocent citizens of Venezuela continue to suffer under extreme oppression and grinding poverty. From 2015 to 2019 the known drug flow out of Venezuela increased by 145%. Over the last few years, the illegitimate Maduro regime has collaborated with National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia Dissidents (FARC-D) to move hundreds of metric tons of cocaine from Colombia through Venezuela via non-commercial aircraft and commercial cargo ships. This relationship also extends to illicit gold mining, a critical commodity that Maduro uses to sustain his illegitimate regime and military loyalty at the expense of the Venezuelan people.

**Regional Terrorist Organizations.** The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia Dissidents (FARC-D) and National Liberation Army (ELN) are the two main organized armed terrorist groups and drug trafficking organizations in the region whose actions pose a direct threat to our homeland and partners. The FARC-D is composed of remnants of the FARC, who traffic drugs and engage in extortion and illegal mining to generate revenue. The FARC-D targets Venezuelan nationals for recruitment, using money, food, and safe passage to encourage or coerce desperate Venezuelan migrants to support their cause. The ELN also remains committed to fighting the Colombian government and does so violently through the use of improvised explosive devices and vehicle-borne explosives. This group fundraises primarily through the drug trade and illicit mining, as well as by imposing “war taxes” on drug labs and other businesses in its control. The ELN and FARC-D benefit from unchallenged freedom of movement and protection in Venezuela, with much of their leadership operating with impunity from within Venezuelan borders. Venezuela has become a paradise of impunity for narco-traffickers, while the Venezuelan people are forced to endure a nightmare of insecurity.

**Al-Qa`ida and ISIS** maintain some sympathizers in the region. After ISIS’s intense propaganda campaign from 2014 to 2017, as many as 200 Trinidadians left the Caribbean islands to join the fight in Iraq and Syria. Several family members who traveled with the fighters are still in the Middle East and seek to return to the region, which will challenge the region’s security services at a time when they are already overstretched due to the pandemic. **Hizballah** leverages the region’s Lebanese diaspora throughout Latin America and the Caribbean for fundraising, recruiting, and logistical support. Operationally, Hizballah’s Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO), its external operations arm, is responsible for at least three high-profile attacks in the region and three other planned operations that were disrupted.

**Special Interest Aliens (SIAs).** In 2020, U.S. and partner law enforcement, with support from the intelligence community, arrested 66 Latin American human smuggling facilitators involved in moving non-U.S. citizens who potentially pose a national security risk to the United States or its interests. These facilitators move SIAs from countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen - areas with pronounced VEO activity - through Latin America and toward the U.S. for fees ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000 per person. This business is dangerous, but lucrative, generating between \$150 to \$350M a year for the facilitators.

***What we're doing about it.*** Our regional partnerships are vital to security and prosperity in this hemisphere and to our collective ability to confront global challenges including ESAs, TCOs, and VEOs. The men and women of USSOUTHCOM work hard every day alongside our strong interagency and international partners to disrupt and degrade these adversaries, while maintaining U.S. presence, access, and influence in our hemisphere. The Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-S) in Key West, conducts our statutorily-directed mission to detect and monitor illicit narcotics, delivering a high return on modest investments. Last year, this international and interagency "team of teams" helped keep 264 metric tons of cocaine off U.S. streets. JIATF-S-facilitated interdictions historically 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, JIATF-S provides the best bang for the taxpayer buck when it comes to keeping drugs from arriving on our shores.

Last year, recognizing the seriousness of the TCO threat to the U.S. homeland, the Secretary of Defense authorized an all domain enhanced counternarcotic operation to reduce the flow of illicit drugs, degrade TCOs, and increase interoperability and readiness. In the past year,

the U.S. Navy stepped up, providing more ship presence and maritime patrol aircraft. These assets have achieved significant return on investment as well as provided readiness building opportunities for our Fourth Fleet and Navy crews. This initiative included an increase in surface and air platforms, other intelligence assets, and a Security Forces Assistance Brigade to work with our partners. We are putting these assets to good use, integrating with interagency and international partners across all domains to ensure long-term success. Through the employment of these additional assets we increased the targeting of known air and maritime illicit trafficking events by 65%. Our whole of government and partner nation approach has disrupted over 240 metric tons of cocaine and almost 100,000 pounds of marijuana. We have detained over 700 suspected drug smugglers, denied almost \$6 billion of profits to TCOs, and most importantly, saved the lives of more than 2000 Americans. A Security Forces Assistance Brigade is currently training Colombian and Honduran forces to more effectively fuse their intelligence to inform manual eradication and lab destruction efforts – helping to stop the drug threat closer to the source, before it begins its journey to the U.S. We plan on expanding this effort into other nations in Central America with a focus on capabilities to counter TCOs.

With this increase of U.S. all domain presence and pressure – a sign of U.S. leadership and commitment to the region – our partner nations, who could have easily turned inward to focus on the COVID-19 crisis, instead stepped up their participation to counter TCOs, demonstrating their commitment to countering this threat. Key partners like Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala, El Salvador, and others have been involved in almost 60 percent of drug disruptions during this operation. Years of sustained security cooperation with our partners throughout our hemisphere is really paying dividends – we have helped build the capability of these nations to operate with us to disrupt drug shipments before those loads enter the homeland.



We have very willing partners in this hemisphere, and they demonstrated their commitment throughout the year, despite the increased challenges of COVID. Colombia kicked off Operation Orion V in April 2020, just as COVID was beginning to impact their country, stating that if the United States is committed to the drug fight during COVID, they would stand with us. Operation Orion V was a multi-national (26 countries), all-domain operation that resulted in 50 metric tons of cocaine disrupted, 72 drug labs destroyed, and \$1.5 billion in profits denied to TCOs. The U.S. provided maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) and analyst support to this operation. Colombia just concluded the follow-on Operation Orion VI, in which this coalition disrupted another 76.5 metric tons of cocaine and detained over 400 traffickers. This is just one example of the large return on investment gained by combining a willing and able partner with a committed U.S. presence in the Western Hemisphere.

While the Secretary of Defense agreed to continue sourcing this mission with traditional military assets, this mission also benefits from non-traditional resources. Congressional support to the counternarcotic mission has been instrumental in the success of these operations. We are filling capability gaps through innovative solutions like the Multi Mission Support Vessel (MMSV). The MMSV has supported the disruption of almost 8 metric tons of cocaine and 15,000 pounds of marijuana, denied over \$180 million in profits to TCOs, and detained 48 drug traffickers, while also keeping three low profile vessels carrying tons of narcotics from reaching our shores. It also extends the reach of our partner nation interdiction vessels as they launch in support of these counterdrug operations. We are applying commercially-available technology like unmanned aircraft systems to increase the MMSV's ability to conduct detection and monitoring and provide information to partner nation interdiction assets.

SOUTHCOM employs less than 1% of DoD Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) resources to counter ESAs and TCOs in this region. To meet the mission, we are pushing the envelope with innovative techniques, focusing on a 21<sup>st</sup> century, non-traditional approach to intelligence that integrates publicly available information, advanced analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning, and open collaboration with allies and partners to disrupt threats. These emerging tools offer persistent, AOR-wide coverage without risk to personnel at a relatively low cost and puts us in a position to better compete against adversaries. Our Technical Network Analysis Cell (TNAC) and Asymmetric Target Acquisition Center (ATAC) are just two examples of our approach. For an investment of \$1.2 million the TNAC at JIATF-S denied TCOs of \$817.1 million in revenue by providing actionable intelligence, in cooperation with our law enforcement partners, that is shared with partner nations and interagency partners leading to numerous disruptions. The ATAC, run by our Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH), is supporting law enforcement efforts to counter TCOs. The Congressional support we have received for ISR has been critical to sustaining the innovative capabilities that support our unique mission, making our non-traditional approach to ISR possible. USSOUTHCOM ISR activities are optimized for return on investment with a mix of traditional platforms, purpose-built sensors, and increasingly non-traditional collection methods. USSOUTHCOM will continue to work with the Department to ensure we can meet our vital mission to disrupt transnational criminal organizations, as well as work in concert with regional partners to confront shared threats.

While we are making strides, we are but one part of the solution. This problem set requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society solution to address both the supply and

demand sides of this threat. Drugs have killed 840,000 Americans since 1999,<sup>2</sup> and continue to kill 70,000 Americans a year. Drugs cost our nation billions each year in criminal justice, healthcare, and productivity losses – in addition to the suffering caused by shattered and lost lives. We must continue and further enhance the tremendous interagency and international cooperation we have fostered over recent years against this common enemy.

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 countering TCOs. Each additional force package (maritime patrol aircraft, flight deck capable ship, embarked helicopter, small boat (US Coast Guard over-the-horizon boat or US Navy 11 meter RHIB), and law enforcement detachment) enables the disruption of 35 more metric tons of cocaine and the strong presence reinforces to our partners that we are all-in with them – building trust.

On the counterterrorism (CT) front, our Special Operations Command – South (SOCSOUTH) maintains persistent presence in several countries in the region, working and training with partner militaries. Our focus is on improving partner nation CT response capabilities, interoperability, and information sharing. The DoD Rewards Program has again provided tremendous return on investment in the fight against terrorism. In 2020, USSOUTHCOM paid \$979,000 in rewards to 54 informants that resulted in the neutralization of a record 107 individuals who were terrorists or force protection threats and seizure of 26 weapons/explosive caches and \$952,000 in cash. Although this is a counterterror and force protection program, it also yielded significant counternarcotic effects including the seizure of 14 metric tons of cocaine and the destruction of 12 drug labs. We also continue to focus efforts on

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/trends-statistics/costs-substance-abuse>

assessing the financial underpinnings of national security threats in the region and have deepened our counter-threat finance related collaboration with the U.S. Treasury Department and interagency partners. This includes providing direct analytic support to the development of sanctions against Central and South American-based transnational organized crime groups that launder money, traffic drugs, and corrupt government officials in the region. An area requiring more emphasis is TCO network mapping and holistic interagency and partner nation efforts to dismantle key TCO centers of gravity such as logistics and finances.

USSOUTHCOM also takes a total force approach to these challenges, taking full advantage of the Reserve component, composed of Guard and Reserve Forces. With fewer apportioned forces and a smaller budget than most regional combatant commands, I have a great appreciation for the importance and critical support they provide to our interagency and international partners. The ability of the National Guard, to work directly with host nations and local institutions through the State Partnership Program is a force multiplier for engaging our partners. Over one third of those State partnerships are in our AOR, strategically complementing our security cooperation efforts.

**Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay (JTF-GTMO).** JTF-GTMO continues to conduct safe, legal, and humane detention operations. In an effort to do so in a more efficient manner, the JTF has taken steps to right-size its force and consolidate operations. To date, we have safely reduced military personnel by over 20 percent. This is part of an ongoing effort to continually assess all USSOUTHCOM operations to ensure we are maximizing use of resources.

### **What More can be Done/What we Need**

**Quality of Life.** People are our most important resource and our absolute priority. None of the initiatives described above would be possible without the tremendous work of our men

and women. South Florida, including Miami and the Florida Keys, is a high cost-of-living area that poses many challenges to our personnel. The housing market is so competitive that personnel pay upwards of \$10K of up-front fees in order to secure a rental unit. We are working with the supportive local community to find immediate relief options for our service members and civilians on housing and other factors that contribute to the high cost of living. We are also appreciative of the Department of the Army's support to find a permanent, cost effective housing solution here in Miami. We have also established TEAM SOUTHCOM, a family readiness group, to support all of our families, especially as they transition to this high-cost area and a non-standard military installation.

**Congressional Support.** We appreciate your support of our security cooperation program in the USSOUTHCOM AOR as a continued recognition of the importance of these programs in our hemisphere. We also appreciate the increased flexibility that Congress included in the FY21 Consolidated Appropriations Act by increasing the percentage of 333 funds that may be used over two years. Greater funding flexibility increases our ability to plan and execute multi-year programs to build partner capacity. Congress also continued support to USSOUTHCOM's ISR program and the MMSV – two investments that will increase our domain awareness and ability to stop threats bound for our homeland.

**Infrastructure.** The FY21 National Defense Authorization Act authorized planning and design funding for a new Command and Control Facility for JIATF-S, recognizing what the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers determined was a compelling need to replace its current 1950's constructed facility. We appreciate this support and are working to complete the design for a resilient facility built to enable interagency and international collaboration for this critical mission. USSOUTHCOM is also working closely with the Defense Health Agency to replace

the hospital at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay (NSGB), which is experiencing severe structural deterioration. This medical treatment facility (MTF) is the only strategic medical hub to support the full spectrum of mission personnel operating in the USSOUTHCOM AOR! It is also the only MTF for personnel at NSGB, as there are no civilian options available. It is also important to note that NSGB is a strategic asset as the only U.S. base in the USSOUTHCOM AOR.

**Supporting our Partners.** The U.S. military has established programs that help our partners develop diverse and inclusive militaries that respect the rule of law and human rights. These are the characteristics of a professional force that has legitimacy in the eyes of its population. Consistent engagement with our partner militaries and security forces through programs like our human rights training and Women, Peace, and Security programs, as well as through the range of security cooperation and assistance programs, is essential to our ability build their institutional capacity and resiliency to the range of threats we all face together.

### **Conclusion**

The security threats in the Western Hemisphere, our shared neighborhood, demand a sense of urgency. TCOs threaten our U.S. homeland. We also see the rise in the PRC's leverage and influence is not just a South China Sea problem, it is a global problem, and it requires a solution that includes our partners and allies. When our neighborhood is strong, so is our national security. We no longer have two oceans to keep our adversaries at bay – their malign activity is knocking on our door, creating instability in an already fragile region, enabling TCOs to take hold in an attempt to weaken democracies and perpetuate corruption. We must stand by our partners.

We hold ourselves to a high standard. We have strong values as Americans. We ensure our partners respect human rights; we train them on the responsible use of military equipment;

we help build the institutional capacity to maintain professional military and security forces; and we operate transparently and in accordance with civilian leadership, international norms, and the rule of law. U.S. security cooperation with our partners ultimately bolsters our own national security and has done so for over 70 years. Investing in our neighborhood is an investment in national security and we are at a critical juncture where focus and attention are essential to maintaining positional advantage.

I look forward to discussing our efforts to capitalize on the opportunities for shared security that exist in strengthening our partnerships.