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## U.S. Counterdrug Strategy for Western Hemisphere

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 Testimony before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control  
 statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,  
 Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, Narcotics and Terrorism

June 22, 1999

### [Resumen en español](#)

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I welcome this opportunity to provide you my assessment of counterdrug (CD) efforts in the United States Southern Command's (SOUTHCOM's) Area of Responsibility (AOR). SOUTHCOM's specific role is to provide and coordinate Department of Defense (DOD) support to Goals Four and Five of the National Drug Control Strategy. All of our CD efforts are focused on providing this DOD support to the Department of State, U.S. law enforcement agencies, U.S. Country Teams and our regional partner nations in order to stem the growth, production, and shipment of illegal drugs to the United States.

Today, I will provide you with the following: my personal assessment of the region's overall security and stability; a strategic overview of the regional drug trafficking threat; an overview of our post Panama Theater Architecture; a brief discussion of resource constraints; our CD strategy; country and regional assessments; and finally my vision of the future.

### Security and Stability in the SOUTHCOM AOR

The strategic and economic importance of Latin America and the Caribbean to the United States continues to grow and cannot be overemphasized. Our growing dependence on oil from the region, which includes Venezuela as our single largest source of imported fuel: 18% annually, combined with the region's growing dependence on U.S. imports, fully justifies a consistent and balanced engagement strategy in the region. Latin Americans currently spend 44 cents of every dollar on imports from the U.S. By 2000 Latin America is expected to buy more U.S. goods than Europe, and by 2010 more U.S. goods than Europe and Japan combined. These figures are expected to increase as initiatives of the Free Trade Area of the Americas take root.

For many years most North Americans looked south and only saw problems: coups, military dictatorships, communist-inspired insurgencies and economic crises. Over the last two decades, the Caribbean and Latin America have embraced democratic governance; of the 32 nations in our theater, all but one are governed by leaders who serve at the pleasure of the people. The military forces of Latin America are also contributing to this process by supporting civilian authority and the rule of law. Human rights are accorded more respect, and in a region where military governments and coups were commonplace, great progress has been made. In fact, the only non-democratic country within the entire SOUTHCOM AOR is Cuba, a sad remnant of the Cold War. We remain hopeful that the people of Cuba will eventually enjoy the personal liberties and increased economic opportunities that are inherent in a free society with a market economy.

While we are encouraged by these political and economic trends, we are mindful that many of these

democracies are fragile. In a region that fears no external power, is essentially at peace with itself, and on a per capita basis, spends less on arms than any other region of the world, transnational threats have emerged as the greatest dangers to regional stability. There is a growing realization throughout the region, from the tip of the Southern Cone to the Straits of Florida, that the corrupting influences of drug trafficking, money laundering and organized crime are undermining the foundations of democracy and impeding economic development. It is against these transnational threats, and specifically illicit drug trafficking, that SOUTHCOM has framed its CD strategy.

## The Drug Threat

The entrenched and increasingly diverse illegal drug business continues to demonstrate an ability to meet the world demand, and poses increasingly complex challenges to CD efforts throughout our area of responsibility. Cocaine and heroin continue to be a formidable industry in the Source Zone. Coca is grown almost exclusively in the three Andean countries of Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. It is refined into finished cocaine Hydrochloride, primarily in Colombia, then transported to the United States. Colombian poppy fields are a primary source of the opium that is converted into heroin also destined for the United States. Finally, there are also numerous growing areas in the Caribbean that supply significant amounts of marijuana for U.S. consumption.

Drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). The nature and modus operandi of DTOs are well known. Their primary strategic strength is their ability to operate with significant financial backing and freedom of action in the source and transit zones. Nurtured by a constant demand for their product, these transnational criminal organizations are resilient, dynamic, and agile. They have transformed and survived through the dissolution of traditional drug cartel organizations. They have proven over time that they can rapidly adjust transit routes and modes in response to U.S. and Participating Nation interdiction efforts.

Motivated by profit, DTOs are increasingly gaining control over Colombia's infrastructure, economy and security apparatus. In some areas, they operate with near impunity, controlling ports and many of the rural areas of the Andean Ridge. An integral part of their security arrangement involves the cooperation of insurgents. These insurgent groups, in turn, have become increasingly dependent on drug profits to sustain themselves. As a result, this mutually beneficial relationship has allowed DTOs to realize profit levels that support sustained secure operations in rural areas; areas that are increasingly encroaching on civilian population centers.

DTOs possess a large amount of capital and resources, which are increasingly invested in legitimate businesses. Their disregard for national sovereignty allows them to cross national frontiers with impunity and gain unfair advantage over legitimate business enterprises, which further undermines the civil government. However, DTOs are not invulnerable. Inefficiencies caused by an effective CD effort can drive up the price of illegal drugs to the point where U.S. demand wanes. With the right amount of effort, the profit from drug trafficking can be reduced to a point where it becomes a far less profitable and lucrative business.

We know DTOs intend to maximize profits. To that end, they are continuing to expand cocaine production and export to the United States, Europe, Asia and new secondary markets in South America. They are also continuing to plant higher-yield varieties of cocaine in the Putamayo and Caqueta growing areas in Colombia and expand cocaine production within Peru and Bolivia. In the future, DTOs will likely seek to expand cultivation within the border regions of Brazil, Panama, and Venezuela. DTOs will also attempt to strengthen security alliances with insurgent groups that undermine regional governments.

## Theater Architecture

To sustain our support to on-going CD efforts in the region and to compensate for our redeployment from Panama, we have worked hard to reset a viable theater support architecture. Our goal is to continue support to detection, monitoring and tracking operations as well as sustain the logistics base for regional engagement activities.

Looking at the map of the hemisphere and taking into account SOUTHCOM's two primary missions, regional engagement and counterdrug, Howard Air Force Base has served us well. However, in compliance with our treaty obligations, we will turn over all facilities to the government of Panama by the end of 1999. We are establishing a theater architecture to support operations into the 21st century.

Puerto Rico will replace Panama as our main operating hub in the theater. The United States Army South

(USARSO) is in the process of relocating its headquarters to Fort Buchanan. Once reestablished, this force of 1,382 active and reserve component soldiers and civilians will undertake the missions previously carried out by a contingent of 3,868 in Panama. To compensate for reduced manning, USARSO will rely heavily on the more than 16,000 Army and Air Force Guardsmen and Reservists stationed in Puerto Rico. In a great many ways this is an ideal marriage. Puerto Rican guardsmen and reservists are bilingual, making them equally effective whether conducting engagement activities with members of English-speaking militaries in the Eastern Caribbean, or with Spanish-speaking counterparts in Central and South America.

Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH) is our most heavily committed component. Each year the soldiers, sailors and airmen of our theater Special Operations Command conduct nearly 150 deployments into our Area of Responsibility. SOCSOUTH provides the quick reaction force we need to respond to crises and other fast-breaking requirements. To perform these demanding missions Special Operations forces must be close to the action and keep a sharp edge on their language and cultural skills. We are relocating approximately 350 members of SOCSOUTH to Naval Air Station, Roosevelt Roads. We are also finalizing basing arrangements for selected command and control and intra-theater airlift assets on Puerto Rico. Collocation of ground and air forces is imperative for precise planning and rapid execution of crucial missions.

Another important organization, strategically located, at the Soto Cano Airbase in Honduras since 1983, is Joint Task Force (JTF) Bravo. JTF Bravo is a contingent of about 500 soldiers and airmen who have for 16 years occupied temporary, expeditionary facilities on the east side of the airfield. Soto Cano has been, and will continue to be, our main hub for operations throughout Central America. To preserve adequate tactical mobility, some of the 228th Aviation Battalion helicopters formerly based in Panama will reinforce the limited aviation assets assigned to JTF Bravo. The superior performance of JTF Bravo during the tragic, early hours of Hurricane Mitch underlined the importance of this unit's presence to the people of Honduras.

The SOUTHCOM Headquarters has now operated in Miami for 20 months. I am convinced that we are in the right place to implement our engagement and CD strategies. Miami is widely accepted by the nations of this hemisphere as the de facto capital of Latin America. With its economic, cultural, academic, transportation and consular ties to our area of responsibility, Miami has proven to be the most credible location in the continental United States from which we can engage the entire region. Relocating from Panama to Miami has supported our mission, and afforded us opportunities to pursue "smart business" practices in providing support services to the SOUTHCOM military community. Consistent with my desire to nurture and fully support "smart business" and business reform efforts, I believe the United States Government will be best served by purchasing our headquarters building and land. An initial review of the development trends in this part of Miami reveals dramatic increases in the value of real property.

Until its recent deactivation, Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-South), operated from its headquarters at Howard Air Force Base and served as our primary planning and execution agent for CD operations and activities in the source zone. Our departure from Howard has caused us to redesign our counter narcotics command and control mechanism. We have merged JIATF-South with its counterpart organization JIATF-East in Key West. Through deliberate integration of communications and information systems we have created a single organization capable of "seeing" from the Florida Straits into the Andean Ridge. The merged JIATF will be responsible for planning, coordinating and supervising the execution of detection, monitoring and tracking and other CD missions in both the source and transit zones. To achieve a streamlined and cost-effective organization, the SOUTHCOM Headquarters will assume responsibility for some administrative, logistical and programmatic activities previously performed by both JIATFs.

We have also made significant progress towards establishing Forward Operating Locations (FOLs) to support the air coverage that Howard Air Force Base formerly provided. Interim access agreements have been signed with the Government of Ecuador for the use of Manta and with the Kingdom of the Netherlands for the use of Aruba and Curacao.

On April 16, 1999, Secretary Cohen designated the Department of the Air Force as Executive Agent for Manta, Ecuador and Aruba/Curaçao and the Department of the Navy as Executive Agent for a future Central American location. We are aggressively moving to establish these FOLs to support on-going air operations. Expeditionary CD operations began in May in Aruba and Curacao and will be expanded in the coming months. Our focus will be on executing strategic/high payoff operations designed to keep our level of support at the 1997 levels achieved from Howard Air Force Base.

In order to sustain the 1997 level of CD operations, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, through his Drug Enforcement Policy and Support office, submitted a proposed reprogramming action of \$45,000,000 from the DoD Working Capital Fund into the Central Transfer Account in

February, 1999. To meet immediate Post 1999 theater CD architecture requirements I deferred \$17,000,000 of current year SOUTHCOM CD requirements, some of which are Congressional high interest items, and \$15,000,000 of Post 1999 architecture requirements. Unless the requested reprogramming action is approved in the very near future, the full Post 1999 CD architecture will not be in place at the start of Fiscal Year 2000. Additionally, I will face the challenge of determining which cuts to make to the theater CD mission in Fiscal Year 2000 to fund these one-time relocation expenses.

## Resource Constraints

In addition to an effective theater architecture, SOUTHCOM requires sufficient resources to support the goals and objectives of the National Drug Control Strategy. The U.S. military services have continued to contribute CD detection and monitoring resources to SOUTHCOM in the form of dedicated CD aircraft flying hours and ship steaming days. The standing Joint Chiefs of Staff CD Execute Order establishes specific requirements. However, while the Air Force and Navy are tasked to provide a specific number of platforms, higher priority contingencies, maintenance requirements, and exercises have prevented consistent and full allocation of these platforms to SOUTHCOM. Over the past years, we have lost some capabilities. For example, a degraded intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capability is eroding the effectiveness of our CD efforts. Adequate ISR capabilities are key to quickly and successfully reacting to drug traffickers, changes in operational patterns.

CD requirements place additional demands on low-density/high demand forces. As a result, we are confronted with a large mission and limited resources. In response to this challenge, we have devised creative approaches that will enable us to effectively and productively carry out our CD responsibilities in a resource- constrained environment. We have developed a three-part strategy to sustain our CD efforts.

## Counterdrug Strategy

The key components of the strategy are:

1. promoting effective regional responses,
2. pursuing better coordination and more effective employment of interagency resources, and
3. applying innovative tactics, techniques and procedures.

### ***Regionalizing the Effort***

By expanding joint and combined operations, we are moving toward multilateral and regional responses. For example, through the SOUTHCOM sponsored Caribbean Nations Security Conference and the Association of Caribbean Command Military Chiefs, we are strengthening our relationships with European forces in the region. Subsequently, the contribution of British, Dutch, and French surface and air assets to multinational CD operations in the Caribbean has resulted in greater operational efficiency and has lifted some of the burden from U.S. forces in the region.

Exercise United CD 98 (UCD 98) is a prime example of how we are supporting regional initiatives of the Summit of the America's. Fifteen countries were represented at UCD 98, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Trinidad & Tobago, Venezuela, and the United States. UCD 98 brought together national CD teams that compiled positive and negative lessons learned from air and maritime CD operations. The exercise provided an opportunity to evaluate operations, discuss information sharing, and increase CD cooperation and coordination. In this regard, the Organization of American States is now a full co-sponsoring partner for this year's exercise.

### ***Interagency Involvement***

In much the same way that we have sought better and more complete coordination and cooperation with our European and Latin American partners, we are pursuing a better integrated CD effort with the Departments of State, Justice and Transportation. A Coast Guard Rear Admiral commands the merged Joint Interagency Task Force in Key West, which has 34 designated interagency billets in its new structure. We have also instituted quarterly coordination meetings between CD resource sponsors from State, Defense and the office of National Drug Control and Policy. In combination, these initiatives are generating a better-managed and more fully coordinated CD effort.

### ***Innovative Approaches***

We have learned that the traffickers study and analyze our operating patterns in much the same way we study and analyze theirs. Therefore, we have developed innovative ways to maximize the use of our limited resources. One example of this is the series of "pulse" operations we have conducted in the Caribbean. The first such operation, "Frontier Shield", successfully disrupted the heavy flow of drugs through Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the Eastern Caribbean. Anticipating that traffickers would shift their maritime routes westward through the Central Caribbean, we conducted a follow-on operation, "Frontier Lance", that targeted routes to and through Hispaniola. A third operation, "Frontier Saber", sequentially targeted transit routes through the Bahamas and the Northern Caribbean.

We are now conducting follow-on phases to these operations to stay ahead of the drug traffickers in the Eastern and Central Caribbean. Additionally, operation "Costa Esmeralda" was recently completed along the Western Caribbean movement vector and Operation "Caper Focus", designed to disrupt and interdict drug traffic along the Eastern Pacific movement vector, is underway today.

As a companion to these maritime efforts, we have initiated Operations "Central Skies" and "Weedeater." These initiatives involve surge operations by U.S. aviation assets in support of Central American and Caribbean CD forces. These operations concentrate our limited helicopter lift assets in specific areas where focused intelligence tells us they will have the greatest effect.

In the Source Zone, we continue to provide Peru and Colombia with night vision equipment and training, improvements and modifications to their interceptors, as well as detection and monitoring support. Our focus is to ensure they maintain the pressure on the long-haul airbridge between Peru and Colombia. It appears that this route remains essentially disrupted. This has forced drug traffickers to shift their air routes over Brazil and increase their reliance on the region's extensive river systems. Anticipating this shift, we have embarked on an ambitious five-year program to enhance the riverine interdiction capabilities of Peru and Colombia. In 1998, the first year of the program, Peru opened a joint riverine training center at Iquitos. Additionally, indigenous riverine support craft have either been launched or are under construction and a training and provisioning program is underway that will ultimately result in the fielding of 12 operational Riverine Interdiction Units in Peru. In Colombia, we have supported improvements to their riverine infrastructure and the formation of seven additional Riverine Combat Elements. We are optimistic that this type of support will enable Peru and Colombia to exert greater control over their inland waterways. We are considering extending the program to other nations in the region.

SOUTHCOM is also assisting Colombia in its efforts to reform and restructure its Armed Forces, transition the Colombian Army from its defensive mindset, forge a better union with the National Police, and improve its overall CD capabilities. Colombian leadership is in the process of creating a Counterdrug Joint Intelligence Center and a Colombian Army Counterdrug Battalion. This battalion is a highly mobile unit, designed from the ground up to work with the Colombian National Police, other Colombian Army units, or independently, taking the fight to traffickers in the safe havens of Southeastern Colombia where the majority of cocaine production takes place. SOUTHCOM is working closely with the Colombian Armed Forces providing them guidance, advice, and training, as they develop these new, important and very relevant capabilities.

## Country and Regional Assessments

With the exception of Paraguay, which was granted a waiver based on vital interests of the United States, all nations within the AOR have passed the counternarcotics certification process.

**Peru and Bolivia.** For the second consecutive year, we have observed significant reductions in coca cultivation, leaf production and base production in both Peru and Bolivia. During 1998, cultivation dropped 26% in Peru and 17% in Bolivia, while leaf and base production dropped by roughly 25% in both countries. It is clear that Peru and Bolivia are making steady and significant inroads into cocaine production and we are assessing equipment and infrastructure development options that will enable them to sustain or accelerate these positive trends.

**Colombia.** Colombia is the producer of 75% of the world's cocaine HCl. Lack of government control over nearly 40% of the countryside has allowed cocaine cultivation in Colombia to increase by 28% in the last year. Colombia's situation is especially complex because the sophisticated international narco-criminal organizations cooperate with a mature insurgency and an illegal paramilitary movement. Colombian security forces confront a triangle of violence with themselves on one point, two well entrenched insurgent groups on another, and brutal paramilitary organizations on the third. Together, these agents of instability and violence threaten not only the democratic and economic security of Colombia, but provide a sanctuary for a thriving narco-criminal element. Operating from safe havens in eastern and southern Colombia, they are enlarging their domains into Panama's

Darien Province, as well as Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru.

We have long recognized that Colombia's problems are international in their dimensions. The events of the past year have brought that point home to all of the countries I have mentioned. We are aggressively working with all of the affected nations to encourage unity of effort against a threat they are individually incapable of defeating. Despite this dim picture, I believe Colombia is headed in the right direction and I am cautiously optimistic. While the government of Colombia seeks a negotiated settlement with the insurgents, Colombia's military leaders are purposefully pursuing reform and restructuring initiatives that will make the security forces increasingly competitive on the battlefield.

**Venezuela.** We have adopted a "wait and see" posture in the aftermath of Hugo Chavez's landslide victory in Venezuela's December presidential elections. We have been encouraged by President Chavez, declaration that he desires closer and broader cooperation with the U.S. on CD matters. It is notable that on several occasions since taking office, President Chavez has pledged "absolute and total" commitment to the regional CD effort. However, Venezuela has recently denied CD overflight requests. My staff is conducting an assessment of the impact of this stance by the Venezuelan government. A U.S. delegation will visit Venezuela soon to discuss CD cooperation. It is imperative that we come to closure with Venezuela on CD cooperation, otherwise our efforts throughout the region will suffer in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

**Panama.** As our forces withdraw in compliance with the treaties, I have concerns about the ability of local security forces to deal with the security challenges that confront Panama. The Panamanian Public Forces (PPF) are neither organized nor equipped to deal with incursions by Colombian insurgents into the Darien and San Blas Provinces. The Maritime Service has already expressed reservations about their capabilities to provide for canal security requirements and we have detected recent indications of an upsurge in drug trafficking in and around Panama.

It will be necessary to completely reassess our security relationship with Panama as our forces depart. We have voiced strong support for increased security assistance funding for Panama to enable the maritime service to strengthen its capabilities, and we are prepared to intensify our engagement with the PPF to assist them in meeting other emerging security challenges.

**Central America.** Beyond Panama, the other nations of Central America have become a vital link in hemispheric efforts to stem the flow of drugs. Fueled by concerns over their emergence as transshipment points and increases in internal drug use, over the past year we have seen the nations of Central America take a more aggressive stance against narcotics trafficking. Interagency estimates tell us that as much as 59% of the cocaine destined for the U.S. travels along the Western Caribbean/Eastern Pacific/Central American movement corridor. We have increased our involvement and engagement with the nations of Central America in the counterdrug struggle. Through Operation "CENTRAL SKIES" we are providing tactical airlift support to host nation security and law enforcement elements, enabling them to respond instantly to intelligence cues. Some significant seizures have occurred as a result of these operations. We have also forged maritime agreements with several of these countries that have facilitated interdiction efforts in their territorial waters. Increased cooperation with Central American countries is slowly but steadily increasing the risk to traffickers along a heavily used movement corridor.

**Caribbean Basin.** The Caribbean serves as the conduit for 30% of the cocaine destined for the United States. Two primary conveyances are used. The first is small aircraft that depart South America and fly to areas off Puerto Rico, Haiti, Cuba, and the Bahamas where they conduct airdrops to waiting high-speed boats that retrieve the drugs and bring them ashore. These high-speed boats are the second common conveyance and are referred to as "go-fasts". These "go-fasts" conduct open-ocean transits or skirt the Central American coast to crossing points on the Yucatan Peninsula. As in Central America, many Caribbean nations have aggressively taken up the fight against drug traffickers by participating in operations, such as "Weedeater". Even so, the ability of DTOs to selectively exploit the limited security and law enforcement capabilities available to Caribbean nations, and particularly Haiti and the small island states of the Lesser Antilles, creates a pressing need for U.S. support and close coordination of regional responses to drug transshipment operations.

SOUTHCOM, in partnership with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Department of State, and the U.S. Coast Guard, continues to work to enhance regional interdiction capabilities by providing host nations with training, infrastructure repair, modernization, and support for maritime operations in support of host nation CD goals. The Caribbean Support Tender, soon to be deployed with a multinational crew, will provide Caribbean nations with a mobile training classroom for their Navy and Coast Guard forces.

## Conclusion

My vision of the future for this region is succinctly stated in our recently published Theater Strategy: "A community of democratic, stable and prosperous nations successfully countering illicit drug activities and other transnational threats; served by professional, modernized, interoperable security forces that embrace democratic principles, respect human rights, are subordinate to civil authority, and are capable and supportive of multilateral responses to challenges."

Printed in Spanish and English, the document containing this statement has been delivered to every military leader in our area of responsibility. I consider this vision to be realistic, achievable and affordable.

In SOUTHCOM we do not need armor divisions, carrier battle groups, fighter wings or Marine Expeditionary Forces. We need modest numbers of the right kinds of people, with the right skills, doing the right things at the right times and places. This is an economy of force theater and I have every intention of keeping it that way. However, cheap does not mean free. Our modest requirements for forces and resources must be met and the unique needs of this region must be considered. I have mentioned several areas where levels of support have receded unacceptably placing the mission at risk. These shortfalls must be addressed and our forces must be positioned where they will do the most good. I request your continued support of SOUTHCOM, especially our efforts to create an efficient and effective theater architecture for the next century.

**Actualizada: 23/VI/99**

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