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United States Southern Command Strategy

“Enduring Promise for the Americas”

INTRODUCTION. This strategy guides U.S. military actions to protect our homeland by building enduring partnerships and countering threats in Latin America and the Caribbean. It reflects the National Defense Strategy’s assessment of the complex global security environment and the reemergence of great-power competition. Sustaining and strengthening our alliances and partnerships in the Western Hemisphere will help to accelerate and shape this global expansion of the competitive space in ways that advance our mutual interests. As we strengthen alliances and partnerships, we will reduce threats to the homeland and create dilemmas for our competitors. We will safeguard our shared principles of democracy, sovereignty, human rights, and rule of law.

The men and women of United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) work every day to earn the trust of allies and partners in Latin America and the Caribbean. We are friends and neighbors, bound together by shared values and a shared stake in our common future. Our partnerships are vital to security and prosperity in this hemisphere and to our collective ability to confront global challenges. We recognize that the success and security of future generations depend on how effectively we build trust with allies and partners in the hemisphere today, in alignment with and in support of interagency partners. These interagency partners include the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, and Department of Treasury.

Our strategy reflects USSOUTHCOM’s **ENDURING PROMISE** to be a trustworthy neighbor. Our strong military-to-military relationships, grounded in shared values and professionalism, are at the core of our contributions to U.S. whole-of-government efforts. The strength of U.S. alliances and partnerships provides us with an edge that no competitor can match. However, in many areas around the globe, including this hemisphere, our competitive advantage is eroding. We must work tirelessly—and with a strong sense of urgency—to maintain that edge.

The risks of not implementing this strategy are significant. Transregional and global threats require sufficient focus and attention on Latin America and the Caribbean. Failure to meet our defense objectives in the region will result in increased threats to the United States and our allies and partners, including greater difficulty in executing our missions to counter drug trafficking and the influence of violent extremist organizations. Without action, the United States will continue to cede influence to China and Russia in the hemisphere. China’s growing access to regional maritime, cyber, and space infrastructure poses increasing risks to the United States and our allies and partners, and could eventually affect global Joint Force employment.

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT. USSOUTHCOM is responsible for military-to-military relationships and the employment of U.S. forces in an area of responsibility encompassing 31 countries and 16 dependencies in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. The nations of this

neighborhood are connected in every domain: land, air, sea, space, and cyberspace. In the words of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1941, “The safety of American homes, even the center of our country, has a definite relationship to the safety of homes in Nova Scotia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Brazil.”

Our relationships are firmly rooted in common interests and values. Our cultural and economic ties are historic and enduring. Countries in the region conduct more than \$1.8 trillion in trade annually with the United States. From 2013 to 2017, total U.S. foreign direct investment in Latin America and the Caribbean exceeded \$655 billion. The region’s projected economic growth presents opportunities for future increases in U.S. trade and investment. U.S. relations with the region extend beyond nation-states to include businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and multinational organizations. Strong cultural, economic, and interpersonal ties posture the United States well to work closely with countries in the region to address shared threats and strengthen the defense of our homeland.

Most relationships between neighbors in this hemisphere are based on respect, cooperation, and mutual understanding. USSOUTHCOM works with professional security forces in the region who contribute actively to regional and global security initiatives. Continuing to increase security and stability in Latin America and the Caribbean will expand opportunities for legitimate trade and investment, and decrease the ability of malign state actors and illicit networks to exploit the region at the expense of our shared interests.

President Roosevelt’s recognition of the link between the security of our neighborhood and our homeland is as true today it was in 1941. The 2018 National Defense Strategy states, “The United States derives immense benefit from a stable, peaceful hemisphere that reduces security threats to the homeland. Supporting the U.S. interagency lead, the Department (of Defense) will deepen its relations with regional countries that contribute military capabilities to shared regional and global security challenges.”

Threats. The strengths and opportunities of our hemisphere are set against a complex array of threats and challenges. Governance and institutional capacity remain uneven across the region. Weak governance and corruption are among the most important challenges. They allow threats to flourish and provide opportunities for malign regional and external state actors to expand their influence. They also increase vulnerability to environmental shocks, including natural disasters.

Transnational criminal organizations and violent extremist organizations threaten citizen safety, regional stability, and the national security of the United States and our allies and partners. These illicit networks exploit the interconnected nature of transnational trade and transportation systems to smuggle people, drugs, bulk cash, weapons, and other contraband across borders. The region is the largest source of illicit drugs and illegal migrants to the United States. The use of bribery, fraud, and violence by illicit networks disrupts legitimate economic opportunity and undermines the rule of law. Many transnational criminal organizations

trafficking in drugs are better funded and organized than the security organizations that confront them.

Their activities contribute to the challenges of violence, corruption, and poverty, which are among the primary drivers of illegal migration. Fourteen of the 20 most violent countries in the world are in Latin America and the Caribbean. Corruption encourages the complicity of government officials in illicit activities and erodes public trust in government institutions. People who lack confidence in their governments are more likely to leave their countries in hopes of finding better opportunities elsewhere.

Weak governance and corruption provide permissive environments for malign state actors to expand their influence and threaten U.S., allied, and partner nation interests. While the United States is still the largest trading partner in the region, China is rapidly increasing its trade and investment, and is now the region's largest creditor. Corruption incentivizes officials to agree to predatory economic and security arrangements with China that put the prosperity and sovereignty of their nations at risk.

China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian models. Many of their actions around the world, including in this hemisphere, are aimed at undermining the principles of democracy, sovereignty, human rights, and rule of law, as well as contesting U.S. legitimacy. China has expanded its One Belt, One Road Initiative in Latin America and the Caribbean at a pace that may one day overshadow its expansion in Southeast Asia and Africa. Russia and Iran have increased anti-U.S. information efforts in the region, and Iran has exported its state support for terrorism into this hemisphere. Emboldened by support from China and Russia, their regional allies Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua engage in destabilizing activities that threaten hemispheric security and democratic governance. As one of the world's most democratic regions, the Western Hemisphere is increasingly important space for malign state actors who seek to challenge and subvert the international order.

China employs the same predatory, opaque foreign lending practices it has implemented around the world to exert political and economic influence in this hemisphere. China's control of deep-water ports and infrastructure associated with the Panama Canal enhance its global operational posture. Its telecommunications investments and access to space tracking facilities place military operations, intellectual property, and private data at risk. China and Russia also support their authoritarian allies in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, often through propaganda and other information-related tools. Russia spreads disinformation to sow disunity, collects intelligence, and deploys strategic assets such as warships and nuclear-capable bombers to the region to demonstrate its global reach. Russia also provides financial, military, and other support to Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua; these long-standing relationships provide Moscow with access and options. Iran's proxy, Lebanese Hezbollah, maintains facilitation networks and raises funds in the hemisphere, often via drug trafficking and money laundering. Iran remains the most significant state sponsor of terrorism around the world.

Cuba, like Russia and China, supports the Maduro regime and is especially complicit in Venezuela's descent into dictatorship. Following the Cuban government's advice and assisted by its intelligence machinery, Maduro is adhering to the same autocratic blueprint Cuban leaders have ruthlessly executed for over six decades. At the same time, Venezuela is engaging in increasingly provocative actions that threaten the sovereignty of its neighbors. Nicaragua appears to be going down a similar path, with Cuba and Venezuela enabling President Ortega's repression of his political opposition.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION. This strategy relies on enhanced integration and alignment with the Joint Force, USG partners, and allies and partners.

VISION. USSOUTHCOM is a mission ready and trusted partner that works collaboratively to ensure the Western Hemisphere is secure, free, and prosperous.

MISSION. USSOUTHCOM deters aggression, defeats threats, rapidly responds to crises, and builds regional capacity, working with our allies, partner nations, and U.S. government (USG) team members to enhance security and defend the U.S. homeland and our national interests.

STRATEGIC APPROACH.

Partnerships based on our shared values of democracy, sovereignty, human rights, and rule of

"The Joint Force retains competitive advantage by reinforcing relationships with allies and partners, while seeking opportunities to expand the competitive space through new partnerships and relationships. Collectively, work on these relationships, to include multinational exercises and wider information sharing, bolsters allied and partner military capability, promotes interoperability, fosters resilience, and provides niche capabilities to mitigate Joint Force capacity shortfalls." — 2018 National Military

law are key to advancing security and stability in the Western Hemisphere. They are elements of the competitive space we seek to expand to limit opportunities for malign actors. Peaceful and prosperous democratic partners are more resilient to the corrosive influence of transnational criminal organizations, violent extremist organizations, and

malign state actors. Increased integration and cooperation between and among nations in the Western Hemisphere helps to reduce threats to the security of our homeland and the hemisphere, and to ensure we are ready to meet future challenges and contingencies. Focused investments in this neighborhood yield a solid return on investment for the United States and our partners.

DESIRED OUTCOMES (ENDS).

- **Shared Values and Greater Opportunities.** All nations support democracy, sovereignty, human rights, and the rule of law. Nations are stable, friendly, and prosperous.

- **Stronger Security Partnerships.** USSOUTHCOM has enduring partnerships with professional security forces and institutions. These partnerships enhance our collective readiness and capability to contribute to regional and global security.

“Stable, friendly, and prosperous states in the Western Hemisphere enhance our security and benefit our economy. Democratic states connected by shared values and economic interest will reduce the violence, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration that threaten our common security and will limit opportunities for adversaries to operate from areas of close proximity to us.” — 2017 National Security Strategy

- **Stability and Security.** USSOUTHCOM, allies and partners, and other USG agencies have defeated threats. Regional and external state actor malign influence is blunted. Drug trafficking, illegal migration, violent crime, and corruption have been reduced to levels at which they do not threaten regional stability and security.

METHOD (WAYS). We organize our efforts along three *Lines of Effort* (*Strengthen Partnerships, Counter Threats, and Build Our Team*). These are the *Ways* we generate our desired outcomes. These *Lines of Effort* are the lanes on the strategic bridge that get us from where we are today to our future destination.

Strengthen Partnerships. USSOUTHCOM is part of a multinational and whole-of-government team working to advance security, governance, and economic opportunity in our neighborhood. We will focus our partnership efforts on shared security challenges and place greater emphasis on achieving measurable outcomes.

- We will increase our presence. Presence is essential to strengthening our partnerships, exercising our interoperability, and signaling U.S. commitment to the region and to the security of our neighborhood. To borrow a sports analogy: we must be on the field to play.
- We will leverage our bilateral security assistance to enhance regional cooperation, including by supporting partner efforts to strengthen and integrate the regional security network through joint and multinational training, exercises, and operations.
- We will emphasize programs that help build professional and effective security forces and institutions.
- We will strive for interoperability with our partners, which includes long-term commitments and opportunities for burden sharing.
- We will improve alignment and integration of our security cooperation activities with broader Joint Force, USG, and regional efforts. Areas of opportunity include increasing information and intelligence sharing, enhancing readiness to respond rapidly to natural disasters and other crises, strengthening border security, and stemming transregional illicit flows of drugs and people.

We work by, with, and through three broad categories of partners:

Allies and Partner Nations. We will strengthen our relationships and interoperability with allies and partners in pursuit of common interests, including in areas of emerging focus like space and cyber. Improving integration with NATO allies who share our interests in the region (Canada, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) will further strengthen regional security structures and reinforce our global network of alliances and partnerships. Greater integration will also improve the efficiency of our respective efforts to build sustainable partner capacity and enhance our collective capacity to respond rapidly to crises and contingencies.

USG Partners. We will increase alignment with USG partners to support whole-of-government efforts to address global and regional challenges. We will increase focus on integrating informational efforts with interagency partners to reinforce respect for human rights, rule of law, and democratic principles, and expose the activities of malign state actors.

Civil Society. USSOUTHCOM will work with NGOs, the private sector, academia, and other elements of civil society to improve our understanding of global and regional security challenges and advance common security objectives. These objectives include our ability to respond rapidly to support humanitarian assistance and disaster response operations.

Counter Threats. We will increase cooperation and information sharing with allies and partners to understand and counter threats from transnational criminal organizations, violent extremist organizations, and malign regional and external state actors.

Transnational Criminal Organizations and Violent Extremist Organizations. By leveraging information sharing and critical U.S. enabling capabilities, we will reinforce partner efforts to deny transnational criminal organizations and violent extremist organizations the use of established smuggling routes through the Americas. We will focus on enabling partner nation and lead-federal agency operations aimed at interdicting illegal drug supply chains and disrupting transnational criminal networks. We will align our security cooperation activities, operational support, and exercises with USG partners to maximize outcomes against priority criminal and terrorist networks.

Malign Regional and External State Actors. We will work with our partners to blunt malign activity in our neighborhood. We will share information on China's predatory and opaque economic practices around the world with allies and partners to increase understanding of China's malign influence. We will deny Russia the strategic opportunity to control the information space in this hemisphere by using our consistent engagement and presence to tell our story and diminish the effects of their disinformation campaign. We will increase information sharing to improve identification and disruption of the activities of Lebanese Hezbollah and their proxies in the region. We will continue to exchange insights with allies and partners on the malign activities of regimes in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

Build Our Team. Our USSOUTHCOM team will be ready for both steady state and crisis operations. Knowledge matters: we must have a trained, educated, and highly competent work

force. Our education will include history and culture. Our team must understand the business of warfighting and be equally capable of executing security cooperation with initiative, agility, and transparency to achieve results. We must plan and act with a sense of urgency, and approach every week as though it is our last week of peace.

We must operate from a foundation of trust, unity of effort, and shared understanding. We will embrace innovation, while holding ourselves accountable for results and to being good stewards of taxpayer resources. We commit to continuous improvement of our knowledge, processes, and business practices in order to align our activities with priorities and measure returns on investment. Being capable and ready includes ensuring our individual and family health and readiness.

MEANS. Our *Means* are the resources (e.g., time, forces, equipment, and money) and authorities we use to achieve our strategic outcomes. A dollar or an hour invested smartly in this hemisphere goes a long way. Primary means include:

Engagements and Presence. Key leader engagements by U.S. military and government representatives help to establish shared defense objectives and generate mutual understanding. Security cooperation personnel located within U.S. Embassies are our “maneuver forces” and our closest touchpoints as we strengthen relationships with partner nations. Our components and rotational teams of conventional, reserve, and special operations forces provide presence, which includes National Guard units through the State Partnership Program (SPP). They also enable the sustained engagement necessary to strengthen partnerships, counter threats, and build our team. Our posture and presence at Naval Air Station Guantanamo Bay (Cuba), Soto Cano (Honduras), and Naval Air Station Key West (Florida) support humanitarian assistance/disaster relief and counter-drug operations. Our presence at Guantanamo Bay also supports detention operations.

Education and Training. Education and training programs for partner nation personnel facilitate mutual understanding of values, doctrine, and culture. This understanding allows us to operate with our partners more effectively. These efforts are supported by Department of State programs (e.g., International Military Education and Training, Foreign Military Financing, and Foreign Military Sales) and Department of Defense programs (e.g., the Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program). We also provide defense institution building and other advisory support through the Ministry of Defense Advisors Program, William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Studies, Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), and Inter-American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA) to assist partner nations in strengthening the transparency and accountability of their defense institutions. USSOUTHCOM also supports the multinational Inter-American Defense College (IADC) through its U.S. Element.

Information and Intelligence Sharing. Information and intelligence sharing build trust and mutual understanding, and enhance our collective effectiveness in countering threats. We continue to improve the quality, depth, and frequency of our exchanges.

Personnel Exchanges. Personnel exchanges, including partner nation liaison officers, enable information sharing and collaboration in steady state and crisis operations.

Exercises and Operations. U.S. participation in multinational exercises and operations builds trust, interoperability, and collective capabilities and readiness. U.S. participation demonstrates meaningful commitment and expands the competitive space. Moreover, it provides opportunities to build mutual collective readiness.

Equipment. Our partners prefer U.S. training, equipment, and education. U.S. equipment comes with the assurance of quality and a “total package” approach that includes training, maintenance, and sustainment.

Authorities. U.S. law provides authorities for USSOUTHCOM to conduct training, support U.S. and partner nation law enforcement agencies, build partnership capacity, and conduct operations.

These *Means* are the building blocks we use to strengthen partnerships, counter threats, and build our team. We embed support to public diplomacy and other information efforts to tell our story within each of these building blocks.

We set these building blocks on the foundation of professionalism. Professionalism is the bedrock of the legitimacy of security forces around the world. It encompasses jointness, talent management (including gender integration), human rights, and non-commissioned officer development. We work with our partners to elevate and integrate key elements of professionalism into our engagements, education, exercises, and operations, including by exchanging lessons learned and best practices.

CONCLUSION. Partnership goes a long way in this hemisphere. The right, focused investments yield a solid rate of return for the United States and our allies and partners. Our efforts in this hemisphere play an important role in countering global threats, including the scourge of illicit drugs and the influence of actors who seek to reshape the world in accordance with authoritarian models. Maintaining and sharpening our competitive edge will require creative approaches and disciplined focus on our priorities. Our return on investment will be lives saved, shared values preserved, partnerships strengthened, and greater opportunities for security, freedom, and prosperity throughout the Western Hemisphere.

The Nation has entrusted the men and women of our team with protecting American lives and interests. We embrace our task.



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