



Colleagues for the Americas Seminar with General Douglas Fraser, USAF

November 18, 2009

Based on 5 busy months as commander, U.S. Southern Command, including visits to eight countries, General Douglas Fraser shared his impressions of opportunities and challenges in Central and South America and the Caribbean. He set the stage for his emphasis on cooperation by discussing geographical, economic, cultural, and military-to-military linkages between the United States and its southern neighbors, citing numerous examples of collaboration, particularly among the armed forces.

Shifting to regional issues, General Fraser touched on many of today's geostrategic dynamics, with an emphasis on poverty, social inequality, populist ideas, and non-traditional foreign influences, and then concentrated on illegal trafficking and associated criminal activities with a global reach, which he considers the critical, long-term security issue in the region. He focused mainly on narcotics-related activities in three corridors—Mexico/Central America, the Caribbean, and South America to Africa and Europe—but also discussed the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, Peru's Sendero Luminoso, the multiplication of criminal gangs in the Americas, and concerns about mass migration.

General Fraser characterized the region's challenge in responding to illicit trafficking enterprises as finding ways to improve ongoing efforts to address nontraditional threats before they become military issues. U.S. Southern Command's role is thus to help build bridges between existing islands of institutional excellence. Joint Interagency Task Force–South does this best with counter-narcotics surveillance. Other bridges toward better

cooperation, he suggests, are information-sharing, humanitarian assistance, United Nations peacekeeping operations, and private-public partnerships involving, for example, international health care and education professionals and representatives from business sectors.

In closing, General Fraser stressed the importance of using soft power and cooperation to address shared thorny issues and emphasized the imperative for the United States to improve its strategic communication to counter widespread Latin American suspicion of Washington's intent in the region.

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