

# We're All in This Together

*The United States can make an enormous contribution in this new stage of global development by helping deepen hemispheric cooperation and political dialogue. If successful, this will lead to a better future for our peoples.*

—H.E. Michelle Bachelet  
President of Chile

**D**uring the last 3 years, many people have said to me, “Admiral, what you’re doing at Southern Command is so important because that’s America’s backyard.” If I accomplish nothing else in these pages, I will consider this piece a resounding success if I can convince you to remove that phrase from your lexicon—if I can get that out of your vocabulary. This is not our backyard, nor is it our front porch. Those are clearly the wrong images. My thesis for you is this: the Americas are a home that we share together.

Looking south from the United States through the lens at U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), what I have discovered is a unitary hemisphere of enormous diversity, beauty, and potential. It is a vast and varied region of the world and it defies easy categorization. Essentially, I have witnessed, and found myself a member of, a house in which nearly half a billion people live together in relative tranquility when compared to other houses in other neighborhoods of the world; and, as family members are wont to do, they both share and compete for resources, languages, cultures, and familial ties. If we fail to spend more time thinking about these members and engaging them, we will find that as time goes on, our family members in this part of the world will have drifted away from us. We will become a house divided. And that would be, in my opinion, extremely deleterious to the security and the future of the United States of America.

U.S. Southern Command is responsible to the Secretary of Defense and the President of the United States for U.S. national security interests through roughly one-half of this hemisphere—31 countries, 10 territories

or protectorates, and approximately 460 million people. All told, it is about one-sixth of the Earth's land surface and almost half of the population of the Americas. It is obvious, though too often underappreciated, that we in the United States have much in common with our partners throughout the region; we share common interests and are dependent upon each other in so many ways. The Americas is an interconnected system—a very diverse, yet interrelated, community. It is a community fundamental to the future of the United States.

There are numerous and compelling geographic, cultural, economic, and political linkages that tie all of the nations of the Americas together. These ties are manifested in the present, ranging from our shared economic activity to our comparative democratic ideals, as well as from mutual social and cultural appreciation to similar geography and climatic systems. There are also historical linkages based upon European colonial exploration and conquest, the insertion of Christianity and other foreign religions, and the way all of this impacted the indigenous peoples throughout the region that were here long before the Europeans arrived. For example, take the great cathedral in Santiago, Chile—it was a magnificent structure by the year 1600, when the highest edifice north of the Rio Grande was probably two floors and built of wood. There is a real pattern to the development in and of this region that evolved from the Catholic Church and it is worth knowing and understanding that. One cannot merely focus on the existing superstructure of the house without acknowledging and seeking to understand the historical linkages and foundation upon which the house is built.

Another comment I hear frequently during my travels is, “Well it must be great to be SOUTHCOM, Jim, because you know, all the countries down there are pretty much the same.” Wait a minute. Consider for a moment the following contrasting examples. Brazil—for most, the name conjures up the iconic image of the statue of Christ the Redeemer, one of the new Seven Wonders of the World. It sits above the gorgeous city of Rio de Janeiro, in a country of almost 200 million people, where they speak Portuguese, not Spanish. Brazil is a very vibrant and unique culture, a massive state that is emerging in a global way. Contrast that to Belize, a tiny, African-descended country on the Caribbean, tucked away in Central America, where the language spoken is English. Can there be two more different countries?

Think about Chile, a First World country in every sense, where 16 million people have created a strong and vibrant economy. Chile has more free trade agreements than any other nation in the world and Spanish is its

primary language. Contrast that with Haiti, the poorest country in the hemisphere and among the poorest in the world. The language spoken there is not French—rather, they speak Creole, which is an amalgam of African dialect, Caribbean slang, a great deal of French, and some English. It is a very diverse language in and of itself. Chile and Haiti, Brazil and Belize—utterly different. This is a region of enormous diversity and we need to appreciate that here in the United States.

### **A House United—Linkages**

With the theme of a shared home in a vast and diverse neighborhood hopefully omnipresent in your mind, let me walk you through some of the streets of this neighborhood—the linkages between the United States and the rest of the nations in this region of the world. To appreciate our linkages, one only has to look at a map. Of course, we benefit from our physical connection by a plethora of land, sea, and air routes. Our proximity lends itself to a very natural tendency to depend upon each other. But we are also connected by so much more than physical means—we share environmental, cultural, security, and economic ties that inextricably link the fates of every nation, every resident of this house, in our hemisphere. In every sense, we share the same DNA in this region.

Continuing with this human metaphor, one might argue that the most important linkage between a nation and the nations around it and around the world is demographics. According to the August 2008 U.S. Census Bureau report, about 15 percent of us—just over 46 million—are of Hispanic descent. When undocumented Spanish-speaking workers are added to the count, it is fair to assume that the United States is now the second-largest Spanish speaking country in the world, only after Mexico. For added perspective, more Hispanics live in the United States today than there are Canadians in Canada or Spaniards in Spain. Meanwhile, the purchasing power of our burgeoning Hispanic population is pushing toward 1 trillion dollars, annually.

That's just today—what about the future? The Census Bureau report goes on to state that by the middle of this century, 30 percent of the citizens of the United States—approximately 133 million people—will be of Hispanic origin. That's by 2050, which is, or hopefully will be, within most of our lifetimes. And where will these people be living? A little over one hundred years ago, the 10 largest cities in the United States based on population were, not surprisingly, located predominantly in the northeast corridor—New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and so forth. Today, of the 10 largest cities, 3 still exist in the northeast, but the other 7 are along the

Figure 1–1. Shared Home of the Americas



southwest border section of the country: Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Phoenix, San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Jose. Seven of our 10 largest cities border this world to the south.

In addition to the physical and the demographic linkages, the bed-rock foundation of our shared home is a common social and political sense that respects democracy, freedom, justice, human dignity, human rights, and human values. We share the belief that these democratic principles must be at the core of what we accomplish in the region and that free governments should be accountable to their people and govern effectively. This common belief is most evident as expressed in the first article of the Inter-American Democratic Charter: "The people of the Americas have the right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it. Democracy is essential for the social, political, and economic development of the peoples of the Americas."<sup>1</sup>

The rest of this tremendous consensus document of the Americas further reinforces our shared values and the goal of strengthening representative democracy in the region. The Charter's promise has been largely fulfilled as democracy has made great strides in the last three decades in the hemisphere: today, civilian constitutional leadership chosen by competitive, participatory elections governs every sovereign nation but one in the region—Cuba. Indeed, the last 3 years have been watershed years for elections, as more general, presidential, legislative, and local elections were held than in any previous time in the entire history of the Americas. The political linkages between the United States and this part of the world are profoundly better today because of this evolution of the last 30 years. We look forward to the first time in history when our entire hemisphere is united in democracy.

The nations of the Americas are also increasingly connected and interdependent economically with our individual and collective fortunes intertwined. Trade between all of our countries is certainly growing and has become an important aspect of building the conditions for prosperity throughout the region. The Americas represents about a 2-trillion-dollar-a-year interwoven economy. Many in the United States normally think in terms of east and west when it comes to trade—in terms of Europe and Asia, respectively. In reality, however, more of the global trade of the United States goes north and south than goes east or west—40 percent of our trade stays right here within the Americas, half of which is with Latin America and the Caribbean alone. This huge volume of goods and services, this life-sustaining trade circulating throughout the hemisphere, acts like oxygen through our nation's bloodstream. As trade relationships mature

and grow, we will see an increase in this economic symbiosis; the nations of the community will work together to forge stronger bonds and closer ties to increase their collective prosperity.

An important example of this connection is that just over 50 percent of the U.S. consumption of crude oil and petroleum products is imported from within our own neighborhood, the Western Hemisphere, with 34 percent coming from Latin America and the Caribbean, far outweighing the 22 percent imported from the Middle East. An important facilitator to this critical trade through the Americas—the major causeway—is the Panama Canal, which sees almost 15,000 ships transit each year, of which two-thirds are going to or from one of our coasts in the United States. The canal, in effect, is the economic heartbeat of the Americas, since 7 of the top 10 nations whose trade passes through the canal are in the Western Hemisphere. Panama recently passed an important referendum to expand the canal for a projected twofold increase in throughput capacity, which will certainly build the growing economic interdependence of this region. The canal also provides an important strategic transit for the nations of this neighborhood if rapid positioning of naval or logistic vessels were required during an emergency.

Historically, we have had very close military ties with our partners in the region. For example, Brazil fought with us during World War II—the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, numbering over 25,000 troops, fought with U.S. forces in Italy from 1944 to 1945. During the Korean War, a Colombian infantry battalion and warship served with the U.S.-led United Nations Command. Beginning in the 1950s, several Latin American countries contributed military units to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations in the Middle East. Recently, in Iraq, troops from El Salvador served as part of the multinational presence and have now completed a noteworthy 11 rotations with over 3,000 total troops. The Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Honduras also dispatched troops to support the efforts in Iraq, and U.S. troops have worked shoulder-to-shoulder with friends from this hemisphere in UN peacekeeping missions around the world for decades.

These are all examples of our partner nations, our cohabitants in our shared home, fighting side-by-side with us in times of conflict. However, we also engage with these nations continuously during peacetime through various bilateral and multilateral exercises, conferences, and other training engagements. One example is the daily interaction the U.S. military has with future senior military leaders throughout the region at military establishments such as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, and the Inter-American Air

Forces Academy. The camaraderie developed among military officers at these institutions and the schools' strong emphasis on democratic values and respect for human rights are critical to creating military organizations capable of effective combined operations.

These bonds, these connections, these linkages—physical, demographic, political, social, economic, and military—are profound. They form the foundation of our shared home. They will contribute to an increased sense of interconnection between the United States and the other inhabitants of this region. However, as with any locality, the roving patrols of the neighborhood watch have revealed a number of elements that challenge or threaten the security and stability of its residents.

### **A House Divided—Challenges**

Given the criticality of our profound linkages in the Americas, it is imperative that we understand the challenges that exist within our shared home, affecting each of its residents, albeit sometimes in different ways and to different degrees. The current challenges and security concerns that we face in this hemisphere fortunately do not involve any imminent conventional military threat to the United States, nor do we anticipate one in the near- or mid-term future. For the foreseeable future, we also do not see any major military conflict developing among our neighbors, the nations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Communication has been strong in our region and has proven itself over the last couple of years during some of the region's political tensions. This is evidenced by the peaceful mediation and resolution by regional leaders of the crisis between Ecuador and Colombia that occurred in March of 2008. The creation of the new South American Defense Council is another indication of the tendency to create forums to encourage dialogue and to reduce tension.

Despite this “peaceful” state of our shared home, at least from a state-on-state violence perspective, numerous security challenges undoubtedly still exist. Narcoterrorism, drug trafficking, crime, gangs, and natural disasters are the primary security concerns and pose the principal challenges to regional stability, and to the United States from the region. Additionally, mass migrations, humanitarian crises, and the specter of ideological extremist terrorism are of concern and warrant due vigilance on our part. These challenges loom large for many of the residents of this region; they are transnational, they are multinational; and they are adaptive and insidious threats to those seeking peace and stability. By their very nature, these challenges cannot be countered by one nation alone—they require transnational and multinational solutions. Within our own country, they cannot be overcome

by the military alone—they require a truly integrated interagency community that brings to bear the synergistic effects of a unified, full-spectrum governmental and even private sector approach in order to best address and confront these challenges.

But before we examine the specific threats to this community, it is essential to comprehend the omnipresent influences that shape and in some cases exacerbate the above mentioned conditions. Despite the economic gains of the past decade, poverty and income inequality remain grave concerns for many people in Latin American and the Caribbean. These concerns drive social unrest and provide fertile ground for many of the region's public security challenges—the same ground upon which our foundation and fundamental linkage pillars are embedded.

To understand this region, the first thing you need to understand is that the world to the south is still very much an expanse in which poverty is the dominant problem. Poverty. According to the 2007 United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) report, *Social Panorama of Latin America*, almost 40 percent of the region's inhabitants are living in poverty, defined as an income of less than 2 U.S. dollars a day. That is roughly 180 million people—the equivalent of the population of everyone in the United States east of the Mississippi—all living on less than the cost of a cup of coffee in the states. Furthermore, nearly 16 percent are living in extreme poverty, defined as less than 1 dollar per day.

Combined with poverty is a disproportionate wealth distribution that is second only to sub-Saharan Africa. According to the World Bank's 2008 World Development Indicators report, the richest 20 percent of the Latin American population earns 57 percent of the region's income, earning twenty times that of the poorest 20 percent. By comparison, the richest 20 percent in high-income regions of the world earns only 7.7 times that of the poorest group. Without a doubt, a true and salient feature of our shared home is that much of this community has not yet emerged into the global economy—it is still, in some ways, in some parts of the region, locked in the past.

Thus, poverty and a large unequal wealth distribution as a result of failing to engage fully in a global environment are two of the fundamental undercurrents of the hemisphere. A third factor in the region that is key to one's understanding of our shared home is the characteristics and the influences of the indigenous cultures. Let me spend a brief moment describing Potosí, Bolivia—a place that very few people, particularly in the United States, would know much about. In the 1600s, Potosí was among

the top five cities in the world in population, exceeding 200,000 at its peak. That's the good news. The bad news is that the reason it had a population of over 200,000 is that this was the location of the largest silver mine in the world. Eight million indigenous Indian slaves died there mining silver for the Spanish. Why do I tell you about Potosí? Because it is important to understand the depth of the emotion in the indigenous cultures in this part of the world, in the people who were residents in this home long before outsiders came in and started "remodeling," doing so-called "home improvements" and "upgrades." It is critical that we truly grasp the historical impact that centuries of colonization and conquest, millions of lives lost, and countless tons of natural resources extracted, continues to have on our partners in this region.

Our shared home has poverty; it is steeped in income inequality and has not yet emerged into the global economy fully; there are indigenous pressures moving through it, but does it have to be like this? To illustrate the point about the potential of this region, I give you this historical anecdote. In the mid-1600s, after an Anglo-Dutch war, the Dutch, as part of the peace and treaty process, were given the choice of which two possessions to keep, namely: Suriname, the old Dutch Guyana on the north coast of South America, or New Amsterdam in North America, a place we know today as New York City. The Dutch chose Suriname.

How did that choice turn out? New York is a city of 8.2 million people, the center of the global economy along with Hong Kong and London. Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname, still looks much as it did several hundred years ago—beautiful, tranquil, rural, but still largely locked in the past. Now, why do I compare and contrast these images? The point is this: if you draw a line, arbitrarily across northern Mexico, and you go back to the year 1500, everything above and below that line is very similar—same climate, same natural resources, same level of indigenous populations, conquistadores knocking at the door in both places; the two sections are almost identical in every aspect in the year 1500.

Now fast forward 500 years: the north is one of the richest parts of the world while the south is still a region in so much poverty. We could spend this entire book, and perhaps several others like it, talking about why that is, but my point here is to emphasize the enormous potential of the region to the south. There is no reason whatsoever why the nations to the south of us cannot emerge in the global economy and be part of a wealthy, forward-looking and -leaning society. However, the cumulative effects of poverty and income inequality in this region provide a fertile field for the seeds of social and political insecurity and attendant instability to sprout,

take root, and grow into the weeds of drugs, crime, gangs, illegal immigration, and trafficking, among others.

### **Pressing Security Concerns**

Taking all this into account, and stemming from these underlying conditions, let us now focus first on the three most pressing security concerns in the region: illegal drugs, gangs, and crime. And based upon the proximity and the linkages to the United States, these become significant security concerns for our nation as well. I will begin with the ubiquitous and most all-pervading of those threats—narcotics.

The global illicit drug trade remains a significant—perhaps the significant—transnational security threat as its power and influence continue to undermine democratic governments, terrorize populations, impede economic development, and hinder regional stability. The profits from this drug trade, principally cocaine, are an enabling catalyst for the full spectrum of threats to our national security, and present formidable challenges to the security and stability for all who inhabit our shared home. Illegal narcotics trafficking is the fuel that powers the car of misery, traveling on the streets in our neighborhood. Our success—or failure—to address this insidious threat and remove this source of fuel and eventually get that car off our streets, will have a direct and lasting impact on the stability and well-being of both developed and developing residents. And this will be true not just in our neighborhood, but in other neighborhoods throughout the world.

Allow me to focus on one specific narcotic that is particularly pervasive and devastating to our hemisphere: cocaine. The Andean Ridge in South America is the world's leading source of coca cultivation and, despite international efforts and record interdictions and seizures, the region still produces enough cocaine to meet the demand here in the United States and a growing demand abroad. Evidence of this global market can be seen in the fact that Spain just recently passed the United States as the highest per capita consumer of cocaine in the world. Still, every year in the United States, somewhere between 6 and 10 thousand U.S. citizens die as a result of cocaine that can be traced back to this region. Not from methamphetamines, not from heroin, not from prescription drugs—6 to 10 thousand die just from cocaine. That equates to two to three times the tragic loss of lives from 9/11, every year. And that number accounts for overdoses, criminal activity attendant to the sale of cocaine, innocent bystanders, and police officers—6 to 10 thousand a year.

From a business model standpoint, the drug trade is an enormous industry that equates to roughly \$65 billion a year in profits. When you add

the resources we use to address health and crime consequences—as well as the loss of productivity suffered from disability, death, and withdrawal from the legitimate workforce—the total societal impact cost to the U.S. economy exceeds \$240 billion and grows at a rate of 5 percent per year. Extending this outward to include our fellow inhabitants of this region, it becomes an approximately \$300 billion global commerce of illegal drug production, distribution, and consumption that is also devastating whole societies in Latin America and the Caribbean. The growing number of societies impacted is directly attributable to the fact that narcotraffickers are intrinsically transnational and continuously adjust their operations to adapt to law enforcement efforts by developing new trafficking routes and consumer markets. They are also highly innovative and keep investing in relatively low-cost and unique conveyance and concealment technologies to counter our detection systems. A vivid example of this is the self-propelled semi-submersible (SPSS) vehicle—low-riding, low-profile vessels that narcotraffickers use to skim along the water line to avoid visual and radar detection. These comparatively new vessels now bring literally tons of illicit cargo to market.

Although we have seen several variants in size, payload capacity, and range, on average, an SPSS can carry approximately 7–10 tons of cocaine; it typically has a crew of 3–4, can reach speeds up to 12–15 knots, refuel at sea, and travel about 600–800 miles unrefueled. SPSS vessels are being built in the jungles in Colombia for about 1/300<sup>th</sup> of the return on investment of each individual payload. In the last 3 years, U.S. and partner nation interdiction teams caught 6 of these in 2006, caught or tracked 40 of them in 2007, and interdicted 11 vehicles at sea on their way to market in 2008. By all estimates, we anticipate roughly 60 similar vessels in 2009 will ply the waters of our shared home, with a collective cargo capacity of 330 metric tons of cocaine. This is a significant problem. And it's not just because of cocaine—if you can move 7–10 tons of cocaine via a single SPSS into the United States or into one of our neighbors, what else can you put in these? This is obviously a big concern and a complex problem, as is the observation that traffickers have expanded their presence in West Africa as a springboard to Europe, while also exploring new Middle Eastern and Asian markets. Finally, we have noted that traffickers have shifted from high seas routes to multi-staging tactics along the Central American littorals, thus attempting to evade international interdiction efforts.

This sign of expansion, both in tactics and in associative elements, is particularly troubling as it leads to an area of increasing concern, namely the nexus of illicit drug trafficking—including routes, profits, and corruptive

influences—and terrorism, both “home grown” as well as imported Islamic terrorism. In the Western Hemisphere, the illicit drug trade historically has contributed, and continues to contribute, significant financial resources to known local terrorist groups like the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionaras de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC) and the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in Peru. In August of 2008, U.S. Southern Command supported a Drug Enforcement Administration operation, in coordination with host countries, which targeted a Hizballah-connected drug trafficking organization in the Tri-Border Area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Two months later, we supported another interagency community operation that resulted in the arrests of several dozen individuals in Colombia associated with a Hizballah-connected drug trafficking and money laundering ring.

Identifying, monitoring, and dismantling the financial, logistical, and communication linkages between illicit trafficking groups and terrorist sponsors are critical to not only ensuring early indications and warnings of potential terrorist attacks directed at the United States and our cohabitants in this region, but also in generating a global appreciation and acceptance of this tremendous threat to security. As a consequence, nations which were once isolated from the illicit drug trade are now experiencing its corrosive effects. Most nations in the hemisphere are now struggling to counteract the drug trade’s destabilizing and corrupting influence. Innovative and inclusive approaches and partnerships are needed to successfully confront this dangerous threat. It will take a coordinated and multiagency and multinational strategic approach that brings to bear the strengths and resources of diverse, capable groups to stem the rising tide of this sinister and cancerous threat.

Drugs—unquestionably—are at the top of the list, not only because of their own adulterating effects, but also because they serve as a gateway for other ills to enter into and take up residence in our neighborhood. For example, a close corollary to the spread of illegal drug traffic is the alarming growth of criminal activity and violence in the region—some of which is a byproduct of the drug trade, but the rest of which is another weed by itself, allowed to grow in the fertile soil of the region’s extensive poverty and inequality. Violence is now among the five principal causes of death in several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Over the past decade, approximately 1.2 million deaths can be linked to crime in Latin America and the Caribbean. In fact, United Nations data places the annual homicide rate for the region as one of the highest in the world, with 27.5 homicides per 100,000 people—five times that of the United States and

three times that of the world average. The Caribbean registers as the highest murder rate of any of the world's subregions, with 30 per 100,000. In El Salvador, the rate is over 55—a rate approaching the level of a war zone. Recent surveys in Guatemala and El Salvador show that two-thirds of the respondents cited crime as the number one problem facing their countries, six times the number who chose poverty.

These statistics are underscored by the growing influence of gangs in several countries and of delinquent youth in general. In Central America, Haiti, and Jamaica, in addition to major cities in Brazil, gangs and criminal violence are a security priority, with some gang population estimates reaching into the hundreds of thousands. Primarily, these are urban gangs whose ranks are filled mainly by disenfranchised youth. Central American street gangs—*maras* or *pandillas*—are known for their brutal initiations and their extortion of “protection money,” or “war taxes” as the locals refer to it. These gangs do not just pose a concern in Latin America—rather, the more sophisticated groups operate regionally, and even globally, routinely crossing borders and operating inside the United States ranging from near our nation's capital in Northern Virginia to the West Coast in Southern California.

The costs associated with violence in the region are difficult to assess, to be sure, but the Inter-American Development Bank has estimated the losses from crime reach 15 percent of gross domestic product for the region. This cost estimate is not just human costs, but on the order of \$250 billion annually in economic impact. This has become a major threat and a destabilizing factor in many nations in the Western Hemisphere, as this economic drain inhibits the efforts to alleviate the underlying conditions of poverty and inequality.

In a noble attempt to ensure social integrity, several nations in the region have committed military forces to counter threats that normally would be the responsibility of the police. Although this is clearly not a preferred solution—especially from the human rights perspective—the growing trend is born out of the simple necessity to counter increasingly powerful and socially destructive gangs, drug cartels, and criminal organizations. In most cases, the military has been deployed as reinforcement for undermanned and outgunned law enforcement units.

But as public security and national defense roles and lines of authority blur, the governments of our shared home will have to be particularly vigilant. The reasons for this include: military units are not normally trained for conducting domestic security; military doctrine is not oriented toward the tasks of law enforcement; and, finally, military weapons are not

particularly suited to the task. Here in the United States, for example, the primary responsibility for helping our hemispheric partners solve these challenges resides with the Department of Justice, Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). We in the Department of Defense seek to be supportive and helpful where appropriate; and through our vital and robust military-to-military linkages throughout the region, we continue to pass along this message to our counterparts: the complexity of the challenges facing the governments of our shared home only reinforces the need for coordinated multiagency and multinational solution sets.

### **The Terrorism Threat**

Even as crime, drugs, and gangs remain a continuing concern and function as a modern day Cerberus, preventing some of our neighbors from being able to emerge into a stable and secure global environment, U.S. Southern Command also focuses on the potential threat terrorism poses to our foundation and our soil, both literally in the United States as well as figuratively in our shared home. And of course, in today's world, when someone says "terrorism," we tend to be spring-loaded to think of the terrorism of Islamic extremists. Here the use is expanded to comprise all types of terrorism, including narcoterrorism. And make no mistake—terrorist networks are active throughout our hemisphere. These networks include domestic narcoterrorists, such as the aforementioned FARC, who reside mainly in Colombia, as well as the Shining Path Maoist-style narcoterrorists of Peru. Islamic terrorist networks are also active, primarily involved in fundraising, proselytizing, and logistical support for parent organizations based in the Middle East, such as Hizballah and Hamas.

Throughout the neighborhood, particularly since 9/11, the potential for terrorist activity is a growing concern. We consider Latin America and the Caribbean to be increasingly likely bases for future terrorist threats to the United States and its neighbors. Our collective intelligence communities have demonstrated that pre-operational and operational activities have indeed occurred, as exemplified by the attempt to blow up the fuel pipelines at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York in 2007 and the leading suspects' roots in the Caribbean. In addition to "home grown" terrorism practitioners and adherents, the foreign terrorist influence can be felt as members, facilitators, and sympathizers of Islamic terrorist organizations are also present throughout the region. Hizballah appears to be the most prominent group active in the hemisphere; while much of their activity is currently linked to revenue generation, there are indications of an

operational presence and the potential for attacks. The Hizballah network in the region is suspected of supporting the terrorist attacks in Buenos Aires in 1992 and again in 1994. We suspect that a similar operational support network exists today and could be leveraged in the future.

But the outlook in this challenge area certainly is not all bad for our shared home. We have seen definite successes in mitigating Islamic terrorist activity in the region. Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina have made much progress in working together to address terrorism and illicit criminal activity through the Tri-Border Commission. A Regional Intelligence Center, located in Brazil and staffed by agents from all three countries, is nearly fully operational. In the last couple of years, there have been dynamic and successful actions taken against terrorist-linked supporters and facilitators. In January 2006, for example, Colombian authorities dismantled a complex document forgery ring with alleged ties to indigenous and Islamic terrorist organizations. More recently, Brazilian authorities arrested a suspect linked to the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hairir. Partner nations throughout the region are working together to maximize counterterrorist successes and ultimately deter, dissuade, deny, and disrupt terrorist and terrorist-associated activities in the area.

### **Colombia's Success Story**

Continuing along this positive thread as we complete our discussion of some of the larger challenges to security and stability in our shared home, there can be no more fitting summation of everything that has gone before than spending some time discussing Colombia, now one of our closest friends and partners in the region. Colombia is a strategic ally, an important partner, and a crucial anchor for security and stability in this shared home. This beautiful and diverse country is the second oldest democracy in the hemisphere, and is truly one of the great success stories.

In the late 1990s, Colombia's government was on the verge of failure. The headlines coming out of the country resembled the worst of those to come out of any war-torn country: daily reports of shootings, beheadings, kidnappings, torture, and bombings. The country was embroiled in an internal conflict that, by any objective measure, was literally tearing it apart. Drug cartels had a wide reign and violence was rampant.

Today's Colombia is a completely different story. Through its own military and interagency efforts, and a stream of modest resources and support from the United States as part of Plan Colombia which started during the Clinton administration, Colombia has battled back from the brink of chaos to a far better situation in terms of peace and stability. There

is real hope and pride in the country and its accomplishments. The Uribe administration—now leading the follow-on to Plan Colombia, the “Strategy to Strengthen Democracy and Promote Social Development,” again with support from the United States—has the country poised for true advancement. Since 2002, homicides have dropped by 40 percent, kidnappings by over 80 percent, and terrorist attacks by over 75 percent. Further, 2008 marked the lowest homicide rate in two decades.

At great effort, the government has established security police force presence in all of its 1,098 municipalities, significantly deterring crime and terrorist incidents. This increased presence has been paired with military development that has produced some significant operational successes against the FARC. None of these was more impactful, perhaps, than the July 2, 2008, daring raid that freed 3 U.S. hostages and 12 others from FARC internment. The Colombian military deserves complete credit for the operation, but it is fair to say that their bold and brilliant tactical action was the culmination of almost 10 years of effort shared by the U.S. Congress, the Colombian government, U.S. Southern Command, and other U.S. agencies responsible for capacity building of the military. The end result was one of the happiest and most satisfying moments of my military career—Marc Gonsalves, Keith Stansell, and Thomas Howes were finally free after almost five-and-a-half long years of captivity. Welcome home, gentlemen—you truly are American heroes!

We have mentioned the FARC several times now, but who and what are they, specifically? Briefly, they are a pseudo-Marxist/Leninist group that originated as a group of ideologues in the militant wing of the Colombian Communist Party in 1964. It began like many militant organizations in the region, rising up out of a popular dissatisfaction with corruption and incompetence in the central government. It eventually started moving away from its ideological base and grew to become heavily involved in the drug industry, primarily through protecting the cartels’ crops. Since then, however, out of a need for increased revenue generation, FARC has created its own drug operation and expanded into kidnapping, as previously mentioned. In short, these are bad people seeking to overthrow a legitimate government in Colombia.

But they have not succeeded. The FARC has been beaten back—key leaders at the strategic/secretariat level have been eliminated and they have seen a greater than 50 percent drop in their numbers. Their communications have been disrupted, desertions continue to accelerate, and morale is at an all-time low. The Colombians have done a magnificent job over the last 7 years of taking their nation back from this insurgency. Today, the



U.S. Southern Command

Admiral Stavridis (left) and Brigadier General Charlie Cleveland (center) welcome home Keith Stansell, Marc Gonsalves, and Thomas Howes after 1,967 days of captivity by the narcoterrorist organization FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). The Colombian military freed the Americans in 2008 in a bold operation that marked the culmination of years of capacity building of Colombian forces by the government, U.S. Southern Command, and other U.S. agencies.

democratically elected government led by President Alvaro Uribe has approval ratings in Colombia of over 85 percent. The FARC approval rating is less than 2 percent. In February 2008, approximately 6 million Colombians turned out to march in the streets of their country—it was a sea of white as virtually every person was wearing a white T-shirt adorned with the slogan *Yo soy Colombia* (I am Colombia). They carried banners with emotionally charged statements like: *No Mas FARC* (No More FARC), *No Mas Muertes* (No More Death), *No Mas Mentiras* (No More Lies), and *No Mas Secuestros* (No More Kidnappings). From its earliest origins, the FARC touted themselves and their movement as “popular insurgency”; it is now the most unpopular group in Colombia.

Highly unpopular, yes, but still not completely eradicated. They still have close to 9,000 fighters in the field, down from about 18,000. They are still kidnappers, torturers, murderers, and drug dealers. This is essentially their “business model.” The United States has been involved in a supportive way with the aforementioned Plan Colombia—a relatively modest program

that included \$5 billion over 10 years and less than 800 U.S. troops on the ground, total. This small number shows how an expert cadre can help a country address an insurgency. This is a real model of how to fight a counterinsurgency, and there is much to learn from our Colombian friends about how they have handled this saga.

As Colombian security forces and other government agencies have continued to expand their presence throughout areas that were previously dominated by illegal armed groups like the FARC, there has been an increase of reporting that highlights the atrocities committed by members of these groups. Many of the charges have centered on forced recruiting of minors and the abuses they have suffered at the hands of their illegal armed “commanders.” Additionally, internally displaced persons in Colombia have become a source of reporting the human rights abuses, as the legal and security processes required to return them to their homes have been established and enacted by the Colombian government.

Focusing the human rights lens on itself as well, the government of Colombia continually seeks to improve its own human rights record. Most recently, the government dismissed 27 Colombian Army commissioned and noncommissioned officers—to include three generals—for failure to comply with established human rights procedures. The dismissal of security forces members involved in human rights violations has been historic and asserts Colombia’s firm intention to confront and correct human rights violations. The government continues to aggressively pursue illegal armed group leaders who have perpetrated human rights crimes against Colombian citizens, as well as investigating inside its own military. This continues to have resounding effects throughout the armed forces, even heavily influencing the retirement of a former army commander.

In addition to investigation and punishment of violations, the government has taken swift action on the prevention and policy side of the equation. The Comprehensive Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Policy of the Ministry of National Defense is the framework document that provides the guidelines, sets the aims, and establishes the programs which the Armed Forces and the National Police are required to obey. The government’s aim is to institute a clear structure of rules and regulations that becomes an integral part of all activities of the national security forces and is closely monitored in its applications. All state forces are required to receive mandatory human rights training. Although still in relative nascence, these policies and programs have produced some dramatic reductions in violence since they have been instituted. For example, according to the Colombian Ministry of Defense and the American

Embassy in Bogota reports, homicides have decreased by 40 percent since 2002—the lowest point in 20 years; homicides of mayors, ex-mayors, and councilors have been reduced by 83 percent; kidnappings have declined by 76 percent; and the victims of massacres have been reduced by 81 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Rounding out Colombia's success story, the government's and military's efforts against the FARC have also significantly impacted the drug cartels, as Colombia has extradited over 700 drug traffickers to the United States. And although cocaine production is still a critical concern, interdiction and seizures of cocaine headed to the United States, other neighbors in the region, and destinations abroad have more than doubled over the last 10 years. This increase indicates improved state control, successful governmental strategies, and overall better interagency and international coordination and collaboration. All this has directly contributed to the fastest sustained economic growth in a decade: greater than 5 percent annually for the past 3 years. It has also encouraged a real sense of positive momentum for the entire country. These hard-fought successes, however, need continued support and steadfast effort from the Colombian government in order to fully win the peace—a permanent and lasting peace—for their country.

I highly encourage all serious students of the region to visit and experience firsthand the tremendous overall improvements and strides this vibrant and trusted neighbor to the south has made. Gain a sense from the people that “this is the moment” for Colombia. This is the time for Colombia and the other residents of our shared home to make the final push to win true peace for their country—a peace that will be of great benefit to all who reside in this neighborhood. For as Colombia wins its peace, narcoterrorists will lose the capacity to grow, process, and transport illicit drugs; other forms of terrorism will lose a vital source of support and funding; U.S. and other neighbors' lives and resources will be saved; and, ultimately, the overall security and stability of our shared home will increase.

## **A Marketplace of Ideas**

Let me close by discussing some of the political challenges in the region. Really, these are challenges of ideas—differences of opinion on issues, values, perspectives, and philosophy. We are fortunate as a hemisphere to have as our neighbors, as cohabitants of our shared home, democracies virtually all of whom share similar principles with us. Unfortunately, the realities of poverty, income inequality, and security challenges all contribute to a growing but frustrated expectation from the people for dramatic and rapid change. As evidence of this, a recent survey conducted

by AmericasBarometer in the region underscores the current fragility of democracy: as recently as 2006, greater than 25 percent of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean would justify a military coup in the case of high inflation, and more than 20 percent would justify one in the case of high unemployment rates. Granted, these percentages tend to be higher among countries recovering from recent conflict and instability; nevertheless, with the present regional and global economic slowdown, this trend might only continue, thereby leading to further autocratic problems to the detriment of democracy in the hemisphere.

Taking advantage of this arable soil and then adding in an abundance of fertilizer in the form of rhetoric, we have seen instances in some countries where political “change agents” have successfully sowed the seeds of radical change, using promises of achieving sweeping results through unorthodox and unproven economic and political policies. There are external actors trying to exert influence in our shared home, as well. Some wish to do us and our friends and allies harm, while others merely seek to develop uniquely beneficial relationships based on trade and access to new markets and additional natural resources.

In summary, I mention all this in the following context: it is often said that we, the United States, are in a “war of ideas” in the world today. I would agree with the notion that we are in a war of ideas with radical terrorists and networks like al Qaeda. In our own neighborhood, however, we are not in a war of ideas—rather, we are in a “competitive marketplace,” a marketplace amidst all the linkages and challenges previously described where the primary commodity traded is ideas. As such, it is incumbent upon us in the United States to demonstrate that our ideas (e.g., personal liberty, electoral democracy, human rights, rule of law, fair and open markets, and political transparency) are the right ones that help a society move forward in a positive way. We need to continue to improve our “acceptance rating” and our “market share.” Again, we live and work in a competitive environment, so a great deal of what we need to do as a nation in this region is in the vein of contending with a variety of alternative models, some of which are dramatically different.

To compete in this marketplace, we engage proactively in the region and counter anti-U.S. messaging with persistent engagement and demonstrations of goodwill, competence, and professionalism. The U.S. Government, through the interagency community, assists our partner nations by addressing the underlying conditions of poverty and inequality; concurrently, we at U.S. Southern Command help build security relationships and create innovative security initiatives with cooperative partners

to confront transnational and multinational security threats. In some cases, we have the complex task of maintaining working relationships with a nation's security force in the face of strained or even antagonistic political leadership and attempts to spread anti-U.S. views and influence. This situation exacerbates the already difficult mission of achieving regional cooperation to address ever-changing and insidious transnational and multinational challenges.

Taken together, all this represents a formidable list of challenges, priorities, and potential areas for cooperation. And we still have not addressed additional specific challenge areas or focuses of concern like U.S.-Cuba relations, mass migration, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and natural disasters; but we will in the proceeding chapters. Clearly, today's situation requires a broader understanding of all aspects of our national engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean. And this broader view brings a better focus upon all our efforts in the region.

Thus far, looking south through the lens at U.S. Southern Command, we have perhaps only been witnessing the tip of the iceberg; but as the coming pages will illustrate, this broader lens has allowed us to start seeing and examining the capabilities of the real mass of the iceberg, the heretofore submerged portion. I am referring, of course, to the enormous hard work of the various agencies and departments of the U.S. Government—the interagency community—as well as those of our partner nations, our neighbors in this shared home. Going still deeper, this mass also encompasses what we truly think is a real untapped and vast potential: namely, the private sector. The coming chapters will highlight the capacity and the abilities of these various elements, as well as offering insight into how they can be brought together, synergistically, in innovative ways with creative and cooperative partnerships. The task before us, then, is to explore how we at U.S. Southern Command confront the myriad complex security challenges in this region and bring security, stability, and ultimately prosperity to the Americas, a home that we share together.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Article 1, "Inter-American Democratic Charter," available at: <[http://www.oas.org/charter/docs/resolution1\\_en\\_p4.htm](http://www.oas.org/charter/docs/resolution1_en_p4.htm)>.

<sup>2</sup> American Embassy Bogota, Scen setter Cable (U) DTG 13163Z NOV08 and Colombian National Defense Ministry, "Achievements of the Democratic Security Plan," February 2009.