

A Former CINC Looks at Latin America

By BARRY R. McCAFFREY

Latin America and the Caribbean are poorly understood by many North Americans whose superficial awareness of the nations to their south is limited to Cuba and Mexico, and perhaps to a belief that the other countries of the region are homogeneous and Spanish-speaking. These people do not understand that the largest community in South America speaks Portuguese, that most in the Caribbean speak Spanish, and that Dutch, French, Guarani, and Quechua are important languages. This perspective is further distorted by the prism of the 1960s and 1970s, when Latin America was regarded as a land of military dictatorships where elites ruled and human rights were violated. That false impression still endures today and influences U.S. policy toward the region.

For this reason, Latin America is ranked low by Washington when it comes to economic, political, and international security priorities. Indeed, only one of six stated U.S. principal foreign policy objectives, countering drug trafficking, is regarded as at stake in the area. The low prominence of the Americas partially reflects a perception that there are no vital national security interests to the south of the United States that threaten our survival. Nor does the region have many problems in common with other areas of the world. It is not haunted by unstable regimes that blackmail other states. Neither are there hegemony that threaten their neighbors and necessi-

tate a counterbalancing U.S. presence or rapid reinforcement. Nor are there rogue states that challenge the international order or sponsor terrorism. Ethnic and religious strife do not tarnish the political scene. Finally, no failed states are fomenting civil war, chaotic fiefdoms, deprivation, or unchecked violence. From all perspectives, it is a good news part of the world. But unfortunately this means that the United States is tempted to ignore the area.

During the 1980s the reality was different, and many contend that U.S. attention to that part of the world was

greater. In South America, a troubled Argentine dictatorship miscalculated and tragically went to war against Great Britain. At home, there was a rancorous debate over how to influence the civil wars in Central America—a controversy that culminated with the Iran-Contra hearings. Nicaragua was seen as a communist foothold and Washington was appropriately intent on preventing a victory by Marxist insurgents in El Salvador. Indeed, U.S. policy toward Latin America was understandably heavily influenced by East-West ideological struggles. As late as 1987 there were 25 Marxist insurgencies supported by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Nicaragua in the area. In response, U.S. naval forces loitered off Central America, Washington trained and advised conventional and guerrilla forces, and the U.S. military considered how to more actively support allies who were mired in vicious internal warfare throughout Central America.

Today the scene has improved dramatically. The Central American instability of the 1980s is essentially over. A U.N. peacekeeping operation

in South America, the transition from authoritarianism to democracy has largely been completed

successfully oversaw a reconciliation process in El Salvador. The disruptive Sandinista regime has been voted out of office in Nicaragua. The corrupt dictatorship of Manuel Noriega was replaced by democracy in Panama. Only in Guatemala has turmoil persisted in a civil war which now seems to be slowly ending. In South America, the transition from authoritarianism to democracy has largely been completed.

General Barry R. McCaffrey, USA (Ret.), is director of the Office on National Drug Control Policy and previously served as commander in chief, U.S. Southern Command.



U.S. Navy (Johnny D. Biviera)

While Jeffersonian democracy may not be the rule, political systems are becoming more responsive to wider constituencies. Military institutions are essentially loyal to constitutional and democratically elected governments. More than 830 million people in the Western Hemisphere live in democratic regimes, with only Cuba enslaved in tyranny. Our collective economies constitute a \$13 trillion market. Intra-hemispheric commerce is striking. U.S. trade is greater with Brazil than China and with Venezuela than Russia, and greater with 3 million Costa Ricans than 100 million Eastern Europeans and with 14 million Chileans than a billion Indians. By the turn of the century, Latin America will have a \$2 trillion economy. It will trade more than \$600 billion in goods and services, and the level of U.S. trade with the region will exceed that with Europe.

Clearly, this part of the world warrants continued U.S. attention based on positive political and economic developments. Despite its being an area where no vital national security interests are at stake, we must still address the flow of drugs from and through it. Moreover, we must prevent uncontrolled immigration from the region. In the past five years, eight of twenty-seven operations conducted by the Armed Forces dealt with unchecked immigration from Cuba and Haiti.

Given the low level of threat to U.S. interests, few defense resources are apportioned to the region. Less than .2 percent of our military (both active and Reserve) is assigned there. In fact, there are more DOD civilians in Japan than U.S. troops permanently assigned in Latin America. The share of the defense budget expended in the region is similarly small. So why does one of the five U.S. regional combatant commands watch the area? Absent the focus that a unified command brings to U.S. security dialogue with any region, meaningful security relations languish. A look at our security affiliation with sub-Saharan Africa supports that assertion.

Regional Cooperative Security

The role of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) is to support the objectives of U.S. policy in its assigned area of responsibility (AOR)—Central and South America with contiguous waters—and assist friendly nations. It is distinguished from the other regional commands in how the military instrument is used. SOUTHCOM is not about power projection or forward presence to dissuade potential adversaries or assure access to strategic resources, but it could be. Planning conventional military operations is not

the central focus, although this type of planning is done.

Nevertheless, the command is a strategic military headquarters which has as its primary function the command and control of deployed U.S. forces committed to national security policy objectives. Toward that end, SOUTHCOM each year oversees the deployment of more than 50,000 soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen from the active and Reserve components. The three major elements of this strategy are building regional cooperative security, supporting the national counterdrug strategy, and fostering the development of appropriate Latin American militaries.

Historical insecurities and border disputes continue to affect Latin American contingency planning, procurement decisions, and force deployments. SOUTHCOM believes that increasing professional interaction among militaries fosters cooperation in the security arena. This contact can reduce the insecurities that influence defense planners and can help resolve long-standing disputes. National forces can then concentrate on peacekeeping, counterdrug operations, illegal migration, arms smuggling, and the cooperative effort to manage land, sea, and air frontiers.

The primary SOUTHCOM vehicle for promoting contact among the armed forces of Latin America is the foreign military interaction program. This program includes multinational exercises, conferences and symposia, personnel and unit exchanges, staff assistance and assessment visits, and orientations that are pursued without seeking to mediate or eliminate disagreements. Instead, we seek collaboration through activities that involve common interests.

Peacekeeping Exercises. The militaries of Latin America contribute to various multinational peacekeeping operations. Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela have participated with great valor and effectiveness in former Yugoslavia. Brazil has played a superb leadership role in peace operations in Angola and Mozambique, both Portuguese-speaking nations,

while 39 percent of the highly professional Uruguayan army has peacekeeping experience. Currently, 10 Latin American countries are participating in 13 U.N. missions around the world.

In August 1995 SOUTHCOM facilitated a multinational peacekeeping exercise in Argentina to foster cooperation among national military forces within the southern cone. The effort was led by the visionary chief of staff of the Argentine army, and featured a scenario that replicated challenges facing

MOMEP is being conducted at essentially no cost to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the United States

peacekeepers in Bosnia. A computer-assisted command post exercise drew players from the U.S. Army Peacekeeping Institute, U.S. Army School of the Americas, XVIII Airborne Corps, 10th Infantry (Mountain) Division, and U.S. Army South. This was the first time that protagonists in the War of the Triple Alliance (1865–70)—Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay—came together in an exercise that emphasized the benefit of multinational military activities to regional security. A similar exercise is scheduled for Montevideo in August 1996.

In addition, SOUTHCOM supported multinational exercises (at the Joint Readiness Center, Fort Chaffee, Arkansas; San Juan, Puerto Rico; National Simulation Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; and Joint Task Force-Bravo, Honduras) which addressed mutual interests such as narco-guerrillas, disaster relief, or peacekeeping. Moreover, wargames that once focused on neighbors are no longer played. During the last year, approximately 10,000 Latin American troops took part in SOUTHCOM-supported training aimed at building regional cooperative security.

Peacekeeping on the Ecuador-Peru Border. In January 1995, a traditional dispute between Ecuador and Peru over an undemarcated section of their border erupted. Although the fighting was confined to a remote jungle area, mobilization by both sides threatened a bloody conventional war similar to

one conducted in 1941. Fortunately, this latest episode was halted by quick diplomatic and military efforts on the part of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the United States, who committed to guarantee the accord reached after the 1941 clash. Since March 1995 military contingents from these guarantor nations have progressively solidified a standing cease-fire. The Military Observer Mission to Ecuador and Peru (MOMEP) has supervised the separation of some 10,000 personnel located in the disputed area. Another 150,000 troops were demobilized and returned to peacetime garrison duty. We are enormously proud that Ecuadorians and Peruvians have been integrated into the four-power observer force in which they constitute the majority of mission personnel.

This casualty-free observer mission is being conducted at essentially no cost to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the United States. Ecuador and Peru agreed to provide \$15,000 daily, a bargain if compared to fighting a war—a half billion dollars for one month of tactical skirmishing. The mission has created military conditions that could lead to a diplomatic settlement. This process must be given time to take root. If an accord is not reached, the hemisphere risks serious fighting between these nations. SOUTHCOM has a small contingent high in the Andes to support the effort. U.S. soldiers and airmen are providing helicopter lift, intelligence, logistics, and command and control for this remarkable peacekeeping mission.

Counterdrug Strategy

Latin America is the source of the world's cocaine. Peru is the origin of two-thirds of the world's coca and Bolivia is the second largest producer. Colombia is the only other country that raises a significant crop. The cocaine potential of South American coca in 1994 exceeded 800 metric tons with a value of over \$30 billion in the United States. The cultivation of Colombian opium has exploded over the past five

years. In 1990 Colombia produced no heroin, yet today it accounts for 5 to 10 percent of the international supply. Heroin sold on U.S. streets is ten times more pure than in the 1970s and sells at 1.5 times the price. Each year, the drugs that come to the United States from Latin America—including almost 300 tons of cocaine—cause irreparable harm, contributing annually to 10,000 deaths and a \$67 billion price tag associated with drug abuse.

The economic power of drug traffickers makes them almost invulnerable to the unassisted counterdrug efforts of Latin American governments. In Colombia, for example, annual proceeds from trafficking by the cocaine cartels is about \$8 billion. This is more than total legal exports in 1992 and about 10 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). The influence of the cartels is so great that allegations of their contributions to the 1994 presidential campaign led to a constitutional crisis. Undoubtedly, the notion of a narco-democracy is a threat to the entire region.

Closer to home, the route for 70 percent of all cocaine entering the United States is Mexico. Traffickers made an estimated \$30 billion profit last year according to Mexico's attorney general. Drugs have been transported into Mexico with almost total impunity on commercial jets and then to the U.S. market. Methamphetamines, once an almost exclusively domestically manufactured drug pushed by California biker gangs, is produced in Mexico for buyers in the United States. Clearly, the illegal drug trade is a transnational threat that requires international cooperation to be countered.

Over the past six years SOUTHCOM counterdrug efforts have sought to build a consensus on the drug threat in the region. Among them is the development of multinational capabilities that can be directed against the drug trade. There have been numerous encouraging tactical successes. Sustained operations against small planes flying coca paste between Peru and Colombia are paying off. Smugglers risk interception and being shot down or having their aircraft impounded or destroyed after landing. That increased risk is reflected by a nine-fold increase

in costs, amounting to \$180,000 per flight in 1995. It is also seen in depressed prices for coca leaves in Peru where the cost has dropped by over 60 percent in some cases as supplies exceed the ability to process and transport coca paste. We have great respect for the valor and skill of the Colombian and Peruvian police and military in their struggle against this violent international threat.

Nevertheless, such successes are not directed by an operational instrument that is capable of having a pronounced effect on the price, purity, and availability of cocaine in the



U.S. Navy (Scott M. Allan)

Coast Guard inspecting merchant ship.

Unloading C-5 at Howard Air Force Base, Panama.



U.S. Air Force (Frank Optanic)

United States. Nor have international efforts succeeded in reducing the overall supply. In Bolivia, for example, where the U.S. Government has maintained an extensive counterdrug presence for the last decade, there has been no significant decrease in acreage dedicated to coca. A contributing problem is that there is no government agency analogous to SOUTHCOM to consolidate international counterdrug efforts. Thus the approach to this transnational problem has been to work on a country-by-country basis. One solution is to create a regional coordinator for counterdrug programs undertaken by U.S. agencies. The tactical success of interdiction efforts inspired by SOUTHCOM—which amount to less than 1 percent of the U.S. counterdrug budget—suggest that unity of effort can bring greater success. This menace demands international will, cooperation, and sustained operations.

National Military Forces

The primary value of SOUTHCOM programs is extensive interaction with national military forces in the AOR. At the forefront of the command's efforts are security assistance organizations (SAOs) and defense attaché teams that are part of U.S. missions. These activities serve complementary but mutually exclusive functions. SAOs are subordi-

nate to SOUTHCOM and normally have command and control over deployed U.S. military elements within the country to which they are accredited. Defense attachés on the other hand respond to the Defense Intelligence Agency and are essentially friendly and overt intelligence collectors. Some have suggested merging these two organizations to conserve manpower. Yet there are fewer than

defense spending in Latin America is extremely low; in fact, no other region expends so little on a per capita basis

200 military personnel assigned to such positions in Central and South America, and consolidating them could result in both functions being executed poorly.

SOUTHCOM experience suggests a variety of observations about the militaries of the region to examine.

Despite accusations to the contrary, national military forces do not cause most regional ills. Defense spending in Latin America is extremely low; in fact, no other region expends so little on either a per capita basis or as a percentage of GDP. Like most militaries of the world, these proud national institutions are products of unique historical, political,

(continued on page 50)

U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND

MISSION: The primary mission of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) is to establish and implement plans, programs, and policies in peacetime, conflict, and war which will contribute to the defense of the United States and its allies, and protect and promote U.S. interests in Latin America. Other major missions include conducting disaster relief and humanitarian operations; monitoring security assistance programs in the region; conducting combat, counternarcotics, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and nation assistance; defending the Panama Canal; and implementing the Panama Canal Treaty-2000.

BACKGROUND: The command traces its origins to the arrival of marines in Panama in 1903, days after Panama

declared independence from Colombia. The Army arrived in 1911, three years before the canal opened. U.S. military strength peaked at 67,000 in Panama during World War II. After the war, Army, Navy, and Air Force components were joined to form Caribbean Command which was redesignated SOUTHCOM in 1963. Under the Panama Canal Treaty, signed in 1977, the waterway will be turned over to Panama on December 31, 1999. However, the United States is committed to guaranteeing the neutrality of the canal “indefinitely.”

AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY: The geographic region assigned to SOUTHCOM recently was expanded to include the waters adjoining Central and South America and the Gulf of Mexico, areas that were formerly the

responsibility of U.S. Atlantic Command (ACOM). This change satisfies two key objectives. The first is to enhance the command’s interaction with the navies of Central and South America. The second is to have one commander in control of all U.S. military activities in the Caribbean basin as well as in Central and South America. Because of long-standing relations between the Caribbean and ACOM, including ongoing U.N. operations in Haiti and counterdrug operations across the region, the transfer will occur in two phases (see map). Phase I, implemented on January 1, 1996, transferred responsibility for the waters adjoining Central and South America. Phase II—to be executed only on order of the Secretary of Defense, but not earlier than June 1, 1997—will transfer responsibility for the Caribbean Sea and its island nations, the Gulf of Mexico, and an additional portion of the Atlantic Ocean.



Miraflores Locks, Panama Canal.



Brazilian carrier *Minas Gerais* off Rio de Janeiro.

U.S. Army (Larry Lane)

U.S. Navy (Tracy Lee Dittus)

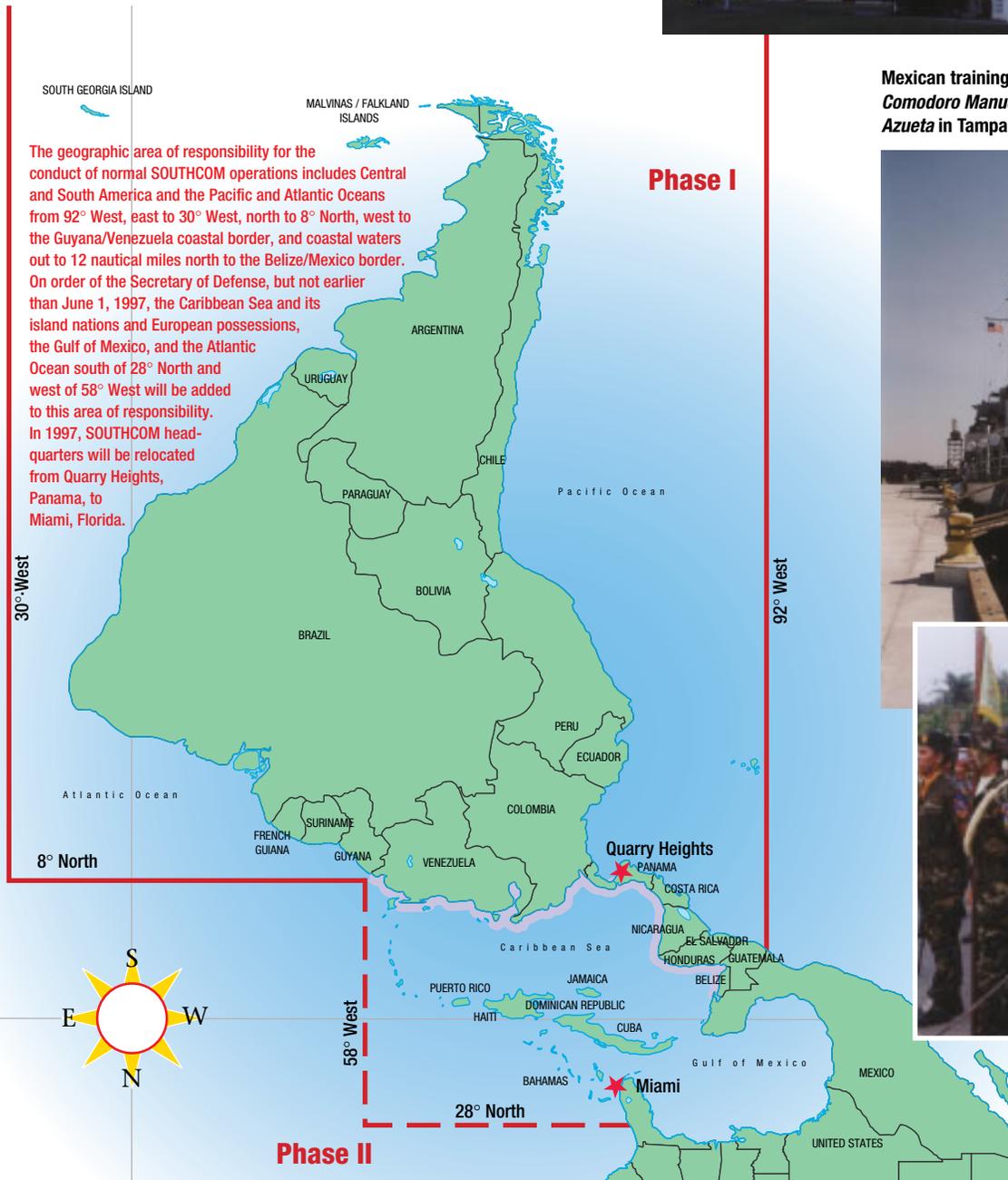
COMPONENT COMMANDS:

U.S. Army South (USARSO); U.S. Southern Air Force (USAFSO)—12th Air Force; U.S. Atlantic Fleet (LANTFLT); U.S. Marine Corps Forces, SOUTHCOM (MARFORSOUTH); and Special Operations Command SOUTHCOM (SOCSOUTH). **JFQ**

SOUTHCOM headquarters, Quarry Heights.



DOD (R.D. Ward)



Mexican training ship *Comodoro Manuel Azueta* in Tampa.



U.S. Navy (John Bowring)



Carlos Hernandez-Gonzalez

Venezuelan army troops.

(continued from page 47)

and social dynamics. Each reflects these factors in its organization and corporate ethic. Less military is not the solution to challenges of poverty, injustice, economic development, and drugs in Latin America.

Most national military forces are professional and honorable. Moreover, many have strong support and trust from citizens. They are led by superbly qualified officers such as Martin Balza of Argentina, Benedito Leonel of Brazil, Moises Orozco of Venezuela, and Jaime Guzman Morales of El Salvador who understand national security and fiscal realities. They are working to maintain disciplined, modern forces capable of accomplishing their constitutional tasks.

National military forces may be inappropriately organized and equipped. Some navies seek blue water capabilities instead of more functional brown water ones, purchasing diesel submarines and destroyers instead of coastal and riverine patrol craft, while air forces acquire jet air-to-air fighters instead of short take-off and landing utility aircraft, coastal patrol aircraft, and helicopters. Their armies feature main battle tanks, artillery, and conscript regiments instead of professional active/reserve units organized for peacekeeping, counterdrug, and engineering/medical operations. In most cases a focus on external threats may be less appropriate than one addressing the new challenges of the 21st century. Some Latin Americans see the belief that a force's professionalism is a function of its similarity to First World military forces as contributing to a disconnect between organization and missions. It is encouraging to note that our senior colleagues reject the notion that the trappings of a modern military force—doctrine, echeloned headquarters, traditional branches, war colleges, etc.—automatically confers professionalism.

Our allies reject the notion of national military forces that are corrupt, distrustful of civilian rule, and concerned primarily with self enrichment. One example of such an organization was the Panamanian Defense Force that under Manuel Noriega formed a partnership with Colombian drug cartels.

SOUTHCOM contacts with regional allies have reinforced this continued focus on more professional and democratic values.

In all dealings with Latin American militaries, SOUTHCOM seeks to function in a collegial manner. It is only through shared, respectful dialogue that change can be achieved. The reality is that the command cannot be the agent of radical change in the region's militaries. SOUTHCOM must assist in a balanced manner, ever mindful of the right of each nation to establish its own forces and doctrine as a function of national sovereignty.

Human Rights

While the region has been marked by enormous political and economic success, there have also been egregious abuses of human rights committed by state and non-state actors including the military, police, insurgents, political organizations, and individuals. But there is reason to believe the human rights record will continue to improve. Strengthening of democratic institutions and the end of Cuban-Soviet inspired insurgency make subversion, terrorism, and associated restraints on civil liberties less likely. Individual rights have also been strengthened by societies that hold governments more accountable and by contributions from non-governmental organizations.

As each nation debates how to address the legacy of human rights abuses, SOUTHCOM has moved to integrate human rights into all of its interactions with Latin American mili-

the sweeping progress in Latin America calls for new strategic thinking and international security arrangements

ties. The military utility of respecting human rights in peace as well as war is stressed. In February 1996, SOUTHCOM and the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights sponsored a conference in Miami on "The Role of the Armed Forces in the Protection of Human Rights." Six government ministers and eight chiefs of services attended this first regional military hu-

man rights conference. Other participants included the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Cesar Gaviria, and representatives from academe, the media, diplomatic corps, and nongovernmental organizations. The involvement of interagency, nongovernmental, and academic spheres in the SOUTHCOM human rights program has been key to its success. It reinforces the concept that the military is accountable directly to civilian governments and indirectly to the people they protect.

The Future

The Panama Canal Treaty signed in 1977 by Presidents Carter and Torrijos transferred both the ownership of and responsibility for the canal to Panama. Moreover, it stipulated that the U.S. military presence in Panama would end at noon on December 31, 1999. U.S. forces are drawing down and returning facilities at a pace that can be accommodated by the local authorities. While no U.S. vital national security interests demand a continued forward presence in Panama, it could have military utility. Many argue it would also contribute to regional stability. A post-1999 presence would only be feasible if the U.S. and Panamanian governments conclude that a common good can be served by such an arrangement. In September 1995 Presidents Clinton and Balladares agreed to hold exploratory talks on the matter.

In 1997, the 800 personnel of the joint SOUTHCOM headquarters will relocate to Miami, the point of convergence for the Caribbean and Central and South America. Miami was selected for its regional ties: 85 percent of the flights by U.S. flag carriers to Central and South America operate out of Miami; all Latin American and Caribbean countries have consulates there; 30 percent of U.S. trade with those countries goes through its port; and more than two million Latin Americans visit yearly. By all indicators, Miami is the economic, communications, and transportation



Scout training in Panama.

hub of the Americas. It is the logical place for the headquarters responsible for U.S. military operations in the Caribbean and Latin America—the SOUTHCOM charter under the recently modified unified command plan (see map on page 49).

The sweeping progress in Latin America, the result of democratic and economic reform, calls for new strategic thinking and international security arrangements. As a free trade area embracing all of the hemisphere emerges within the next ten years, a goal set at the Miami Summit of the Americas in December 1994, we cannot afford to ignore the nontraditional threats to our national security that emanate from the region: illegal migration, drug trafficking, terrorism, and violations of intellectual content and patents of U.S. products. In fact, many people see lower trade barriers as a downside that creates vulnerabilities which will be exploited by international criminal organizations. This is a serious concern as customs formalities on the U.S.-Mexico border are liberalized under the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Most problems cannot and should not be addressed in military terms. Instead, they require collective efforts by all societies affected. Absent a coherent interagency strategy to address these

threats, U.S. successes will be tactical and episodic. They will mostly cause non-state actors to shift their patterns of operation. The drug cartels and sophisticated illegal alien smuggling rings will continue to violate state sovereignty almost at will. Nevertheless, the Armed Forces can contribute to national and regional security by continuing modest interactions with the militaries of Latin America. We can help defuse conventional military crises—as we did on the Ecuador-Peru border. We can help committed nations stop drug traffickers from violating sovereign land, sea, and air space—as we have done with coordinated efforts against the Colombia-Peru airbridge. We can contribute to the ongoing debate over appropriate roles and missions of the armed forces in democratic societies. While this is a debate that must take place in each country, we can share our experience. Forums such as the Williamsburg Defense Ministerial which brought together defense leaders from the hemisphere and SOUTHCOM-sponsored symposia facilitate those debates. We can also help countries reorganize and modernize their forces under democratic leadership.



Extracting marines during exercise on Panama Canal.

SOUTHCOM believes that military operations today offer a model for security dialogue in the context of interstate relations that are not fundamentally based on traditional security concerns. The command is about professionals collaborating to tackle transnational problems and achieving efficiency through shared ideas. It focuses on advancing regional security through exchanges and confidence building measures. Finally, the intention of SOUTHCOM is to contribute to stability, the precursor of democracy and economic growth. Current U.S. military strategy for the Americas is sound. Washington spends only a fraction of its defense resources in the region—less than .2 percent of its budget and under 5 percent of security assistance funds. These are sums that many partners of the United States in the region feel is money well spent. **JFQ**

U.S. Marine Corps (Timothy E. LeMaster)

U.S. Marine Corps (Timothy E. LeMaster)