

TRANSCRIPT

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THIS IS A RUSH TRANSCRIPT AND MAY CONTAIN ERRORS. USERS ARE ADVISED TO CONSULT THEIR OWN TAPES OR NOTES OF THE SESSION IF ABSOLUTE VERIFICATION OF WORDING IS NEEDED.

Q: Welcome to General John Craddock. He's the Commander of SOUTHCOM. A lot of you knew him before then as Military Assistant to the Secretary and before then as the Commander of 1st ID over in the Balkans. Welcome, we're glad to have you.

A: Thank you.

Q: I thought we'd start out this morning talking about Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. You've had some things to say about him over the past year or so. Recently, I think it was this week, the Secretary of State talked about the need for the United States to devise a "strategy of inoculation," which sounds a little bit like a strategy of containment. There have been people in the administration for some time saying that there's a need to devise a strategy to contain Chavez, contain what's going on down there. First of all, what do you think about that idea? Do you agree with that idea? Do you think that's smart? Secondly, if that's where we're going, what's SOUTHCOM's role in such a strategy?

A: I would say that with regard to Secretary Rice's comments and her testimony on the Hill, I would agree with her comments, I would endorse those comments in terms of how she characterized what's happening in Venezuela. Now with regard to a strategy of inoculation, by and large Southern Command is not going to get into strategy development. We'll input, we'll coordinate on that. And I don't know, maybe it is going to be a strategy of inoculation. I'm not sure what that means, quite frankly. I know what containment means. We've had strategies in the past, confrontation containment, you name it. Inoculation is a new one to me.

Let me just say that over the past 15 months or so that I've been at Southern Command I think our tact, our approach in Southern Command has been one of information sharing, to inform

Venezuela's neighbors in the region of what we see going on, what we know, and then let them make their own judgments as to how that impacts their security both from a public security perspective with regard to a populist approach that may be generated because of that Bolivarian Revolution, or because of a national security issue from other perspectives.

So that is kind of what we've done.

Now the fact of the matter is we've had great relations with the Venezuelan military over the years. We would like to continue that but it is at the current time not going to be possible to do that based upon decisions that have been made in Venezuela. We are finding that military relations are strained, they're growing apart, and we have less and less contact.

In August of 2004 our military group there that does the security cooperation with the host nation military was moved off of the Venezuela military installation and they had to relocate to the embassy. When you lose the ability to engage on a daily basis you lose the contact. It's become more strained since then.

So I don't think the outlook is good from a mil-to-mil perspective. We're not optimistic at the current time that we're going to be able to regain that. So I think we will at SOUTHCOM get further understanding of an inoculation strategy, and in the mean time we'll continue to observe and inform and I think the neighbors understand the current situation.

Q: If I were to guess what she meant by inoculation strategy it would be working with other nations in the region to help them resist any kind of slop-over from what's happening in Venezuela Where would that be most urgent to take those steps? Colombia?

A: I don't think so. I think Colombia right now under President Uribe is pretty strong, they're headed toward elections. I don't see that Bolivarian revolution, if you will, taking hold there. I think I would focus probably on Bolivia. I think with the elections recently completed there for the first time a resounding majority for their new President, which is a first. An indigenous President, which is a first. We probably need to observe that, watch that, engage, and we are.

Upcoming elections all over the region X Peru in April is another area. Ecuador in the fall. Those are fragile democracies that are susceptible to influence, whether it be internal, the indigenous issues if you will, of inequality, poverty, corruption; or external where one may want to spread revolutionary idea.

Q: Just to sum up then, I take it from your response here that inoculation doesn't have much of a military component at this stage.

A: Fair enough. We'll get that, I'm sure, as get definition and understanding of that. And I think you're probably right. Inoculation maybe equals containment. But in the mean time I think we've got a reasonable approach to the situation and that's what we're going to do until we get further

guidance to adjust our effort.

Q: General, last fall Senator Levin made a floor speech and he talked about the investigation of the abuses at Guantanamo. I know that General Schmidt [Furla] recommended that Major General Jeff Miller be held accountable for failing to supervise the interrogation of a high value detainee that he admonished for that failure, but that you disapproved that recommendation.

Can you talk a little bit about that, what was your thinking about why you disapproved that?

A: As I said before the committee when I testified, I looked at the recommendation from Schmidt [Furla]. The report said there were no laws violated, no regulations violated, and no policy violated in the conduct of interrogations at GTMO. So at the first instance then is why would we hold someone accountable for failing to supervise when there were no violations of law, policy or regulation?

Secondly, what was going on at GTMO at the time? Miller had just gone in. We had two task forces before X one for interrogation, one for detainee operations, security, military police. He was told when he went in in November to consolidate those into one task force; take two dysfunctional operations and make them functional; all the while enhance, increase, upgrade the quality of life for all the American Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines who were working there; and upgrade the quality of life for the detainees so that we got out of the old Camp X-ray mentality. And while you're at it, make sure you integrate and coordinate all the interagency operations down there from all the government agencies that are there and turn all this into a functioning, well oiled machine.

Now Miller said in his sworn statement that he knew about the separation of the detainee special interrogation techniques. He was aware of how man hours a day that was going on. He was aware of the detention. He was aware of his diet. He was aware of the requirement. And he [shored] and enforced medical personnel to routinely, hourly, look at this individual to make sure that he wasn't being harmed. So when you look at what he was aware of, he was aware of the high risk application of the techniques. Was he aware of each episodic application? No. Should he have been? In my judgment, no. Not with everything else he was doing.

so when I looked at what a commander's responsible for, I looked at the task he was given, I looked at what he said he knew in his sworn statement, I felt that he was providing adequate command oversight and supervision and leadership.

I think if you look at statements for people who were there over the subsequent months they would say thank God Miller came because he pulled this together and got this place working.

Q: But isn't a commander ultimately responsible for everything that goes on under his command?

A: That's what I just said. But he can't know everything. If he does, he doesn't need a subordinate

chain of command, he just needs a bunch of people and he'll pull all the strings. But he delegated, he trusted his subordinates who got that authority, did not violate statute, did not violate regulation, did not violate the policy. You might not like the policy but the fact of the matter is he operated within the guidelines. That's why I did what I did.

Q: What is your concern level and why as far as the possible infiltration of either terrorists or into south America, Central America, and also the role of gangs and the impacts it has on some of those governments such as MS13 and variants thereof?

A: We're very concerned. The first part of your question is the trafficking. Whether it's trafficking in drugs coming north, people coming north, weapons, explosives north and south, money, forged documents. The trafficking routes are well established, they are mature, there are known networks.

You go to some countries down there, I won't state it, but pay your money, \$15,000, and if you want to come to the United States you will get in a queue, they will get you on a boat, and they will guarantee you're going to get here.

If you get interdicted at sea and you get returned to the country of origin you go back in the queue, wait your turn, and you reboard and still the guarantee's there. These are very mature organizations.

The drug traffickers. They move through fishing boats, they move through fast boats. Sixteen hours from the coast of Colombia to Jamaica X non-stop. If you can move a ton of cocaine, what else can you move? You can move a ton of this or a ton of that. Or five people. Extremists, you name it. A big weapon, radiological dispersion weapon. Sure. We can do that in a fast boat.

So we are concerned that one, the drug trafficking, the trafficking in people is bad enough. But any time there's an uncontrolled area, any time there is lawlessness, it's an opportunity for others, whether they be extremist groups, illegal armed groups, whatever the case may be, to fall into that niche, if you will, that ungoverned space, and then be able to move unnoticed, unhindered, and likely into the United States through these networks.

So that's the concern that I have.

On the surface we want to stop the drugs. Last year we did 247 tons interdicted at sea, and a little bit through the air so that's pretty good. But we don't know what we didn't get. Was it all drugs? Was there something else out there?

Secondly, the gangs. Interestingly enough in the past the gangs in Central America have operated under a reimbursable basis. They have provided security, safe haven and logistics support to the traffickers in return for currency.

What I'm hearing through all the countries, both in Central America and the Caribbean, is things are changing. What they're getting now is payment in kind. The traffickers are giving them a cut of the drugs and then the gangs are now starting to turn that into distribution in their countries which is going to cause a greater problem with public security, crime as an addict base, if you will, grows up in these countries which is going to have to buy the drug, which means they're going to have to make the money, which means they may turn to crime because they don't have jobs. So I think this pushes up the risk to the public security. It's what's caused to a great extent the focus on public security and reinforcement of police, oftentimes with military, in Central America. I think if you look at Jamaica you'll see the same thing.

Jamaica recently I believe now has the highest per capita murder rate in the world.

Q: In follow up, what are you folks doing to either aid or abet an effort to stop that.

A: We have supported an effort by Colombia, quite frankly, to bring together the security elements of Central American countries and the Caribbean countries to focus on this trafficking problem. So Colombia's got the lead and we're supporting that in terms of our Joint Interagency Task Force South in Key West, to provide information.

Now we're trying to disseminate to these countries a common operating picture of what illicit tracks of sea and air are moving in their sovereign territory and throughout the Caribbean region as a whole. We think if we can get a common operating picture out there one, then there will be situation awareness by all the countries. That will help them then to focus, to vector their security forces to where the traffickers may make landfall, or if it's airplanes, may land.

About three weeks ago I was in Guatemala. I went up to the border with Mexico called the Paten area. It's in the northern part of Guatemala. It was astounding. It is a boneyard of airplanes. The traffickers fly in there because it's an uncontrolled area, it's a national park. They fly in mostly at night, sometimes in day time. When they fly in at night they know there's no landing strips, these are just out in the open fields. They crash land, transfer the drugs out, and then they either torch the airplane or shoot it up so it can't be used. There are hundreds of airplanes out there in a small area about the size of two football fields, eight or ten, that they took me around and we visited.

They have found small portable lights that the traffickers have hidden and then pull out at night to aid the night landing.

So the Guatemalans now have put together a Joint Interagency Task Force with their limited capability to go up there and try to shut this down. But this is all over the region. In Honduras, it's the Masquidia coast. They're coming in by sea. It's an ungoverned area, no infrastructure. They land, transfer drugs, and move on in to Mexico and in the United States.

So we are one, trying to generate situation awareness of what's moving in the region; and two, where we have the authority and the capacity to help train police with counter-drug capability,

and it's very limited, our authority to do that. Mostly State Department does that. But where possible then we work with militaries for counterterrorism capability and provide them opportunities to join in in that public security mission. And depending on how the countries approach it.

There's a balance between police and public security and the military public security and each nation's laws are different.

Q: General, the number of hunger strikers at GTMO is down sharply. Human rights groups are saying it's in part because of the use of force feeding techniques, using what they consider abusive technique. This restraint chair.

Can you tell us a little bit more about why folks at GTMO have gone to use this chair and the criteria for putting that type of X

A: At one time we had 130. I think we're down now to five. Three of which are being force fed to sustain life.

We went to that chair because what we found was that when we accommodated the detainees who were under force feeding, what they wanted to do was to partake of what's called bolace feeding, which is the feeding tube goes through the nose, into the stomach and stays there so there's a tube coming out the nose, capped, and then for feeding, the medics would come around and provide the nutrition solution.

What we found was that they were purging after feeding. They could use this tube to purge the food out. It was not sustaining life. It was causing problems because some of these hard core guys were getting worse.

The way around that is you have to make sure that that purging doesn't happen. That's why they were put in the chair. I've seen the chair. It is padded. It is not inhumane. Doctors explained to me exactly what they do. They're fed and then they stay in the chair so the nutrition is absorbed and they can't purge it within an hour or so. That way we know the solution is going in, the nutritional solution is being absorbed, and it's taking effect.

There it is.

The tube is of very small diameter. By the way, the preferred tube color is yellow. Detainees get a choice.

Q: They have a choice?

A: They have a choice. They like yellow.

Q: Doesn't that take the force out of force feeding? [Laughter].

A: Please write that, okay? I like that.

Q: What are the other colors?

A: Clear or beige.

Q: Do you know why yellow?

A: No. I can tell you what color cough drop, throat lozenge what flavor they like the best. They like the cherry flavor.

Look, they get choices. That's part of the problem. If you make it too comfortable, it's not an issue.

What you want to do is you want to say wait a minute. I've got to strike a balance between what makes sense for those who have to administer the force feeding and the medical care and overwatch of these people and how easy it is on detainees. So we've found the balance. When we found the balance, I think a lot of the detainees said I don't want to put up with this. This is too much of a hassle to be made to stay here for an hour after I eat.

Q: So it's been an effective deterrent.

A: Yeah.

Q: How many people have you actually used the chair on?

A: I don't know. We can find out. But it's not like "the chair". It's "a" chair. It was designed by a sheriff they tell me out in the Midwest. It's pretty comfortable. It's padded all over, so it's not like this thing is abusive or anything. It's the way to ensure they don't purge.

You know how they purge? They take the tube and you get the siphon going like you'd siphon gas, and then you bend over to get lower than your stomach and it will all run out of the tube. Then you lose the nutritional value of the force feeding.

We went to the Bureau of Prisons and we said what do you guys do when you have this problem? They told us about this. So this isn't anything we developed and dreamed up. They gave us this solution and we tried it and it worked. They said look, we found it helpful. Sometimes these guys draw on each other for sustenance and strength. So separate them. Put them in different locations where they can't get together all the time and sustain each other. So we separated them. Pretty soon it wasn't convenient. They decided it wasn't worth it.

Q: General, the new President of Bolivia, a coca grower himself, said he doesn't want to stop the eradication program but he also says he wants to control cocaine production. How are you going to work with him? What is that going to do for our programs, the eradication and other so-called [inaudible]?

A: Eradication is a State Department program obviously, and we don't have much to do with that. We do partner with the Bolivian military. We support their efforts in counterterrorism to the extent that we can given that they're under an Article 98 sanction so we don't have a lot of opportunity.

I think right now the focus ought to be on deeds, not words. Let's see what happens.

We have not, U.S. Southern Command, has not stopped any programs. We're still building some barracks for their military so they're not out in tents out in the region where a lot of the work goes on. We are doing some humanitarian projects still and digging water wells and putting some things together for them. So we're going to continue on because our folks have met with the new high command. They want to continue on. So until such time as we see actual indications or changes in policy that become, that are implemented down there, we want to continue on and sustain those relations.

So I would have to defer to the State Department with regard to how they're going to approach the issue with the licit versus illicit cocaine drugs. But I think the key will be let's see what happens, let's not listen too much to the shrill rhetoric of a lot of the forces down there that are at play right now.

Q: General, go back to Guantanamo, but not an abuse question. The last new detainees or detainees brought into Guantanamo was like September of 2004. It's been some time. Since then there's been a fairly steady flow of detainees out of Guantanamo. As construction continues on Camp 6, I'm curious as to what your thoughts are in the future of Guantanamo. What it's going to look like in a couple of years. How many detainees will be there.

A: I wish I had a crystal ball. Let me tell you what we're doing. Those are policy decisions with regard to what's going to happen. Let's take the realities of today. We've got about 2000 people in the Joint Task Force now. We're going to start rotating next month to a new set of people. When we do that we're going to draw that down by about 400 because of the new fence that provides us some electronic capability so we don't need all those guards, and Camp 6 later on in the year that's under construction now.

Joint Task Force Guantanamo has some very very capable people who every day their work is to assess the detainee population with regard to what do they know and who do we think they are. These guys have aliases as long as your arm. Then whether or not they either continue to have intelligence or pose a threat if released or not. So we categorize.

The Administrative Review Boards that are under the auspices of the Secretary of the Navy meet, different people, and they review all the files and they also categorize them.

Amazingly the two assessments are very similar with regard to how many are in this category and how many maybe are returned to country of origin with continued detention and then released. So from that perspective.

I would, this is my judgment here, I would like to see these negotiations with countries of origin by the State Department continue, to reach agreement with those nations for return of detainees that we think could be returned, with conditions that we may have to set, potentially continue detainment, access, things like that. There may be some and there are some that I think the assessment is could be returned and released at this time. Not many, but some.

So we need to continue that process. We need to refine what we know. We need to assess it routinely, because we're still finding out information that's relevant. But as that continues on over time we may find that some of that now from certain people becomes less relevant.

There is a need for detention for a lot of these people because they are self-avowed terrorists, they're going to get out and they're going to kill somebody. That's what their mission in life is. If those arrangements can't be made with country of origin, then I think they have to be held somewhere else for accountability.

Ultimately I think the best solution over years and years possibly would be a return with continued detention to the country of origin.

Q: Do you expect that to occur X building Camp 6, for example, a more permanent type facility. Is there a group of say hard core people that you think may be there indefinitely? People who could be there for years and years?

A: I don't know about indefinitely. That's a long time. I think there will be some folks who will be there for quite some time, unless there are changes in policies or decisions made by our government with regard to the negotiations for countries of origin to take them back. There has to be some negotiations, caveats and agreements as to what those conditions are.

But there are bad people there who need to be detained.

Q: Do you see any scenario where new people would be brought in?

A: Yeah, I can. Depending on wherever around the world. There might be X al-Qaida or al-Qaida affiliates who would be captured; and since Guantanamo is a strategic detention facility who would need to be detained in such a facility as opposed to a field or tactical facility.

Q: General, what if the level of al-Qaida or other Islamist terrorist activity in Latin America at

the moment, in the sort of wake of 9/11 there was a lot of, you read a lot of concern about the tri-border area, various other parts of the continent. What is your intelligence telling you now about the penetration of Latin America by al-Qaida and its affiliates and what their strategy is?

A: With regard to let's say Islamic radical groups, we don't see any operations nor any training areas, training camps. We do see activity with regards to transit, with regards to logistics support, document forgery, money laundering. So there is an underlying support base throughout the region but nothing that we've seen operational since probably the bombings in Argentina in the mid '90s.

Q: What about attempts to cross the border from Mexico?

A: As I said, there are very mature trafficking networks, trafficking of humans, special interest aliens moving north. So the opportunity, we believe, exists for anyone to embed in those and get lost in that movement, that trafficking effort, that is capable, mature and effective. That's the concern. That's about all I can say.

Q: General, my question is about the Colombian NCO program. As I understand it four rotations have been finished by the end of 2005 and one Colombian and one Honduran have finished the program. I'm wondering how many rotations you expect to complete in 2006. And have you seen any interest from other Latin American countries to start this academy in their countries?

A: The exact number of 2006 I don't know. Let me tell you what I've done. I looked at this program late last year and said we need a strategy. We need a program. Because there is interest. To answer your second question, there is considerable interest across the region X Central America and South America X to develop a non-commissioned officer corps. The question is how do you go about it? What's the best way? I don't think that every nation has the resources and the capacity to develop their own non-commissioned officer academy as we have. So where should it best be if it's a regional approach? How do you resource it if it's regionally? How do we best go about supporting that effort? That's why right now I'm waiting for the U.S. Army South who has the lead on all this to bring in their proposal for a program. Then we're going to have to figure out how we resource it, where we fund it.

The fact that we've got 11 countries that are under Article 98 restrictions on FMF and IMEF will have some impact on it. But we've got to look at a long term plan and figure out the greatest return on investment. It may well be Central America has a regional non-commissioned officer academy. It may well be the Andean Ridge or Southern Cone, or South America, of you will.

The Caribbean is a little different. Except for the Dominican Republic you've got an English-speaking, along with Belize, so we've got a different dynamic there we're going to have to work through. But we need a comprehensive overall strategy instead of right now, which I think what we've got is episodic. We roll resources against it, it does a lot of good, but then it falls off the table until the next time it's needed and we roll another one together and we teach a class, or the

Colombians teach a class.

It is effective and it is making a difference. Now part two. After you've got these non-commissioned officers who are better trained and understand their role, you've got to teach the officers how to use them better. If you don't do that they will always use them in a role that is much much less than their capacity. So we've got to start that also.

We've realized that, that's the next page, and of course that will be another effort to be able to take advantage of that capability that we're developing, but it is powerful and potent.

I was in Colombia last week, down in JTF Omega where the main effort is in the jungles, and then down along the Futamayo area near Ecuador. You can see those non-commissioned officers, the pride they have, because they've got this now. They just have to be able to realize it. We've got to push them.

Q: Are you expanding the program at all in Honduras and Bolivia?

A: Bolivia will be to be determined. Right now we've got to figure out if we're going to run an Andean Ridge effort and a Central American effort.

So the program's going to expand. I don't know exactly how far.

Q: Can you tell us about the demonstration, what's going on with Global Hawk in terms of drug interdiction, surveillance, how's that going and what's the future for X

A: Global Hawk?

Q: Yeah. UAV.

A: Very little. Congressional language a few years ago said that Global Hawk would be, we'd test it in terms of its contribution, what it could provide to the detection and monitoring of traffickers moving out of South America to the United States. The Air Force is the executive agent for that. They recently ran a test. We, with our Joint Interagency Task Force South contributed to scenarios for that test, if you will, to include measures of effectiveness. As I understand it's still ongoing, it has started. I have not seen the results, but I've got folks from Key West who are embedded in the conduct of that test.

Look, I think there is great potential for non-air-breathing detection and monitoring of trafficking lanes headed north X whether they be air or surface. Tethered aerostats, unmanned aerial vehicles, satellite imagery, commercial stuff that could be worked with software to be able to provide quick, real time downlink. So I think we've got to pursue that.

Q: Sir, I wonder if you could address some of the things SOUTHCOM might be doing to

promote cooperation among militaries around the tri-border area.

A: First what we're not doing is building a base with 500,000 American service members down there. That is not happening. I know there's been a lot of rhetoric in the paper.

Tri-border area. Interesting area. What we are doing right now is we've got some special operations folks doing the joint combined training exercises with Paraguay and counterterrorist units. This is routine. Over the past five years we've done more mil-to-mil exchanges and exercises and subject matter expert work with Paraguay than any other nation in South America, save Colombia. So this isn't anything new. So we've got a couple of those going and we have had medical readiness exercises in Paraguay where we have sent out doctors and nurses down and our dentists and veterinarians. They go out and conduct clinics, family practitioner type work for the rural areas that might not get the opportunity to visit medical facilities. Those are enormously beneficial, popular. People will come from miles around to take advantage of that. Strangely enough, the veterinary effort there is probably more important to them than the medical and dental, but that's the way things are.

Again, because of the American Servicemember Protection Act, Paraguay has not signed an Article 98. We have limited ability to engage with foreign military financing for equipment, and to bring their servicemembers here in the United States for schooling. What we do then is work through Special Operations Forces and use the counterterrorism training to be able to engage.

They have capable elements and they're getting better. And they are I would say growing up a few more over time. But it is a very interesting area.

Now Argentina, Brazil. Obviously we have good mil-to-mil relations with both of those countries at the border there with Paraguay. And we engage with them routinely. So I think from that perspective we have a lot of activity with those countries.

Now not in a conventional sense. Brazil, same way. The American Servicemember Protection Act.

Argentina, even though they have major non-NATO ally status which exempts them from the ASPA law, I think there are some Brook sanctions remaining from years past that limits the engagement there. But where we have the opportunity, where we have the authority we have engaged fully and I think what's going on in Paraguay is positive. I think they have now recognized these ungoverned spaces can lead to public security problems and they're taking steps to face that.

Q: As a follow-up, sir, could you address anything that SOUTHCOM is doing to prevent or to alleviate the kidnapping problem in Colombia? I believe some Americans have [inaudible].

A: Kidnapping in Colombia is down, that's the good news. There are still a lot of people that are

held hostage. We've got three people, contractors, that have been now as of the 13th of February, it's three years.

Look, it's a big jungle out there. It's hard to find people in the world. We know that from other places in the world. We are looking. We are looking every day. I get a report every day on our process. I'll just tell you that it's up and it's down. But it has to be, at the end of the day, an all-source issue because in that type of environment anywhere in the world human intelligence has to be where you start the effort. That's hard. We have constraints and restraints on human intelligence.

We are working every day to find those three people. They are the longest held U.S. political captives anywhere in the world, quite frankly, and it's a terrible situation, but it's a difficult situation. Given the fact that the FARC who has them has operated for years in that area. They have enormous in-roads and lines of communication. The coming military through their JTF Omega is winning that fight, but the enemy gets a vote and it changes its tactics and changes its procedures. You have to recognize that and change yours. But it's a brutal, tough enemy who has said publicly that any time there's an attempt, and they've done it in the past. The Colombians have tried rescue attempts of their own people. They've failed and the people were killed. So it's a very sensitive issue and very difficult.

Q: I've got a question for you on the rest of Cuba. I was wondering what your assessment is of the military forces in Cuba these days and what role you think they would play if [inaudible].

A: I'll tell you, we don't have much. I don't have much of an assessment of the military forces right now. Obviously over the years X First of all, Cuba is not in my area of responsibility but it is in my area of responsibility. It's a strange arrangement here. So we have some operational responsibility but it's not inside my geographical area. We work through that obviously with NORTHCOM and it works okay.

Over the years Cuba's engaged around the world, Angola and other places, and they have built up in the past a very competent military. I don't know what's happened in the intervening years where they haven't been out there conducting military efforts. So we don't have a lot of information on the Cuban military.

With regards to what they might do in the future, unknown. Raoul is the commander of the military. I talk to a lot of the folks in Miami. We go to seminars. Recently there was a role-playing seminar done down there where local Cuban-Americans played the roles of what might happen in the event of Fidel's death. It was very interesting as to what their views were.

I think if you talk to ten people there will be probably eight different perspectives of how it will play out so I think anything I would add would be speculation. I don't want to do that.

But the fact is that after the fall of the Soviet Union and the lack of a support base from them,

that Venezuela stepped in. I think that has changed the situation a bit so we'll have to take that into consideration, understand the impacts of that for the future.

Q: Any sense about Raoul [inaudible]?

A: No. Other than he's been the commander of the military for years and arguably there is a loyal support base for him in the military.

Q: General, I'd like to get back to the NCO Academy thing which fascinates me because at the end of the '90s in NATO enlargement that same thing was such a big issues, having a career professional.

I realize it's awkward to ask you to talk about what we see as limitations in the culture of other militaries, but obviously the NCOs and the officers in those militaries behave in certain ways now and we see something else is different.

Can you, navigating a diplomatic minefield there, can you talk a little bit about what it is that you see that you have to change first about the NCO Corps, because [inaudible], but then you raise this point about needing officers that can interface with professional NCOs. Just flesh it out a little bit.

A: I think heretofore to a greater rather than lesser extent, the non-commissioned officers were there to attend to the duties that the officers did not want to. I think that's still the extent in some places. And were given menial tasks and no authority commensurate with their responsibility. Which wasn't much, but still there was not much authority. The officer ruled.

I think because of the contact, the engagement that we have brought a lot of the servicemembers from countries in the region to the United States, and we have sent them to schools, whether they be tactical schools or they be Command and General Staff College, War College for the officers; Non-Commissioned Officer Academy, Fort Bliss. We send them to technical training at Lackland Air Force Base to understand logistics for aircraft, and small boat training in Mississippi. All over. They've come, they see that, they understand the non-commissioned officer role which is to [run it]. The officer commands it, the non-commissioned officer runs it. They have seen something they would like to have. Now the question is how do you go about giving that to them. So that's what we're working on.

Everywhere we have invited and they have attended to these classes, whether they be coming out of Honduras, or El Salvador which is a very good case because of their work in Iraq. They have grown up a capable, competent non-commissioned officer corps. They all want more, so we've got some good ones.

The down side is we still haven't got it all quite right. We have got to make sure that when we put these systems in place, these educational systems, which educate and train, that they're

resourced adequately.

I was talking to some senior non-commissioned officers in Colombia, in Baranquia, the northwest part of the country. I asked them about the course, the sergeant major had been to his Colombian school. He said it's great. He said the only problem was I had to use all my money to buy books and that's really hard on the family. So we can't have that. We've got to make sure that we've got it all okay, that it's not a burden. Even though you want to do it and it's career enhancing and professionally enhancing, we don't create a burden which we've worked so hard not to do here with our own forces, by sending them to schools and making them buy their own textbooks and things like that. So we've got to work through the nuance, if you will, the really subtle stuff that causes the problem. Because we may look at it from 20,000 feet and it's great, you've got this wonderful academy and you've got every seat filled. But if the underlying problem is they have to do this, this and that, it's a burden, and now all of a sudden you're forcing them to do it as opposed to they want to do it. It won't work. So we've got to get inside of that.

That's why it's so essential to develop our program, our plan, and figure out how we want to do it.

We went over to EUCOM and looked at what they're doing with the countries of the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe. They're doing a pretty good job. They've got a Partnership for Peace and some other opportunities. We've got to figure out how to break through the crust and get into that type stuff. The one in Colombia is very good. It's not enough. We've got to grow it.

Q: General, about foreign language training. Both DoD and Congress have been in recent years really sort of pushing it. We haven't seen a lot of [inaudible] as far as their cultural training. Obviously Spanish ain't as hard as Arabic to learn, but at the same time X

A: It depends on how old you are. [Laughter].

Q: What kind of impact have you seen on the younger troops just coming in from basically straight out of high school and how prepared they are, and what do you think needs to be done, at least in your area?

A: The fact is, we've got to do better. I don't think we've done much so far. We're probably doing it at the officer level, but in terms of enlisted troops coming in across the board, not to where it should be.

One advantage, obviously, for my region is that we've got a lot of Hispanics in the military. So you look at the military groups and you look at the attaches. They don't work for me, but I still work with them. And our mil groups down there, they run anywhere from one to 40 or 50 in the country. A lot of them are foreign area specialists, both non-commissioned officer and officer. It's a multiple tour. They're on their second, third, fourth, fifth tour. They have great familiarity in the region and they understand it. So we're probably a little better off. We're a lot better off

than everybody else, and that's a good thing.

Right now my mil group commander in Guatemala is going to rotate down to another country and I took the mil group commander from Ecuador and moved him to Colombia last year because it made sense. He understood the region and the Andean Ridge. So those things work well.

We as a nation don't do foreign languages well. We've got to do better. I think, quite frankly, that it ought to be, everybody ought to come out of college with a foreign language. I think it ought to be mandatory in the service academies. And it ought to be relevant to the needs of the world today. You can make your own judgments of whether that's Arabic or whether it's Chinese or whether it's Spanish, but we don't do it very well.

We've got a lot of schools here in the United States that are Spanish-speaking schools. People take advantage of that. Over here at National Defense University, the American Defense College, the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security down at Fort Benning. All of those are taught in Spanish and that's a good thing. And we've got a lot of exchange students down in the region. So I think it's better, easier for us, but there's a long way to go for other specified areas of the world that probably have been neglected and ought to be brought to the front.

Q: What is your take on the role of foreign military sales in Latin America? A couple of examples I was curious about, we've been selling a lot of helicopters to Colombia and I'm wondering how that changes your job. Also we've tried to block some sales to Venezuela and that hasn't really had much of an effect that I've seen. So what do you make of all that?

A: Latin America is the most demilitarized region in the world. If you look at the amount of dollars going towards buying military equipment. Now Venezuela may change that here in the future. It's the least militarized in the world.

There are no countries today with their armies at each other's borders encroaching in any way. There are traditional, longstanding border disputes but they have not led to any conventional alignment or arraying of forces in any threatening posture, so I think that's a good thing.

Colombia is fighting an insurgency. What they are buying essentially is to defeat the insurgents in that country. That's the helicopters. If you look at that country, it's complex terrain. They have deserts, believe it or not, in the north; they have the jungle; plateaus; savannahs; the coast lines; these rivers are enormous; and tactical mobility is air mobility. And it's not only to move troops for the fight, it's to evacuate the wounded. It's to bring out the soldiers who go in for six months. Six months. At the end of six months they expect to get pulled out of the jungle, go back, get cleaned up and go home for 30 days leave. How do you do that? You've got to do that with aircraft because they're not going to walk out and they can't truck out. There's no roads. They've got to have it for logistics, to fly in food. Every ten days those guys down in the jungle, those platoons and those companies that are moving down that jungle, every ten days they either have

to be in an open area or they've got to hack out of the jungle with their machetes a landing zone for the helicopters to come in and give them their food and their water for ten more days. That's the life they live.

So every day there's a struggle in Colombia for helicopters. They've got them on order. We because of the war are short some helicopters and there's a continual balance of parsing those helicopters out.

With regard to the region, Chile has got the F-16s they just bought. They've bought some frigates. They're buying tanks from Germany, Leopard tanks. They're modernizing and it's not for any threatening purpose, but over the years they haven't done that.

I know in talking to countries in the region, there is concern over the pace and level of modernization or military procurement in Venezuela. Very concerned about those rifles, those 100,000 AK-103s, 104s, because of the potential for proliferation to people that shouldn't have them, to illegal groups. So there is concern there.

With regard to our policy in technology, what we agree to, and what nations agree to to buy our technology in terms of second and third party sales. I think it is what it is and we ought to follow it. If we don't like it, change it. But for the time being I think it's just fine.

I think, again, those who's job it is to enforce that policy are addressing it adequately and will continue to do so, so from that perspective we'll follow developments.

Q: General, a little while ago you said there was a need for detention for a lot of the people at Guantanamo. There are a lot of self-avowed terrorists there. In your estimation, what percentage of these 400-plus detainees that are in Guantanamo are hard core al-Qaida or Taliban?

A: I don't know. I've got my own judgment, but this is all on the record, you guys will put this out "Craddock says" and it's my own judgment. It wouldn't stand the test of scrutiny other than what I'm thinking up here based on being down there every month and seeing, hearing, listening, smelling, feeling, touching.

I talk to the analysts who deal with these people. I don't want to speculate. But let me just tell you this. It's significant. It's not [inaudible], it's significant.

Q: Are you aware of that Seton Hall University Law Study that came out and said that only eight percent of the detainees out there [inaudible] al-Qaida? You completely disagree with that?

A: I completely disagree with that.

Q: Could you give me [inaudible], there's still a lot of relevant information that's [inaudible] from the interrogations. Can you give us specific examples?

A: I think General Hood, Jay Hood, talked about the fact that there was information after the London bombing that some folks at GTMO who had lived in London knew these people and information was asked for, solicited, gained, and provided.

I don't want to get into the operational issues. But the fact is, the fact is that there is still relevant information. How much longer that will be, I don't know. But put it in this context. You say those people have been down there a long time so they don't know anything. But in the war on terror around the world we've killed and captured a lot of al-Qaida leadership. Fair? Okay. If you believe that then the question is who's leading them now? Well, somebody moved up in the organization. I'd submit to you that those people that moved up may well be peers of these people that we have in GTMO. So I think there are possibilities.

Q: General, about a year ago you popped into the news with some comments about what China is doing. The influence it's seeking to establish in Latin America, particularly along the Pacific Coast, some of those nations.

Anything happened recently that you think is worth passing along to us here about China's activities in your part of the world?

A: They're still active. There's still great economic interest. Trade's going way up. Imports from Latin America to China, as well as exports. Mil-to-mil relations, in terms of no string attached military assistance is still a routine occurrence.

If you look in the Caribbean, there is a Chinese embassy in about every one of those island nations. They're building cricket stadiums for the World Cricket Cup in '07. Lots of civil/military projects, no strings attached. That may be fine. I'm not saying that's a bad thing, but there is an enormous presence.

Back in the fall of '04 the Chinese Premier, [Hu Jintau] came to swing through Latin America, talked about \$100 billion worth of investment. We haven't seen that. I think there's been some articles come out of Brazil and Argentina. They haven't seen it either, that have been critical of the expectation that was built without much coming in after it.

So I would say there's still an attempt. I think from a trade perspective they're looking to optimize the extraction of resources, whether it be oil or copper in Chile or iron ore, agricultural products out of Brazil. Again, a huge export for the Brazilians.

So the engagement is still there.

Q: In that respect, is the United States handcuffed somewhat by the stance on the ICC? The International Criminal Court?

A: Look, only from the perspective of if we can't offer, for example, military education and training benefits such as schools in the United States due to those restrictions, someone else will. We see quite a bit China is offering to host many of the regional militaries, whether it be their leaders or others, for classes in China. Military type training and education. So they are indeed a competitor as are some other nations around the world.

Q: Are the Latin American militaries taking them up on that? Going to China to X

A: I think most of the Chiefs of Defense have either been invited and gone, or have a trip scheduled. So if you start at the top, the answer is yes. And we've seen, again, other occasions where groups, military groups, whether they be a group of officers, a war college, or a staff college, have gone as a group to China. It is not now necessarily the exception. We see it more and more.

Q: We're out of time. Thanks very much.

A: Thank you very much.

END TEXT