



**Remarks for Consular Corps of Miami
Luncheon Remarks
3 November 2009**

2661 words	2 Nov 09 Approx. 17 mins.
------------	------------------------------

Mr. Ashkar, thank you so much for the kind introduction. It is an honor for me to be here. I would like to thank the Vice Dean of the Consular Corps, the Honorable Kent Hippolyte ... and the entire consular corps for the invitation to speak with you today. This is a diverse and distinguished group, and I welcome this opportunity to speak with you.

I took command of US Southern Command on the 25th of June, returning to a region I had known during my childhood. I graduated high school from Colegio Nueva Granada in Bogotá, and because of this experience and the friendships I forged ... I gained a life-long appreciation and affection for Latin America. Since then, my career in the United States Air Force has taken me to other parts of the world and I never dreamed I would have the opportunity to return to work with the warm, charming, caring, vibrant people I so admired in my youth.

In the 120 days since I took command, I have made several trips throughout the region. My travels have not only reaffirmed my fondness of this rich, distinctive region ... a region with soaring, majestic mountains; the vast “green sea” of the Amazon rainforest; its tranquil, idealic beaches; its energetic, vibrant cities; but resident throughout the region is the warm, generous spirit of its people.

But my travels have also raised my awareness and understanding of the challenges facing Latin America and the Caribbean. Across the region, poverty, unequal income distribution, and corruption darken the vibrance and spirit I just described. We also face the recurring challenges that recurring natural disasters, like hurricanes, floods, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes provide. Importantly for me, I see these as challenges that we **all** share together...and as such, we need to work together to address them.

But before I focus on what I see as our primary threat and challenge, let me say that I do not see a conventional military threat in the region, to the United States nor between other nations within our hemisphere. Our nations may disagree on political and economic matters, but we have seldom resorted to war as a means of settling these differences ... and I do not see this dynamic changing in the foreseeable future. Our nations are ***united by a common view that we can settle our problems through negotiated agreements*** and this view provides the key for security of our citizens. This view requires a steadfast commitment to protecting our fundamental liberties and defending our common commitment to maintaining democracy and the rule of law. The recent Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord signed in Honduras reflects this view.

With this as a backdrop, let me address the challenge I think we all face today. It is a significant, non-traditional, national and international security threat to the region – the threat of illicit trafficking.

When I talk about illicit trafficking, I want to make it clear that I am not focusing only on illegal drug traffickers – in addition I include human traffickers, weapons smugglers, money laundering, wildlife traffickers, and document forgers. Illicit

trafficking is a transnational enterprise with many different stakeholders – it is an enterprise that flourishes with and breeds instability. This said, let me focus my discussion of illicit trafficking on drug-traffickers because it remains the most wide spread and widely known transnational illicit enterprise.

Cocaine, as you know, remains the primary drug export product for illicit traffickers in Latin America. However, trafficking in other drugs is growing – such as methamphetamines and heroin. Unfortunately for the United States, we remain the drug traffickers primary market. Recent estimates show that more than two thirds of cocaine leaving the Andean Ridge region of South America is destined for the United States.

But this fact is changing and illicit traffickers look for additional markets. The other third of cocaine leaving South America is ending up in markets in Europe and the Middle East and this number is growing. In Europe, Spain now has the highest per capita rate in the world.

In addition, according to the United Nations 2009 World Drug Report, drug traffickers are establishing new markets in Latin America. Drug trafficking organizations now pay for their activities in kind, using drugs vice money for payment. This is resulting in higher drug use throughout the transit countries. Just last week, Brazilian Federal Police arrested 59 people in two massive anti-drug operations in nine states. One drug ring operated on the Brazilian border with Paraguay, Bolivia and Colombia, while the other drug ring focused on transporting drugs from Colombia through Brazil to markets in the United States and Europe.

The illicit drug trade undermines governments ... throughout the Americas ... But with its enormous income – an estimated \$320 billion per year global industry – it fuels the vehicle for other illicit activities.

The networks and routes used to move illegal drugs are also being used to smuggle weapons, transport currency, and ship forged documents ... even to smuggle exotic wildlife and human beings. For example, as the U.S. and other nations have strengthened their financial reporting laws since September 11, 2001, it has become increasingly difficult for illicit organizations to deposit large sums of money. As a result, we have seen an increase in the size and number of money seizures in the last several years. The largest cash seizure was by Mexican authorities in 2007, confiscating more than \$205 million US dollars—over two **tons** of paper currency—all directly related to the drug trade. And just two months ago, Mexican, Colombian and US authorities worked together to seize more than \$41 million US dollars found in shipping containers headed to Colombia.

The Illicit trafficking enterprise is a global business constantly looking to find new domestic, regional and international markets, to expand their reach and increase their profits. They intentionally and unintentionally undermine national sovereignty and the rule of law. And as a result, from where I sit, illicit trafficking has grown beyond the capability of individual governments to address. Because it operates internationally, together, we must address it as a regional security concern as well as the internal national security concern.

The success of the Colombian Government against the FARC and growing success of the Mexican Government against the drug cartels serve to illustrate

my point. As both governments are successful at reducing the problem internally, the illegal organizations are moving to other areas in the region where they can operate more freely ... within Central America, the Caribbean, and other parts of South America. To emphasize this point, earlier this year, Guatemalan President Álvaro Colom acknowledged that the Mexican Gulf Cartel and its armed group, *Los Zetas*, occupy several parts of its provinces bordering Mexico.

Illicit trafficking organizations seek to exploit the institutional and geographic boundaries within and between nations – the very boundaries that we use internally and internationally to govern, protect our citizens, and conduct commercial activity. They exploit the boundaries between national and international law enforcement organizations, between law enforcement and militaries, between international borders, and they exploit the international agreements and structures that enable our international system to work.

Confronting the threat of illicit trafficking will not be successful by using sophisticated airplanes, vehicles and weapons alone. Nor can victory be achieved by each nation alone. Nationally, it requires a whole-of-government approach. Internationally, it requires a whole of governments approach that empowers all partners at all levels – military and civilian ... foreign and domestic ... public and private sectors, to work together to confront this threat to our security.

You are probably asking why, as a military officer, I've spent so much time talking about this subject. The reason is that as I look across our hemisphere at our security challenges, the recurring and growing challenge remains illicit trafficking. We have all witnessed its impact on Colombia and Mexico and the focus it is taking both

countries to address the problem. And as they become successful, the traffickers will look for other havens. For example, this year, the amount of drugs transiting through Panama has grown from 7 percent to 24 percent. As a result, Panama now estimates that 85 percent of its homicide rate is associated with drug trafficking. So I'm talking about the issue because I think we need to find a 21st Century solution to this 21st Century threat.

Today, the U.S. military plays a small but important supporting role in the fight against traffickers. Working in conjunction with other U.S. federal agencies and international partners, U.S. Southern Command supports the operation of the Joint Interagency Task Force South, located in Key West. JIATF South, as it is known, is headed by a US Coast Guard Admiral responsible for the detection and monitoring of illicit trafficking through the maritime environments of the Eastern Pacific, Caribbean and Western Atlantic Ocean. The Director manages an organization that integrates thirteen partner nations ... including 5 from outside the Western Hemisphere... as well as 11 US Government agencies, including US armed forces, law enforcement and intelligence agencies. JIATF South's ability to integrate actionable intelligence and analysis enables the organization to respond quickly and across multiple lines of jurisdiction and authority to constantly challenge illicit traffickers. By fostering a close working relationship with many partner nations and agencies, information is passed quickly to multinational forces patrolling international and territorial seas to interdict illicit traffickers. I am extremely proud of JIATF-South's continued success, but I am even more heartened by **the standard** it has set for coordination, integration and cooperation among so many various partners. And it has been the model of consistent and

enduring engagement for **20 years!** We need to foster more organizations like JIATF South.

While I have focused my talk so far almost exclusively on illicit trafficking, Southern Command is partnering with other regional militaries and security forces throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. We're working with one another to improve the capability, capacity and interoperability of our forces.

Two examples of this cooperation and partnership are exercises UNITAS GOLD and PANAMAX.

Earlier this year, UNITAS GOLD conducted its 50th annual exercise, representing ***a half century legacy*** of naval cooperation and partnership in the Western Hemisphere. This exercise brought together partner militaries to build and improve maritime domain capability and capacity. This year provided an impressive display of partnership – more than 25 ships, four submarines, 50 aircraft, 650 Marines and 6,500 Sailors from eight partner nations participated, including Germany and Mexico.

In another example, just completing its seventh year, PANAMAX 2009 was one of the largest multinational training exercises in the world, involving more than 30 vessels, a dozen aircraft, and 4,500 personnel from more than 20 sovereign states and the United Nations. The exercise focused on providing support for Panama and ensuring the defense of the Panama Canal, a critical point in the free flow of trade and goods for the region and the world.

Another example of US Southern Command's engagement and partnering in the region is our CONTINUING PROMISE program, an annual humanitarian and civic assistance program supported by US and international military medical personnel,

regional health ministries and non-governmental institutions. For the second time in three years, the hospital ship COMFORT brought medical, dental and veterinary services to 7 Caribbean, Central and South American nations during its 4-month deployment. More than 270 volunteers from non-governmental organizations and 70 medical personnel from 10 partner nations were on board to treat more than 100,000 patients. These numbers mirror what COMFORT accomplished in 2007, and what USS KEARSARGE and USS BOXER achieved in 2008. We are already in the planning stages for CONTINUING PROMISE to carry on this vitally important work and engagement next year. Our continuing commitment to building important partnerships in the region is demonstrated through these and other types of endeavors, exercises and operations that are underway throughout the Americas 365 days a year.

Southern Command is committed to partnering in meaningful and productive ways. We work to build upon each other's strengths to forge enduring relationships and foster trust through open and direct communication.

In conclusion, now, more than ever, we must remain committed and engaged to address the challenges and threats we face **together**. The detrimental effects of illicit trafficking are numerous – border insecurity, rising health care costs, increased crime, and public insecurity. Illicit traffickers do not respect the rule of law, democracy, or national sovereignty ... nor do they take a vacation. Only through building enduring partnerships, can we successfully meet these threats and challenges to a secure, stable and prosperous Americas.

Thank you.