In this early part of the 21st century, rising agricultural, energy, and commodity prices are stimulating instability and unrest worldwide. This is due to a number of factors: global integration, the growth of China and India’s economies, and increasing demand for bio fuels and traditional fuels. These inflationary trends and their side effects suggest the need for broader approaches to traditional national security planning and operations. We need to rethink how we approach international and interagency engagement to address this array of challenges, which are made only more vexing by the continued scourges of narco-terrorism, illicit-trafficking and debilitating humanitarian crises. These are not traditional areas for military involvement, but they are matters requiring innovative engagement, because food, water, and energy shortages have become pressing national security problems.

The United States Southern Command is charged with promoting security cooperation and conducting military operations to achieve U.S. strategic objectives in Latin America and the Caribbean. Successfully accomplishing this mission enhances the security and stability of the Western Hemisphere, and ensures the forward defense of the United States. This area is one where the likelihood of military confrontation between two or more nations is relatively low. It is, however, an area marked by high levels of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. We seek to work with other departments and agencies of the U.S. Executive Branch to better integrate our regional operational engagement to promote stability, enhance security, and by doing so enable prosperity. This will help confront the underlying conditions and the symptomatic security challenges of our hemisphere in a harmonized civil-military approach.

Background

U.S. Southern Command traces its origins back to 1903, when the U.S. Navy and Marines helped secure Panama’s independence, making building the Panama Canal possible. This “Path between the Seas” transformed global economic flows and remains a vital economic artery for the United States, Latin America, and beyond. The Command was formally established in 1963 and remained in Panama until 1997, when, in compliance with the 1977 Carter-Torrijos treaties the United States turned Canal operations over to Panama and U.S. Southern Command relocated to Miami.
For most of its history, U.S. Southern Command was a conventional war-fighting organization, conducting numerous successful multilateral and unilateral military operations in the region. With the end of the Cold War and the consolidation of democratic rule, the region’s challenges changed from classic military threats to cross cutting regional concerns.

**Opportunities & Challenges**

Over the past decade, South and Central America and the Caribbean have made remarkable progress in addressing the pernicious problems that have plagued economic growth and development. There remain challenges stemming from widespread poverty, inequality, corruption, and weak institutions. While democracy has taken root in all countries but one, democracy’s tangible benefits have not reached the poorest, most marginalized sectors. The inability of governments to provide public security, legal protections, public services, and employment opportunities threatens support for democracy and promotes the rise of authoritarian populists. Insecurity and instability impede economic growth and democratic consolidation testing national and international strategies for resolving these matters.

In Latin America, income distribution remains one of the most skewed in the world. Nearly 40 percent of the region’s almost 600 million inhabitants live in poverty, defined as an income of less than two U.S. dollars per day. Of that number, about 16 percent live in extreme poverty -- less than one U.S. dollar per day. The top tenth of the population earn almost 50 percent of total income with the poorest tenth earning only 1.6 percent. This income disparity and extreme poverty serve as catalysts for social and political instability.

Corruption also fuels insecurity. It stifles productivity and undermines the rule of law. Transparency International reports that two fifths of the region’s 32 countries (U.S. Southern Command’s area of focus includes 34 countries and 13 territories) consider corruption among politicians and public officials serious. The inability of governments to deal with corruption undermines their credibility and public support. Weak justice systems, poorly trained and equipped police forces, and over crowded prisons exacerbate these perceptions. Defeating corruption, however, requires strong institutions and steadfast political will.

Violent crime and lawlessness further undermine governments’ authority and legitimacy, and combine in ways that threaten their national security. Gang activity crosses borders and affects numerous countries, including the United States. The homicide rate in Central America is one of the highest in the world. The region’s armed forces face strong pressure to augment police forces overwhelmed by violent gangs and drug traffickers in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and throughout Central America and the Caribbean. Even then, as witnessed in Mexico’s ongoing battle against drug gangs, there are no easy solutions.

Drugs and other forms of illicit trafficking challenge all our governments. Drug consumption is a serious problem not only in the United States, but also in countries throughout the hemisphere and beyond. We estimate that several thousand people will die in the United States this year due
to cocaine related activities. The drug business is lucrative, violent, and expanding to Africa and Europe. The transnational nature of this threat requires an integrated regional and international response.

Finally, natural disasters plague the region. Hurricanes, floods, volcanoes and earthquakes ravage fragile infrastructures and challenge institutions’ capacity to respond. We are working with our partner nations to build their capacity to respond to natural and manmade disasters. We support USAID and others, when requested, in responding to these contingencies. Dealing with these humanitarian crises requires a coordinated multi-agency approach in order to provide value added and a unified U.S. response.

**Partnership of the Americas**

Our neighbors have asked U.S. Southern Command for help in areas where we traditionally have not engaged. We recognize, however, that responding to these complex problems requires integrated, cross agency solutions. Of the many lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq, the clearest is that it takes a “whole of government” approach to manage multidimensional challenges. Indeed, it is increasingly evident that we need a “whole of society” approach, one in partnership with the private sector to promote stable, prosperous societies.

Over the past two years, U.S. Southern Command underwent a total examination of how it conducted operations and how it is organized. It began restructuring to address more effectively the opportunities and challenges confronted by the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean. As part of this transformation, U.S. Southern Command refocused its engagement strategies to deal with new security challenges, including many that directly affect the United States.

In order to promote more collaborative, innovative approaches, U.S. Southern Command recognized the need to transform its organizational structure from the standard coded directorates to a modern organization capable of addressing these threats. In the new construct, we added a Civilian Deputy to the Commander, an Ambassador from the Department of State. We reorganized into three mission-focused directorates – Security & Intelligence, Stability, and Partnering – supported by three functional directorates – Strategy & Policy, Resources & Assessments, and Enterprise Support.

Most significantly, we invited other departments and agencies in the U.S. Executive Branch to join us as fully integrated members of our team. Many have already sent personnel to Miami, with more expected to arrive next year. This will improve our ability to plan, coordinate, and execute across a full range of contingencies; efficiently use limited funds and resources; improve communications; and, perhaps most importantly, help create a more responsive, seamless U.S. government effort.
U.S. Southern Command is also working with the private sector in order to obtain better understanding of how we can collaborate. We incorporate non-governmental organizations, private voluntary and international organizations into our humanitarian and civic assistance programs. With these new partners, we seek to promote security cooperation and achieve U. S. strategic objectives in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In addition, U.S. Southern Command is hosting a pilot program for business engagement. Acknowledging that the existence of a vibrant commercial sector promotes economic stability and is an integral part of building “whole of society” solutions for defeating transnational threats, we appointed a business advisor to the Commander. A senior Department of Commerce officer, his focus is on establishing relationships among national and international business trade groups such as Business Executives for National Security and U.S. Southern Command.

Effective interagency and private sector collaboration supports the development of cooperative approaches to regional problems. We are developing transnational strategies to complement country specific programs, managed and led by the U.S. Mission Chiefs throughout the region. This will promote greater understanding of U.S. government operational requirements and implementation challenges across borders and across the region.

U.S. Southern Command offers representatives from the interagency community and private sector the opportunity to work closely together in a peacetime environment -- learn each other’s cultures, lexicons, and modes of operations. It advances policy implementation and helps break down bureaucratic stovepipes. It also promotes an appreciation of other agencies and organizations capabilities and expertise. Misunderstanding of the scope and extent of other agencies’ programs and capabilities can lead to duplication and missed opportunities for achieving U.S. objectives. This collaborative effort generates new ways to address complex problems and prepares us for better integration in the next crisis, be it manmade or natural.

**Interagency Cooperation Works**

There are existing examples of how cross agency planning and implementation can bring new synergies to our outreach to our neighbors. Working with other members of the U.S. Executive Branch (the Departments of State, Justice, and Defense as well as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)) and led by the U.S. Country Team in Bogotá, we have helped support Colombian efforts to expand its capacity to establish government presence in areas recently liberated from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Initially a DoD project created through partnership with the Colombian government in 2003, the Coordination Center for Integrated Action (CCIA) brings together interagency representatives from the Colombian government focused on reintegrating rural Colombian communities. The United States provided seed money and advice, but significantly, this is a Colombian effort to reclaim its country. Located in the Office of the Presidency, the Colombian government has committed over $110 million to ensure the success of CCIA.
With the creative use of DoD funding provided to State Department for stabilization and reconstruction activities and USAID Office of Transition Initiatives matching dollars, we will establish a fusion center in the former FARC stronghold of Meta where the CCIA will work with the local cooperatives and mayors to extend state benefits to former coca farmers. By establishing government presence -- police, social security, health care, education -- Colombians who have known only FARC domination will be better able to integrate into their democratic nation.

This cohesive interagency approach has reaped benefits for Colombia as well as for the United States. The CCIA brought U.S. government agencies together, bringing each agency’s expertise and comparative advantage to the project. Cooperation and synchronization of efforts streamlined our international engagement. It also provides a model of how to extend government services to the poorest members of society. Reestablishing government presence in post conflict zones, and creating the space for the return to normal life requires the effort of the “whole of society.” This model has great value for our future worldwide engagement.

**A Work in Progress**

In the context of other transformation efforts across government, U.S. Southern Command’s restructuring makes sense. U.S. Africa Command, the Coordinator for Stabilization and Reconstruction (S/CRS), and Dr. Rice’s transformational diplomacy at State Department are all efforts to rebalance our interagency integration and interaction, and recalibrate our international engagement. These initiatives will make government more responsive to complex and unconventional requirements in far-flung nations around the globe.

While retaining full capability to conduct its primary mission of military operations, U.S. Southern Command’s restructuring allows it to adapt to 21st Century challenges. Addressing these multifaceted challenges require flexible institutions capable of responding quickly. Better understanding of other agency’s authorities and capabilities reduces redundancy and improves the use of limited resources. Combining activities and operations will streamline delivery of those limited resources providing greater impact and more complementary effects than disjointed and uncoordinated regional efforts.

U.S. Southern Command’s restructuring has been underway for nearly two years, and in that time we have made exceptional progress. There is no denying, however, we will need more time to reap fully the benefits of true interagency integration. Thus far, our efforts to synchronize operations and activities have improved collaboration between U.S. Southern Command and other U.S. Government agencies and Departments. It is a work in progress, as others see the value in this collaborative approach we are confident that U.S. Southern Command’s restructuring will succeed and become a model for other U.S. regional commands.

*The information in this article has been extracted and amplified from other publications and briefings*