



Association of the United States Army

Voice for the Army—Support for the Soldier

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U.S. Army South

*Fostering Peace and Security in South America,
Central America and the Caribbean*

When it comes to South America, Central America and the Caribbean, I cannot overstate the importance of awareness, access and the enormous return on investment from personal, on-the-ground security relationships. As the United States turns its attention to the home front to address domestic economic and budget issues, I firmly believe we must remain engaged with the nations in our shared home, the Western Hemisphere, for one very simple reason: proximity. Left unaddressed, security concerns in the region can quickly become security concerns in the homeland.

General John F. Kelly, USMC,
Commander, U.S. Southern Command¹

U.S. Army South maintains over a half century of history with partner armies in Central America, South America and the Caribbean region. These strong relationships are essential to successfully meet unique challenges of illicit networks that threaten our nation's security.

Major General Joseph DiSalvo, USA,
Commander, U.S. Army South²

Introduction

Between the end of the Vietnam War and the 11 September 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks on the United States, the U.S. military was involved in three armed conflicts. Two of the three—Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada and Operation Just Cause in Panama—occurred in the U.S. Southern Command (U.S.-SOUTHCOM) area of responsibility (AOR). This area encompasses 31 countries and 15 special sovereignty areas across more than 15 million square miles, including all Central and South American landmass and adjacent waters south of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea and island nations. This environment presents challenging conditions such as unequal wealth distribution, social exclusion and corruption. It also poses a unique combination of security issues: transnational organized crime, illicit networks, mass migration, narco-terrorism and natural disasters.

Joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational commitment has quietly but effectively prevented additional armed conflict, but this environment remains influenced by persistent tensions, challenging conditions and security issues that make it imperative to maintain an engaged, committed presence in the region. Conditions in the AOR, just a short distance from the U.S. southern coast, present a real and present danger to the homeland.



As the United States, after more than a decade of war, reprioritizes to operate within a complex, uncertain and resource-constrained environment, its security depends on leveraging capabilities and forward presence. The 2013 National Security Strategy outlines new priorities and emphasizes the nation's ties to its allies:

We must begin to reposition our worldwide force projection capabilities, defend critical strategic resources, and promote stability in the international system through unilateral strength and multilateral alliances.³

The U.S. Army, with a long history in the Caribbean and Central and South America, continues to share

¹ Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, United States Marine Corps, Commander, United States Southern Command, before the 113th Congress Senate Armed Services Committee, 19 March 2013.

² Major General Joseph DiSalvo, Commander, United States Army South, remarks to staff, 30 July 2013.

³ *National Security Strategy 2013 (Final Draft)*, [http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/sites/default/files/file/news/National%20Security%20Strategy%202013%20\(Final%20Draft\).pdf](http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/sites/default/files/file/news/National%20Security%20Strategy%202013%20(Final%20Draft).pdf).

U.S. Southern Command Area of Responsibility: A Diverse Region



Source: United States Southern Command

responsibility for fostering peace and security in the Western Hemisphere. From Hurricane Mitch humanitarian assistance in Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua (1998), to Operation Just Cause (1989), to the 2010 Haiti earthquake response, U.S. Army South (ARSOUTH), the Army's land force in the Caribbean and Central and South America, has supported U.S. national security objectives in the region through proactive engagement and enduring partnership.

Background

Since 1904, when the first U.S. Soldiers arrived in Panama to assist with the construction and defense of the Panama Canal, through its present Army service component command (ASCC) status with headquarters at Joint Base San Antonio, Texas, ARSOUTH has continuously contributed to stability in the region. It continues to reinforce that commitment through exercises, partnership events and natural disaster response efforts that not only shape an alliance with partner nation militaries but also provide U.S. forces opportunities for realistic multinational contingency training. The command fills multiple roles as ASCC, U.S. Southern Command Land Component Command and, on order, a joint task force (JTF) or Coalition Force Land Component Command (CFLCC).

Approximately 1,550 Soldiers and civilians serve at the main command post, the 1st Battlefield Coordination Detachment in Arizona, JTF-Bravo in Honduras and JTF-Guantánamo (GTMO) in Cuba. ARSOUTH provides

Title 10 and Executive Agent support to JTF-Bravo, 1/228th Aviation and the 525th Military Police Battalion and provides Combatant Command Support Agent services to those organizations, the Office of Military Commissions that facilitates detainee trials at JTF-GTMO and 26 Security Cooperation Offices throughout the Western Hemisphere. ARSOUTH is also the Headquarters, Department of the Army Executive Agent for worldwide Phase III Reintegration operations, providing medical and psychological care and other transition services to help missing, captured or detained personnel resume stable professional and personal lives.

The command maintains depth through regional alignment with active Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve units, including the Georgia National Guard's 48th Brigade Combat Team. ARSOUTH's regional efforts are also integrated with and complemented by 19 National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) units that maintain enduring relationships with 22 counterparts in the AOR. This combination of active and reserve forces provides a scalable, flexible, agile and responsive team with unique professional skills and unmatched experience.

Current Initiatives

ARSOUTH maintains an active presence to prevent conflict, shape security conditions and prepare U.S. and partner forces to win in combat decisively by focusing on three main efforts: countering transnational threats, contingency response preparedness and theater security cooperation.

Countering Transnational Threats (CTT). Transnational threats are a growing U.S. national security concern warranting a whole-of-government approach, including Department of Defense (DoD) support as outlined in the President's *Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime*, released in July 2011. The President's strategy recognizes that

Criminal networks are not only expanding their operations, but they are also diversifying their activities, resulting in a convergence of transnational threats that has evolved to become more complex, volatile and destabilizing.⁴

Drug trafficking represents the preponderance of illicit trafficking in the Western Hemisphere and is the principal means by which transnational criminal organizations obtain funding and increased power and influence in the region. Central America is also a conduit for a broader range of transnational threats—including human trafficking, migrant and weapons smuggling, gang violence, forgery and money laundering—which increasingly exceed the capacity of partner nation police and security forces. Narco-organizations and related illicit trafficking present an unmistakable danger not just to the AOR but also to the U.S. homeland. An estimated 17,500 foreign nationals, many from the Western Hemisphere, are trafficked in the United States each year.⁵ Additionally, supporters and sympathizers of Hezbollah conduct illicit activities in the AOR to fund terrorism worldwide and to support and harbor terrorists in the region.⁶

To counter these threats, USSOUTHCOM conducts operations to support partner nation security forces and interagency and intergovernmental efforts. ARSOUTH provides planning, training and infrastructure development support to partner nation military and security forces to improve their capabilities to conduct counternarcotic and counter-illicit networks efforts and border security missions. It leads partner nations to a regional approach to security. If partner nations agree to burden-sharing, potential adversaries' freedom to proliferate will be contained.

Contingency Response Preparedness (CRP). Contingency response represents the most likely venue for the deployment of Army forces in the AOR. The unique geographical characteristics of the region make it vulnerable to devastating natural disasters which often require international support to save lives and mitigate suffering. In addition to frequent hurricanes and highly destructive earthquakes, the region is also affected by volcanoes, mud slides, flooding, fire and tsunamis.



As the largest of the USSOUTHCOM components, ARSOUTH is tasked to form the core of a joint task force for contingency response in the AOR. It maintains a command and control node capable of responding to short-term contingency requirements. Within 72 hours, it can deploy in response to natural disasters and catastrophic events throughout the AOR. The initial deployment package can be expanded to a larger contingency command post or joint task force, depending on the severity of the contingency event. ARSOUTH's humanitarian response plans were tested during Hurricane Mitch disaster relief in Central America in 1998 and in Operation Unified Response in Haiti in 2010.

Fuerzas Aliadas—Humanitarius (Allied Forces—Humanitarian, or FA-HUM) is the annual Joint Staff-approved, regionally oriented disaster response exercise that includes ARSOUTH, partner nation forces and regional disaster management agencies. Capitalizing on contingency response training events and exercises such as FA-HUM not only prepares U.S. and partner forces to operate effectively in times of crisis but also promotes integration and interoperability with other U.S. government agencies, among partner nations and within local communities.

Theater Security Cooperation (TSC). Building partner nation capacity for security and governance reduces the likelihood of armed conflict, garners support for military operations and extends presence and security into ungoverned and under-governed areas. ARSOUTH integrates theater security cooperation efforts with its sister services, regionally aligned forces and National Guard SPP units to shape security conditions in the AOR. Its headquarters staff includes senior foreign liaison officers from Chile, Colombia and Brazil who not only coordinate activities between

⁴ President Barack Obama, *Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime*, July 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/2011-strategy-combat-transnational-organized-crime.pdf>.

⁵ Congressional Research Service, *Trafficking in Persons: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, 23 December 2010.

⁶ Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012, Public Law 112-220—December 28, 2012, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-112publ220/content-detail.html>.



their armies and the United States but also participate as an integral part of the command.

ARSOUTH's robust exercise program is a cornerstone of theater security cooperation. PANAMAX—the annual event designed to exercise the defense of the Panama Canal by a multinational joint task force—has grown from a U.S.-led exercise with three participating countries at its inception in 1993 to a partner nation-led event with 19 countries in 2013. PANAMAX, FA-HUM, Peacekeeping Operations—Americas and Integrated Advance are exercises designed to promote readiness and interoperability for active and reserve Soldiers to work together with other services, agencies and one or more partner nations. Beyond the Horizon (BTH), a three-to-four-month engineer, humanitarian civic assistance and infrastructure construction/repair operation, is conducted in two countries each year. BTH also exercises readiness and interoperability and creates an opportunity for active and reserve Soldiers to practice their professional skills by providing needed medical, dental, veterinary and engineering support to underdeveloped areas in the region.

In addition to exercises, exchanges and sustained engagements, ARSOUTH conducts the U.S. Army South Staff Talks Program on behalf of the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army to synchronize activity for bilateral security cooperation between the U.S. Army and Brazil, Chile, Colombia and El Salvador, its four staff talks partners. The program includes multiple steering sessions and engagements culminating in an annual meeting with each partner country to confirm activities to build interoperability and cooperation.

While the staff talks are a platform for cooperation between ARSOUTH and individual partner armies, the Conference of American Armies (CAA) expands Western Hemisphere security cooperation discussions to 20 member armies, five observer armies and two observer organizations. An international military organization established in 1960 to build relationships and synchronize efforts among the armies of the Western Hemisphere, the CAA has grown to include a long-term vision for coordinated army-to-army interaction.

The Way Ahead

For more than a century, the Army has demonstrated its commitment to building relationships with partners in South America, Central America and the Caribbean to foster peace and security and address challenges to common interests. America's partner nations have made tremendous progress in the areas of public security, human rights and rule of law. The return on the nation's small investment in this AOR



has been substantial. Through the effective use of limited resources, ARSOUTH, in its many roles, has helped promote a more stable region with reduced violence and greater multinational cooperation. If the United States does not invest the time and effort to maintain strong regional partnerships, it risks eroding these achievements and creating a void for other state and nonstate actors to fill. Focused regional security cooperation is paramount to building both the capability and the commitment required to confront security challenges before they mature into direct threats.

USSOUTHCOM and the U.S. Army depend on ARSOUTH exercises, engagements and advisory capabilities as low-cost, small-footprint means to achieve security objectives.⁷ Maintaining the small investment of an engaged U.S. Army component in the Western Hemisphere not only supports partner nations but also provides a cost-effective opportunity to exercise U.S. forces' capabilities and readiness. The U.S. Army maximizes presence in the region by integrating shared objectives and activities among a mix of active and reserve forces. Long-standing Army National Guard SPP relationships are a model for building interoperability, promoting access and enhancing security. Active and reserve units deploying to the region learn to operate together, maintain readiness, renew critical skills and provide support to local populations.

Together, through persistent and effective engagement with partner nations and the support of joint, interagency and intergovernmental organizations, America and its Army are postured to face the challenges of transnational threats and chart a course for improved security and stability in the Western Hemisphere. **Timely and predictable funding together with leveraging half-century-old enduring relationships between the U.S. Army and its partner nations' militaries are keys to fostering peace and security in this vital region.**

⁷ *Western Hemisphere Defense Policy Statement*, October 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/news/WHDPs-English.pdf>.