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U.S. Decline in Latin America Prompts Southern Command Operations



U.S. Southern Command has been mobilizing on various specters of its low-intensity warfare in South America and the Caribbean. Since the beginning of the Russian Federation's special military operation in Ukraine, the Pentagon's wing for the region has shown that it is still active in its hegemonic will in relation to what it considers its "backyard".

It must be taken into account that there is no widespread rejection in the region of the Russian operation, if we observe the statements of the foreign ministries and the votes in the General Assembly of the United Nations on the subject. In fact, Russia has important ties of cooperation in the Western Hemisphere with countries that the United States has on its radar of influence, for example, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico.

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General Laura Richardson, head of that military command center, has expressed concern about the ties that are tightening between the China-Russia tandem, comprehensive strategic allies, and many of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. His [position on the matter](#) has been made clear in the last two testimonies given before the Armed Services Committee of the United States Senate in March.



General Laura Richardson, head of the Southern Command, greets Colombian General Luis Navarro, head of the Colombian Military Forces.

On March 8, 2022, he raised his concern that "the People's Republic of China, our long-term strategic competitor, continues its relentless march to expand economic, diplomatic, technological, informational, and military influence in Latin America and the Caribbean and challenges U.S. influence in all these domains," and compares the region to influence ("negative," according to American slang) that Beijing is having in Africa.

Meanwhile, Russia, a more immediate threat, is increasing its commitments in the hemisphere as Putin seeks to keep his options open and maintain relations at our near abroad. In January, Russia's deputy foreign minister said he could neither claim nor exclude that Russia would send military assets to Cuba or Venezuela. A few days before Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, the Russian deputy prime minister visited Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela, countries that maintain close ties with Russia and offer Putin a foothold in our hemisphere," Richardson told the Senate Committee.

According to the Southern Command, "transnational criminal organizations" operating under a cloak of "corruption and violence" have "allowed the People's Republic of China and Russia to exploit these countries." According to the narrative elaborated [by the State](#)

[Department](#), Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela have allowed these "organizations" to consolidate in their territories, if properly their respective governments are not themselves the protagonists of the aforementioned ones.



Richardson demands that *"we must use all available levers to strengthen our alliances with the 28 like-minded democracies in this hemisphere that understand the power to work together to counter these shared threats."*

The Latin-Caribbean arm of the Pentagon is concerned that China is investing (they call it *"extracting"*) the equivalent of some \$35 billion scattered in infrastructure and energy production in Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Jamaica, Panama and Peru.

- According to the 2021 [report](#) of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) regarding foreign direct investments, China remains the third largest investor behind the European Union and the United States, however, these two have reduced their participation compared to previous years.

At Richardson's hearing before the same Senate Committee on March 24, 2022, she stated that she is concerned about China's economic presence in the region, as 21 of the 31 countries that make it up are signed to and are signatories to the Belt and Road Initiative.

In addition, it insists that it needs greater investment for security cooperation in three key areas: the training and capacity of armies and security forces for the "*protection of borders*", also for the "internal security" of the countries that cooperate with the Command; the export of training 'from other countries in Latin America'; and also in "peacekeeping operations around the world".

In this way, it can be glimpsed that the vision of the Southern Command is expanding towards the other latitudes in the rest of the globe, with China and Russia in the main sights as competitors and threats of US hegemony, clearly in decline in all parts of the planet, except in Europe and the Western spectrum.



Air Force Gen. Glen D. VanHerck, commander of the North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command, [testified](#) on March 24 before the Senate that "Russia and China are spreading disinformation, actively sowing division and internal discord with the intention of undermining the foundations of our nation, our democracy and democracies around the world."

Richardson further said that "Iran expanded economic and security cooperation with Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia through fuel transfers, barter, basic food and military assistance, reducing the effects of U.S. sanctions," with the Islamic Republic being another threat posed by the Eurasian-core multipolar initiative.



General Laura Richardson and Colombian General Jorge González Parra, Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of Colombia, sign a Framework for Commitment and Cooperation at the headquarters of the Southern Command.

Strategy: Balkanize everything

In 2019, the Southern Command [published its strategy for the region](#) and had already directly identified the six actors with whom it was going to antagonize most aggressively, and who have been mentioned in this note. The high command says:

«China and Russia want to form a world in accordance with their authoritarian order, and they are weakening the principles of democracy, sovereignty, human rights and the rule of law. China employs harmful economic influence, Russia spreads disinformation to sow discord, and Iran has exported state-supported terrorism to this hemisphere. Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua – encouraged by the support of China and Russia – further destabilize the hemisphere and threaten democratic governance.»

Since these three Latin Caribbean countries attract the most attention to the Pentagon in the region to execute operations "in all areas, including special operations, cybernetics, information operations" (Laura Richardson *dixit*) with the aim of balkanizing the relations of these countries with each other and between the Eurasian powers, we must point [out the activities that the Southern Command has been carrying out](#). and their "friendly governments" on the territorial borders of these three states, for they have come to each other.



It is striking that on the borders with Venezuela there are greater operations, specifically two of importance and one of them related to a violent event of high impact in Colombia.

- Near Bogotá, on Saturday night, March 26, there was an explosion at the Immediate Attention Command of Arborizada Alta, in Ciudad Bolívar, an act that was described by outgoing President Iván Duque as a "terrorist attack." Immediately, the conservative mayor of the Colombian capital, Claudia López, [asked](#) *"the Government of Venezuela to identify, capture and extradite any member of the residual group Frente 33 of the FARC dissidents to answer for this cowardly and criminal attack."* This guerrilla group has not claimed responsibility for the event nor have the Colombian authorities given reliable evidence that the government of President Nicolás Maduro protects guerrilla groups in Venezuelan territory.
- Almost immediately, on March 28, the head of the Southern Command received the general commander of the Colombian Military Forces, General Luis Navarro. The [command unit's press release](#) reads: "Richardson and Navarro discussed defense cooperation between the United States and Colombia. Navarro also met with other senior leaders of the Southern Command and was briefed on the command's mission and cooperation with Colombia's armed forces. For many

decades, U.S. and Colombian forces have worked together during exercises, humanitarian assistance missions, professional exchanges, and security operations to counter transnational threats." By "transnational threats," we know, they mean, among others, the governments of Nicolás Maduro, Miguel Díaz-Canel and Daniel Ortega and the Eurasian leaders.

- The U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command and the U.S. 4th Fleet conducted a maritime "anti-submarine warfare training" exercise with the Colombian Navy in the Caribbean Sea from February 27 to 28, which included the Virginia-class fast attack submarine USS Minnesota (SSN 783) and the freedom variant littoral combat ship USS Billings (LCS 15). The Minnesota and Billings were joined by the Colombian Navy submarine ARC Pijao (SSK 28), the frigates ARC Independiente (FM 54) and ARC Almirante Padilla (FM 51), and Colombian helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft. A [press release from](#) the Southern Command reads: *"The exercise served as a joint exercise with Colombia, in which both countries exchanged knowledge to maximize communication and understanding of the tactics and procedures shared by each to facilitate the conduct of naval operations against emerging threats in the region."*
- Minnesota is undergoing a homeport change from Groton, Connecticut, to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. But the alarm sounded, above all, because it is an armed submarine with nuclear capacity, a unit that for the first time takes part in naval military exercises in Caribbean waters in conjunction with a signatory country (Colombia) of the [Treaty of Tlatelolco](#), which *"prohibits the development, acquisition, testing and placement of nuclear weapons in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean"* and whose zone of application *"it is the sum of all the territories of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean"*. In this way, the Colombian State violated a treaty that was negotiated during the years of the Cold War, because *"the Latin American and Caribbean States perceived that the possible interference of nuclear weapons would make the region a target of eventual nuclear attacks and would fatally provoke a ruinous arms race."*



In the border countries of Cuba and Nicaragua there have also been intense activities by the Southern Command, although less significant in terms of intimidation and even violation of regional agreements.

The relationship of military dependence of some countries in the region with respect to the Pentagon deepens at a time when US hegemony loses spaces in the economic, financial and commercial aspect, but also political, in other global latitudes. The political decisions of the Joe Biden administration to try to undermine Russia and China are not only spreading in Europe and Asia but also in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Under that umbrella, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba are in the crosshairs of the different operations that the Southern Command carries out both officially and covertly, especially on the Bolivarian Republic, which in the matter [has been dismantling](#) camps, logistics and financing of the Colombian Armed Terrorist Drug Trafficking Groups (TANCOL) in the border states of Apure and Zulia.

Especially in Honduras. Since Xiomara Castro took the presidential reins, the Southern Command has strengthened [ties of cooperation with the Honduran army](#) under [different programs](#), General Laura Richardson [met with the president, the](#) senior military commanders of Honduras and the United States [signed a bilateral agreement](#) within the framework of the Central American Working Group, a Joint Task Force established [commitments with Honduran NGOs](#) and [held training exercises](#) with firefighters from the Soto Cano Air Base Squadron.

At the heart of the U.S. strategy is the balkanization of the entire region, because in the division of its components is the strength of the United States, because it has more room for maneuver to influence in the midst of chaos. In that sense, the main pivots of Latin-Caribbean integration are being attacked, even more so with the strengthening of the alliances of the "*troika of tyranny*" (so described by the warlike John Bolton) with the emerging powers of the nascent multipolar world.

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Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)

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