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REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
UNITED STATES SOUTHERN COMMAND
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER
3511 NW 91ST AVENUE
MIAMI, FL 33172-1217

SCCC

9 November 2004

MEMORANDUM FOR Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, 1000 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301-1000

SUBJECT: Opportunities and Challenges in the US Southern Command Area of Responsibility

1. Sir, as I relinquish command of USSOUTHCOM, I want to thank you for your leadership, guidance and trust over the past two years and three months. Command of such an important and diverse unit has enriched my life and deepened my appreciation for the greatness of our nation. As I depart, I'd like to highlight a few opportunities and challenges that I see in the Southern Command **AOR**.
2. Although I do not see a current or potential conventional military threat in the AOR, Latin America has become the most violent region in the world. I see the issues of violence and poverty as two sides of the same coin: the rampant violence impedes the economic growth necessary to pull up the **43%** of the population who live below the poverty line. The poverty and hopelessness foment discontent, creating ready recruits for gangs, narco-terrorists and other illegal armed groups. The issue of gangs has the potential to be, over the next five to ten years, the greatest destabilizing force in the AOR. Gangs are currently most prevalent in Central America and Brazil, but the problem will spread if we do not address the threat quickly. The size, transnational nature and financial power of the gangs has outstripped the region's police. The fact that gangs are considered a law enforcement issue prevents the military from confronting the threat in most countries. The security forces of the AOR must change in order to combat the current array of threats. We must help our partner nations find a solution that makes sense, respects human rights and recognizes the historic mistrust of uniformed military acting in a police role. In order to do so, we must transform ourselves and readdress our current restrictions against training police. This will require DoD leadership in the interagency and within the Congress.
3. Islamic Radical Group (IRG) activity in the AOR is concentrated on fundraising and logistical support for worldwide terrorism. We do not see in our AOR operational cells of IRG terrorists staging for an attack on the United States. I take no comfort in that fact, however, since what we don't know about the IRG activity in the region greatly outweighs what we do know. We are vulnerable to an airborne threat because our outdated laws on aerial interdiction limit our actions and prevent our neighbors from taking action. We now have the technology to be able to detect and monitor an airplane that takes off from Panama, flies through all the countries of Central America and Mexico and crashes into a key target in the southern extreme of the United States and we will have done nothing about it because the current policy assumes that the worst thing that plane could be carrying is drugs. September 11th showed us the fallacy of this policy and we must fix it regionally for it to be effective. The regional approach is critical in Central America



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due to the short flight time required to fly from the airspace of one country into the airspace of another. Regional airbridge denial is a sensitive and controversial issue across the interagency, and I believe that only you will be able to take this on effectively.

4. You can be proud of what the men and women of Southern Command do to support the Government of Colombia. The armed forces of Colombia, for the first time since the 1960s, are conducting sustained offensive operations in the old “*despeje*” region, which previously gave sanctuary to narco-terrorists. Those efforts are beginning to bear fruit as we are seeing greater numbers of desertions and decreased activity on the part of the illegal armed groups. We must stay the course in Colombia by continuing to provide logistical, intelligence and planning assistance to the Colombian military while interdicting the illicit trafficking that sustains the narco-terrorist groups. We must seek to regionalize our support, especially to Perú, Ecuador and Bolivia, whose fragile democracies must be shored up or we risk pushing the problem out of Colombia and into her neighbors. Again, DoD leadership is essential, both in the interagency and on the Hill.

5. In 1978, sixteen of the countries in this hemisphere had communist or totalitarian governments. Today, all of Latin America and the Caribbean, save Cuba, have made the shift to democracy and the militaries in the region are supporting democracies. USSOUTHCOM has played a key role in this maturation by close, continuous, personal interaction with the armed forces of the AOR. This engagement is necessary if we are to assist in the transformation of Latin American security forces to meet 21st century threats and it is vital to our continued understanding of the realities on the ground in the AOR. I am seeing the effects of the negative impact of ASPA sanctions on our engagement, especially in terms of IMET. Several of our key partners are already looking to Europe and China to fill the gap that ASPA is creating in Professional Military Education and exchange programs. Current limits on information sharing, security clearances and access are at cross-purposes with our professed goals of regional cooperation. The SOUTHCOM staff is working on ways to ameliorate the impact of these limitations. We must overcome these barriers if we are to continue to be the security partner of choice for the nations in this hemisphere.

6. Disenchantment with failed institutions and unfulfilled economic promises in Latin America and the Caribbean have resulted in tremendous social upheaval in the region. One manifestation of the dissatisfaction with the existing political institutions is the fact that several presidents in the AOR find themselves in the presidency as their first elected public office. As a result of the latest referendum in Venezuela, President Chávez appears to be a fixture in the region. From a strictly military point of view, I am concerned that President Chávez is turning his armed forces into a highly politicized praetorian guard, which will choose loyalty to him over loyalty to the constitution. On a larger scale, I am concerned about the exportation of his “Bolivarian Revolution” to countries in the AOR where governments can ill afford added instability. I urge the pursuit of an interagency consensus around a policy designed to limit the detrimental impact that Chávez is likely to have on the region.



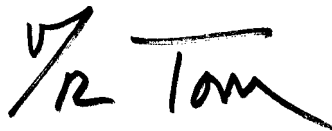
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7. I have seen the ongoing suffering of Haiti first hand, both under the UN mandate back in 1994 and as commander of our more recent efforts there. Until the Haitian people are able to lift themselves from abject misery to at least dignified poverty and develop some semblance of working institutions, Haiti's problems will continue to haunt the United States. Short of a comprehensive long-term international effort to support Haiti, we will always be just one step away from the next migration crisis or political collapse. DoD has a leadership role to play in Haiti and must find a way to support Haiti's security forces.

8. The stabilization of SOUTHCOM Headquarters stands without resolution. As you are well aware, I remain convinced, as did my predecessors, that Miami is the right location for the headquarters from a strategic point of view. The recent proposal by the Governor of Florida presents us with an opportunity to make a sound fiscal decision as well. I strongly encourage DoD to consider the Governor's proposal as a means to resolve the command's stabilization in Miami. We should come to closure on this issue for both the strategic and fiscal reasons I mentioned as well as for the quality of life of our people.

9. I thank you again for the opportunity to have served as the Commander of United States Southern Command. I have been privileged to work shoulder to shoulder with great patriots and I have been blessed by having known some of the most brilliant leaders of this hemisphere. I thank you for your steadfast leadership in this critical phase of our country's history. I am enthusiastic and optimistic about USSOUTHCOM's role in helping the people of the Americas fully enjoy the fruits of democracy and economic opportunity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J T Hill".

JAMES T. HILL
General, US Army
Commander

CF:
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff



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