

U.S. Hegemony in Latin America: The Southern Command as an Instrument of Consensus and Coercion

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Abstract: From a neo-Gramscian approach, this research analyses the military institution of the Southern Command as a strategic instrument to U.S. hegemonic maintenance in Latin America. To this end, this article seeks to present an X-ray of the Southern Command from the 2000s, paying attention to its organization, budget structure, and its operating strategies – in particular, in the use of military bases, in the development of ‘partnerships’ for defense and public security, and in the analysis of military education and training in the schools where this institution operates. To conduct the analysis, primary data were collected from documents and electronic sites published by the same institution and by high level institutions, such as the Department of Defense and the U.S. Congress. As a result, we conclude that the Southern Command is characterized by a hybrid mechanism for hegemonic maintenance through a combination that simultaneously encompasses the use of force and consensus.

Keywords: Southern Command; hegemony; Latin America; United States; Gramsci

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There is no region on which we depend more for our prosperity and security than Latin America and the Caribbean.

Craig Faller, testimony to US Congress in 2020
(apud Deslanders 2020)

President Duque sent us his best and paid for it. So he [Brigadier Juan Carlos Correa] came here fully paid by Colombia and works for me. [...] And our Brazilian addition – President Bolsonaro – a new addition to our H.Q., Brigadier David Alcoforado. One of the sharpest in the Brazilian Armed Forces is in our J5 organization. Brazilians are paying him to come here and work for me.

Craig Faller, meeting with former
President Donald Trump (2020c)

Introduction

The epigraphs above refer to the speeches of Admiral Craig Faller, former commander of the Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), as he delivered his testimony in Congress and in a meeting with then-President of the United States (USA) Donald Trump at the headquarters of that institution, respectively. In just two quotes, it is possible to highlight the importance that Latin America played and still plays in the US hegemonic strategy and the hegemonic relationship concealed in military cooperation, in which Latin Americans sustain the US military dominance in the region, a kind of intervention made to order from strategies that combine strength and consensus.

From a Gramscian perspective, we can understand hegemony as a set of strategies¹ of domination and direction that is exercised by a dominant class over the rest of society that uses a ‘combination of strength and consensus that balance each other in various ways, without force greatly supplanting consensus’ (Gramsci 2007: 73). As such, we understand that this dominant (or ruling) class uses the state and functions in its name to maintain its privileges and private interests. In this sense, when we refer to the ‘state’ or to ‘hegemony’ in this research, we are referring to this dominant class that proclaims a supposed national interest (therefore, public interest) to promote interests that are private and specific of the said class.

In the international system, this hegemony is understood as a form of domination where the predominant states, representative structures of these same dominant classes, create a world order consistent with their values and interests to reproduce this domination through practices of coercion and consensus. As such, the state is the natural expansion abroad of the hegemony deriving from the domestic level. Currently, US hegemonic domination has sought to minimize punctual and mainly coercive interventions (as in

the case of US occupation interventions in Central America in the early 20th century and economic and political destabilization in South America in the mid and late 20th century) and to increase ideological persuasion strategies through ‘partnerships’, ‘cooperation’, and ‘education’ that meet the interests of a dominant class in that same country. As the hegemonic condition is related to the ‘possibility of giving state activity an autonomous direction, which influences and has repercussions on other states’ (Gramsci 2007: 55), a system of alliances is created with other countries and dominant classes in order to extend their interests beyond their borders.

As Stephen Gill (2008: 14) notes, ‘central to the maintenance of hegemony is a system of rules based more on consensual aspects of power than on direct coercion.’ However, although the use of consent strategies is evidenced in the post-Cold War period and new forms of external interference have been observed,² this does not imply that force and/or coercion have been minimized as a tool for maintaining hegemony. Quite on the contrary. In fact, not only has the US sought to strengthen Defense ‘partnerships’ with Latin American countries, but also its military assistance programs for Latin America have grown in recent years.

On the other hand, in addition to a reading that privileges the understanding of US neglect in relation to Latin America after the September 11 attacks and the beginning of the War on Terror (Hakim 2006; Riggiorozzi and Tussie 2012; Lima 2013; Long 2015), we consider here that the region not only remained a priority for the US, but the very emphasis on the War on Terror enabled new means of engagement in Latin America under the justification of fighting the terroristic threat. In this sense, it is worth mentioning the empirical study by Livia Milani that corroborates this argument: ‘The war on terror contributed to the militarisation of US Foreign Policy to the region [South America], denoting an increase in the military influence in foreign policy issues’ (Milani 2021: 124).

The US military involvement in Latin America, as a region of ‘important economic and strategic interests’ for the country (Pach 1991: 8), is neither recent nor unprecedented. It is part of Latin American and Caribbean history (Schoultz 2004 and 2018; Prasad 2020). During World War II, this cooperation was institutionalized to fight a common enemy. However, the end of the war does not engender the end of US military action in the region. At the beginning of the Cold War, there was an increase in investments and military cooperation between Latin American countries and the US (Pach 1991). The military maintenance strategy in the region sought to ensure Latin American orientation towards the United States orbit and maintain a permanent system of inter-American cooperation. In this sense, military cooperation aimed to guide Latin American militaries into the US area of influence and ‘protect’ them against ‘hostile’ military influences (Pach 1991: 19). Thus, ‘To secure these goals, the services intended to offer extensive military aid, including arms, training missions, and instructions of Latin American personnel in U.S. service schools’ (Pach 1991: 37).

If during the Cold War, the idea of military cooperation came to be seen as a permanent strategy for the construction of a ‘spirit of friendly cooperation’ (Pach 1991: 37), limiting the action of communism and the reach of the Soviet Union in the region; with

the end of the Cold War, the idea became to maintain the region as an area of American influence and action, legitimizing its actions then based on the threat of narco-terrorism through bilateral partnerships and education and training programs, thus avoiding the strengthening of Latin American relations with countries such as China and Russia. In this sense, SOUTHCOM has been an important vehicle to fulfill this task.

SOUTHCOM (U.S. Southern Command) is one of the 11 Unified Combatant Commands and part of the U.S. Department of Defense.³ The institution is currently located in Florida, as well as with components in states other than Cuba and Honduras, is formally responsible for providing ‘contingency planning, operations, and security cooperation [...] protection of U.S. military resources’ in South America, Central America, and the Caribbean; and also for ‘ensuring the defense of the Panama Canal’ (SOUTHCOM 2021a). With 1,200 employees representing both the three Armed Forces (Army, Navy, and Air Force) and civil society (federal agencies),⁴ this Command has, since the 2000s, been modernized in the construction of new threats, discourses, and tools to act in Latin America, prioritizing an agenda that includes defense and public security based on partnerships with the military and local political elites. In 2020, its Commander announced the massive expansion of the military presence in the region, demonstrating how, in addition to the idea of post-hegemonic world orders (Legler 2013; Ikenberry 2015; Haas 2015), the contemporary international system continues to be governed by hegemonic powers that use force and consensus to expand their interests and areas of action, as in the case of the USA under SOUTHCOM and the Latin American region.

The Brazilian academic literature on SOUTHCOM is scarce. Articles that deal specifically with the institution are rare, as most academic journals in International Relations specialized in Defense and Security do not register works on it. Nonetheless, authors such as Bandeira (2005; 2008; 2006) and Guimarães (1999), albeit not specifically emphasizing SOUTHCOM, present this institution as an instrument for US hegemonic maintenance in Latin America. Recently, Milani (2021), from a different theoretical and methodological approach, reaches the same conclusion. Nevertheless, the area where the Command has received more attention is in the Brazilian military schools that, although traditional and state centric theoretical approaches and distinct methodological tools, detail the activities developed by the institution and point some of its impacts (Abreu 2002; Figueira 2018).

In this sense, this research seeks to present an X-ray of SOUTHCOM from a theoretical approach that emphasizes the use of both consensus and coercion to hegemony maintenance, prioritizing the period from the 2000s onwards and paying attention to its organization, budget structure, and operating strategies – specifically, in the use of military bases, in the development of ‘partnerships’ for defense and public security, and in the analysis of military education and training in schools. This ensures that, in addition to a strategy of coercion, US hegemonic maintenance is also supported by consensus strategies. This research relies on collecting primary data published by this institution and by higher institutions, such as the US Department of Defense and Congress. Finally, the work is divided into three parts: a first part, that presents the structural X-ray of SOUTHCOM with its organization into components, chains of command, and budget; a second, that

deals with the institution's modes of action in Latin America, paying attention to the military bases operated, the defense, security and humanitarian cooperation operations, and the education and training institutions of these forces; and, finally, the final remarks. With this paper, we expect to contribute, from a critical perspective and with primary data collected, to Brazilian literature on the field and to enhance the knowledge on the instruments employed by the US foreign policy in Latin America to maintain its hegemony.

Organization, command structure, and budget

Command organization and activities

SOUTHCOM's area of operation encompasses 31 countries and 16 territories in Latin America from southern Mexico and adjacent waters to Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. To carry out its missions, SOUTHCOM has 5 components: U.S. Army South, Air Forces Southern, U.S. Marine Corps Forces South, Naval Forces SOUTHCOM (4th Fleet), and Special Operations. Besides, the Command is also responsible for coordinating the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies and three task forces with the following specific ongoing missions in the region: 1) Joint Task Force Bravo (Soto Cano, Honduras); 2) Joint Task Force Guantanamo (Guantanamo, Cuba); and 3) Joint Interagency Task Force South (Key West, Florida) (SOUTHCOM 2021a; Congress Research Service 2013).

The activities developed by SOUTHCOM are based on the Unified Command Plan. This document, confidential to the Executive Branch, is prepared by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, revised, and updated every two years; assigns missions, planning, training, and operational responsibilities of the institution. The update of this guiding document is based on three strategic documents of U.S. international policy, namely the National Security Strategy of the United States of America, the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, and the National Military Strategy of the United States of America; and by national agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency, Department of Justice, and the Security Department. (Congress Research Service 2013).

In its official statements, SOUTHCOM specifically claims to have its activities focused on combating drug trafficking, humanitarian actions, regional cooperation, and conducting military exercises with the Armed Forces of friendly countries (SOUTHCOM 2021a). However, when observing the activities and attributions of each one of its components, we can see attributions related to the US international defense agenda that are not always mentioned in these official statements. This is the case of activities aimed at combating terrorism. We present in Table 1 with each of the components and their activities. In it, we observe the organization of the coercive strategy in the international realm from a repressive state apparatus that, as characterized by Althusser (2013:118), constitutes an organized whole 'in which different parts center themselves under a command unit ensured by its organization, unification and centralization, under the leadership of the representatives of the occupying classes of power.'

Table 1: Components and description of activities

Component / Task force	Base location	Description	Purpose/activities
U.S. Army South	Fort Sam Houston, Texas UNITS: New Orleans Honduras Cuba Honduras	Command of the SOUTHCOM Army Service Component, responsible for all Army forces in the theater.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducts unified ground operations; - Defines and maintains theater and conducts security, cooperation operations, and activities; - Supports regional disaster relief and drug enforcement efforts; - Exercises oversight, planning, and logistical support for humanitarian and civic assistance projects; and - Conducts and supports multinational operations and security cooperation to contain transnationals and strengthen regional security.
12 Air Force	Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona	Responsible for SOUTHCOM Air Force forces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducts security cooperation and provides air, space, and cyber capabilities across the region; - Acts as executive agent for future operation sites; - Oversight of joint/combined radar surveillance architecture and air transport; - Regional disaster relief and anti-drug operations exercises; and - Stops aggression.
U.S. Marine Corps Forces, South	Miami, Florida	US Marine Corps Service Component Command for SOUTHCOM.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief; - Building security forces to detect, detain, and defend critical infrastructure and assets; - Trains partner nations for U.N. peacekeeping missions in Haiti, Congo, and the Middle East; - Conducts deployment and relocation planning and execution of assigned and attached Navy forces; and - Performs other operational missions as assigned.
U.S. Naval Forces/4th Fleet ⁵	Naval Station Mayport, Jacksonville, Florida	Fleet with the primary mission of maintaining and training operational units (providing advanced sea-based presence to ensure freedom of maneuver, as well as developing cooperative relationships with partners in the region).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Security cooperation activities; - Maritime security operations; and - Contingency operations.

Component / Task force	Base location	Description	Purpose/activities
Special Operations	Homestead Air Force Base, Florida	Provides the main contingency response force and plans, prepares, and conducts special operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Controls all Special Operations Forces in the region; and - Establishes and operates a Joint Special Operations Task Force when directed. -> Examples of organized operations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Fused Response</u>: Annual exercise with partner nations and government agencies. <u>Fuerzas Comando</u>: Special operations skills competition and seminar for senior leaders designed to promote inter-military relationships, interoperability, and regional security. <u>Panamax</u>: Combined/Joint Multinational Task Force Exercise to respond to requests from the governments of Panama and Colombia to secure and ensure the safe passage of traffic through the Panama Canal.
Joint Task Force Bravo	Soto Cano, Honduras	Operates an all-weather, day/night forward airbase, C-5 Soto Cano, Honduras.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizes multilateral exercises with partner nations; -Combating transnational organized crime; -Humanitarian assistance/disaster relief efforts; and -Partner capability development.
Joint Task Force Guantanamo	Guantanamo Bay, Cuba		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducts detention and interrogation operations in support of the War on Terror; - Coordinates and implements detainee screening operations; - Supports law enforcement and war crimes investigations, as well as Military Commissions for Detainees Enemy Combatants; and - Supports mass migration operations at Naval Station Guantanamo.
Joint Interagency Task Force South	Key West, Florida	Interagency task force that integrates and synchronizes U.S. anti-drug operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acts as a catalyst for integrated and synchronized anti-drug operations across agencies; - Is responsible for detecting and monitoring suspicious air and maritime drug activity in the Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and eastern Pacific; - Collects, processes, and disseminates anti-drug intelligence for interagency operations; and - Works in coordination with the Northern Command on a variety of anti-drug and trafficking operations.
Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies (CHDS)	Washington, DC	Educational center managed by SOUTHCOM.	Offers education, dissemination, research, and knowledge sharing activities on defense and policymaking with regional military and political leaders.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on (SOUTHCOM 2021a; Congressional Research Service 2013 and 2020; Watson 2011).

Command Structure

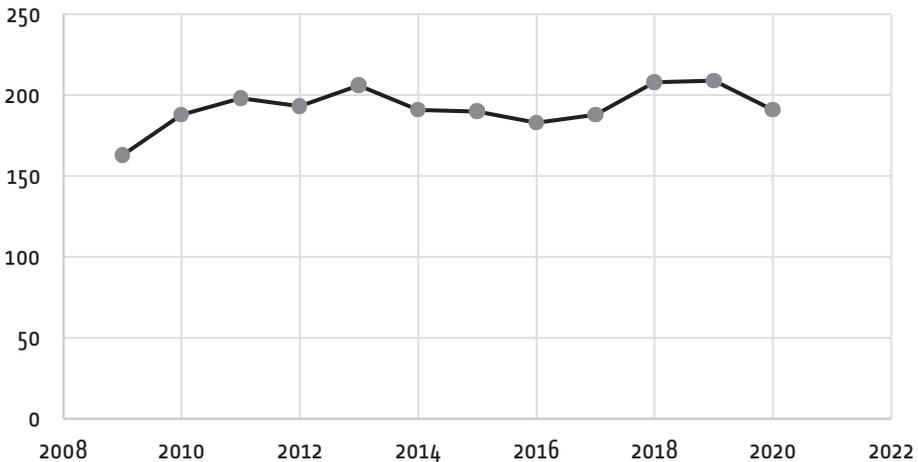
The chain of command assigned to SOUTHCOM is governed by the provisions contained in Section 162 of Title 10, Armed Forces, USA (United States 2022). The command starts with the President, is followed by the Secretary of Defense, then by the General Staff Command of the Armed Forces, and finally, by the commander of SOUTHCOM. With an average tenure of two years and staffed by generals from any of the US Armed Forces who meet the rank and training requirements, the SOUTHCOM commander is a nominee by the Secretary of Defense, appointed by the president, and confirmed by the Senate. In October of 2021, the Navy Admiral Craig Faller was substituted by the Army General Laura Richardson, currently responsible for the SOUTHCOM command.

Budget

Under Section 166 of Title 10 of the US Armed Forces, the Secretary of Defense includes in the Department of Defense's annual budget, that is submitted to Congress a separate budget proposal for the activities of each of the unified combatant commands. The budget should include funding for: (1) Joint Exercises, (2) Force Training, (3) Contingencies, and (4) Select Operations (United States 2022).

In Chart 1, we present the SOUTHCOM budget from 2009 to 2020 that was declared by the Department of Defense. This budget funds the Command's day-to-day operations (operation and administration of Command Headquarters personnel, including civilian pay, travel, supplies, and training); and mission activities that promote regional stability:

Chart 1: SOUTHCOM budget per year in millions of US dollars
Budget



Source: Elaborated by the authors based on budgets available in the *Operation and maintenance overview fiscal year budget estimates* from 2009 to 2020 (USD 2021b).

However, this budget does not disclose the Command's total funding. Combat Command funding is, with a few exceptions, limited to operations and maintenance accounts for headquarters and mission support activities. Thus, the forces and operations assigned to the components are generally funded by the Armed Forces (either in their base budgets or with resources destined for Contingency Operations Abroad). The SOUTHCOM budget also includes additional funding requests for, for instance, the compensation of civilians; personnel for the Identity Intelligence Program to assist other agencies and partner nations in combating threat networks, travel; and training (USD 2021a and 2021b; Congressional Research Service 2013 and 2020).

This base budget also does not include a Department of Defense budget account known as the Combating Terrorism Readiness Initiatives Fund. Activities authorized under this fund include the acquisition and maintenance of physical security equipment and, in extraordinary circumstances, physical security management planning; the acquisition and support of security forces and security technicians; and any other physical security-related activity (Congressional Research Service 2013).

In this sense, the budget in question, published from official US Department of Defense documents and approved by Congress, is a minimum budget for maintaining the physical structure of the Command's headquarters administration and logistics. Amendments and submissions of new resources can still be made during the year. However, it was not possible to access this data.

Action strategies

Creating the threat

The first strategy in creating consensus and legitimizing coercion is to securitize the region by creating a threat. This threat is created, naturalized, and consented through individual and institutional discourses from the dominant and ruling class, granting them the hegemonic power with the allowance to secure interests that are supposedly public and/or national. Because they are naturalized and internalized by the society, the hegemonic actions are seen as legitimate. Consensus for the use of coercion is established that way. In this sense, we collected and categorized all the speeches of SOUTHCOM commanders between 2000 and 2020 during the Congressional Special Committee, an annual event that that Command commanders are required to attend.

Traditionally, Latin American countries are not considered a threat or an enemy of the United States, as shown in Table 2. Until 2018, the few states identified in the speeches of the commanders were identified as a problem and not a threat, as in the case of Cuba, which could cause destabilization due to a possible immigration crisis. It was not until 2018 that some Latin American countries were considered a threat due to supporting values different from the US, and given their alleged associations with states declared hostile to the country. This is the case of Cuba and Venezuela since 2018, along with Nicaragua since 2020.

Drug trafficking was repeatedly cited as the main internal threat in the region over the years analyzed in this research, and that gained prominence with the War on Terror. According to the commanders' statements, the use of resources by drug trafficking for groups considered as terrorists made the threat of narco-terrorism justify the deployment of greater resources and operations in the region. In this vein, from 2002 onwards, the speeches of the commanders began to highlight the region of the triple frontier where the Islamic group Hezbollah would be supposedly operating. Alluding to this threat, the speeches also relate drug trafficking to certain national groups, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Sendero Luminoso in Peru. As of 2013, SOUTHCOM commanders began to link terrorism with an Iranian presence in the region that would be supporting Hezbollah.

It was not until 2010 that certain countries were identified as threats to US influence in the region and regional stability. As of that year, speeches began to emphasize the presence of China, Russia, and Iran in Latin America. By characterizing them as authoritarian states hostile to the U.S. and as 'malign state actors' (Faller 2020b: 3), SOUTHCOM commanders create and at the same time represent the fear of loss of hegemony in the region. Thus, in a speech to the Senate in 2017, Commander Kurt W. Tidd (2017:3) stated: 'China, Russia, and Iran seek to expand their influence and challenge the international order and democratic principles of transparency, good governance, and the rule of law abroad—and much closer to home.' In this context, three years later, Commander Faller characterized the American continent as 'our hemisphere' as he announced an increase in the U.S. military presence in the region:

There will be an increase in U.S. military presence in the hemisphere later this year. This will include an enhanced presence of ships, aircrafts and security forces to reassure our partners [...] and counter a range of threats to include narco-terrorism. (Faller 2020a)

Nevertheless, these speeches are not exclusive to SOUTHCOM commanders but are allied to a broader defense strategy. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the US Department of Defense has not published a new national strategic plan. The latter had been developed within the war on terror framework shortly after September 11. In 2018, however, the Department published a new national defense strategy presented by the then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis. In it, the terrorist threat was related and sometimes replaced by the threat of certain nations – specifically China and Russia (Department of Defense 2018). In this sense, it is emblematic of the construction of the threat from external countries, especially Russia, China, and Iran; for Latin America, and even for Latin American countries, in the case of Cuba, Venezuela, and, more recently, Nicaragua, according to Table 2.

Table 2: Creating Threats: Speeches by SOUTHCOM'S Commanders to Senate and Congressional Committees

Year	LATIN AMERICAN STATES AS A THREAT/ PROBLEMS	THREAT/INTERNAL NON-STATE PROBLEMS IN LA	EXTERNAL STATE THREAT to LA	EXTERNAL NON-STATE THREAT to LA
2000	Absent	- Drug trafficking	Absent	Absent
2001	Absent	- Illegal immigration; - Illegal arms trafficking; and - Corruption and organized crime.	Absent	Absent
2002	Absent	- Drug trafficking; - Illegal immigration; - Political instability; and - Corruption and 'weak governments'.	Absent	Terrorism
2003	Absent	- Drug and arms trafficking	Absent	Terrorism
2004	Absent	- Criminal organizations; and - FARC's.	Absent	Terrorism
2005	Absent	- Drug trafficking; - Narco-terrorism; - Money laundering; - Criminal organizations; - Natural disasters; and - Illegal immigration.	Absent	Terrorism
2006	Absent	- Drug trafficking; - Narco-terrorism; and - FARC's;	Absent	Terrorism
2007	Cuba (as a problem)	- Organized crime; - Drug trafficking; and - FARC's;	Absent	Terrorism
2008	Cuba (as a problem)	- Organized crime; - Drug trafficking; - Poverty and inequality; and - Violence and crime.	Iran	Terrorism
2009	Absent	- Drug trafficking; - Narco-terrorism (FARC's); and - Criminal organizations.	Absent	Terrorism
2010	Absent	- Natural and human disasters; - Organized crime; - Drug and human trafficking; - Money laundering; - Poverty and inequality; - Corruption; and - Narco-terrorism (FARC's and SL).	China Russia Iran	Absent
2011	Venezuela (as a problem)	- Illicit trafficking; and - Natural disaster.	China Russia Iran	Terrorism
2012	Absent	- Illicit trafficking; - Organized crime; - Drug trafficking (FARC's and S.L.); - Humanitarian crisis; and - Natural disasters.	China Russia Iran	Terrorism

Year	LATIN AMERICAN STATES AS A THREAT/ PROBLEMS	THREAT/INTERNAL NON-STATE PROBLEMS IN LA	EXTERNAL STATE THREAT to LA	EXTERNAL NON-STATE THREAT to LA
2013	Absent	- Transnational organized crime; and - FARC's.	China Russia	Terrorism
2014	Absent	- Transnational organized crime; - Illicit trafficking; - Immigration/refugees; and - Violence.	China Russia Iran	Terrorism
2015	Venezuela (as a problem)	- Drug trafficking; - Immigration/refugees; - Transnational crime; and - FARC's.	China Russia Iran	Terrorism
2016	Absent	- Poverty and inequality; - Violence and corruption; - Chronic unemployment; - Deteriorating security and 'weak' governments; - Transnational crime; - Immigration/refugees; and - FARC's.	China Russia Iran	Terrorism
2017	Absent	- Drug and human trafficking; - Violence; and - Corruption.	China Russia Iran	Terrorism
2018	Venezuela (as a threat) Cuba (as a threat)	- Drug, arms, people trafficking; - Illegal immigration; and - Natural disasters.	China Russia Iran North Korea	Terrorism
2019	Venezuela (as a threat) Cuba (as a threat) Nicaragua (as a threat)	- Organized crime; - Natural disasters; - Weak institutions; - Poverty; - Corruption; and - Violence.	China Russia Iran	Terrorism
2020	Venezuela (as a threat) Cuba (as a threat)	- Transnational crimes; - Extremisms; and - People smuggling.	China Russia Iran	Terrorism

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the *Posture Statement of Senate Armed Services Committee* from 2000 to 2020 (Armed Service Senate 2021).

Containing 'threats': SOUTHCOM's performance

Besides components, task forces, and the Defense School, SOUTHCOM is also involved in other activities in Latin America. In particular, the following stand out: (1) supervision of Cooperative Security Locations (CSLs), (2) administration of radar stations, and (3) preparation and execution of Plan Colombia (Rippel 2017; Guzzi 2008; Bitar 2016).⁶

CSLs are leases, runways, and/or naval bases (in the case of El Salvador) for US aircraft that replace former American air bases in Central America and the Caribbean. There are

currently two:⁷ one in Comalapa (El Salvador) and another in Aruba and Curaçao. CSLs grant US access to locations in Latin America that would otherwise be denied, and are a result of long-term cooperative arrangements between the US and ‘host’ nations. These CSLs required extensive US-funded modifications and upgrades to ensure that airfield facilities and force protection measures meet US standards for safe operation by aircraft and personnel (Bitar 2016; Rippel 2017). SOUTHCOM also maintains fixed and mobile radar stations throughout Latin America. In South America alone, there are seventeen such stations. For the official purpose of detecting air traffic used to transport illegal drugs, there are eight fixed stations in Colombia, three in Peru, and three in Venezuela. The other stations are mobile, and their locations are classified as secret (Rippel 2017).

SOUTHCOM also played an important role in the conception and execution of Plan Colombia (Soares and Lima 2018), as reaffirmed by the speeches of the commanders in their testimonies in Congress. In 2000, the SOUTHCOM Commander, General Charles E. Wilhelm, describes the institution’s role in the preparation and structuring of the Plan:

We have helped the Colombian Army organize, train, and equip their first Counternarcotics Battalion (CN B.N.), which became operational December 15, 1999. Manned by more than 900 professional soldiers and based at the Joint Task Force (JTF)-South headquarters in *Tres Esquinas*, the C.N. Battalion is comprised of a headquarters company and three maneuver companies. The Battalion completed an extensive three-phase training program conducted by U.S. Special Forces at a cost of \$3.9 million and received \$3.5 million in individual and unit equipment, and medical supplies to enable stand-alone operations. (Wilhelm 2000 [n.p])

The partnerships

Involvement and coordination with Latin American nations is essential in maintaining U.S. hegemony. It is necessary to establish legitimate ‘partnerships’ in an alleged cooperation where both countries (the USA and its partner countries) play in a *win-win* game. In this sense, since the 1990s and, especially since the 2000s, SOUTHCOM has prioritized bilateral relations with Latin American countries. So:

Active engagement with our neighbors in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean contribute to regional and U.S. security. The U.S. Armed Forces build regional security through sustained engagement to stop adversaries, preserve stability, support allies and partners and cooperate with others to address common security challenges. (SOUTHCOM 2021a [n.p])

Formally, SOUTHCOM operates on three fronts in relation to its partners, namely operational support with military and public security forces; action in natural and human disasters; and operational and educational training of security and defense forces. According to its official website, SOUTHCOM provides strategic and operational support

in cooperation with the military and security forces of 'partner' countries, including the provision of military equipment, planning, and training of these countries' operational forces. Thus, 'We seek to develop the capabilities of regional military and security forces to address internal stability, sovereignty, and security challenges' (SOUTHCOM 2021a).

Some actions and partnerships are highlighted. This is the case of the Caribbean, considered the 'third border of the USA' and whose 'regional strategy of maritime interdiction' is based on the supply of equipment and training for air and maritime domain in the region (SOUTHCOM 2021a). Also, it has specific activities, such as Tradewinds, an exercise sponsored by SOUTHCOM and conducted by 'partner' nations aimed at achieving greater integration of defense and public security forces to combat organized crime 'and conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations' (Ibidem). Besides Tradewinds, SOUTHCOM develops the Strategy for Engagement in the Caribbean, an important strategy for US action in the region that is justified by the threat of ISIS 'violent extremists' (SOUTHCOM 2020a), as well as corruption and illegal immigration to the United States. Therefore,

In security, we will work with our Caribbean partners to ensure that ISIS does not have a foothold in the region, dismantle illicit trafficking networks, improve maritime security, tackle violent and organized crime, and increase threat intelligence sharing between countries. (SOUTHCOM 2020a [n.p])

In South America, Brazil and Colombia are cited as examples of partner countries of shared military capabilities. In Peru, SOUTHCOM's effort has been counterterrorism against Sendero Luminoso (SOUTHCOM 2021a).

Another area of constant SOUTHCOM activity is Central America. Most of SOUTHCOM's exercises focus on the Panama Canal, a space SOUTHCOM controlled until the 1980s, including establishing its headquarters and the School of the Americas in this location (Long 2016). Various operations and exercises are carried out in this region. This is the case of Operation Martillo, a joint interagency effort among 'partner' countries and the U.S. that aims to control air and maritime space, preventing the access of criminal organizations within Central America. Led by the Joint Interagency Task Force South, which acts as a hub for integrated operations in the fight against drug trafficking and monitors the maritime areas of the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and the eastern Pacific, it started in 2012 with the participation of 14 countries and is considered a 'success' (SOUTHCOM 2021a). In addition to Operation Martillo, recent exercises include: *Beyond the Horizon/New Horizons*, *Tradewinds*, *Fuerzas Aliadas Humanitarias*, *Fuerzas Comando*, *PANAMAX*; *UNITAS*, and *Southern Partnership Station*.

Sponsored and coordinated by SOUTHCOM, *Beyond the Horizon/New Horizons* refers to an operation that gathers specialized engineering and health troops to provide services and 'humanitarian civic assistance exercises' in Guatemala and Guyana. Thus, 'Hundreds of U.S. military personnel, representing the National Guard, active and reserve forces of all three Armed forces, will be in Guyana and Guatemala at any time during each exercise' (SOUTHCOM 2021a).

Along with the *U.S. National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP)*, SOUTHCOM has been developing specific partnerships in Latin America since 1996 using the National Guard. In SOUTHCOM's area of activity, cooperation takes place between 18 states in the US, in addition to Puerto Rico and Columbia and 24 nations in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America (Table 3). According to the SOUTHCOM website, this cooperation engenders security activities (ports, borders, and aviation); disaster relief and humanitarian assistance; maintenance (of aircraft, vehicles, and vessels); engineering; communication; logistics; operations planning; and 'professional development'. (SOUTHCOM 2021b). Partnerships are treated as success stories, such as the West Virginia National Guard's partnership with Peru under SOUTHCOM:

The West Virginia National Guard has a formidable reputation in the Republic of Peru due to the dedication and trust of the organization's leaders and our partnership significantly enhances U.S. objectives and lines of effort in US SOUTHCOM's area of responsibility. In just over 24 years, Peru and West Virginia have partnered for more than 120 interactions between forces that provide insight into the regional challenges facing the Andes Mountains, especially in the areas of counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, emergency preparedness, risk mitigation, disaster response, and recovery. (SOUTHCOM 2021b [n.p])

In order to justify and legitimize the training of its armed forces, SOUTHCOM also presents itself as an institution that seeks to strengthen disaster recovery strategies and humanitarian capacities in 'partner' countries in Latin America, calling its actions 'humanitarian services': 'We work with partner nations to conduct low-cost humanitarian assistance programs and exercises that provide US and partner nation with personnel training while providing humanitarian services to communities across the region' (SOUTHCOM 2021a [n.p]).

The so-called humanitarian exercises refer to humanitarian and civic assistance and are characterized by the mobilization of armed forces to build schools and medical centers (commanded by SOUTHCOM officers with the participation of the host country's armed forces). In addition, they provide teams of health forces 'to citizens of the host country who need care', as is the case with *Beyond the Horizon* activities (SOUTHCOM 2021a). Nevertheless, this support appears to serve less to humanitarian causes than to armed forces training. In this regard, the Human Rights Office was created by SOUTHCOM in 1995 'to promote greater observance of human rights in the Western Hemisphere and directly advise the commander on these issues' (SOUTHCOM 2021a [n.p]). Formally, this office is responsible for promoting and overseeing human rights strategies, including education and security cooperation (specifically in the case of human trafficking), and acts as a liaison between SOUTHCOM and representatives of civil communities and non-governmental organizations.

It is worth noting the effort that the US ruling class has traditionally played in promoting 'civic virtues' and 'humanitarian aid' in peripheral countries. Be it through consolidated institutions such as those that originated in Bretton Woods or through less visible

(albeit no less important) institutions such as the National Endowment for Democracy, the Center for International Private Enterprise, and the Atlas Network, for example, the ruling class finances and enables ‘aid’ programs for peripheral countries as ‘true professionals of hegemony’ (Guilhot 2003: 213).

Table 3: U.S. National Guard’s State Partnership Program: SOUTHCOM Area of Operation

Partner State – USA	Partner Nation – LA	Partnership establishment
Arkansas	Guatemala	2002
Connecticut	Uruguay	2000
Delaware	Trinidad-Tobago	2004
Columbia	Jamaica	1999
Florida	Guyana	2003
Florida	Virgin Islands	2006
Georgia	Argentina	2016
Kentucky	Ecuador	1996
Louisiana	Belize	1996
Louisiana	Haiti	2011
Massachusetts	Paraguay	2001
Missouri	Panama	1996
New Hampshire	El Salvador	2000
New Mexico	Costa Rica	2006
New York	Brazil	2019
Puerto Rico	Honduras	1998
Puerto Rico	Dominican Rep.	2003
South Carolina	Colombia	2012
South Carolina	Suriname	2006
Texas	Chile	2008
West Virginia	Peru	1996
Wisconsin	Nicaragua	2003

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on SOUTHCOM, 2021b.

Still, in the field of Human Rights, SOUTHCOM created the Women, Peace, and Security Program (WPS), as ‘part of a national effort to promote the significant contributions of women in the defense and security sectors around the world’ whose official mission is ‘empowering women’ (SOUTHCOM 2021b). Under the supervision of the Civil Delegate of the SOUTHCOM Commander, this strategy, however, is one of many that uses progressive agendas, such as the case of feminism, to maintain masculine and oppressive hierarchical structures, despite being under a virtuous guise. Considering that male domination in International Relations is operated by the warmongering emphasis and by the construction of the citizen soldier (Tickner 1997), the idea that we live in a dangerous world is absorbed. The internalization of this idea thus serves to reinforce the primacy of

the particular in the form of the masculine while oppressing women since, in this idea of the world, men are the natural protectors while women are the ones who need protection (Enloe 2014; Tickner 1997).

The use of private interests disguised as public interests and the maintenance of hegemonic and oppressive structures presented as emancipatory are part of the strategies for maintaining consensus. This is also the case with the defense of neoliberalism, represented as a supposedly universal, scientific, and as a beneficial economic policy (Bourdieu 2003) that is accepted by a significant portion of society constituting a market civilization (Gill 1995). The neoliberal world reason (Dardot and Laval 2016) is strategically introduced in Latin American countries, even though it is shrouded in a veil of 'causality' or 'naturalness' that hides external interference and symbolic violence. One of SOUTHCOM's areas of activity is precisely this.

The partnerships developed by SOUTHCOM with Latin American 'partner' countries are also supported by the Public-Private Cooperation (PPC) program. This program seeks to coordinate, along with non-governmental organizations, business, and academia; an environment of stability and security to 'enable prosperity' in Latin America (SOUTHCOM 2021b). Thus, this division of SOUTHCOM seeks to leverage relationships and resources to 'amplify the effects of business programs and activities' (ibidem). If hegemonic maintenance is maintained by both fronts represented by force and consensus; the Defense field also cannot be sustained without the ideology of the free market. This SOUTHCOM action pillar is a good portrayal of that relationship. In this sense, the Plan Colombia case is emblematic. Since the first U.S. Congressional sessions that debated the size of the budget to the Plan, private companies were at the forefront of the discussions in a kind of 'outsourcing of interests' (Villa; Ostos 2005:11). United Technologies, Textron, Lockheed Martín, Sikorsky, Bell, DynCorp, and Military Professional Resources are companies that commercialize arms, radars, helicopter, and even mercenaries. All of them strongly participated in the U.S. Legislative knowing that, once the budget Plan was approved, they would be hired for their services.

Finally, the third type of action with 'partner' nations refers to educational and professional exchange programs, such as foreign military financing activities; international military education and training; and defense institution development programs – specifically the Ministry of Defense Advisors Program and the Defense Institutions Reform Initiative, Science and Technology programs, and sponsored by US SOUTHCOM. Therefore, SOUTHCOM (2021a) 'helps partner nations enhance security and professionalize their militaries and security forces while increasing their ability to conduct peacekeeping operations, stability operations, and disaster relief operations.'

Besides training and 'educating' Latin American defense and security forces, SOUTHCOM also carries out supposed humanitarian activities in the education field. Some of these programs have scholarships for the chosen ones who can then undertake an exchange program in the USA. Examples of such training programs are the Inter-American Air Force Academy, the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, the Inter-American Defense College, the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School, and the Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program.

Ultimately, these activities are not altruistic or humanitarian. As the history of U.S. interventions in the Latin American region clearly demonstrates, the actions carried out by this country traditionally aim to maintain its regional hegemony. This requires acting on two fronts: force and consensus. SOUTHCOM performs both functions. It acts through force and coercion when performing military and security activities in Latin American countries under the justification of combating a certain threat (imaginary or real); and through the creation of consent when ‘educating’ and training individuals from those countries who are, or will later be, incorporated into defense and public security forces. There is nothing more secure for maintaining hegemony than having leaders in your area of influence and interest who have internalized the hegemonic discourse and reproduced it in their own countries. As SOUTHCOM Commander Admiral Craig Faller rightly pointed out, these individuals are paid by their governments and taxpayers and work for them – more specifically, they work to maintain American hegemony in Latin America, not only with the subservience but also with the support of these individuals.

The ‘education’

A structure of domination and precise hegemonic maintenance is based on a kind of technical knowledge (Cox 1981) in which the hegemonic center holds the financial resources, produces ideas, concepts, and theories; while the periphery imports and consumes them through a reproduction of knowledge that, not by chance, reproduces the mechanisms of domination. If we consider that every worldview is made for someone and has some interest (Cox 1981), we realize that the importation of these views not only has explanatory gaps arising from economic and social differences but is also harmful insofar as it reproduces views of the world that are alien to the development of the periphery. As Arturo Jauretche argues, the appearance of universality (and scientificity) of these ideologies and worldviews is only possible because of the power of universal expansion that the centers (which create them) hold. Thus, ‘Taking these relative values as absolute is a defect in the genesis of our “intelligentsia” and hence its colonialism’ (Jauretche 1975: 6-7).

U.S. hegemony in the realm of ideas would not be possible without the role of the local intelligentsia – nationals whose interest in maintaining their class is allied with the interests of the hegemonic economic class (Jauretche 1975); or organic intellectuals – social groups that ‘create for themselves and organically one or more layers of intellectuals that give them homogeneity and awareness of their own function, not only in the economic field, but also in the social and political’ (Gramsci 1989: 3). The conquest, therefore, is related to the colonization of the external mentality by the hegemonic power. This kind of neocolonization, or pedagogical colonization (Jauretche 1975), guarantees the subordination of peripheral states, and subordinates classes to the hegemonic power. SOUTHCOM excels at building and maintaining consensus.

Educational institutions are privileged instruments since they work by transmitting values and homogeneity (Kalil, Mei and Silveira 2021). As such, these institutions possess a strong symbolic component: they diffuse values, beliefs, procedures, and doctrines that are planned, taught, and allow the reproduction as well as the transformation of society

(Ibidem; Penido 2015). Hence the importance of centers for disseminating knowledge and training that organize the dissemination of a particular worldview and action strategy to be reproduced in other countries by co-opted nationals.

Among the educational institutions that are directly or indirectly accountable to SOUTHCOM, we can name William Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, Inter-American Defense College, Inter-American Air Force Academy, and Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS). These are institutions maintained by U.S. government finances, most of which are subordinated to the Defense Department (through SOUTHCOM or other institutions such as Drug Enforcement Administration and Department of Justice). Subjects to US laws (with the exception of the Inter-American Defense College) and portrayed doctrines oriented by security and defense documents, this set of educational institutions are primarily geared towards Latin American actors at the highest levels of the armed forces, public security (militaries and civilians), defense ministries (civilian and military personnel), attachés, diplomats, and university professors.

The case of the William Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies (Perry Center) is emblematic. Of all mentioned schools, it is the only one whose coordination and administration is conducted by SOUTHCOM. Presenting itself as an education center of excellence, the Perry Center began in 1997 by initiative of the then Secretary of Defense, William Perry. An institution of the US Department of Defense and associated with the Southern and Northern Commands, the Center receives Latin American military and civilian personnel who are exposed to training in US security doctrines (Vitelli 2020). It acts in the following three areas: education; advice to American nations in the formulation of defense and security policies; and an integrated network of alumni who participate in continuous discussions in an extension model.⁸ The Center was a pioneer in the attempt to create and maintain consensus in the post-Cold War Latin American region in the defense field. To Marina Vitelli,

Considering the U.S. influence on hemispheric institutions and the Perry Center's active role in the socialization of Latin American security and defense authorities from the perspective of multidimensional security, it may seem reasonable to conclude that the increasing focus on 'new threats' is a consequence of the US policy, and another sign of its military hegemony over the region. (Vitelli 2020: 96 [t. n])

In its institutional plans, these schools reflect the threats and strategies developed by SOUTHCOM. The courses it creates stem from its perceived needs. Nevertheless, its concepts, problems and threats thought in these educational centers are reproduced, sometimes in a non-critical way, by Latin-Americans. According to Hector Saint Pierre,

In Latin America, in the realm dedicated to international security, defense, and peace; theories, concepts, and notions of remarkably analytical, explanatory, and heuristical infertility; of poor predictive ability, inconvenient prescriptive force, and inconsequential operational management; are incorporated. [...] With this acritical embodiment of concepts, it was admitted, for example, that migrations

constitute a threat to sovereignty, that poverty ‘can put a risk national security and democracy’ – when, in reality, the motives of part of these migrations lay in the deficiencies of the state in offer economic, political, and social conditions; [and] when poverty, far from being a threat, it is an unmistakably indication of government’s inability of creating and distributing wealth and a clear symptom of the dysfunction of this ‘democracy.’ (Saint Pierre 2011)

Funded by federal resources and agencies, these schools reflect the threats and strategies developed by SOUTHCOM. Besides, partnerships are formed between these schools and Latin American institutions to carry out courses and visits mediated by SOUTHCOM. Southern Command members participate in training and act as educators and disseminators of knowledge in these schools (Chairez 2020). Finally, there are interactions between groups of high-ranking officers from ‘partner’ countries who take courses at these schools and visit SOUTHCOM:

A group of Latin American military special forces listens to a briefing on US SOUTHCOM partnerships in Latin America and the Caribbean. They visited SOUTHCOM in the summer of 2018 as part of an international course for strategic leaders at the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS) at the John C. Stennis Space Center, Mississippi. Most of them are high-ranking officials from Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, Mexico, and El Salvador. (Cook 2019 [n.p])

NAVSCIATTS, in this sense, is the most universal institution among the four institutions mentioned above. It serves all regions of the globe as the primary security forces assistance training resource for US Commands (NAVSCIATTS 2021a).

It is also important to mention the endogenous relationship that operates within the scope of schools and the teaching and training performed by SOUTHCOM. Students who participate in these US schools are indicated by their superiors in their home countries – sometimes, the superiors themselves have already gone through this same teaching and training procedures. Once the study is completed, it is common for the military and civilians of the countries of origin to become instructors and members of the board of these schools themselves.

On the other hand, WHINSEC refers to the former School of the Americas that operated between 1946 and 2001. Under the Department of Defense, this school reported to the Army as an Executive Agent and to the Combined Arms Center. The students who pass through there come from practically every country in Latin America and Canada: 36 countries altogether. There is, however, a predominance of individuals from Caribbean countries. The instructors are US military and civilian personnel as well as military and police officers from ‘partner’ nations. By corroborating the endogeneity that characterizes these schools, all instructors are specialists in relation to the courses they teach and must have completed some basic instructor training, usually at the institution itself, before

entering the teaching platform where they are required to continue their training while they are assigned to be instructors there. These students are recruited through US embassies and their agencies. After selection, the Department of State does the final review and certifies the selected students. The courses offered account for different hierarchies, even among the military (Whinsec 2021a). The Command and General Staff course for Officers, for example, is aimed at working together in interagency and inter-institutional and multinational cooperation. Formally, the courses offered include training content to the promotion of human rights in addition to combat illicit and disasters – which not by chance, are all the threats pointed out by SOUTHCOM commanders in their speeches to Congress (Whinsec 2021b).

There is also the Inter-American Defense College (IADC, or CID), subordinated to the Organization of American States (OAS) through the Inter-American Defense Board. The instructors and students are part of the OAS member countries. Students are high-ranking officers of the Armed Forces, national police officers, and civil servants of governments in Latin American countries. Each OAS member country can present candidates to participate and train in the IADC in the Specialization and, since 2013, Master's courses in Inter-American Defense and Security (CID 2021; CID 2019; RBJID 2021). As part of their training curriculum, students take part in courses and make visits to SOUTHCOM's headquarters. Throughout its history, IADC graduated 2,700 students, about a third of which were promoted to general officer or an equivalent ranking in the civilian realm. Three presidents in Latin America (including Chile's Michelle Bachelet) and 31 state ministries walked through this institution (CID, 2019; Medeiros 2018).

Another school is the Inter-American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA), based in Texas and reporting to the US Air Force. With an annual education of approximately 800 students, this school receives officers and non-commissioned officers from the aeronautical, civilian, and civil and federal law enforcement agencies through recruitment made by the US Office of Security and Cooperation and the partner governments that select the students (IAAFA 2021a and IAAFA 2021b). About 33 courses are offered, divided into three major groups: professional military training; operations and support training courses; aircraft and systems training resources. Ministered by US officers and non-commissioned officers and Latin American guests, the courses offered are organized based on the annual US strategic objectives as outlined in SOUTHCOM's Engagement Plan and based on specific requirements of the 'partner' country (IAAFA 2017).

Finally, NAVSCIATTS operates under the command of the US Special Forces and the US Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSCIATTS 2021b). Classes are taught in English and Spanish, and other languages and include operations, repairs, vessel support, communications, weapons, small unit tactics, range security, intelligence fusion operations, and instructional education for partner nations in all courses mentioned. More than half of the courses offered apply to any armed force, not just the naval one. The instructors are high-ranking US officers and non-commissioned officers. Some instructors are even designated by their countries to serve an 18–24-month period as guest instructors. Table 4 seeks to exemplify and condense some of these observations.

Table 4: Schools part of SOUTHCOM's sphere of action

School	Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC)	Inter-American Defense College (IADC)	Inter-American Air Force Academy	Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS)
Established	2001	1962	1943	1963
Institution to which it reports	Department of Defense	OAS through the Inter-American Defense Board	Department of the Air Force	US Special Forces
Headquarters	Georgia	Washington, D.C	Texas	Mississippi
Official Language	Spanish	Spanish, French, English, and Portuguese	Spanish	There is no data
Total graduates	25,683 (2018)	2,669 (2020)	800/year	13,000 (2020)
Characterization of students	Military Civil police officers; Civil (Ministries of Defense and Civil Police)	High-ranking officers, the Armed Forces, police, and civil servants of governments	Aeronautical officers; Civil and federal police officers	Civil and Military Security Forces
Origin of students	36 L.A. and CAN countries	26 L.A. countries	Latin America	More than 120 countries
Recruitment	Embassies and their agencies in the home country, plus further review at the Department of State	OAS member countries can nominate candidates	U.S. Office of Security Cooperation and partner nations	There is no data
Number of courses offered	16	2	33	21
The courses	They encompass training content for combating illicit and disasters and promoting human rights.	Specialization and Masters (since 2013) in Inter-American Defense and Security	- Military training; - Operations training; - Aircraft and aviation systems training.	Vessel, communications, armaments, security, intelligence, and instructor training from partner nations.
Average of courses	From 4,7 weeks (for Army officers and generals) to 4 weeks (Human Rights)	11 months	8 weeks (for non-commissioned officers) and 14 weeks (officials)	There is no data
Who prepares the courses?	U.S. Government Agencies and U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. They support the security cooperation plans of the Northern and Southern Commands.	There is no data	SOUTHCOM Engagement Plan and partner country request	There is no data
Who are instructors	U.S. military and civilians and partner nations' military and police.	From OAS member countries	U.S. officers and non-commissioned officers and guests from Latin America.	High-ranking U.S. and partner nation officers and non-commissioned officers.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the following sources: SOUTHCOM 2021a; Chairez 2020; CID 2019 and 2021; Cook 2019; IAAFA 2018 and 2021a and 2021b; NAVSCIA-TTS 2021a and 2021b; WHINSEC 2021a and 2021b.

Final considerations

If the communist threat legitimized U.S. interventions and actions in Latin America, with the end of the Cold War and, therefore, the end of the communist threat, a need to maintain the US hegemony in the region emerges, demanding the development of new strategies of action in new ways. SOUTHCOM, therefore, can be characterized as a hybrid strategic instrument that mixes military action (based on cooperation in the field of armaments and the use of military bases); supposedly 'humanitarian' activities (comprising 'crises' and disasters); and educational and training activities that entail defense and security forces. These three pillars support the hegemonic maintenance strategy in a combination that simultaneously encompasses the use of force and consensus. In this article, we seek to highlight these ways of maintaining US hegemony in Latin America in the post-Cold War period, by specifically highlighting the role SOUTHCOM plays in this exercise.

Data collection was a very difficult task due to the difficulty of accessing the data in question and, even when accessed, due to its disperse nature. One example was the difficulty in obtaining the SOUTHCOM budget, for the Department of Defense budget documentation does not break total funding down by combatant command. In general, the information accessed is diffuse and biased. The diffuse character seems to be inherent to the SOUTHCOM structure. Besides having a network of actors, institutions and action strategies, the Southern Command is scattered throughout Latin American countries in several fronts, such as military action, humanitarian aid, and education. However, if the action is diffuse, the elaboration of the plan that organizes the objective and the action strategies is not. Highly centralized, SOUTHCOM's action plan is decided in a military summit that includes the high ranks of the Department of Defense, the Unified Commands, and, in particular, SOUTHCOM.

In this research, we seek to make an X-ray of SOUTHCOM and depict it as an important actor for the maintenance of U.S. hegemony in Latin America, as it combines both strategies of strength and consensus. In our view, it represents the use of force for hegemonic maintenance in military bases and defense cooperation operations, and also represents the use of consent concerning humanitarian aid 'partnerships' and the training and education institutions of military and security forces. Thus, SOUTHCOM represents a very endogenous pedagogical colonization circuit, which reproduces the US national security plan and acts to maintain US hegemony in the Latin American region. The first task is to securitize the region by creating a threat. Thus, SOUTHCOM is progressively approaching drug trafficking and terrorism as threats in the region, in addition to countries such as Cuba, Venezuela and, recently, Nicaragua. From 2010 onwards, the performance of countries such as Iran, China, and Russia, characterized as 'evil states' and as hostile to US interests and values, appears as a threat in Latin America since 2010. The second task is to spread consensus about the threat (real or imagined) to Latin America. For this, the role of 'partnerships' is fundamental. Through bilateral relations, SOUTHCOM operates in Latin American and Caribbean countries to occupy military bases; develop defense; and/or humanitarian operations; foster cooperation with the private sector (facilitating

the insertion of US companies in these countries); and coordinate training and education for defense and security forces in these ‘partner’ countries.

Finally, in an area of studies that typically privileges state-centric and US approaches, as in the case of Realism in International Relations, this research sought to contribute to studies that can account for relatively marginalized concepts and approaches, as observed by Gramscian hegemony. As such, we aimed to contribute to studies that emphasize the strategic and priority dimension that Latin America acquired and continues to do so, to this day, in US foreign and defense policy. We also intended to contribute to critical theoretical approaches that prioritize the analysis of mechanisms of hegemonic maintenance in the international system, specifically in the Gramscian dimensions of strength and consensus. Therefore, we presented the role that U.S. military and educational institutions play in creating threats and consensus to legitimize hegemonic performance; as well as the instruments and strategies used by the hegemonic power in the validation of certain values and ideas that maintain their privileges.

With the rise of other powers, such as China and even Russia, the spectrum of the Cold War as a war fought on the periphery, from zones of influence, still lingers. How Latin American countries will respond to this trend remains to be seen, in terms of whether they shall consent or resist the hegemonic US maintenance.

Notes

- 1 ‘Strategy’ as employed in this work does not refer to the concept defined by studies on conflict and use of lethal force. The term ‘strategy’ used here refers to the mechanisms and/or instruments used by USA to hegemonic maintenance in Latin America.
- 2 One example is the concept of Hybrid War: A kind of indirect warfare led by the United States in the recent crises in Syria and Ukraine, called ‘color revolutions’ (Korybko 2018).
- 3 Created out of the National Security Act of 1947 with the aim of establishing a post-war system of unified command over US military forces around the world, the Unified Combatant Commands are US military forces operating abroad. Established by the President, through the Secretary of Defense, with advice from the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces, they consist of military commands that have broad and continuous missions. They are composed of forces from two or more military departments and are divided by geographic or functional responsibilities (Congress Research Service 2013; Watson 2011 and United States 2022).
- 4 It should be mentioned that the operational staff is floating, designated according to specific operations and rarely disclosed to the public. In this research, we obtained data from the Joint Task Force Bravo, which, in 2021, was composed of more than 500 US military personnel and 500 Honduran and US civilians (JTFB 2021).
- 5 The Fourth Fleet was in operation during World War II, was deactivated at its end and reactivated in 2008.
- 6 In an agreement with Panama in 1997, the US returns the sovereignty of the Panama Canal region to the Panamanians. In this area, the Americans had several military bases, including the Air Force Base, which officially served to combat drug trafficking in the Central American and Caribbean region. In order to replace it, it was decided that they should look for airfields in Central America, the Caribbean and in North of South America, where the USA negotiated with the countries of interest so that their aircraft could have the runways and logistical facilities necessary for the operation, giving rise to “Forward Operating Locations” (FOL), currently popularized as CSLs (Rippel 2017).
- 7 During the 2000s, there was a third FOL located in Ecuador. The contract with the USA was not renewed in 2009, under the administration of Rafael Correa.

- 8 It is important to mention that the Perry Center also receives a relevant number of Latin American professors whose research agenda is focused on security and defense issues. Perry Center is considered an educational institution of excellency. In some cases, after the courses ended, networks between former students are created in which information, works, and public policies formulations are exchanged. This is the case of Maria Quitéria's network, founded in 2021 by former students of the Center that is composed by Brazilian professors, researchers, public agents, and militaries.

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Hegemonia dos EUA na América Latina: O Comando Sul como instrumento de consenso e coerção

Resumo: A partir de uma abordagem neogramsciana, esta pesquisa trata da instituição militar do Comando Sul como instrumento estratégico para a manutenção hegemônica dos Estados Unidos na América Latina. Para tal, este artigo busca apresentar uma radiografia do Comando Sul dos anos 2000, atentando para sua organização, estrutura orçamentária e suas estratégias de atuação – em especial, no uso de bases militares, no desenvolvimento de “parcerias” para a defesa e segurança pública e na análise do ensino e formação militar nas escolas onde essa instituição funciona. Com esse fim, foram coletados dados primários de documentos e sites eletrônicos publicados pela mesma instituição e por instituições superiores, como o Departamento de Defesa e o Congresso dos Estados Unidos. Como resultado, apontamos que o Comando Sul se caracteriza por um mecanismo híbrido de manutenção hegemônica, em uma combinação que engloba simultaneamente o uso da força e o consenso.

Palavras-chave: Comando Sul; Hegemonia; América Latina; Estados Unidos; Gramsci

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