

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL LAURA J. RICHARDSON
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SOUTHERN COMMAND
BEFORE THE 118TH CONGRESS
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
14 MARCH 2024



Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker, and distinguished committee members, United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) celebrated its 60th anniversary this past year. Since 1963, USSOUTHCOM, working alongside our Allies and partners, has advanced security and stability throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. For 60 years, the brave men and women of USSOUTHCOM have steadfastly devoted themselves to a cause greater than their own – an *Enduring Promise* to the region – that in the face of tyranny, corruption, pandemic, and natural disasters, the United States of America will always stand beside those who seek and promote peace, prosperity, and the democratic ideals upon which they flourish.

Today, democracy and democratic values are under attack globally. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Russia are strategic competitors who operate without regard for international law or norms. They condone and perpetrate corruption, disinformation campaigns, cybercrime, and human rights abuses that undermine the existing democratic political processes of fragile democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean and bolster the authoritarian rule of regimes in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

Meanwhile, Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) fuel violence and corruption throughout the region, enriching themselves while undermining democracy and co-opting the legitimate governance functions of our partners. They traffic drugs, weapons, persons, wildlife, and a range of illicit items, leaving citizen and environmental insecurity, death, and instability in their wake. TCOs bear direct responsibility for the mass quantities of drugs that continue to pose a threat to American lives.ⁱ

In response, and as the 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS) outlines, we embrace the opportunity to expand our partnerships and bolster “economic resilience, democratic stability, and citizen security” throughout the region.ⁱⁱ *Integrated Deterrence* means leveraging all

instruments of national power – diplomacy, information, military, and economics – and doing so in concert with Allies, partners, non-governmental organizations, academia, and the private sector. It’s what I call *Team Democracy*. Together, we must step forward and act with a greater sense of urgency to outcompete our adversaries by providing alternatives to PRC-centric solutions. We must remain the region’s most trusted defense and security partner. Our partners need our help, and as one senior leader in the region recently told me, “When you need a rope to grab, you aren’t necessarily looking to see who threw it.” *We* must be the ones throwing the rope, not our Strategic Competitors.

The NSS recognizes the direct link between this region’s prosperity and security to that of our own.ⁱⁱⁱ Over my two-plus years in command, I have made it my priority to meet our partners where they are - to hear and understand firsthand the issues and challenges they face. I’ve learned that presence *absolutely* matters. If we want to win, we must be on the field. USSOUTHCOM’s presence in the region builds the capacity of our partners, helps counter our adversaries’ malign intent, and contributes to our homeland defense. The many challenges this hemisphere faces are a *Call to Action*.

USSOUTHCOM’s strategy focuses on three lines of effort: *Strengthening Partnerships*, *Countering Threats*, and *Building our Team*. We remain committed to coordinating, collaborating, and synchronizing with our Allies, partners, U.S. Interagency, and Non-Federal Entities to outcompete our Strategic Competitors, defeat the pervasive threats, and overcome the challenges within the Western Hemisphere.

Expanding Challenges in the Region

Strategic Competition with the People's Republic of China

The United States and the PRC are engaged in geopolitical competition based on opposing views of the value of the international rules-based order. The PRC, through the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), seeks to supplant the United States as the world's leading economic and military power.

The PRC understands the importance of economics and the intertwined role of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in achieving its *Chinese Dream* – the PRC reclamation of China's central role in world affairs. In Latin America and the Caribbean, USSOUTHCOM recognizes the opportunity to collaborate with our partners, build their capacity, and increase their resiliency to the pervasive challenges and threats they face. Conversely, the PRC is exploiting a fragile security environment and taking advantage of the region's need for economic investment to gain influence and advance its malign agenda. The PRC knows that economic power is a prerequisite for global military power and it is imperative that we view the PRC's economic activities, particularly in the Americas, as connected to their global political and military desires.

With a population of 1.4 billion people, the PRC must look beyond their shores for the resources to sustain both its large populace and consolidation of power at home. Latin America and the Caribbean offer such resources. The PRC is laying claim to the abundant food, water, and critical earth minerals found in the Western Hemisphere. This region is home to 31 percent of the planet's fresh-water resources and by 2028 will account for 25 percent of global agriculture and fisheries exports.^{iv v} The PRC has not extended itself into the Western

Hemisphere to offer win-win, high-quality investment - they have come to extract, and they intend to gain access and influence by employing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a “natural extension of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.”^{vi vii}

Twenty-two of the 31 countries in the SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR) are now signatories to the BRI, which the PRC portrays as expanding economic, financial, and trade opportunities. The PRC has now surpassed the United States as South America’s top trading partner and is Central America’s second-largest trading partner.^{viii} In 2002, PRC trade with Latin America and the Caribbean was just \$18 million; in 2022 it ballooned to \$450 billion. That number is expected to increase to \$700 billion by 2035.^{ix}

But it’s not just access to resources that the PRC seeks with its investments; it’s the furtherance of political and military objectives to increase isolation of Taiwan. Globally, only 12 countries recognize Taiwan, seven of which are in my AOR. PRC pressure to abandon existing recognition is mounting and is often a precondition for investment. Last year, Honduras, home to Joint Task Force-Bravo, cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan and signed onto the BRI.

The PRC is playing the “long game” with its development of dual-use sites and facilities throughout the region. The PRC messages its investments as peaceful, but in fact, many serve as points of future multi-domain access for the PLA and strategic naval chokepoints. These investments include critical infrastructure such as deep-water ports, cyber facilities, and space facilities. In Panama, PRC-controlled State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) continue to bid on projects related to the Panama Canal – a global strategic chokepoint. Meanwhile, in Argentina, another SOE is attempting to secure the rights to build dual-use maritime installations, which would support sustainment and power projection in proximity to the Strait of Magellan, the Drake Passage, and Antarctica. This would dramatically improve the PRC’s ability to access the

Antarctic region and its fisheries and impact U.S. strategic mobility to an area reserved for peace and science.^x

The PRC blueprint for development and subsequent dual-use of deep-water ports elsewhere in the world is already a matter of public record.^{xi xii} Here in the Western Hemisphere, a Chinese SOE will be the first with majority ownership and control of a country's port infrastructure - the future \$3.6 billion mega-port in Chancay, Peru. The port will serve as a PRC-proclaimed "gateway from South America to Asia."^{xiii}

To shape positive perceptions of both the PRC and the CCP, Beijing pours billions of dollars into foreign information operations.^{xiv} Their approach includes information manipulation using "propaganda and censorship, promoting digital authoritarianism, exploiting international organizations and bilateral partnerships, pairing cooptation and pressure, and exercising control of Chinese-language media."^{xv} A recent Department of State special report on the PRC notes, "the PRC suppresses critical information that contradicts its desired narratives on issues such as Taiwan, its human rights practices, the South China Sea, its domestic economy, and international economic engagement."^{xvi}

Partnering with the PRC and agreeing to the terms of their funded projects leaves some of our partners saddled with debt, exorbitant interest rates, and poorly constructed infrastructure that worsens already dire environmental crises, as is the case with the hydro-power station at the Coca Codo Dam in Ecuador. Some geologists argue that the dam has "so disrupted the Coca River's natural flow and accumulation of sediments" that it accelerated an erosion process that would normally take thousands of years into five.^{xvii}

The PRC's resource extraction is not limited to land. Each year, the PRC subsidizes a distant water fishing fleet of about 200 to 600 vessels operating near the Galapagos and other coastal nations' Exclusive Economic Zones in South America, often engaging in illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing practices. This fleet often exhibits concerning fishing behavior, with some vessels disabling AIS transponders. Illegal fishing in the western hemisphere alone comes at a cost of approximately \$2.7 billion annually in lost revenue.^{xviii xix xx} But it's not just financial cost at play - it's opportunity cost. Our partners' constrained maritime resources are being diverted away from fully engaging in other critical missions to take a leading role in combating these environmental and economic crimes.

The PRC has also taken a keen interest in expanding its access and control of the space domain, viewing it as the "ultimate high ground."^{xxi} There are at least 10 PRC-linked space facilities across five countries in the region, the most PRC space-enabling infrastructure outside mainland China. Despite its public stance against the weaponization of space, the PLA continues to invest and improve its military space capabilities, including a deep space station in Argentina, providing the PLA with global space tracking and surveillance capabilities. These space-based capabilities could translate into global military capabilities "that could support the monitoring, tracking, and targeting of our forces" and affect "conventional and nuclear targeting, ground-air-sea operations, precision conventional strike capacities, and missile defense."^{xxii xxiii}

As Latin American and Caribbean governments and their telecommunication industries seek faster, cheaper, and more inclusive communication coverage, PRC SOEs or associated entities, such as *Huawei* and *ZTE*, penetrate virtually every country through a mixture of funding, equipping, or servicing core and radio access networks. Some partners have privately told us about 'buyer's remorse' for allowing *Huawei* to set up 5G networks in their countries due

to increased potential for PRC exploitation. *Huawei* has built and continues to build a robust network of 2G, 3G, 4G, and 5G mobile and internet infrastructure in the region. The company has engaged with our partners for the last 15 years and invests significantly across 24 nations in the AOR.

The PRC's control over *Huawei*, and its funding related to the deployment of telecommunication networks, threatens our partners' national assets, sovereignty, and freedoms.^{xxiv} *Huawei's* 5G infrastructure could contain backdoors that allow the Chinese government to collect and centralize massive quantities of data and give Beijing the necessary access to attack communications networks and public utilities. Ultimately, this could provide the PRC with unrestricted access to information and other capabilities that can be used for espionage, as coercive levers to gain unfair advantage, and to exert malign influence to achieve its goals.

Huawei routinely violates local laws in countries where it operates. The U.S. Justice Department has obtained an indictment against *Huawei* charging fraud, money laundering, violating U.S. sanctions against Iran, and stealing trade secrets from its U.S. business partner, T-Mobile. *Huawei* was linked to the theft of intellectual property from Cisco, and U.S. startup CNEX sued *Huawei* and its deputy chairman alleging conspiracy to steal trade secrets. *Huawei's* opaque operational nature and “mysterious ownership structure, contribute to concerns about the company’s operations and intentions.”^{xxv} As Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Wray has publicly stated, the PRC is the greatest espionage threat that democracy has ever faced.^{xxvi} The scale of its informational theft is unprecedented.^{xxvii}

Russia as an Acute Threat

It has been two years since Russia's unprovoked and unlawful invasion of Ukraine. Vladimir Putin's assault has "disrupted global supply chains, agricultural production, and energy resources," which has slowed Latin America and the Caribbean's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.^{xxviii} Putin's authoritarian hand serves as a model for and bolsters the authoritarian regimes of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

Within the AOR, Russia continues its attempts to frustrate United States goals and interests, undermining democratic institutions and the rule of law, and props up problematic regimes in exchange for strategic access and resources.^{xxix} Moscow is working hard to disrupt relations between the United States and our partners to extoll the virtues of a multipolar world.^{xxx} To do so, Russia employs a host of malign activities within the gray zone, including malicious cyber activities, disinformation campaigns, and periodic high-level visits and military force projection.^{xxxi xxxii}

Moscow and affiliated cybercriminal groups seek to destabilize democracies by targeting public institutions and sensitive government frameworks, disrupting critical infrastructure, and stealing information.^{xxxiii} Recently, a Partner Nation fell victim to such an attack which targeted dozens of institutions, including a key ministry.

Russian disinformation in the region is increasing in scope since Russia invaded Ukraine.^{xxxiv} The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, think tanks, and the oligarchy guide the narratives employed by propagandists at state-controlled and regional media providers such as *Actualidad RT*, *Sputnik Mundo*, and *Telesur*. These media outlets spread anti-U.S. messaging across traditional and social media platforms to their millions of followers in

Latin America and around the world.^{xxxv} Their false media narratives commonly blame the United States for creating a global food crisis and supporting Nazism in Ukraine, while portraying the United States as a greedy and imperialist state concerned with maximum extraction of the continent's resources.^{xxxvi}

At the same time, Russia has been leveraging its diplomats and periodic military force projection to maintain and gain regional influence. Last April, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Brazil, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. The trip's purpose was to increase cooperation with the countries it views as critical to creating a multipolar world where Russia, China, and others act as a counterbalance to the United States.^{xxxvii} Lavrov again visited Brazil, Cuba, and Venezuela at the end of February 2024. In January 2023, the Russian frigate Admiral Gorshkov tested its strike capabilities in the Western Atlantic Ocean, running a computer simulation on hypersonic missiles.^{xxxviii} Then, in July, the Russian Navy training ship *Perekop* docked in Cuba for three days before making stops in Nicaragua and Venezuela.^{xxxix} Russian presence aims to prop up dictatorial regimes who share a common worldview, while expanding authoritarian influence in the Western Hemisphere.

Transnational Criminal Organizations

TCOs remain the primary obstacle to lasting security and stability. Moreover, TCOs imperil the security of the American people and the values at the heart of this hemisphere's democracies. USSOUTHCOM estimates that approximately 200 TCOs and four terrorist groups are operating in the region, including Mexican cartels such as the *Jalisco New Generation Cartel* and the *Sinaloa Cartel*. Through a combination of corruption and intimidation, and outright attacks on government officials and institutions, TCOs undermine the rule of law and disrupt legitimate governmental functions.

The National Liberation Army (ELN), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army (FARC-EP), FARC-Segunda Marquetalia (FARC-SM), and Shining Path (SL) are designated terrorist organizations that use criminal activities to fill their coffers. TCOs traffic in weapons, drugs, persons, wildlife, gold and minerals, commodities, and counterfeit goods, resulting in earnings of approximately \$330 billion annually, five times the combined military budgets of every nation in Latin America and the Caribbean. Consequently, TCOs are often better funded, equipped, and manned than the security forces trying to fight them. They are brutal and vicious, setting fire to public transportation, murdering innocent civilians, and exerting control over significant swaths of urban and rural territories. In response, regional militaries are increasingly called on to respond to this threat, further eroding democratic norms, which in turn opens space that the PRC and Russia can exploit.

Mexican criminal groups like the *Sinaloa Cartel* and *Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación* work with primarily PRC-based companies and brokers to source fentanyl, fentanyl precursors, and pre-precursors, which are then mixed into both cocaine and counterfeit prescription medications and trafficked into the United States, Mexico, Central America, and South America.^{xl} The result is the deadliest drug epidemic our country has ever faced and an ongoing economic crisis throughout our neighborhoods. TCOs are killing hundreds of thousands of Americans and draining valuable resources from struggling communities and states.^{xli xlii}

Iran

Iran seeks to increase its ideological influence in Latin America with the support of terrorist organizations such as Hizballah.^{xliii} Using Spanish-language media, social networks, and satellites, Iran’s National Ministry of Intelligence and Security is engaging in large-scale psychological warfare to promote its interests in attacking the West and Latin America.^{xliv}

Moreover, “Iran has moved from categorizing and tracking targets for possible attacks...to launching plans, including the attempted assassination of Israeli businessmen in Colombia.”^{xlv} Hizballah continues to leverage the Shi’a diaspora in Latin America to disrupt Western objectives and surveil against enemies of the Iranian regime, to include targets with Jewish heritage.

Additionally, this past year Iran completed a naval deployment that circumnavigated the globe and included a port call in Brazil. Iran also delivered coastal defense missile patrol boats to Venezuela.

Regional Humanitarian Crises

Irregular Migration. TCO-driven violence, economic desperation, political instability, and climate change, are just a few of the cross-cutting challenges that are driving unprecedented levels of irregular migration throughout the region. A significant number of these migrants are from Venezuela, Ecuador, and Haiti, all home to both security and interconnected economic challenges that drive migration. Additionally, a growing number of Chinese migrants are moving through the AOR to the United States. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) encountered approximately 24,314 Chinese migrants along the Southwest Border, a 10-fold increase of migration from the previous fiscal year.

Panama’s Darien Region is a likely route to the north for those whose travel originates in South America. Among the dense jungle, mountains, and swamps, TCOs, such as the *Gulf Clan* and *Tren de Aragua*, facilitate smuggling operations, exploiting the most vulnerable. Migrants are subjected to extortion, robbery, sexual violence, wild animals, and disease, among so many other dangers. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands are willing to brave these conditions, and

the number of people passing through the Darien has more than doubled to 505,674 from FY 2022 to FY 2023.

Haiti. Nowhere is more indicative of the destabilizing effect of criminal groups than Haiti, where gang violence has increased, overwhelming the capacity of the Haitian National Police. Gangs recently coordinated attacks, control an estimated eighty percent of Port-au-Prince and have a significant presence beyond it, dictating many aspects of daily life under their control, including the ability to move freely, seek medical assistance, or attend school.^{xlvi} United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres recently cited a report that recorded the brutality of these gangs, with 3,758 intentional killings between October 2022 and September 2023.^{xlvii xlviii}

Exposure to severe disease, lack of food, potable water, and sanitation services are just a few of the heartbreaking challenges resulting in the internal displacement of 200,000 Haitians.^{xlix} Moreover, Haiti's geographic location leaves 96 percent of its citizens on the precipice of disaster – from earthquakes and hurricanes to flooding and mudslides.¹ Government agencies lack the capacity and capability to mitigate and then subsequently respond to frequent emergencies effectively. Political instability, unprecedented levels of violence, and tragic poverty have resulted in increased irregular migration, with more than 70,000 Haitians encountered at the United States Southwest Border in FY 2023.

USSOUTHCOM continues to support U.S. Government efforts promoting deployment of a United Nations Security Council-authorized Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission in Haiti. The MSS mission is to augment and build the capacity of the Haitian National Police to maintain security and counter gangs.

Nicaragua. The Ortega regime maintains an iron grip upon Nicaragua’s governmental institutions and its people as it continues to engage in repressive attacks on human rights, fundamental freedoms, and civil society.^{li} Aligned in shared values and interests, Nicaragua and the PRC remain engaged in negotiations on a free trade agreement with PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi.^{lii} Additionally, the Ortega Regime openly supports Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine and was the sole Latin American country to participate in 2022’s Russian Vostok war games.^{liii}

Cuba. Food, medicine, fuel, electricity, and political freedom remain scarce in Cuba. President Miguel Diaz-Canel and his government continue to repress and disproportionately punish all forms of public dissent. According to reports, during the past two years, more than 400,000 Cubans have fled the island amid an economic crisis.^{liv} Conditions on the island have become so difficult that Russian exploiters have even lured Cuban citizens to join the Russian military in its war against Ukraine.^{lv}

Both the PRC and Russia are taking advantage of the existing conditions within Cuba to deepen cooperation across all elements of national power, with President Diaz-Canel commenting during last summer’s BRICS Summit in South Africa that Cuban-Chinese relations were at an all-time high.^{lvi} On 6 November, President Xi Jinping met with Cuban Vice Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz in Beijing, affirming China’s willingness to support Cuba’s defense of national sovereignty. Havana continues to assert its willingness to carry out the BRI and strengthen ties. We remain focused on monitoring and assessing the PRC’s and Russia’s malign activities on the island, including defense cooperation, military deployments, intelligence collection, or any other activity that poses a threat to the United States – especially since these activities are occurring just 90 miles from our shores.

Venezuela. Nicolas Maduro presides over an unmitigated humanitarian disaster in Venezuela, as his stewardship of Venezuela’s economy has worsened living conditions for desperate Venezuelans who have limited access to food, water, and fuel, spurring many to migrate.^{lvii} Recently, the authoritarian regime held a referendum to “claim sovereignty over the oil- and mineral-rich” Essequibo region in Guyana.^{lviii} We are monitoring this issue and support a diplomatic resolution. Maduro and his representatives have done little to stop drug trafficking and human rights abuses.^{lix} Extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, torture, and prosecution without due process have been undertaken by the security forces in Venezuela.^{lx lxi} *Maduro representatives are responsible for the worst ecocide in the history of Venezuela.*^{lxii lxiii} Consequently, record numbers of Venezuelans are leaving their homes in search of a better life – more than 7.7 million Venezuelans have fled their country since 2013. Venezuelans are now the primary migrant nationality from the SOUTHCOM AOR encountered at the United States Southwest Border.^{lxiv}

Levers: Overcoming Threats and Challenges in the AOR

Today’s complex threats and challenges span all domains and the spectrum of conflict. To counter and overcome them, we need an integrated, whole-of-society approach that leverages all instruments of national power. The threats presented by the PRC today are substantially different than those presented by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, where competition centered on military capability.^{lxv} Specifically, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Communist vision offered by the Soviets and their regional acolytes provided little to the populace.^{lxvi} Today’s PRC offers our partners the veneer of modernization – airports, railways, deep-water ports, internet access, inexpensive technology, and available financing expeditiously.

To counter, we must expand beyond our traditional mechanisms and increase American economic investment in the region.

After more than two years in command, I am convinced that Economic Security is National Security, and many of the challenges in the Americas are directly tied to a lack of economic investment and opportunity. USSOUTHCOM's support of initiatives like the *Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity* will mobilize high-standard investment in this hemisphere into critical infrastructure and supply chains to expand economic prosperity and opportunity. U.S. investment can enable regional competitiveness, bring transparency to the construction of critical infrastructure, and provide alternatives to PRC SOEs within our hemisphere.

Moreover, with support from the U.S. Government, U.S. companies need to raise their profiles in the region and improve the branding of *Team USA*, both in messaging and advertisement of what good quality U.S. investment brings to the Americas. U.S. companies employ international environmental and labor standards, have strong anti-corruption measures, invest in local communities, ensure the safety of their locally hired workers, and adhere to principles of transparency – a stark contrast to the PRC and the disinformation narratives perpetuated by Russia. Additionally, more legitimate job opportunities for local populations diminish TCO support and reduce opportunities for corrupt practices. Economic Security is National Security – as it drives global influence, prosperity, and reinforces other vital elements of national power.

USSOUTHCOM, with our Allies, partners, U.S. Interagency, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, seamlessly campaigns across all domains to overcome the many challenges to the Western Hemisphere. The safety of our homeland is directly linked to

the resilience, stability, and security of our Latin American and Caribbean partners. As such, USSOUTHCOM is laser-focused on *Strengthening Partnerships* and *Countering Threats*.

Strengthening Partnerships and Countering Threats

Strengthening partnerships means building trust and being present. Trust is an investment and cannot be surged.^{lxvii} Our alliances and partnerships are our greatest strategic advantage. They are directly connected to the region's collective ability to meet its evolving security challenges. In the face of our adversaries' pervasive malign influence, we continue to substantively engage with our Partner Nations to build trust while maintaining our status as their preferred partner. USSOUTHCOM does this through a pre-existing foundation of trust, mutual respect for democratic values, and shared interests in cooperation and interoperability. Our engagements, presence, and policies remain flexible, consistent, and responsive as we campaign in strategic competition. Putting *Integrated Deterrence* into action, USSOUTHCOM works by, with, and through our Allies and partners to improve Partner Nation capability, capacity, and resilience. Every day we leverage Security Cooperation exercises, training, and education activities to build trust.

Concurrently, cross-cutting threats and transboundary challenges put at risk sovereignty, democratic values, and security. USSOUTHCOM aggressively counters threats through campaigning and integrating deliberate multi-domain operations and exercises alongside our Allies and partners. *Team Democracy* can deny our adversaries the ability to expand their presence and influence and increases regional stability, security, and prosperity.

Security Cooperation. In a resource-constrained theater, USSOUTHCOM continues to work with the U.S. Interagency and Allies to maximize efforts in exchanges, training, equipping,

and exercises to build Partner Nation capabilities or capacities and to advance regional Partner Nation interoperability. Building Partner Capacity Programs are the main lever for partner engagement and provide meaningful opportunities to strengthen partnerships and develop military capabilities. In FY 2024, we have planned 1,014 activities by, with, and through our regional partners. We appreciate congressional support of this critical program and will continue maximizing all resources to build our willing partners' capacity.

The Security Cooperation funds provided by Congress are critical to delivering equipment and capabilities to our partners, and these resources have significantly accelerated and expanded the capacity of our efforts to counter the PRC, Russia, and TCOs. Key examples are the contracts awarded to Ecuador and Peru for King Air Maritime Patrol Aircraft. These aircraft will significantly enhance the Maritime Domain Awareness capability by illuminating the current threat of IUU fishing and monitoring and detecting illicit maritime movements.

Department of State Security Assistance. Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), and Excess Defense Articles (EDA) programs increase interoperability with our partners while supporting their security requirements. These programs are critical tools to counterbalance PRC military engagement in the region. In December 2023, the Chilean Air Force signed an FMS letter of acceptance for the modernization of their F-16 fleet. This modernization will increase the lifespan of their fleet by 15 years, provide NATO interoperability, and continue to provide access, presence, and influence with a critical partner. Our partners increasingly face a choice between seeking equipment and training from the U.S. or our Strategic Competitors and other malign actors. The superior goods and strong relationships built by our programs enable us to meet the needs of our partners in a timely manner while outcompeting our adversaries.

USSOUTHCOM executes the Department of State's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program that provides professional military education emphasizing professionalism and democratic values to personnel from 28 countries in the region. In FY 2023, our IMET allocation to our Partner Nations provided professional military education for approximately 800 international students in U.S. schools. This opportunity to influence our partners is important, as the personnel attending these schools often become senior military leaders in their countries. Currently, three ministers of defense and 13 chiefs of defense have attended IMET-funded courses at U.S institutions.

Additionally, regional educational institutions such as the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies and the Inter-American Defense College provide executive-level education and help cultivate lasting relationships, improve regional understanding of U.S. policy, and ensure the sustainability of U.S. Security Cooperation investments. These institutions' influential alumni networks foster whole-of-hemisphere collaboration in resolving top security and defense challenges in the Americas.

Joint Exercise Program. Our Joint Exercise Program continues to provide an outsized return on investment to strengthen partnerships and interoperability among our Allies, partners, U.S. Interagency, and Non-Federal Entities. Over 13,500 participants from 36 Nations were integrated into our exercises this past year. I traveled to Colombia in July for the 64th annual UNITAS, the world's longest-running multinational maritime exercise. There, I saw firsthand how 7,000 people from 27 countries across the globe collaborate, innovate, and experiment with emerging technologies and naval concepts – including the integration and management of unmanned systems – to deter Malign State Actors and foster security and stability across the global commons. Honing our warfighting skills has primacy in all we do.

Last August, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States put *Integrated Deterrence* into action during Exercise SOUTHERN STAR, a multi-lateral special operations exercise hosted throughout Chile that focused on countering threat networks in the AOR. Through subject matter expert exchanges, tactical operations, and command and control exercises, over 1,100 Chilean, 500 U.S. service members, and dozens of Allies and partners came together to enable global collaboration and interoperability while building Allied and Partner Nation capacity to conduct contingency operations.

USSOUTHCOM's exercises CENTAM GUARDIAN and TRADEWINDS focus on countering TCOs and bringing together the Department of State, Department of Justice, and the Department of Homeland Security, along with our Allied and Partner Nation military and security forces, to enhance readiness, domain awareness, interoperability, and intelligence and information sharing.

Through training on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HA/DR), Human Rights, and Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), these exercises not only provide year-long engagement opportunities throughout the AOR but also serve as forums to enhance force professionalism and underscore democratic principles.

Theater Maintenance Partnership Initiative. The Theater Maintenance Partnership Initiative (TMPI) builds partner capacity from the tactical level (operator maintenance) to the operational level (Ministry of Defense logistics and sustainment functions). Maintenance and sustainment are hard for our U.S. military, and TMPI invests in our partners by teaching and building a culture of maintenance readiness. TMPI is a seven-year program and will build capacity through education by establishing nine Maintenance Centers of Excellence in the AOR. It will also address maintenance requirements of U.S.-provided defense articles our partners

utilize. Fostering an integrated approach to logistics, TMPI will improve readiness and readiness reporting so that Allied and Partner Nations can visualize materiel readiness, apply resources, communicate challenges, and request needed support. Additionally, USSOUTHCOM is working to create Multinational Logistics Courses to promote NATO standardization, Life Cycle Management, and the conduct of logistics at the Operational and Strategic levels. TMPI will enhance interoperability, self-sufficiency, and resiliency among Allies and partners, leading to sustainable readiness improvements that increase regional stability.

CONTINUING PROMISE. This past year, from August to September, the USNS BURLINGTON and 120 crewmembers embarked upon a 52-day humanitarian assistance (HA), readiness building, and goodwill mission that touched Colombia, Grenada, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago. This evolution marked the 13th CONTINUING PROMISE mission to the AOR since 2007 – a joint military and civilian effort that provides expeditionary medical care, veterinary care, training, and subject matter expert exchanges with our Partner Nations. While CONTINUING PROMISE missions typically feature the USNS COMFORT hospital ship, which is currently undergoing maintenance, the mission relied on the USNS BURLINGTON as the deploying platform. The “fast, flexible, and maneuverable” ship served as a proof of concept for transporting personnel and equipment in support of regional disaster relief and humanitarian operations.^{lxviii}

During the mission, CONTINUING PROMISE personnel delivered medical care to 6,100 patients, administered 950 vaccinations, dispensed 8,750 prescriptions, and repaired \$500,000 worth of Partner Nation medical equipment. Additionally, U.S. Navy Seabees led construction and engineering projects benefiting schools, hospitals, and local communities. The CONTINUING PROMISE mission is a critical soft power asset that creates and sustains an

immeasurable amount of goodwill from our partners and their people, offsetting PRC influence in the region while building the legitimacy and capacity of our Partner Nations.

Key Leader Engagements. The importance of maintaining and cultivating relationships with senior leaders within my AOR cannot be overstated. Since taking command in October 2021, I have been to the region 48 times, visited 17 countries, and conducted over 150 Key Leader Engagements with Allied and Partner Nation ministers and chiefs of defense. Additionally, I have met with 17 heads of state, three vice presidents, and three prime ministers. These engagements and the enduring Congressional and Staff Delegations to the region assist in establishing and successfully executing our shared security objectives while generating mutual trust and understanding. Moreover, they reinforce diplomacy and U.S. Interagency initiatives. After many discussions with the region's leaders, it remains apparent that our partners need our assistance in combatting their many challenges.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) continues to provide vital support to the USSOUTHCOM AOR by executing an extremely diverse program that not only builds infrastructure and capacity, but also ensures that considerations for environmental sustainability, climate resiliency, and at-risk indigenous populations, are factored into their projects. Wherever we have a USACE effort, we are facilitating presence and access. USACE currently has activities in 17 countries within the AOR and has some form of full-time presence in eight of them. For example, they are managing large construction efforts in Colombia and Peru, providing humanitarian assistance projects in Guatemala and Belize, and executing technical assistance in agreements with the Dominican Republic, Brazil and Ecuador. USACE builds projects in support of our exercises, incorporates work with Allies and the U.S. Interagency, executes exchanges with partners having complex engineering challenges, and

works to select contractors internal to that country or region to enable investment in the local economy. The quality work and the transparent nature in which they do business are providing an environmentally conscious and more technically sound alternative to outcompete the PRC. These projects, programs, and *Integrated Deterrence* efforts increase our regional competitiveness, facilitate interoperability, and build Partner Nation resilience.

National Guard State Partnership Program. 2023 marked the 30th anniversary of the State Partnership Program and 30 years of the National Guard assisting our Partner Nations' military and security forces to build capacity and meet ever-evolving security challenges. USSOUTHCOM has the largest State Partnership Program of all the Combatant Commands, spanning 30 countries. Since 2010 our program has completed 3,629 events, with 426 events completed in FY 2023 and another 328 planned for FY 2024. Improving regional interoperability and the readiness of both Partner Nations and U.S. forces to respond to crises and threats, the State Partnership Program is instrumental in the conduct and success of not only our operations, but also our enduring relationships throughout the region.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response. Regional geography and climate change leave our Partner Nations vulnerable to extreme weather events and natural disasters. Before, during, and after a catastrophe, we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our partners to provide assistance. USSOUTHCOM engages regularly with our Partner Nations, encouraging and assisting them to take the necessary steps toward preparedness, mitigation, and resiliency. In FY 2023, USSOUTHCOM completed 256 HA and three Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) projects in 29 countries.

HA activities address the basic needs of civilian populations and build partner capacity by improving Partner Nation disaster preparedness and risk reduction, health, education, basic

infrastructure, and HMA activities. Over the last year, USSOUTHCOM planned and conducted 25 medical civic-action projects, constructed or renovated nine medical and dental clinics and 14 schools, executed 18 projects to provide potable water to towns and villages, and constructed and equipped four Emergency Operations Centers/Disaster Relief Warehouses. Moreover, we conducted 22 projects to provide local firefighters with equipment, radios, and personal protective equipment during the outbreak of wildland forest fires in Chile. Of note, USSOUTHCOM conducted 18 projects to support the governments of Colombia and Panama in their efforts to provide humanitarian services to mitigate the suffering of migrants in the Darien region. These projects demonstrate our commitment to building Partner Nation capacity and meeting humanitarian needs, while simultaneously increasing the United States' access, visibility, and influence in a time of strategic competition throughout the region.

Countering PRC Malign Efforts. The PRC is America's pacing threat; countering their aggression and malign influence requires a whole-of-society approach. USSOUTHCOM continues to coordinate with non-governmental organizations, the private sector, academia, and the U.S. Interagency, including both the Department of State and the Department of Commerce, to source U.S. and Allied solutions as alternatives to PRC offerings in critical infrastructure, cyber, and telecommunications. By methodically identifying and synchronizing separate initiatives, from building cyber capability to exposing PRC malign activities, we can strengthen critical infrastructure to improve our collective ability to operate in the face of the PRC's multi-domain threats.

The PRC is working overtime to expand its network of port access and space infrastructure. As such, we remain focused on building our relationships and interoperability with our partners and Allies through sustained Security Cooperation engagement and investment.

Moreover, we continue to illuminate and expose the malign intent and dual-use nature of PRC infrastructure and space sites. Information sharing with our partners paints a vibrant portrait of the PRC's past, present, and future steps to undercut our partners' sovereignty while expanding theirs. Armed with the facts and U.S. and Allied investment alternatives, our partners are better able to make informed decisions regarding engagement with the PRC.

We will WIN this strategic competition by emphasizing and seizing upon our strengths. A global network of Allies and partners guided by democratic values and principles gives the United States an unrivaled advantage over the PRC. We continue to campaign across all domains and the conflict spectrum while instituting *Integrated Deterrence* into all our activities, operations, and investments. By doing so, USSOUTHCOM demonstrates its commitment to the region, forges stronger partnerships, and enhances regional resilience, stability, and security across the Western Hemisphere.

Countering Russian Malign Influence. We remain postured for competition with Russia through the coordination and application of information-related capabilities. Russian malign activities are ever present, and the associated fallout continues to plague the region. USSOUTHCOM's approach empowers our partners and exposes Russian disinformation and malign activity to limit its reach and effectiveness.

Our Allies and partners support efforts that impose costs on Russia, and this past year, we have successfully collaborated with partners to counter Russian malign activities occurring in the information environment. Additionally, we continue to work with our partners to exchange Soviet-era equipment for newer NATO-interoperable, U.S.-made equipment in the future. We must continue to coordinate and collaborate expeditiously with our partners, especially when assisting them in replacing antiquated equipment and maintaining operational readiness. The

stakes are too high; we cannot allow Strategic Competitors or other malign actors to fulfill the needs of our partners due to self-imposed inefficiency.

Countering TCOs. Utilizing a whole-of-government effort, Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-South) monitors both the air and maritime domains in our region to detect deadly drugs and contraband headed toward the shores of the United States. In FY 2023, this statutorily directed mission saved 3,030 American lives and resulted in the disruption of 361 illegal smuggling events, including the disruption of almost 308 metric tons of cocaine and 78 metric tons of marijuana, with a combined wholesale value of \$7.7 billion. Additionally, evidence and information gathered from these disruptions assist U.S. Interagency and international law enforcement in prosecution efforts that further degrade TCOs.

Our Partner Nations continue to be critical enablers in countering TCO smuggling operations. In coordination with JIATF-South, our Partner Nations have participated in 79.5% percent of operations, resulting in the removal of 240.675 metric tons of cocaine routed toward the United States. The success of these operations relies upon Partner Nation collaboration, which we systematically nurture and support throughout our routine military-to-military engagements, training, and exercises. A key investment in this shared fight is the contracted Ship Special Mission (SSM), an afloat forward staging base embarking Partner Nation Navy and Coast Guard interceptor teams, extending their reach hundreds of miles offshore where TCOs traffic their illicit commodities. In FY 2023, the SSM embarked teams from six Partner Nations in the Pacific, Caribbean, and Atlantic Oceans while conducting nine separate counter-TCO operations. Our partners operating from the SSM seized over 12 metric tons of cocaine and 10 thousand pounds of marijuana, with a combined street value of approximately \$500 million.

U.S.-led, multinational counternarcotics operations ultimately result in our partners taking the lead on their own operations, as Peru recently did during Operation MAR DE GRAU. This operation showcased the value of *Integrated Deterrence* and resulted in 2.897 metric tons of cocaine seized or disrupted in three separate cases. This level of success is directly tied to continued U.S. investment in training and equipping our military and security partners.

Moreover, USSOUTHCOM works hand-in-hand with the Department of Treasury to counter malign actors' ability to generate, store, move, and use funds. This includes revenue from corruption, drugs, weapons, human trafficking, and illegal trade in natural resources and wildlife. During the past year, USSOUTHCOM supported Treasury's designation of *Los Huistas*, who facilitated the importation of precursor chemicals from China to manufacture methamphetamines, as a Drug Trafficking Organization.

Notwithstanding our significant achievements over the decades in this mission space, there is still more to do, especially in support of efforts to combat TCOs who directly threaten the democratic stability of the region. As U.S. resources against this threat decline, we will continue to innovate by re-examining and creatively leveraging current authorities and unconventional tools, like contract assets, commercial data, and artificial intelligence and machine learning. We are also working to better align counternarcotics efforts with our larger campaign focus on strategic competition, such as supporting U.S. law enforcement efforts to sever state-crime alliances related to illicit finance, cybercrime, and the use of proxies.

Confronting Climate Change. Climate change and environmental degradation reduce military readiness by expanding requirements and diminishing resources. This AOR is disproportionately affected by extreme weather events and natural disasters, conditions that impact the region's access to food, water, healthcare, and energy. El Niño and other naturally

occurring phenomena are exacerbated by elevated surface temperatures, which dry out soil and render farmland less productive, further contributing to irregular migration. This weather pattern also results in less rainfall in Central America and Northern South America, which affects the water levels required to operate critical infrastructure such as the Panama Canal, through which five percent of global commerce passes through annually. Low water levels have limited the number of vessels able to transit each day, at a time when global shipping is further challenged by threats in the Red Sea.

Alongside our Partner Nations, USSOUTHCOM builds resiliency and increases capacity to respond to extreme weather events and environmental disasters by holding subject matter expert exchanges and incorporating energy and climate security scenarios into our major exercises. We also leverage an integrated approach with the Pacific Disaster Center in Hawaii and other civilian partners, who facilitate HA/DR training and assessments with our Partner Nations.

USSOUTHCOM is executing a program to assist partners in the Western Hemisphere to provide training to defense and security partners in how to plan against, prepare for, and respond to climate contingencies, leveraging data-driven decision making and analytic tools. The program will fund additional bilateral and multilateral research on climate security in the Western Hemisphere. In 2024, USSOUTHCOM will co-host sub-regional symposia and a region-wide Capstone Conference on addressing the impacts of climate change. The program's goal is to catalyze regional collaboration and response mechanisms leading to climate-resilient outcomes.

Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing. The increasing urgency to address the severity of the economic, human, and environmental consequences of IUU fishing and associated

labor abuses continues to grow throughout the globe. President Biden has cited IUU fishing as one of the greatest threats to the world's oceans.^{lxix} It contributes to the “collapse or decline of fisheries that are critical to the economic growth, food systems, and ecosystems” of our Partner Nations.^{lxx} Additionally, it can “undermine port and maritime security, as criminal elements may use similar trade routes, landing sites, and vessels...for trafficking arms, migrants, drugs, and other contraband.”^{lxxi}

In partnership with other U.S. Government initiatives, USSOUTHCOM is promoting a whole-of-society effort to better use commercial data, analytics, and emerging technology to improve maritime domain awareness. Through Enhanced Domain Awareness, a secure, unclassified, virtual environment, we provide partners with a consolidated, near real-time picture of IUU fishing activities, trends, and reports that contribute to counter-IUU fishing operations as well as other issues such as migration, human trafficking, and illegal mining.^{lxxii} Our decisive actions are a bulwark against unsustainable PRC resource extraction. Simultaneously, they reduce lost Partner Nation revenues and impede the ability of our adversaries to engage in nefarious activities in the region. Countering IUU fishing is one more way to bolster our partners' national and economic security.

Cyber. Cyber is an all-encompassing domain that links every facet of society, including defense. The interconnectedness of the cyber domain continues to grow exponentially with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. This means cybersecurity and cyber defense are challenges confronting more than just information technology specialists. These difficulties span the full spectrum of government and society, from presidents to average citizens. Successful plans for countering adversary activities in the cyber domain require

allocating increased resources and integrating whole-of-government solutions to deliver the required support quickly and in sufficient quantity.

We support our partners' advancement of their defensive cyber capabilities and develop cyber resiliency through cybersecurity defense training, software, and equipment with the *Joint Combatant Command Cyber Assistance Teams* – USSOUTHCOM's cyber quick reaction force – and *Defend Forward Operations*. Latin America suffered about 12 percent of global cyber-attacks even though it only accounts for eight percent of the world's population.^{lxxiii} Over the last year, *Team Democracy* came together to help a requesting Partner Nation recover from a massive Malign State Actor-supported cyberattack against government ministries that resulted in over \$10 million in losses. We successfully leveraged internal and external resources through multiple engagements to support recovery and fortify their cyber resiliency. As a result, this partner pursued telecommunications solutions that conform to the *Budapest Convention on Cybercrime* and eliminated certain Malign State Actors from competition.

Competing in the Information Space. Democracy's adversaries continue to flood the information space with disinformation, seeking to advance their malign narratives and agendas upon the “smokeless battlefield.”^{lxxiv} USSOUTHCOM's information operations team works tirelessly to shape pro-U.S. and pro-democracy narratives that “tell our story” and highlight the truthful, positive outcomes in the region from our collective efforts. By synchronizing and coordinating with our Allies, partners, and the U.S. Interagency, we aggressively pierce the information space to expand our partnerships, underscore the enduring value of human rights and the rule of law, and retain the offensive in exposing and countering the harmful activity and disinformation generated by the PRC, Russia, and other malign actors.

Agile Processes. The window to seize the strategic initiative is now. We must continue to innovate and support our partners at the speed of relevance. Our adversaries work in an authoritarian system that is not checked by transparent processes or accountability, offering our partners equipment, services, and education on an expedited basis. Our status as the preferred partner is jeopardized by bureaucratic inefficiencies that result in overpromising and underdelivering. Our Strategic Competitors fill this void.

The United States must use all the instruments of national power to propel innovation and operate at the cutting edge of technology. Through collaboration with academic and private industry partners, this command seeks to take innovative technologies from a controlled laboratory environment to a permissive practical application environment, establishing the USSOUTHCOM AOR as an innovation hub. In October, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. Fourth Fleet held its Hybrid Fleet Campaign Event, hosting 47 Department of Defense Commands, 10 foreign partners, and 18 industry partners to foster innovation and experimentation to inform the Unmanned Campaign and Hybrid Fleet. Over the course of the week, unmanned systems were evaluated in advanced kill chains, contested operations, survivability, and sustainment at sea. Additionally, USSOUTHCOM has focused on striking bilateral agreements with our Partner Nations to mutually advance military technologies so that we can work together quickly to create new beneficial capabilities.

I have made it a priority to integrate tomorrow's technology into our operations and exercises today. Continued investment and advancements in the areas of robotics, cyber technology, and artificial intelligence and machine learning will overmatch our adversaries and assist the region's democracies to emerge as global leaders in science and technology.

Coast Guard Support. The U.S. Coast Guard remains a key partner and enabler of USSOUTHCOM’s priorities and missions. The U.S. Coast Guard maintains unique authorities and capabilities, which, in coordination with the Joint Force, our Allies, and Partner Nations, disrupt TCOs, IUU fishing, terrorism, and irregular migration. Moreover, they support USSOUTHCOM Theater Security Cooperation initiatives and conduct a variety of lifesaving and HA mission support across the region by delivering critical aid in the wake of a disaster. Jointly with the U.S. Army, the U.S. Coast Guard, as part of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative - Technical Assistance Field Team, bolsters the capabilities of Caribbean Partner Nations’ maritime assets in support of regional security and counter-trafficking while simultaneously displacing PRC influence. As always, USSOUTHCOM can faithfully rely on the U.S. Coast Guard to ensure the safety, security, and stewardship of the region’s waters.^{lxxv}

Building Our Team – People First

“People execute the strategy.”^{lxxvi} USSOUTHCOM continues to invest in its people to *Build Our Team*. With their trust being the foundation of our profession, the health, safety, and welfare of our people remains paramount. USSOUTHCOM maintains a professional atmosphere that offers educational opportunities, leverages broad expertise, and fosters diverse and innovative thought to generate solutions to the dynamic problem set in the Americas.

Housing, Cost of Living Allowance, and Locality Pay. Service members, civilians, contractors, and their families are the heart and soul of USSOUTHCOM. Our success is tied to the welfare of our team. While South Florida is the geographic gateway to the Americas, living and working in the area has many economic challenges that have affected our command, especially as it relates to the cost of housing. Through the hard work of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Department of the Army, along with the support of federal and

state officials and local leaders, we have physically broken ground on the USSOUTHCOM privatized housing project and expect phased completion between the summers of 2026 and 2027. This project will house nearly 200 service members and their families.

Our service members and civilian teammates continue to be negatively impacted by the rising cost of living in the South Florida area. Miami has recently been identified by U.S. News & World Report as the fourth most expensive city in the United States, with a 5.7 percent increase in basic goods and services and a 10.1 percent increase in rent of primary residence over the course of CY 2023 - while car insurance rates in Florida have increased 55 percent over the 2023 national average.^{lxxvii lxxviii lxxix lxxx} USSOUTHCOM remains in contact with state and federal officials, including the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Department of the Army, as well as policymakers, to voice concerns and advocate on behalf of our team.

Joint Interagency Task Force-South Resiliency. JIATF-South is currently spread across four buildings that are 70-plus years old and do not meet requirements to support their important mission. Design for a new and consolidated facility will be completed in July 2024. We appreciate the continued support as we look to build a resilient facility for this critical mission of our nation.

Women, Peace, and Security. USSOUTHCOM's WPS program promotes women's meaningful participation, leadership, and engagement in decision-making at all levels throughout the AOR. USSOUTHCOM integrates gender perspectives within our operations, activities, and investments to maximize the talents of women in the force through their recruitment, retention, training, and advancement. In May 2023, USSOUTHCOM and 14 Partner Nations gathered in Colombia for the 6th Senior Enlisted Leader Women, Peace, and Security Seminar. With over 300 in-person and 1000 remote attendees, this three-day seminar featured panel discussions,

working group sessions, and a forum to highlight the professional growth, capability, and integrity of women filling the Senior Enlisted Leader ranks.

Through our ongoing WPS engagements, we build the capacity of our Partner Nations and better enable their military and security forces to engage with local populations, gain gender perspectives, and better assess the needs of all the citizens they proudly serve. I have made it a priority to incorporate WPS events into all my travel within the region, hosting events this past year in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Panama, Peru, Paraguay, and Uruguay – showcasing the power of example. Our partners continue to make historic strides. In Colombia, the first female naval officer was promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral and the first 72 female Marines graduated from Infantry boot camp. In Uruguay, the Uruguayan Senate approved, for the first time, the promotion of three female military officers to the rank of Colonel this past September. Women play an important role in increasing readiness and sustaining regional stability, security, and prosperity, and so we must redouble our efforts to integrate and institutionalize Women, Peace, and Security initiatives internally and among all our partners.

Total Force. The trends in the Latin America and Caribbean region require a total force approach that maximizes the integration and strong relationships between the National Guard, Active Component, and Reserve forces. This approach is exemplified by the Navy Reserve Joint Intelligence Operations Center 0174, whose reserve sailors supported the intelligence and evidentiary package that led to sanctioning action on *Pingtán Marine Enterprise, Ltd.*, along with eight other affiliated entities involved in IUU fishing. Our Reserve Component is integrated into our daily operations, including staffing our Joint Operations Center, planning and participating in joint exercises, and managing the State Partnership Program.

What Resources Does USSOUTHCOM Need?

In this region, a small investment – whether in time, physical resources, funding, or collaboration – goes a long way. We don't have to outspend the PRC to outcompete, but we must be present on the field and deliver at the speed of relevance. This requires having a timely budget – continuing resolutions are disruptive to U.S. and Partner Nation efforts to defend against threats. The PRC and Russia are already here in the Western Hemisphere; time is of the essence.

Security Cooperation. USSOUTHCOM has adopted a proactive approach to identify opportunities to expedite delivery of equipment from Security Cooperation and Security Assistance programs. The command maintains frequent communication with all Security Cooperation stakeholders to anticipate or recognize factors that might generate delays on FMS, FMF, and Section 333 cases. We then engage with the organizations involved at a senior level to ensure all teams pre-emptively take actions to mitigate risk and accelerate deliveries to build necessary partner capacity to address mutual security threats. We appreciate Congress' support for USSOUTHCOM's security cooperation activities, as these engagements are our main lever in maintaining strong partnerships that help us edge out the PRC in the region.

Intelligence. Congress has also supported innovative pilot programs that increase domain awareness in the theater. Given the Department's demand for and limited availability of exquisite Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance assets, USSOUTHCOM aims to mitigate our ranking priority in the collection posture with Commercial Imagery. Commercial Imagery bypasses the task-saturated national system and provides expedited, relevant, and unclassified data that has proved crucial during a recent high-profile Haitian Kidnap for Ransom incident, increased irregular migration, and in monitoring the malign behavior of PRC, Russia,

and Iran as tension in the region continues to rise. We also rely heavily on intelligence gained through the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Section 702 authorities. Without a reauthorization of Section 702, we would lose significant domain awareness and insight into the threats and challenges in our own hemisphere.

Technology and Innovation. I have made it a priority to integrate tomorrow's technology into our operations and exercises today. Continued investment and advancements in the areas of robotics, cyber technology, artificial intelligence and machine learning will overmatch our adversaries and assist the region's democracies to emerge as global leaders who feed and fuel the world. Additionally, we must improve our information networks, cybersecurity posture, and interoperability. Improving our networks enhances situational awareness, accelerates decision-making, and ensures communication readiness across all echelons and with mission partners operating throughout the USSOUTHCOM AOR. Investments in Mission Partner Environment and Combined Joint All-Domain Command and Control will underwrite these and future objectives. Moreover, continued Congressional support of exercises in the Western Hemisphere will ensure the United States' ability to evaluate cutting-edge technologies in operationally relevant environments. These activities operationally refine future warfighting capabilities and accelerate technologies for deployment to meet military requirements. USSOUTHCOM's operational experimentation helps transition research and development from concept to implementation across all Combatant Commands and domains and, in the end, strengthens *Integrated Deterrence* and *Team Democracy*.

Ambassadors. The United States has nine posts operating without an Ambassador, our number one diplomat who coordinates and synchronizes *Team USA's* in-country ground game. These absences are a national security issue and send the message to our Partner Nations that

they are not a priority to the United States at a time when the PRC continues to elevate its presence throughout the Western Hemisphere. The Senate could take action on the five WHEM nominees for Ambassadorial positions that have already been sent to Congress.

Economic Engagement in the Region. USSOUTHCOM is aware of multiple legislative efforts to encourage economic engagement and investment in the countries of the Western Hemisphere. National security rests on economic security, and any increases in economic opportunities for the countries and people of this neighborhood will mitigate many of the challenges we face as a hemisphere. If people have jobs to sustain their families, they will be less likely to consider illegally migrating to the United States for opportunities or working with the TCOs to make ends meet. If governments in the region have the option to work with U.S. or other Western companies, they are less likely to choose to work with the PRC. Legislative efforts that responsibly incentivize U.S. and Western investment in the region could greatly add to a whole-of-society approach to national security.

Beijing Convention. Ratification of the *Convention on the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Relating to International Civil Aviation*, otherwise known as the *Beijing Convention*, would expand our ability to cooperate with Partner Nations for the prevention and prosecution of certain criminal activities, including certain criminal uses of civil aviation.

Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School. We appreciate Congress' support of the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS) in FY 2024 and look forward to working closely with the Department of the Navy, U.S. Special Operations Command, and Congress to keep this important facility operational for years to come. The rivers and littorals are critical pathways in securing the

hemisphere, and NAVSCIATTS is uniquely positioned to train our Partner Nations on how to secure this domain as it has for the past 54 years, training 13,000 personnel from 123 countries.

Conclusion

This is a *Call to Action!* Our adversaries' malign actions and intent, coupled with the numerous transboundary threats, are a growing challenge – replicating the first and second island chain – to our homeland. USSOUTHCOM, alongside our Allies and partners, stands ready to defend the democratic values, ideals, and institutions that will continue to enable this vibrant region to feed and fuel the world. Through *Integrated Deterrence* and utilizing all instruments of national power, we will ensure that the safety, security, and prosperity of Latin America and the Caribbean endure for this generation and all those to come.

- ⁱ Congressional Research Service, *China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role*, IF 10890, Barrios, Ricardo; Lawrence, Susan V., and Rosen, Liana W., Congressional Research Digital Collection, September 28, 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10890>.
- ⁱⁱ “The Biden-Harris Administration’s National Security Strategy.” *The White House*, 12 Oct. 2022, p. 12, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Id.* at 40.
- ^{iv} “World Water Day: Latin America Leads in Water Management but Inequalities in Access Remain.” *World Bank*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/03/22/world-water-day-latin-america-achievements-challenges>.
- ^v Latin America and the Caribbean will account for more than 25% of global agricultural exports by 2028, says FAO - Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce (brazilcham.com)
- ^{vi} Wang Yi, “The Belt and Road Initiative Becomes New Opportunity for China-Latin America Cooperation,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, September 18, 2017
- ^{vii} “Belt and Road in Latin America: A Regional Game Changer?” *Atlantic Council*, 9 Oct. 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/belt-and-road-in-latin-america-a-regional-game-changer/>.
- ^{viii} “How Should the U.S. Respond to China’s Influence in Latin America?” *United States Institute of Peace*, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/08/how-should-us-respond-chinas-influence-latin-america>.
- ^{ix} “China’s Engagement in Latin America: Views from the Region.” *United States Institute of Peace*, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/08/chinas-engagement-latin-america-views-region>.
- ^x Brady, Anne-Marie. *China’s Expanding Antarctic Capacity and Interests*. Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2017, pp. 7–7. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep04257.6>.
- ^{xi} Berg, Ryan C. *Combating Chinese Dual-Use Infrastructure: Bringing In the Private Sector*. Dec. 2022. www.csis.org, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/combating-chinese-dual-use-infrastructure-bringing-private-sector>.
- ^{xii} Phillips, Michael M. *China Seeks First Military Base on Africa’s Atlantic Coast, U.S. Intelligence Finds*, *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 Dec. 2021, www.wsj.com/articles/china-seeks-first-military-base-on-africas-atlantic-coast-u-s-intelligence-finds-11638726327.
- ^{xiii} “Chinese-Backed Port Project in Peru to be the ‘gateway from South America to Asia,’ Official Says.” *AP News*, 23 Aug. 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/peru-chancay-china-port-construction-d13e8e8fe19289a6ab97628f708bc671>.
- ^{xiv} “How the People’s Republic of China Seeks to Reshape the Global Information Environment.” *United States Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/gcc-special-report-how-the-peoples-republic-of-china-seeks-to-reshape-the-global-information-environment/>.
- ^{xv} *Id.*
- ^{xvi} *Id.*
- ^{xvii} Dube, Ryan and Steinhauser, Gabriele. “China’s Global Mega-Projects Are Falling Apart.” *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 Jan. 2023, www.wsj.com/articles/china-global-mega-projects-infrastructure-falling-apart-11674166180.
- ^{xviii} “The Impact of IUU Fishing.” *Diálogo Américas*, 24 Oct. 2022, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/the-impact-of-iuu-fishing/>.
- ^{xix} Fisheries, NOAA. “Countering IUU Fishing: Partnership for Sustainably Managed Fisheries | NOAA Fisheries.” *NOAA*, 14 Mar. 2023, <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/enforcement/countering-iuu-fishing-partnership-sustainably-managed-fisheries>.
- ^{xx} Center for Advanced Defense Studies; 1 May 2019; *Following IUU Fishing Networks Onshore: Leveraging Open Source to Identify Convergence and Facilitators of IUU*
- ^{xxi} *China Dream, Space Dream: China’s Progress in Space Technologies and Implications for the United States | U.S.- CHINA | ECONOMIC and SECURITY REVIEW COMMISSION*. <https://www.uscc.gov/research/china-dream-space-dream-chinas-progress-space-technologies-and-implications-united-states>. P. iv.
- ^{xxii} Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2023, Annual Report to Congress, Department of Defense, p. 89 (<https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/19/2003323409/-1/-1/2023-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>)
- ^{xxiii} Cordesman, Anthony H. and Kendall, Joseph, “Chinese Strategy and Military Modernization in 2016,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, D.C., 2016), 435.
- ^{xxiv} “The Dragon Chases Its Tail.” *Diálogo Américas*, 4 Oct. 2023, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/the-dragon-chases-its-tail/>.
- ^{xxv} “Securing 5G Networks.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/report/securing-5g-networks>.
- ^{xxvi} Pelley, Scott. *China Stealing Technology Secrets, “Five Eyes” Intelligence Leaders Warn | 60 Minutes - CBS News*. 22 Oct. 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-stealing-technology-secrets-five-eyes-intelligence-leaders-warn-60-minutes-transcript/>.
- ^{xxvii} *Id.*
- ^{xxviii} Torres, Guido L., The Impacts of the Russo-Ukrainian War on Latin America in the Age of Strategic Competition, Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, March 2023, P. 2, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/impacts-russo-ukrainian-war-latin-america-age-strategic-competition>
- ^{xxix} “Lavrov in Latin America: Russia’s Bid for a Multipolar World.” *United States Institute of Peace*, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/04/lavrov-latin-america-russias-bid-multipolar-world>.
- ^{xxx} “Countering China and Russia’s Asymmetric Activity in Latin America.” *Brookings*, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/countering-china-and-russias-asymmetric-activity-in-latin-america/>.
- ^{xxxi} *Id.*
- ^{xxxii} “China and Russia Step Up Cyber Presence in Latin America.” *Diálogo Américas*, 26 Aug. 2022, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/china-and-russia-step-up-cyber-presence-in-latin-america/>.
- ^{xxxiii} Countering China and Russia’s Asymmetric Activity in Latin America.
- ^{xxxiv} “Russian Influence Campaigns in Latin America.” *United States Institute of Peace*, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/10/russian-influence-campaigns-latin-america>. P. 19
- ^{xxxv} *Id.* at 12.

- xxxvi Id.
- xxxvii “Lavrov in Latin America: Russia’s Bid for a Multipolar World.” *United States Institute of Peace*, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/04/lavrov-latin-america-russias-bid-multipolar-world>.
- xxxviii “Russia Defence Ministry Says Frigate Tests Strike Capabilities in Atlantic.” *Reuters*, 25 Jan. 2023. [www.reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-defence-ministry-says-frigate-tests-strike-capabilities-atlantic-2023-01-25/), <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-defence-ministry-says-frigate-tests-strike-capabilities-atlantic-2023-01-25/>.
- xxxix “New Era of Cuba-Russia Relations Threatens Latin America.” *Diálogo Américas*, 30 Aug. 2023, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/new-era-of-cuba-russia-relations-threatens-latin-america/>.
- xl “Readout of Secretary Blinken’s Event, ‘Addressing the Public Health and Security Threats of Synthetic Drugs Through Global Cooperation.’” *United States Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/briefings-foreign-press-centers/readout-of-addressing-the-public-health-and-security-threats-of-synthetic-drugs/>.
- xli “How Is China Involved in Organized Crime in Mexico?” *Brookings*, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-is-china-involved-in-organized-crime-in-mexico/>.
- xlii *Office of Public Affairs | Justice Department Announces Charges Against Sinaloa Cartel’s Global Operation | United States Department of Justice*. 14 Apr. 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-charges-against-sinaloa-cartel-s-global-operation>.
- xliii “Iran Increasingly Turns to Latin America.” *Diálogo Américas*, 30 Oct. 2023, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/iran-increasingly-turns-to-latin-america/>.
- xliv Id.
- xlv Id.
- xlvi “UN Human Rights Official is Alarmed by Sprawling Gang Violence in Haiti”, *PBS News Hour*, 31 Oct. 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/un-human-rights-official-is-alarmed-by-sprawling-gang-violence-in-haiti>
- xlvii “Gang Violence in Haiti Is Escalating and Spreading with a Significant Increase in Killings, UN Says.” *AP News*, 28 Sept. 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/haiti-gang-violence-un-report-killings-5d3f7ff272b7303852869dfc67692a23>.
- xlviii “UN Human Rights Official Is Alarmed by Sprawling Gang Violence in Haiti.” *AP News*, 31 Oct. 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/haiti-un-human-rights-oneill-gangs-d75361f059fbc6b457b3d7d1cedda6e>.
- xlix *Haiti: PAHO’s Humanitarian Response amid Escalating Violence - PAHO/WHO | Pan American Health Organization*. <https://www.paho.org/en/news/15-9-2023-haiti-pahos-humanitarian-response-amid-escalating-violence>.
- l “Overview.” *World Bank*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/overview>.
- li “Promoting Accountability for Nicaraguan Officials for Restricting Freedoms.” *United States Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/promoting-accountability-for-nicaraguan-officials-for-restricting-freedoms/>.
- lii *A Warm July in China-Nicaragua Relations*. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/a-warm-july-in-china-nicaragua-relations/>.
- liii Arturo McFields, Opinion Contributor. “Nicaragua’s Dictatorship Again Embraces North Korean, Russian Terror.” *The Hill*, 1 Aug. 2023, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/4122078-nicaraguas-dictatorship-again-embraces-north-korean-russian-terror/>.
- liv https://www.wsj.com/world/small-businesses-become-a-lifeline-for-cubas-floundering-economy-4d49e562?mod=Searchresults_pos11&page=1
- lv “How Russia Is Recruiting Cubans To Fight in Ukraine.” *TIME*, 18 Sept. 2023, <https://time.com/6314093/russia-recruiting-cubans-ukraine-war/>.
- lvi “China’s Xi Vows to Support Cuba in Defending Its National Sovereignty.” *Reuters*, 24 Aug. 2023. [www.reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/chinas-xi-vows-support-cuba-defending-its-national-sovereignty-2023-08-24/), <https://www.reuters.com/world/chinas-xi-vows-support-cuba-defending-its-national-sovereignty-2023-08-24/>.
- lvii Arturo McFields Yescas, opinion contributor. “Venezuela’s Dictator Mocks International Community ... Again.” *The Hill*, 17 Nov. 2022, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3740965-venezuelas-dictator-mocks-international-community-again/>.
- lviii “Venezuela Referendum Result: Voters Back Bid to Claim Sovereignty over Large Swath of Guyana.” *The Guardian*, 4 Dec. 2023. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/04/venezuela-referendum-2023-results-guyana-region-claim-succeeds-sovereignty-essequibo>.
- lix *Southern District of New York | Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces Narco-Terrorism Charges Against Nicolas Maduro, Current And Former Venezuelan Officials, and FARC Leadership | United States Department of Justice*. 26 Mar. 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/manhattan-us-attorney-announces-narco-terrorism-charges-against-nicolas-maduro-current>.
- lx Human Rights Watch. “Venezuela: Events of 2021.” *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/venezuela>.
- lxi “Report: Venezuela Security Forces Continue Killings, Torture.” *AP News*, 5 July 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/caribbean-united-nations-venezuela-c84d79516c08a1121edf25f3b5585b97>.
- lxii Arturo McFields Yescas. “Venezuela’s Dictator Mocks International Community ... Again.” *The Hill*, 17 Nov. 2022, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3740965-venezuelas-dictator-mocks-international-community-again/>.
- lxiii Tahtinen, Ryan C. Berg, Lauri. “Venezuela’s Maduro Should Be Tried for Ecocide.” *Foreign Policy*, 1 Feb. 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/14/venezuela-ecocide-maduro-icc/>.
- lxiv “U.S. Needs to Invest More in Latin America to Counteract China in the Region.” *United States Institute of Peace*, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/10/us-needs-invest-more-latin-america-counteract-china-region>.
- lxv Id.
- lxvi “Looking Back for the Way Ahead: An Interview with Retired Gen. Lloyd Austin”, https://www.army.mil/article/198441/looking_back_for_the_way_ahead_an_interview_with_retired_gen_lloyd_austin.
- lxvii Sykes, Lashawn. “Burlington’s Top-Tier Completes First-Ever Continuing Promise Mission.” *Military News*, 26 Oct. 2023, https://www.militarynews.com/norfolk-navy-flagship/news/topstories/burlington-s-top-tier-completes-first-ever-continuing-promise-mission/article_4a42db44-7359-11ee-8880-b3cc818ef90a.html.
- lxviii “Memorandum on Combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing and Associated Labor Abuses.” *The White House*, 27 June 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/06/27/memorandum-on-combating-illegal-unreported-and-unregulated-fishing-and-associated-labor-abuses/>.
- lxix Federal Agencies Release Joint U.S. Strategy for Combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing, <https://www.uscg.mil/iuufishing/>.

^{lxxi} “Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing.” *United States Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/key-topics-office-of-marine-conservation/illegal-unreported-and-unregulated-fishing/>.

^{lxxii} Vincent, Brandi. “As It Helps Combat Unlawful Fishing Internationally, NGA Is ‘Posturing’ for an AI-Driven Future.” *DefenseScoop*, 10 May 2023, <https://defensescoop.com/2023/05/10/as-it-helps-combat-unlawful-fishing-internationally-nga-is-posturing-for-an-ai-driven-future/>.

^{lxxiii} *Americas Quarterly*, Vol. 17, Issue 3, 2023, at 22.

^{lxxiv} “Why Do Young Americans Support Hamas? Look at TikTok.” *The Free Press*, 2 Nov. 2023, <https://www.thefp.com/p/tik-tok-young-americans-hamas-mike-gallag>.

^{lxxv} “Coast Guard Roles and Missions.” *United States Coast Guard Academy*, <https://uscga.edu/careers/roles-and-missions/>.

^{lxxvi} U.S. Department of Defense, *2022 National Defense Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2022): 20, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

^{lxxvii} *Most Expensive Places to Live, Ranked*. U.S. News and World Report, <https://realestate.usnews.com/places/rankings/most-expensive-places-to-live>.

^{lxxviii} *Rent of Primary Residence in Miami Area Rose 10.1 Percent over the Year Ended December 2023: The Economics Daily: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2024/rent-of-primary-residence-in-miami-area-rose-10-1-percent-over-the-year-ended-december-2023.htm>.

^{lxxix} *Consumer Price Index, Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach — December 2023: Southeast Information Office: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, https://www.bls.gov/regions/southeast/news-release/consumerpriceindex_miami.htm.

^{lxxx} Machado, Alina. “Why Are We Paying More for Car Insurance in Florida?” *NBC 6 South Florida*, 21 Jan. 2024, <https://www.nbcmiami.com/responds/why-are-we-paying-more-for-car-insurance-in-florida/3211024/>.