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Research Report

THEATER STRATEGIC ESTIMATE
CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO

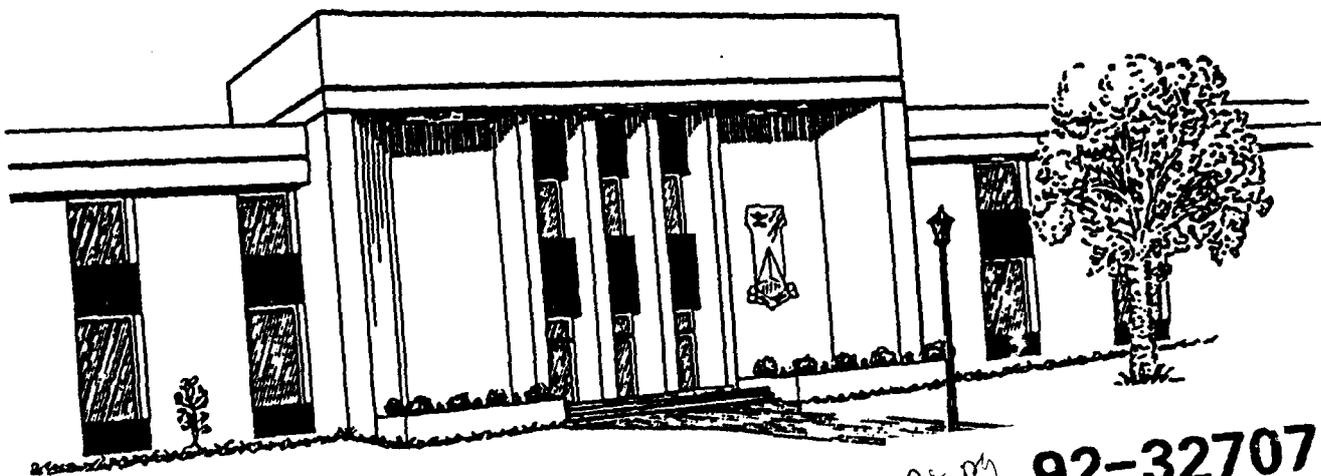
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Theater Strategic Estimate
Central America and Mexico

by

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MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a Theater Strategic Estimate for Central America and Mexico developed as part of the Air War College regional studies program requirements.

For purposes of this paper, Mexico has been included with the Central American region, although the author recognizes that it lies outside the Southern Command's area of responsibility.

This paper is based on the format contained in JCS Publication 3-0, Appendix B, "The Strategic Estimate." It is an update and completion of the draft submitted in February 1992, based on continued research and a visit to the region.

Theater Strategic Estimate

CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO

Section 1: Strategic Direction

A. Major Components of National Security Strategy:

United States policy toward Central America and Mexico is based on the principle of a common destiny and mutual responsibility, as expressed in the "National Security Strategy of the United States." The failure of communism and collapse of the Soviet Union's empire is allowing the formation of a new world order which will provide the United States with many opportunities to further our national interests throughout the Latin American region. We have the chance to expand on our partnership and common interests within this new world order. The entire western hemisphere can set the example by channeling competing interests into cooperation for everyone's benefit in economic and security terms while advancing the cause of human rights and the resurgence of democracy.

President Bush expressed this concept of a new world order as one in which "... all nations and peoples seek political and economic freedom; that governments rest their rightful authority on the consent of the governed, and must live in peace with their neighbors." (1:v) This vision combined with the stated United States interests and objectives forms the basis for this theater strategy.

Global components of this strategy are derived directly from the United States interests, objectives, and overall national security strategy.

The first objective, the survival of the United States as a free and independent nation, with its fundamental values intact and its institutions and people secure, directly affects our dealings with the region in terms of security of the Panama Canal, reducing the spread of arms, and reducing the flow of illegal drugs into this country. In recognizing the serious threat posed by narcotics production, trafficking and consumption to the U.S. and the nations of Latin America, the fight against illegal drugs has been given the highest priority by our national and Defense Department leadership. (2) Our interest in maintaining a healthy and growing U.S. economy is linked to the markets, resources, trade opportunities, and desire for stability in the region. Similarly, maintaining healthy, cooperative and politically vigorous relations with the nations of the region will help strengthen the commonwealth of free nations, lead to balanced partnerships, and further the causes of democracy and human rights. By avoiding or preventing military imbalances in the region, promoting diplomatic solutions, and assisting in combating threats to democratic institutions, we will come closer to our fourth objective of a stable and secure world. Economic freedom, human rights, and democratic institutions can flourish throughout Central America and Mexico as we work together in the new world order.

Regional components of our strategy focus on the resurgence of democracy, military relationships, and economic realism. The reality of a completely democratic hemisphere is drawing closer as the momentum of freedom progresses throughout Latin America. In Central America, specifically, great progress has been made. Costa Rica continues to shine as the region's longest standing democracy. Elections in Nicaragua, the ouster of Noriega from Panama, emerging peace in El Salvador, and reforms in

Mexico all portend an optimistic future. Yet we must recognize the fragile nature of these democracies and assist them at every opportunity. That assistance will frequently be in the form of military-to-military relationships promoting professionalism, assisting civil authorities and promoting human rights. We must continue to support the trend evident throughout the region for negotiated settlements and demilitarization of the "police" forces. At the same time our dedication to free-trade and market oriented reforms where needed can lead to a more prosperous hemisphere. In this area we will focus on expanded trade, increased investment, reduced debt burden, and environmental and natural resource protection.

In summary, the U.S. strategy for this region can best be appreciated in the context of the strategic vision expressed by the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Southern Command, General George A. Joulwan:

"A community of free, stable, and prosperous nations throughout the western hemisphere, acting in concert with one another while respecting the dignity and rights of the individual and adhering to the principles of sovereignty and international law."
(7)

B. Major Components of National Military Strategy:

As the new world order emerges, the United States is embarked on establishing a global military strategy which is based on flexibility, is regionally oriented, and is responsive to the challenges to our national interests and objectives. Key directions for military planning and action must recognize that despite the encouraging progress in the former Soviet Union, they retain a very significant military capability. We will seek to provide a framework for peacetime engagement wherever possible to

enhance security while retaining a similar focus on regional contingencies. We will undoubtedly have to meet these challenges with a "base force" much smaller than we have today, and perhaps smaller than we even now anticipate. Our challenge will be to maintain an appropriate and enduring military capability. In this regard we must maintain a credible strategic deterrent while remaining prepared to counter conventional, regional threats; we must place a premium on efficiency without compromising effectiveness.

These principles have been further articulated in our National Security Strategy as four fundamental demands of the new era: strategic deterrence, force reconstitution, forward presence, and crisis response. (1:25) For the Central American and Mexico region, the later two aspects present the most relevant implications. In terms of crisis response in this region, we must be prepared principally for events which may involve only one or a few nations; that is, regionally oriented contingencies which involve the lower spectrums of armed conflict. Similarly, we are challenged to provide a forward presence tailored for this theater of operations. This should include such aspects as forces located at U.S. bases in Panama and at Soto Cano, Honduras, Security Assistance Offices at each U.S. Embassy, and military assistance and training teams deployed within the region. Another view of forward presence, peacetime engagement, carries a more proactive connotation. It brings with it four mission areas: diplomacy and support for diplomacy, pre-crisis activities, force projection and crisis response, and post-crisis initiatives. (4:15) This view integrates the strategic fundamentals of crisis response and forward presence. These two aspects of our National Strategy form the essence of our regional approach.

From the Central American and Mexican regional perspective this means focusing on the national military objectives of ensuring access and influence, promoting stability and cooperation, and stemming the flow of illegal drugs. Secondary objectives include deterring and being able to defeat aggression in concert with our regional allies as well as combating terrorism in the region. The foundation for this approach will be through a forward presence tailored to the region and its countries combined with a crisis response capability. Our forward presence will consist of fewer permanently stationed troops (as we withdraw from the Panama Canal Zone) and will depend more on periodic deployments, combined exercises, intelligence sharing and cooperation, port visits, humanitarian and security assistance, and military-to-military contacts. This will enable us to demonstrate our commitment to the region, reinforce cohesion, and build on existing relationships. Particularly, through professional military education and training, we will continue to build upon the necessary military-to-military relationships for response to crises as they may develop. Our intention must be to resolve any crisis in which we elect to become involved swiftly and decisively, in cooperation with our friends and allies.

C. Other National Sources:

The principal sources of other components of our strategy will come from other executive departments and agencies. For example, the Department of Commerce will strive toward free and open trade throughout the region. Emphasis on the free trade agreement with Mexico can be expected to increase in the near future. The Department of Justice

will also provide strategic components as its agencies assist the nations of the region in reforming their justice and police systems. The Justice Department also plays a key role in the region through the Drug Enforcement Agency's counter-narcotics programs, which are closely coordinated with corresponding U.S. military efforts in the region. Other agencies involved in the region include Central Intelligence, Agriculture, and U.S. Customs.

D. Alliance and Coalition Components:

A first priority for the United States will remain solidarity with our friends and allies. With the nations of this region we share fundamental moral, political, and security interests. Our common efforts will result in the realities of the emerging new world order.

The United Nations is now beginning to act as an effective conduit for this cooperation. Within the Central American and Mexican region, the United Nations efforts have been effective in fostering democratic change in Nicaragua and more recently in El Salvador. Similar United Nations efforts will be aimed at improving human living conditions and education, fighting illegal narcotrafficking and terrorism, and challenging assaults on the environment. Each of these will be important for furthering our interests in the region. Equally important, the United Nations will play a role in securing and maintaining peace throughout the region. It will be essential to our security to continue to enforce the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which created a Latin American nuclear-free zone. (1:16)

This component of our strategy must also consider what has been called the Inter-American Military System (IAMS) -- "the combination of multilateral and bilateral organizations, activities, and relationships" aimed

at providing regional security. (5:41) Although history has not always seen a reliance on these establishments in the region, there are opportunities to increase their role and effectiveness. The basis for this originates in the 1947 Rio Treaty (the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance), the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), and the Organization of American States (OAS). It can be argued that this loose system of collective security has worked reasonably well against the perceived common threat of communist imperialism. However, they have not proven effective when there is less consensus on the threat. Hopefully, the war on drugs will be recognized as a threat to each nation and the region and will focus and clarify agreement on this common threat. Although the OAS continues to evolve into an otherwise effective organization, there seems little evidence that it will adopt the defense role called for in its charter. Similarly, the IADB initiatives have suffered from lack of member's support. As a result, processes such as the Contadora group and the Arias peace plan have emerged as alternatives; leaving the United States outside the negotiations. Because of the necessary major role the United States plays in the region's security and the shared narco threat, these initiatives have met little success, absent strong U.S. involvement. It would seem that the OAS offers the primary opportunity for the United States to remain engaged in other than bilateral relations in this region of the world.

Section 2: Theater Strategic Situation

A. Characteristics of the Theater:

The Central American and Mexican area of responsibility are dominated by harsh geography, urban congestion, political and cultural diversity, and a heritage quite different from the United States. However, when combined with our common democratic desires, this region's geographic proximity and economic dependence create strong ties to the United States.

In the northern extreme of the region is the 1,952 mile long undefended border between the United States and Mexico. Our defense interests begin here, focusing on illegal immigration and counter narco-trafficking. At the opposite extreme lies the Panama Canal. Built by the United States and scheduled to be fully returned to the Panamanians at the beginning of the next century, the Canal is the centerpiece of our policy for Panama. The intervening geography presents many challenges to both military operations and further social and economic development and integration.

Mexico can be viewed as four separate areas. The regions bordering the United States are primarily high, semi-arid deserts with relatively large populations and currently experiencing economic growth from significant United States industrial investment. Next, Mexico City, with its burgeoning population of over 23 million people. This megalopolis is quite different from the surrounding mountain valleys and coastal regions. In the south, high mountains and dense jungle somewhat isolate the region's predominantly Indian population. Of the total 87 million population, nearly 88% are literate and the per capita gross national product is greater than \$7000.

Further south, mountainous regions, dense jungle, and fertile coastal plains continue dominating the Central American countries. Guatemala's

population of 8.4 million is principally clustered in Guatemala City and the urban regions lying west of the city. The northern portion of the country, the Peten region, lies as nearly uninhabited jungle and swamp, directly south of the Yucatan peninsula. To the east of Peten, lies the coastal country of Belize which somewhat isolates Guatemala's Peten region, limiting its further exploitation. Further south Honduras and El Salvador are also dominated by the mountains which continue through Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama. Only the eastern regions of Honduras and Nicaragua offer relatively low-lying lands for cultivation or conventional military maneuvers. This predominance of mountainous terrain and jungle provides the entire region with a geography suitable for insurgent guerilla operations.

This geography offers agricultural opportunities which are principally plantation crops, such as sugar, bananas, cocoa, and coffee. As a result there are literally hundreds of small airfields throughout the region, providing narcotics trafficking avenues to the United States. Since this type of agriculture can not support large, growing populations, urban migration has resulted in every country. People flee to the cities as the only source of employment and opportunity. Combined with high population growth and unemployment, these cities hold high potential for conflict and unrest.

Other sources of unrest include the disparity between the haves and the have nots, often heighten by racial tensions. As a legacy of earlier colonial times, the Central American and Mexican region is quite socially stratified. The large land owners control the political and economic power and exploit the poorer population. In some cases and areas, such as in Costa Rica, a strong middle class has evolved. In most situations, social

mobility is difficult, if not impossible, with the most frequent opportunity being through military service. In this structure, democracy is emerging, but with only a tenuous foothold.

In many cases, the regions heritage can be attributed for much of this situation. This is a heritage of an indigenous Indian population being dominated by Spanish rulers. The resulting *caudillo* system remains embedded in the land holding/ownership structure and the control mechanisms of society. In essence, these countries are governed by an elite which has little if any motivation for further democratic progress since they have the most to loose. Although this trend is slowly changing and people are being empowered, there is a long way to go before these populations view themselves as citizens of their countries in the same way we in the United States do. Until then, they will remain merely exploited inhabitants.

B. Intelligence Estimates:

Intelligence within the region is focused predominantly on two topics, counter-insurgency and counter narcotics production and trafficking. In some cases, these two threats are closely linked. As a result, governments are often cooperative as efforts to counter narco trafficking, a principal United States interest, are also often fruitful in countering insurgents and visa versa. These nations are also beginning to recognize the tremendous social price they pay as a result of narcotics production, trafficking, and use. Hence, further cooperation can be expected.

A good deal of the counter-insurgent intelligence effort is directed at the provision of armaments for the insurgents. External support for

insurgents has originated in Cuba and the Soviet Union, although that influence is dwindling as a result of recent international developments. None the less, support for insurgents in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras warrants continued scrutiny. Similar sources of discontent in fragile democracies (such as Panama and increasingly Mexico) will stimulate a need for continued United States assistance in intelligence gathering and exploitation.

A greater role for regional intelligence efforts lies in the area of counter narcotics efforts. Central America and Mexico have long been used as production and trans-shipment routes for Andean cocaine and other illegal drugs destined for the U.S. and Europe. There is also an increasing relationship between insurgents and narco-traffickers as ideological allegiance no longer is sufficient to support an insurgent movement with arms and cash. Intelligence lies at the heart of coping with this threat. It remains in each country's best interest to fully cooperate and coordinate these efforts. In this regard, a critical component for the United States military effort is the Airborne Reconnaissance-Low (ARL) program. The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, General Joulwan, has term this program as ". . . essential if we are serious about our role in Central and South America, particularly in the war on drugs." (6:166) This program is complemented by other signal and imagery intelligence and tactical analysis teams where it is utilized by host nation and other United States government agencies in providing near real time imagery and other intelligence to those who need it (including the host nations.)

C. Global Implications:

Recent global developments have greatly changed the external threats to the Central American and Mexican region. With the downfall of the Soviet Union, their exportation of revolutionary Marxist ideology has essentially ceased. Likewise, Soviet support of the Castro regime in Cuba has essentially come to a halt. These developments mean that insurgent forces will no longer be supported financially and with military equipment and training by the Soviets and Cubans. However, potential alternatives lie in North Korea and Communist China. We must carefully guard against incursions by these nations into this hemisphere. Additionally, support to insurgents is increasingly being provided by narco-traffickers for their own selfish motives.

In the future, Europe may play an increasing role in the region. With the emergence of the European Community as a viable economic organization, they are seeking the resources (such as Mexican oil) and markets of the region. Additionally, as counter narco-trafficking and money laundering efforts by the United States become more effective, the drug cartels are beginning to turn toward Europe as both a market and a place to spend their narco-dollars. This should result in more attention being paid to the region by the Europeans.

Similarly, Asian influence in the region is growing, but for different reasons. Always seeking opportunities abroad, Japanese investment in Mexico is climbing in light of the favorable economic trends in that country. There is talk of Panama City becoming the new "Hong Kong" as that Asian city is returned to the Chinese and capital flees to other ports. This trend is further encouraged by Panama's liberal banking laws.

D. Logistics Estimate:

The major issue affecting the continued logistics support for United States interests in Central America and Mexico centers on the transfer of the Panama Canal to the Panamanian government. As part of this arrangement, we are turning over all U.S. military installations to the Panamanians.

A particularly noteworthy loss will be the facilities in Panama City and Colon. These facilities, especially Howard Air Force Base, serve as logistical support bases for U.S. forces throughout this region and South America. This includes support for counter-narcotics programs conducted by the Drug Enforcement Agency, U.S. Customs, and the Army, Navy and Air Force. Also affected will be the support for the military and diplomatic missions in Central and South America which presently transit Howard on a routine basis.

We must insure that access to these facilities for the United States remains intact as part of the transfer program. Similarly, we must assure that any prepositioned material is safely secured and maintained for our immediate use, should that become necessary. This access will be especially important to the U.S. due to the absence of other suitable, developed infrastructure (such as ports and major road networks) in the region. In order to adequately respond to crises and to protect U.S. citizens and other interests, access to these facilities will remain critical to the U.S.

The magnitude of the resources presently dedicated to the region are indicated by the United States Southern Command's fiscal year 1992 budget for the Central American region (which excludes Mexico and Security Assistance funding). That budget amounts to \$195.8 million, of which \$22.5 million represents the counternarcotics portion. (6:116) This is over 53% of the Command's entire budget for the year.

E. Command, Control, and Communications Estimate:

Complications of geography and distance have always plagued communications for the U.S. Southern Command. The Command Management System is aimed at improving that situation. It will have major impacts on the anti-drug war and the related counter insurgency efforts. The concept is to link U.S. Southern Command Headquarters with our nation's capital, the security assistance offices at the U.S. Embassies in the capitals of the host nations, the Joint Intelligence Center, and other forward based military units and missions. When combined with the Airborne Reconnaissance-Low program and the proposed Caribbean Basin Radar system, the Commander's capabilities to influence the situation on a real-time basis will be greatly enhanced.

F. Personnel Estimate:

The anticipated reductions in U.S. forces are likely to affect the Southern Command in the same way other unified commands are impacted. Fewer personnel and skilled, trained organizations will be available to execute the CINC's mission. This could be particularly significant in terms of reduced numbers of regional experts in the military. At present, the U.S. Army's Foreign Area Officer program is the primary source of this expertise; the Air Force and Navy do not have similar programs. This region of the world is often considered to be neglected by their neighbors to the north. The growing need for and lack of military regional experts is but another example of this neglect.

Deployments, combined exercises, and nation building assistance can be expected to decrease as our military budgets are reduced. Similarly,

our foreign aid budget can be expected to decline, placing further constraints on our activities in the region. Also, since support for our U.S. military missions to these countries is paid for principally through the administrative surcharge funds from foreign military sales, our capabilities in this area will also be adversely impacted.

Another source of personnel concern in the region is the relocation of the Southern Command headquarters from the Panama Canal Zone. Once the new location is determined, it will be necessary to carefully plan and execute the transition in order to minimize the adverse impact on our operations and the personnel involved. This will undoubtedly be an effort spread over several years aimed at minimizing personal turmoil while maintaining continuity of command and operations. It is anticipated that a final decision will await the outcome of the 1994 Panamanian elections, after which there should be adequate time for the transition by the end of the century, if required.

Section 3: Strategic Concepts

A. Military Dimension:

Military aspects of the United States strategy for Central America and Mexico stem from the fundamentals of crisis response and forward presence. They should focus principally providing assistance to the host nations while retaining access capability in the event the United States is required to insert forces in a crisis situation. The security assistance aspects should be aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and promoting regional stability. This includes assisting nations in controlling and eliminating threats to their security primarily in the areas of

insurgency and narcotics trafficking. Assistance to host nation military forces themselves should be aimed at improving the professionalism of those organizations and instilling a sense of commitment to the governments and peoples of their respective nations. A goal should be improved human rights and reduced abuses by these military organizations.

Sales of high-tech, sophisticated weapon systems are not anticipated. Rather, these nations should be relying on simple, police-type equipment for their internal security missions. This will further dictate the type of training which will be required. Weapons and tactics specific training will be complemented by continued enrollment in professional military education in the U.S. and through military advice and training from deployed teams.

This region also continues to present many opportunities for nation building activities on the part of our deployed forces. Continued support to these governments in this way will secure our access, increase our knowledge, and assist in countering lingering insurgent activities. These same activities can also be useful in the counter-narcotics efforts by teaching the indigenous people and their militaries the dangers of and alternatives to the narcotics business.

Continued cooperation in the inter-agency and international arena should be aimed at improving our ability in intercept narcotics shipments throughout the region. This will require continued close cooperation with the governments and militaries of each country. The concept of interagency operations, while not new, presents many challenges which the U.S. organizations have yet to over come. Closer cooperation in terms

of planning, intelligence, communications, execution, and post-operational nation support is required.

B. Diplomatic Dimensions:

Diplomatically, the United States will continue its leadership role in the region. We should seek to support the functions of the United Nations and in particular the Organization of American States. The latter will continue to be the main forum in which we can participate with these nations on collaborative efforts. Other, bilateral diplomatic thrusts should continue to focus on human rights and improved judicial processes for these countries.

In this context, the concept of the rule of law, versus the rule of an individual man, should guide our efforts. This concept was quite well articulated by David Gallagher in an article appearing in "The Wall Street Journal" on March 13, 1992. (7:A11) In this article, Mr. Gallagher reviews Chile's economic progress, pointing out the importance of the rule of law in overcoming the burdens of corruption and favoritism which so heavily bear on the emerging nations of Latin America. This region's traditions of *caudilloism* and rule by the elite epitomize the approach to government by an individual, rather than by an established body of laws. It is exactly this threatening concept which we see in action today in Peru's President Fujimori's handling of that nation's crises.

Our response to developments in Peru and elsewhere, must be consistent with this concept of the rule of law. This approach provides a foundation for our relationships with governments and the peoples of these nations, rather than alliances with individuals who run these countries.

Another aspect of the diplomatic dimension is the need for increased involvement by other nations such as those of Europe and Japan. These nations are suffering from the problems of narcotics use and trafficking and money laundering just as are the Americas. They also have a stake in this region owing to their rapidly increasing capital investments in the area. This involvement could include diplomatic, economic, and even military participation in the counter-narcotics efforts.

C. Economic Dimensions:

Free trade and open markets are the keystones of our economic policy in the region. Negotiation of the free trade agreement with Mexico will lead the way to a North American free trade zone. Careful negotiation and implementation will be required to insure that unexpected consequences do not result. For example, the open trade of corn from the United States could devastate Mexican corn farmers who produce the bulk of Mexico's corn at nearly three times the cost of U.S. production. This could result in increased migration to the U.S. as displaced Mexican farmers seek alternatives. (8:A5)

Continued investment in the region by U.S. and other foreign corporations can be expected. This should have the affect of improving the employment situation in many areas and perhaps reducing the illegal immigration the United States currently experiences.

D. Sociopsychological Dimensions:

The regions cultural heritage is slowing evolving from the classic *caudillo* system to a more modern one. The peoples of these nations are beginning to see themselves as participants in their societies, as citizens

with an investment in their governments, rather than merely inhabitants of the region they live in. Efforts by the United States aimed at providing regional security and nation building can directly contribute to and accelerate this process. Our policies and strategies should be mindful that our nation also has a heritage strongly linked to the region.

E. Other Dimensions:

Counter narcotics efforts will continue to dominate other aspects of our relationships in the region. So long as consumption of illegal drugs in the United States continues at high rates (today approximately 60 percent of world wide consumption) and Latin American production continues (two-thirds of the world's output), this will remain a major issue. (9:20) Coordinated efforts between U.S. Customs, DEA, the U.S. military and the nations of the region will remain essential. This will bring challenges of interagency planning and execution which we have not previously experienced. The U.S. military in the region will be particularly challenged in a new role of working with these other U.S. government and multi-national agencies in a situation where the military is not the lead participant.

Section 4: Specific Courses of Action

A. Enemy Course of Action:

With the principal objective of supporting and strengthening the emerging democracies in Central America and Mexico, many obstacles can be expected as the region continues its transition. Social, economic and

narco-trafficking pressures will combine to create pressures for return to the old style regimes which have dominated the region in the past.

On going insurgencies can be expected to continue and even to accelerate in some cases. This can be expected to result from the social pressures which may be expected as reform continues. Dissatisfaction with governments is likely to stimulate insurgencies and give them a cause for their continuation. All though support for these insurgents is no longer expected to be ideologically based, they are increasingly being supported by the narco-traffickers. This is a particularly ominous development since this source of support is very well organized and financed. The underlying cause for this support comes from the advantage the narco-traffickers gain in an unstable country in which the rule of law is weak and the government is not supported by the population.

The evolution of these nations can also be expected to be slowed by the very nature of their social structure and the extremes therein. The concept of citizenship and an individual's invested interest in government can only expect to develop slowly. The stimulus for such change needs to be supported and guided from the top down in these societies. Yet at the top are the ruling elite who have the most to loose personally from such changes. It would seem natural for these individuals to be reluctant in building consensus forms of government aimed at benefiting an entire population rather than a fortunate few.

B. Own Course of Action:

The U.S. military's course of action, in concert with U.S. national security strategy, should be aimed at supporting and assisting the

individual nations of the region. Our efforts must carefully focus on support for the rule of law, vice individuals, insistence on human rights, and interagency and intergovernmental counter narcotics strategies. The result will be stronger democracies, economic development, and the elimination of insurgent threats.

The war on drugs offers the opportunity to demonstrate our resolve in working with the nations of the region on each aspect of this strategy. Drug production and trafficking flourish in a governmental environment based on rule by an individual, stimulated by corruption. By working together to counter this threat to our nation and each nation of the region, we support the concept of the rule of law. Similarly, the narco-traffickers and the insurgents which they support have been notorious in abusing human rights. Our cooperative approach to fighting this war with each nation can demonstrate how human rights can be safeguarded in a system of justice and rule by law. This will require us to stimulate and assist the militaries of these nations in a transition from an elite force ruling a country to a force focused on combating crime and supporting democracy. Such a transition has begun in Panama, where it is serving as a test bed for a concept of demobilization of the military and the transition to a peacekeeping police force. This approach to military power in the region will also assist these nations in defeating their insurgent threats. By viewing and attacking these insurgencies as criminal activities and in the same manner attacking their criminal source of support (narco-trafficking), success is possible.

This approach will require an enhanced degree of professionalism in each of these nation's military organizations. Our continuing role in this regard should focus on both appropriate military capabilities and

appropriate military conduct. Security assistance efforts should be tailored to meet each nation's needs as defined collectively by governments meeting similar threats. Enhancing military professionalism through continued IMET programs, officer exchanges, and continued reserve component regional training activities will be invaluable.

One remaining responsibility for the U.S. military in the region will be to stay prepared to protect U.S. citizens and property in the region. A parallel responsibility is to insure a free and open Panama Canal. These challenges will become increasingly difficult as U.S. forces shrink in general and as the U.S. physical presence in Panama declines in accordance with the Panama Canal Treaty.

C. Comparison:

Regional threats to democracy are based in long established social and economic problems. Although insurgencies are no longer necessarily fueled by ideology, they retain many of their objectives and approaches. Hence the solutions to the problems of emerging democracy, human rights and counter-narcotics will not be quick in implementation. In this sense, the element of time may be to the advantage of the insurgent, particularly if tangible progress is not evident for the general populations of the region. However, the insurgents acceptance of a long time table in reaching his objectives, also plays to the advantage of the democratic governments. They require investments and economic progress, sustained social reform and demonstrated human rights concerns to convince their people of their value and legitimacy. These developments all take time; each will also require the support of the U.S.

The U.S. will also remain the central figure in the war on drugs. Although the narco-traffickers are well organized and financed, their resources do not match that the U.S. in combination with the nations of the region. They do seem to have a present advantage regarding our degree of commitment of these resources and resolve to solve the problem at home and abroad, however. There is a growing appreciation of the threat narco-trafficking presents to Mexico and the nations of Central America on their part. To be fully effective in meeting these challenges, a further refinement of resolve on everyone's part will be needed. Until that time, only limited success can be expected from the limited resources being employed, both internally and externally by each nation involved.

Section 5: Decisions and Recommendations

The following are broad, strategic recommendations concerning the Central American region which can serve as a basis for further development of operational plans and approaches on the part of U.S. Southern Command. Based on the existing situation in Central America and Mexico and the National Security Strategy of the U.S., the U.S. Southern Command should pursue the following actions:

A. Encourage collective, multi-national approaches to regional problems (such as narco-trafficking) by supporting participation by the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Defense Board, and other nations which have not been previously involved in such operations (Europe and Japan.)

B. Work to develop closer inter-agency cooperation between the U.S. military and other agencies of the U.S. government involved in the region.

This should include close cooperation in intelligence collection, planning, conducting, and after action support for the war on drugs in the region.

C. Seek opportunities where the U.S. military forces can employ their technological advantages in support of host nation military activities, especially in counter-narcotics and counter insurgency operations.

D. Continue the nation building projects which are conducted by elements of the U.S. reserve components. These projects not only provided good training for our forces, they also demonstrate to the host nations the close cooperation that can be developed between the military and the citizens of a nation. These projects contribute directly to increasing the professionalism of the host military.

E. Continue efforts to improve the professionalism of host military forces. Emphasis should be placed on preserving human rights and solidifying military loyalty to the nation and its people rather than to a ruling individual. U.S. efforts in this regard should include continued IMET, mobile training teams, frequent deployments and combined exercises.

F. Be prepared to conduct operations for protecting the free and open Panama Canal during the final periods of transition to Panamanian control and early in the next century.

G. Prepare for the potential negotiation of basing rights for U.S. forces in the region, either in Panama or at another location, to ensure the continued ability to support U.S. operations in the region.

H. In coordination with the host nations, acquire and deploy communications and control equipment needed in the war on drugs and against insurgencies.

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