

**THE BUSH EFFECT:
U.S. Military Involvement in Latin America Rises
Development and Humanitarian Aid Fall**

**An Arms Trade Resource Center Fact Sheet
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Media attention turned to Latin America briefly while President George W. Bush attended the Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina. Bush was there to push his controversial free trade agenda, which drew tens of thousands into the streets and failed to gain support from regional leaders. Now that the spotlight has turned away again, another type of trade-- the arms trade-- received almost no attention.

U.S. military aid, training and arms sales to the region have all increased sharply since the beginning of the war on terrorism and threaten to exacerbate conflict, empty national coffers and sidetrack development programs.

At the same time that military aid and training are on the rise, U.S. economic aid to the region is dropping-- the 2006 foreign aid request foresees a sharp drop especially in development assistance, child survival and health programs.

In 2002, in the United States budgeted \$225 million for U.S. Agency for International Development programs in Latin America, including funds for child survival and health programs, disaster and agricultural assistance. The request for 2006 totals \$125 million for the region-- a decrease of more than 40%.

Through the Foreign Military Financing program, military aid has drastically increased during the Bush administration. In 2000, U.S. military aid to Latin America was \$3.4 million, a tiny share of worldwide FMF spending of \$4.7 billion. By 2006,

overall spending on Foreign Military Financing actually decreased to \$4.5 billion, after peaking at \$6 billion in 2003. But military aid to Latin America increased to *34 times over since 2000*, to \$122 million in 2006 alone.

After a tense few days in Argentina, President Bush also visited Brazil and Panama. Argentina is the third largest recipient of military aid in Latin America, with a total of \$6.3 million between 2000 and 2006. Panama, where the United States long controlled the canal area, is also a major recipient of military aid, with a total of \$5 million for the same period. Argentina's population is ten times that of Panama, making the near parity in their military aid levels striking.

But, when looking at military aid to the region, it is most noteworthy that El Salvador tops the list of recipients, with almost \$23 million in FMF since 2002. This relatively large amount of military aid can be explained at least in part by Salvadoran support for the war on terrorism. El Salvador is one of the Bush administration's few remaining allies with troops in Iraq, and six Salvadoran Special Forces soldiers have been awarded the Bronze Star.

The administration has also sought to draw a parallel between El Salvador's transition to democracy and Iraq's rocky progress toward that goal. While in San Salvador last year, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld praised the country's progress, saying "it just proves that the sweep of human history is for freedom." He added, "We've seen it in [El Salvador], we've seen it in Afghanistan and I believe we'll see it in Iraq."¹

El Salvador, which emerged from a U.S.-backed civil war in 1992, is also the second largest recipient on military training through IMET, and it is 11th on the list of arms sales recipients, purchasing a total of \$46.8 million in weaponry between 2000 and 2003. During the civil war, in which 75,000 people were killed over 12 years, Washington contributed \$1.5 million a day in military and economic aid to support the dictatorship's fight against guerillas.²

MILITARY TRAINING

In fiscal year 2000, the United States distributed almost \$50 million in military training funding through International Military Education and Training (IMET), with \$9.8 million or 18% allocated to the Western Hemisphere. This funding trained 2,684 soldiers from Latin American countries.

Fast forward six years and into the midst of the war on terrorism; overall IMET funding worldwide has increased 75% to \$86.7 million. Funding for military training in Latin America has increased at a proportional rate, to \$13.6 million for 2006. This will fund training for 3,221 Latin American soldiers in everything from counterintelligence to helicopter repair.

Colombia tops the list for IMET, with \$9.3 million in military training aid since 2000, an increase of almost 90% over six years. But other countries have received larger percentage increases over the same period. IMET funding to El Salvador and Nicaragua increased more than 200%, and their neighbor Panama received a 400% increase between 2000 and 2006.

WEAPONS SALES TO LATIN AMERICA: Hundreds of Millions and Counting

In addition to aid programs such as FMF and IMET, the United States sells military hardware through arms sales programs such as Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Direct Commercial Sales (DCS). The top 15 recipients of arms sales in Latin America took delivery of more than \$3.5 billion in military hardware and weaponry between 2000 and 2003 (the last year for which full data is available).

Brazil topped the list with almost \$720 million in arms from the United States. The top five U.S. arms sales recipients-- Brazil plus Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela and Argentina-- accounted for two thirds of all U.S. weapons sold in the region.

As a large and relatively wealthy country, Brazil can sustain a regular expenditure of over \$100 million a year. Other countries maintain a more cyclical approach to armament. Instead of a steady increase or decrease in sales, countries go through phases to expand their military, thus boosting sales, and then spend a few years maintaining and servicing the existing equipment, causing a drop in sales. A clear example of this is Guyana, which in 2003 remarkably increased their arms expenditure over 5,000% from the previous three years, and Argentina, which spent 800% more in 2001 than in the two years that followed.

Foreign Military Sales are conducted between the requesting government and the Pentagon. This process is usually reserved for larger orders and "package deals" that include delivery, training, spare parts, maintenance and even a warrantee on equipment, in addition to the military hardware. Most of the weaponry sold through FMS either comes from the Pentagon's stockpile, or from supplies of military hardware restricted from market sale.

Direct Commercial Sales, however, are conducted between the requesting government and the weapons manufacturing firms. As a rule, these transactions take less time because they are not subject to the same level of Congressional intervention or Pentagon red tape. But, sales are drawn from a more limited inventory because of the above-mentioned market sale restriction. FMS and DCS are both subject to review from the State Department.

MILITARY AID AND THE WAR ON DRUGS

In addition to military aid through Foreign Military Financing and International Military Education and Training, Latin American police and security forces are receiving billions in "counter-narcotics" aid.

Under President Bill Clinton, the U.S. initiated the \$1.3 billion Plan Colombia, ostensibly aimed at

strengthening the military to combat the drug trade. President Bush now has his own version-- the Andean Counter-drug Initiative (ACI). Since its establishment in 2001, the Bush Administration has requested \$1.33 billion in police and military aid for Colombia through ACI.³

International Narcotics Control funding for Latin America (not including additional supplementals to Colombia) totaled \$169 million between 2001 and 2005, and the State Department has requested \$51 million for 2006. Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela all receive some funding, but the lion's share continues to go to Colombia.

U.S. counter-narcotics funds go mainly to drug interdiction; programs to train and support national police and military forces; provision of communications and intelligence systems; support for the maintenance and operations aerial eradication aircraft; and improvement of infrastructure related to counter-narcotics activities. Beginning in 2001 with \$154 million in aid, the program has so far totaled more than \$2.9 billion.

Is the United States' "war against drugs" working? A study by the Washington Office on Latin America found that the cocaine is 31% cheaper on the streets of the United States than it was before Plan Colombia was initiated.⁴

In his second term, President Bush is continuing these failed policies under a new moniker-- the "war on narco-terrorism." President Bush made Colombia one of his first state visits after the November 2004 reelection, promising more than half a billion dollars in new military and police aid and praising President Uribe's counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism agenda.

SOUTHERN COMMAND

U.S. Southern Command is the hub of the military's presence in Latin America. Now based in Miami and headed by General Brantz Craddock, SOUTHCOM operates on a budget of \$800 million a year and considers 19 countries in Central and South America and 13 in the Caribbean as its area of concern.

The Command's size and budget, especially given the current military preoccupation with the Middle

East, speaks to the United States' enduring influence in the Western Hemisphere-- Washington's backyard. The Southern Command is staffed by 1,470 people-- more than are tasked with the region by the Departments of State, Commerce, Treasury and Agriculture and the Joint Chiefs office and the Office of the Secretary of Defense combined.

UNGOVERNED SPACES: Al Qaeda in Latin America?

According to its public documents, Southern Command is interested in improving "effective sovereignty" in Latin America's "ungoverned spaces" like the "Tri-border Area" between Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil, where national governments have little power, smuggling is rampant, and U.S. military experts allege that fundraising for Islamic terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah is taking place. Former SOUTHCOM head James Hill states that "branches of Middle East terrorist organizations conduct support activities in the Southern Command area of responsibility."⁵

According to San Diego Union Tribune contributor Andres Oppenheimer, other "ungoverned spaces" include the "Tabatinga-Leticia corridor on the Brazil-Colombia border, the Lago Agrio area on Ecuador's border with Colombia and the Darien jungle in Panama" where "Colombian drug traffickers, narco-terrorists and arms dealers roam about freely, and often control large territories."⁶

But, many Latin America and security experts say that the terrorist threat there is overstated. Adam Isaacson, an analyst with the well-regarded Center on International Policy, says that with the exception of Colombia, "terrorists are rather scarce in Latin America, and terrorists who threaten U.S. citizens on U.S. soil are scarcer still...To portray terrorism as a region-wide threat, from the Rio Grande to Tierra del Fuego, seems like a tough sell."

The lack of a significant threat has done little to cool the rhetoric. Isaacson notes that "the word 'terrorism' appears as a justification for military aid in 16 of the Western Hemisphere country narratives in the State Department's 2005 Congressional Presentation document for foreign aid programs."⁷

RADICAL POPULISM: Latin America Tilting Left?

While fanning concerns about the growing role of Islamic fundamentalists in Latin America and keeping a wary eye on “ungoverned spaces,” what seems to concern Washington most is the leftward tilt of many Latin American countries.

In its 2004 Posture Statement, SOUTHCOM noted that “radical populism” is a major threat to stability in the region. At a briefing before the House Armed Services Committee in April 2004, then-SOUTHCOM Commander James Hill said that “terrorists throughout Latin America bomb, murder, kidnap, traffic drugs, transfer arms, launder money, smuggle humans.”⁸

He elaborated that there are both “traditional terrorists,” like the criminal gangs in Central America and paramilitary and guerilla groups in Colombia; and “emerging terrorists” like the “radical populists” who tap into “deep seated frustrations of the failure of democratic reforms to deliver expected results.” Radical populists apparently include Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales, a former leader in the Bolivian coca growers’ union who now heads that country’s main opposition party.⁹

In March, CIA Director Porter Goss testified before the House Armed Services Committee that the U.S. should paying greater attention to threats “in our own back yard.” He noted that presidential elections will be held in eight South American and Central American countries in 2006 and warned that “destabilization or a backslide away from democratic principles...would not be helpful to our interests and would be probably threatening to our security in the long run.”¹⁰

As Tom Barry, co-director of Foreign Policy in Focus, said, “Latin America is a continent that is drifting to the left, maybe out of U.S. control.” To many in Washington, that seems to be at least as scary as a robust terrorist network in their backyard.¹¹

ON THE GROUND IN LATIN AMERICA: The U.S. Military in Paraguay and Elsewhere

U.S. military bases, forward operating locations and radar stations like the ones listed on page five try to keep a low profile, but they are not as elusive as on-again, off-again military “training missions,” like those taking place in Paraguay this summer.

The United States military and the Armed Forces of Paraguay are conducting joint operations at a Paraguayan military base, including one that involves U.S. soldiers providing counterterrorism training to 65 Paraguayan air force officers.

While U.S. officials, including Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, have denied Washington’s interest in a permanent military base in Paraguay, the location of the exercises raise suspicions. The military base is 200 miles from the Bolivian border and almost as close to the country’s natural gas reserves and fresh water aquifers. It is also close enough to Brazil to be threatening. In late July, the Brazilian army launched military maneuvers along its border with Paraguay, parallel to the arrival of U.S. troops in Paraguay. According to InterPress Service, the United States has conducted 46 military operations in Paraguay since 2002.¹²

U.S. BASES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In addition to strengthening the militaries of Latin America through aid, training and equipment, the United States continues to stake out a claim on the use of Latin American territory for its own foreign policy objectives. Some of these bases are well-known (and in the case of the U.S. base at Guantanamo, notorious), while others-- in Honduras, El Salvador, Ecuador and Caribbean islands-- are open secrets.

What follows is a list of what we know about the United States’ “military footprint” in the region (drawn largely from the work of the Center for International Policy). The term Forward Operating Location is used to describe U.S. arrangements with foreign nations for temporary access of military bases. But in some cases, “temporary” can mean decades, not months.

<p align="center">U.S. BASES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN</p>	<p align="center">PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE</p>
<p>Guantánamo Bay, Cuba</p>	<p>United States military has about 850 U.S. forces from five branches stationed in Guantánamo. Its military base, now largely a detention facility for foreign prisoners in the “war on terrorism,” is the oldest U.S. base outside of the continental United States and the only permanent overseas U.S. presence within a country the U.S. regards as hostile.</p>
<p>Soto Cano, Honduras</p>	<p>About 550 U.S. troops are stationed in Honduras as part of JTF-Bravo’s mission “to enhance cooperative regional security through forward presence and peacetime engagement operations.” Specific activities include military exercises, humanitarian and civic assistance projects, disaster relief, and support for counter-drug operations.</p> <p>JTF-Bravo also assists Central American armed forces in “restructuring their militaries to fit changing security requirements.”</p>
<p>Manta, Ecuador</p>	<p>Forward Operating Location From the Eloy Alfaro International Airport, U.S. Navy P-3 Maritime Patrol Aircraft conduct counter-drug detection and monitoring missions.</p>
<p>Aruba</p>	<p>Forward Operating Location The U.S. has a small presence in Aruba, with two medium and three small aircraft, about fifteen permanently assigned staff and twenty to twenty-five temporarily deployed operations and maintenance personnel.</p>
<p>Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles</p>	<p>Forward Operating Location The Curaçao section of this Caribbean FOL hosts F-16s, Navy P-3 and E-2 Airborne Early Warning planes, E-3 AWACS and other military aircraft. As many as 200 to 230 U.S. military personnel are temporarily deployed on operations at this base.</p>
<p>Comalapa, El Salvador</p>	<p>Forward Operating Location The Salvadoran facility hosts four P-3 (or similar sized) aircraft. The main focus of the flights using this site is detecting maritime drug trafficking, especially in the Pacific.</p>

<p>Seventeen Counter-Drug Radar Sites</p>	<p>In Colombia, Peru, and in mobile and secret locations, the United States military operates radar sites to detect possible drug-smuggling flights. In most cases, the radar sites are located within host-country military bases, but U.S. personnel are in charge of their own security. A typical detachment consists of 36 to 45 personnel.</p> <p>Known Radar Locations</p> <p>Colombia Leticia (southeastern Colombia) Marandúa (east, along border with Venezuela) Ríohacha (northeast, on the Caribbean coast) San Andrés (east of Nicaragua in the Caribbean Sea) San José del Guaviare (southern central Colombia) Tres Esquinas (south west, near border of Ecuador)</p> <p>Peru Iquitos (on the Amazon River in near Colombian border) Andoas (Northern Peru, between Colombia and Ecuador) Pucallpa (on the Ucayali River near Brazil)</p> <p>The rest of the radar sites are either mobile or in secret locations.</p>
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Source: Center for International Policy

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

Just the Facts

A Civilian's Guide to U.S. Defense and Security Assistance

Center for International Policy and the Latin America Working Group Education Fund

<http://ciponline.org/facts/>

U.S. Southern Command

<http://www.southcom.mil/home/>

U.S. Weapons at War 2005:

Promoting Freedom or Fueling Conflict?

A World Policy Institute Special Report, June 2005

<http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports/wawjune2005.html>

September's Shadow:

Post- 9/11 U.S. Latin American Relations

Latin America Working Group, September 2004

<http://www.lawg.org/docs/SeptembersShadow.pdf>

NOTES

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- ¹ Mark Mazzetti, "Rumsfeld Meets With Central America Allies," *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 2004.
- ² Douglas Farah, "Government Ran Death Squads U.S. Overlooked Abuses, Report Says," *Chicago Sun Times*, March 16, 1993.
- ³ *Congressional Budget Justification for FY05 Foreign Operations*, Request by Region: Western Hemisphere, State Department, Bureau of Resource Management, February 2004.
- ⁴ Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosin, eds., "Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy," *Washington Office on Latin America*, November 2004.
- ⁵ Testimony of General James T. Hill, Commander, United States Southern Command, hearing of the House Armed Services Committee: "Fiscal Year 2005 National Defense Authorization budget request," March 24, 2004.
- ⁶ Andres Oppenheimer, "Latin America's 'ungoverned spaces'," *San Diego Union Tribune*, March 12, 2003.
- ⁷ Adam Isaacson, "Closing the Seams: U.S. Security Policy in the Americas," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, May/June 2005.
- ⁸ Testimony of General James T. Hill, Commander, United States Southern Command, hearing of the House Armed Services Committee: "Fiscal Year 2005 National Defense Authorization budget request," March 24, 2004.
- ⁹ Jack Epstein, "General Seeks Boost for Latin American Armies," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 30, 2004.
- ¹⁰ Dana Priest and Walter Pincus, "CIA, White House Defend Transfers of Terror Suspects," *Washington Post*, March 18, 2005.
- ¹¹ Tom Barry, "U.S. Brass Worry about Latin America's Swing to the Left," *Global Information Network*, June 17, 2005.
- ¹² "Paraguay Says USA Not Interested in Setting up Military Base," *BBC*, August 17, 2005.