

Introduction

If I have a single theme for you throughout the coming pages, it is that, collectively, we in the United States need to spend more time with, and pay more attention to, the vitally important region to our south—I hope to convince you of that as we go along. I also hope to persuade you how truly erroneous and disrespectful it is to refer to Latin America and the Caribbean as “America’s backyard.” This could not be further from the truth. It is my strongest conviction that this region, the Americas, is *our shared home*. It is a home containing a vast and diverse family with a shared stake in a common future. We, the United States, must also strive to ensure that our fellow residents recognize and believe that we are truly in this together; we want them to see the United States as the partner of choice in a cooperative approach to our shared destiny of a safe, peaceful, flourishing, and egalitarian home.

Traveling throughout the Caribbean and Latin America for 3 years as Commander of U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), I’ve had the wonderful opportunity and privilege to experience all that this region has to offer. During my travels, I’ve been honored to meet with Presidents, prime ministers, defense officials, dignitaries, U.S. Ambassadors, and many others who are fully committed to the security, stability, and prosperity of the people they represent. As a student of the rich culture and heritage that define this hemisphere, I’ve walked among the ancient ruins of Machu Picchu in Peru, felt the solemn grandeur of sacred cathedrals in Colombia, and marveled at the sheer force of human will as I watched ships big and small traverse the wondrous Panama Canal. I’ve made it a point along the way to enjoy the traditional cuisine and wine produced in places like Buenos Aires, Santiago, Brasilia, and everywhere else I’ve visited in the region. I’ve seen grandiose buildings dating back to the age of the conquistadors and admired monuments of national pride in Managua, Guatemala City, Tegucigalpa, and San Salvador. I’ve made it a priority to not only learn but to converse in the principal languages of the region, something I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to do.

Again, wherever I travel, with whomever I meet, I convey this important point: The Americas is a home we all share. The United States has so much in common already with our partners throughout the region; as our demography shifts and our Hispanic population blooms,

we find increasingly that we share common interests, values, and goals, and are profoundly dependent upon each other in many ways. The geographic, cultural, economic, political, and historical linkages that tie all of the nations of the Americas together are numerous and compelling. While each of us celebrates our uniqueness and diversity across the hemisphere, these tremendous linkages and natural alignments bring us closer together with each passing year. As our hemisphere “virtually” shrinks, each of our nations—working together—becomes more important in facing the challenges posed by this new century.

I am passionate about the ties we share in this hemisphere. At U.S. Southern Command, we dedicate a good portion of our time studying these connections, and firmly believe that the region is inextricably linked to the economic, political, cultural, and security fabric of the United States. Understanding each other helps us all make the best use of our collective and distinctive implements of national power in order to better extend peace and prosperity throughout the entire region. Perhaps the most important connection we share is that of respect for democracy, freedom, justice, human dignity, human rights, and human values. We are fortunate that all but one nation in the region are led by a democratically-elected government.

Throughout the hemisphere, among both the leaders *and* the people of these vibrant and diverse democracies, there is also a common understanding and recognition that the regional challenges to security, stability, and prosperity are threats to us all. The scourges of illegal drugs, poverty, and violent criminal gangs are transnational and thus cannot be countered by any one nation alone. Their eradication requires cooperative solutions; it requires security forces, international agencies, and humanitarian assistance groups throughout the region to band together to establish a *true* Partnership for the Americas. Fortunately, many of the nations of this community have courageous leaders at the helm to navigate this epic journey, as well as some well-developed structures in place to discuss these threats and to fashion regional synergistic strategies to counter them.

As evinced by the already strong linkages shared within the hemisphere, we believe that overcoming the region’s challenges to security and prosperity will unlock the real promise of the Americas: a secure, prosperous, and democratic hemisphere that works together to face threats to peace and stability.

The word *promise* has two appropriate meanings for how U.S. Southern Command approaches its role in the region to achieve our mutual view of the future for this hemisphere. On one hand, a promise is a commitment honestly undertaken and executed by two or more parties. In this case,

Southern Command is committed to lasting and beneficial partnerships with the countries in the region. Encouraging, cultivating, and nurturing regional partnerships have been cornerstones of our strategy for many years and part of a formal strategic objective for the last 4 years. Our promise entails fulfilling the commitment of being a good partner and pursuing better cooperative security arrangements in order to confront together the tough challenges that face us now and into the future.

Promise can also mean *potential*—the potential to do something foundational and fundamental; the potential to be something special and extraordinary. We believe that through lasting partnerships, we can help achieve the security conditions necessary to create the enduring basis for prosperity and healthy democratic institutions in this important region. This is the promise of a hemisphere of shared trade, technology, commerce, science, and culture; a home free of gangs, drugs, human trafficking, money laundering, and terrorism. It is the promise of all of us together finding cooperative solutions to demanding security challenges. No one nation is as strong as all of us working together.

The goal of U.S. Southern Command is simple: we will work with our partners to help unlock this “Promise of the Americas.” Everyday we strive to be engaged in a positive way with as many of our regional security partners as possible, and in doing so, enhance the security of the United States while simultaneously enhancing their own as well. The command strives to fulfill the promise of this region by building partner capacity and enabling partner nations to protect their sovereignty and provide for the security and well-being of their citizens. Even as we focus on security cooperation, our partners at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) focus on development and our partners at the State Department focus on diplomacy.

Let me share a few examples of these partnerships and their benefits:

- During the summer of 2007, the hospital ship USNS *Comfort* visited 12 countries in the region on a humanitarian assistance training mission. Working closely with various Ministries of Health and international charitable organizations, the 800-person crew performed nearly 400,000 patient treatments over a 4-month period. The *Comfort* mission offers a model for cooperation and partnerships across the Americas, and she returned in 2009 and again in 2010 responding to the Haitian earthquake. In embarking various nongovernmental organizations on *Comfort*—such as Project Hope and Operation Smile—we have only just begun to tap into

the enormous resources and synergies of partnering with the private sector and nonprofit ventures.

- Following the devastating effects of a major earthquake in Pisco, Peru, numerous countries in the region responded immediately to alleviate the suffering of residents there.
- Regional and international relief efforts were again mobilized and deployed to Belize and Nicaragua in the aftermath of Category 5 hurricanes. Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega personally thanked U.S. Soldiers for responding in his country's time of need.
- Working with partners throughout the region, nearly 730 tons of cocaine were interdicted in the Caribbean and Pacific in 2006–2009.
- The Panama Canal is often referred to as “the economic heartbeat” of the Americas, because of its crucial role in the economic well-being of the hemisphere. In both 2007 and 2008, more than 20 nations sent naval forces to participate in Panamax, making it the largest joint maritime security exercise in the world. We had even more outstanding participation and representation in Panamax 2009.

I'm encouraged by these and the many other examples of cooperative efforts in the region. Through these efforts, we are building partnerships in time of peace that will endure in time of trial.

Another example of a durable and vital partnership that has proven essential to the success of the command and engagement in our shared home has been the one that USSOUTHCOM shares with its own physical home, the wonderful city of Miami, Florida. In September of 2009, we celebrated the 13th anniversary of our move to South Florida. Thinking about our indispensable bonds with the city, what stands out most in my mind is the connection to this community that has welcomed and embraced the men, women, and families of Southern Command. Each day as I drive through the gate and enter the command compound and see our new headquarters buildings under construction, I also see the prospect of continued partnership with this important and vibrant society for many years to come.

Having been born in West Palm Beach, I personally love being here in South Florida. Miami is truly the “Magic City” and is utterly unique. It is fast-changing and fast-paced. It is culturally diverse, energetic, and exciting. And it is constantly transforming and reinventing itself, undergoing a continual and obvious metamorphosis that we see every day in Miami's skyline, in the continuous flux of the population and cultural influences,

and in the business opportunities that are ever-evolving and growing. This mutable character is one of Miami's greatest strengths and each day it reveals even more promise for the future.

When U.S. Southern Command relocated from Panama, Miami's strategic location and access to the region were the deciding factors that brought us here. As a major transportation hub for the Americas, the Miami location of the headquarters has increased staff access to partner nation counterparts. Our location has contributed to strengthened military-to-military relations across the region. This is not just because it is easier for *us* to get to the *region*, but also because it is easier for our *partners* to visit *us*.

Miami also offers the opportunity for cultural immersion in the region in a way no other city could. It really is the best classroom for the cultural understanding we need to be good partners in the Americas: there are expatriate communities from every country in the hemisphere; major Spanish-language radio, television, and newspapers in Miami are recognized for their premier coverage of the Americas; and, Miami is home to numerous academic centers focused on the hemisphere. This has afforded Southern Command the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue with many regional experts, gaining a broader perspective and understanding of the region. Miami is also the first home (or a second or third home) for many Latin American and Caribbean or Hispanic American musicians and artists, all of whom add to the richness not only of this community but of the entire country.

Finally, Miami is the "Gateway to the Americas" for more than just business interests and the rich cultural influences of the region. Numerous nongovernmental and governmental organizations focused on Latin America and the Caribbean have a strong presence in Miami. U.S. Southern Command has capitalized on their presence by organizing to integrate and synchronize activities and resources within the region. This interagency group has become the seed for a major transformation of the command into a new vision of integration, with over 20 interagency partners represented.

In short, Miami is a dynamic, effervescent, and transformational city that represents new promises every day; it has been the optimal location for U.S. Southern Command to lead the way in evolutionary and innovative approaches to interaction with Latin America and the Caribbean. We've had a fruitful partnership thus far and it will inevitably continue to grow and expand in new directions, exploring new connections with our community every day. A magic city indeed—especially for U.S. Southern Command.

Allow me to leave you with this final introductory thought: We are living in an age of rapid change facilitated by advancing technologies and increasingly networked systems, societies, and economies. In order for security agencies to be successful in this complex environment, those organizations must be flexible, open, and forward-thinking. As globalization deepens and threats emerge and evolve, security organizations will need to continue fostering and building relationships with willing and capable partners to face transnational and multinational challenges. The security of the United States and that of our partners depends largely on our capacity to leverage joint, international, interagency, and public-private cooperation, all reinforced by focused messaging and strategic communication.

Despite all the references to change, evolution, transformation, and the like, our core mission at U.S. Southern Command has been left unchanged—we remain a military organization conducting military operations and promoting security cooperation in Central America, the Caribbean, and South America in order to achieve U.S. strategic objectives.

The ensuing pages will attempt to describe the characteristics, beauty, and vastness of the diverse region to our south. I will explore the tremendous linkages that we share with Latin America and the Caribbean—important geographic, cultural, economic, and geopolitical linkages. I will then also outline some difficult underlying conditions faced by the region—led by poverty and unequal wealth distribution—and how they contribute to specific challenges such as crime, violence, and illicit trafficking of drugs, people, and weapons. Finally, I will spend the majority of this work describing some innovative approaches and key initiatives USSOUTHCOM has underway to fulfill our mission more effectively and detail our efforts to modify our organization to meet current and future security demands. I will showcase some of the positive results and real success stories that we—both specifically at USSOUTHCOM and as the region as a whole—are seeing from the innovative approaches and initiatives in progress.

We are all in this together. The fortunes of those who call the Americas home will rise and fall together. We in the United States want to contribute as appropriate and necessary to the well-being of our home. There are a wide variety of mechanisms available, ranging from intelligence and information-sharing, to mutually beneficial exchanges of trainers, to transfers of equipment and technology. Our message is truly a message for the entire region: the United States is a caring friend and partner—we genuinely welcome the opportunity to discuss ways we can cooperate on regional security concerns.

At U.S. Southern Command we are ready to discuss issues and craft solutions to challenges and threats to our shared security, stability, and prosperity. Our pledge is to work with joint, combined, multiagency, multinational, nongovernmental, and private sector partners to achieve our collective goals in the region. In support of these, we employ a theater security cooperation strategy that calls for building host nation security capabilities. Over time, these capabilities will ensure our partner nations have the means to control their borders and protect their citizens, while also deepening the roots of good governance. We also envision our partners being able to work together in a collective environment so they can counter emerging and adapting threats. To this end, most of our military-to-military engagement is in the form of training and education programs, joint exercises, peacekeeping, and other partnership programs.

Latin America and the Caribbean are not “America’s backyard”—that is an expression that is wrong in every dimension. The Americas is a home that we share together; and in this home, we must all work together to help each other face the security challenges of this turbulent but ultimately promising 21st century.

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