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US Southern Command on the Way to Revive Cold War

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The United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), located in Doral, Florida, is one of nine Unified Combatant Commands in the Department of Defense responsible for providing contingency planning and operations in Central and South America and the Caribbean. It has a wide range of measures at its disposal to be used as leverage over the countries of the region, including blackmail, discrediting evidence accumulated by US special services, usual corrupt practice, like, for instance, offering bribes to top political and military leaders. The military presence is explained by the need to enhance multinational military interaction and contingency

operations. Soto Cano Air Base (commonly known as Palmerola Air Base) is a Honduran military base (5 mi (8.0 km) to the south of Comayagua used by US military. Since 1983 it hosts the Joint Task Force Bravo (JTF-B) JTF-B, which includes ARFOR (Army Forces), AFFOR (Air Force Forces), JSF (Joint Security Forces), and the 1st Battalion-228th Aviation Regiment (consisting of some 18 aircraft, a mix of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and CH-47 helicopters.

Latin Americans are often reminded of humanitarian operations conducted by JTF-B to include relief missions responding to Hurricane Stan in Guatemala in October 2005 and supporting Operation Unified Response (Haiti) in 2010, when the country suffered great damage as a result of earthquake. Some things are hushed up. For instance, the United States invaded Panama (Operation Just Cause) in December 1989 under the pretext of safeguarding the lives of U.S. citizens and restoring democracy. The death toll among Panamanian citizens is somehow never mentioned by American propagandists.

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) is considered as a geopolitical threat by the United States. Some members of the alliance, such as Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Bolivia, are not controlled by Washington. They implement independent policies and are looked upon as enemies by the United States. The Obama administration has launched an unparalleled subversive campaign against the governments of these states. The expansion of cooperation between them and China evokes jittery reaction in Washington. More frequently Latin American media offers Cold War style publications, for instance: Russia is Flexing Muscle in South and Central America, Moscow Aggressively Restoring Influence in Latin America, Russian Military More Assertive in its Actions in Caribbean. Friendly port calls by naval ships and strategic bomber flights are used as a pretext for whipping up tensions in media. For instance, one of media outlets reported that in 2014 a Russian intelligence gathering ship was on patrol in the Mexican Gulf and in the vicinity of US East Coast. It dropped anchor in Havana a number of times. Then the information was added by a flurry of accusations against Russia, including the most far-fetching ones. Douglas Farah is known as the mouthpiece of the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency, testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Western Hemisphere on March 17, 2015, «The Maduro administration is the central component to a multi-state ongoing criminal enterprise, carried out in concert with Iran and a growing Russian presence, whose primary strategic objective is to cling to power by whatever means necessary and harm the United States and its allies». (!)

The Obama administration is especially hostile to the government of Venezuela. It hopes that the fall of Nicolas Maduro will spark a chain reaction among ALBA states. In December 2014, the US President Obama signed the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014 into law. It imposed targeted sanctions on certain individuals in Venezuela that were responsible for violations of human rights during the anti-government protests in 2014. Over ten million people across the world put their signatures to protest the Act. Some time passed and President Barack Obama issued an executive order on March 9, 2015 declaring Venezuela a national security threat, sanctioning seven individuals and expressing concern about the Venezuelan government's treatment of political opponents. According to the order, the seven individuals named in the order would have their property and interests in the United States blocked or frozen and they would be denied entry into the United States. U.S. citizens would also

be prohibited from doing business with them.

US officials regularly accuse Venezuela of human rights violations, militarization of the country, cracking down on independent media and non-government organizations. They predict the impending collapse of Venezuela ruled by Maduro government. The head of the US Southern Command, General John Kelly, said on March 9 at a hearing in the Senate that Venezuela is «near collapse and implode» because of his «sad economic situation». The US general called it «sad fall» to Venezuela in an «economic atrophy» caused by inflation and shortages of some commodities. Hosting the Caribbean Energy Security Summit in Washington (January 2015) Vice President Joe Biden said the days of Nicolas Maduro staying in power were counted and economic difficulties would make Venezuela stop discounted oil deliveries to CARICOM.

The Southern Command increases its presence in the region while ballyhoo is raised as a result of propaganda efforts. The US has significant military capability potential in Latin America. US military facilities are deployed in Costa Rica (Liberia), Salvador (Comalapa), Puerto Rico (Roosevelt), Curacao (Hato Rey) and Cuba (Guantánamo). The list can go on.

In January the Dominican Republic signed a reciprocity pact with the United States to broaden cooperation with U.S. military personnel temporarily deployed to the Caribbean country. The agreement was signed by Foreign Minister Andres Navarro and U.S. Ambassador James W. Brewster at a ceremony attended by Dominican Defense Minister William Muñoz Delgado and Gen. John Kelly, chief of the U.S. Southern Command. John Kelly, the key figure at the ceremony, was beaming. According to Ambassador Brewster, U.S. personnel in the Dominican Republic will participate in training programs, military exercises, humanitarian operations and other activities. Andres Navarro said the agreement will provide U.S. military and civilian personnel on temporary assignments in the Dominican Republic, easier arrangements for visits, exercises and other activities. «The Dominican Government recognizes the value of the efforts of the U.S. government, through the Southern Command, in the arduous task of combating drug trafficking, security operations, intelligence and support to similar activities in the country and our region, which demonstrates, once again, the ties of friendship between the countries», Navarro said.

By the end of March an additional contingent of US military arrived in Peru. Now at least 3500 US military are stationed there. Formally the mission is to provide aid to Peruvian military in its fight against Sendero Luminoso (English - Shining Path, a Maoist guerilla insurgent organization) and drug dealers. The US military is especially active in the areas near the borders between Peru and Bolivia, Ecuador and Brazil. Peruvian political scholars say Peruvian president Ollanta Humala is not able to oppose the United States in its efforts to increase military presence in the country.

The news about US air base in Honduras has hit the radar screen recently. Honduran military authorities announced March 27 that some 250 U.S. Marines (Fuerza de Tarea de Propósito Especial Aire-Tierra de Marines-Sur) arriving soon will be based at the U. S. airbase at Soto Cano in addition to 600 servicemen stationed there before. Equipped with a high-speed JHSV

Spearhead catamarans at least four CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters and possibly MV-22 Osprey tilt rotors and KC-130 Hercules tankers they are part of the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-South. The official version of their mission is to carry out «training for forces in the region, humanitarian assistance missions, and anti-drug operations». It is planned to boost the group's transport capabilities in the near future. That's what Marine General John Kelly told the 2015 Central American Regional Security Conference (CENTSEC) in Tegucigalpa March 25. The event gathered the representatives of Columbia, Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Costa Rica and some other Latin American states. The General emphasized that the creation of the force was a necessary step to maintain the capability to timely respond to contingency situations in the region.

UNASUR (The Union of South American Nations) General Secretary Ernesto Samper Latin American countries should discuss removing all US military bases from their soil. According to him, the issue may be discussed at the upcoming Summit of the Americas in Panama. The 7th Summit of the Americas on April 10 and 11 is to be attended by regional leaders. The UNASUR Secretary-General suggested that the summit would be a good place to «reassess relations between the US and South America». «A good point on the new agenda of relations [in Latin America] would be the elimination of US military bases,» the former Columbian President told the news agency EFE. He added that the bases were «a leftover from the days of the Cold War and other clashes».

The upcoming summit will hardly influence the SOUTHCOM strategic plans. In a congressional hearing on March 12, 2015, General John Kelly, the head of US Southern Command, said that «Russia is using power projection in an attempt to erode U.S. leadership and challenge U.S. influence in the Western Hemisphere ... Russia has courted Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua to gain access to air bases and ports for resupply of Russian naval assets and strategic bombers operating in the Western Hemisphere».

The United States implements the policy aimed at making the Cold War times return to the Western Hemisphere. It will do its best to counter the process of Latin America integration, especially in the field of military cooperation. The interaction and final integration of ALBA and UNASUR military is an acute issue on the agenda. Venezuela is an example. In March 80 000 military personnel and 20 000 civilians participated in the drill called Operation «Bolivarian Shield». The Venezuelan government considers the union civico-militar (civil-military union) to be a cornerstone of its national policy. The exercise was staged to enhance the capability to repel a US aggression, if need be. «Venezuela is not, and can never be Libya nor Iraq, Venezuela is Venezuela, a land of peace, and we must keep it that way», said Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Russian and Venezuelan navies will hold the exercise VenRus-2015 in the second half of the year in the Caribbean Sea. A group of Russian Northern Fleet combat ships, including nuclear missile cruiser Peter the Great as a flag ship, will take part in the training event.