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COUNTER DRUG OPERATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION

by

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September 2021

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**COUNTER DRUG OPERATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF GREAT POWER
COMPETITION**

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ABSTRACT

The United States invests significant time and resources in conducting drug interdiction operations in the Western Hemisphere. However, the primary strategic focus for the United States is great power competition (GPC) with Russia and China. GPC objectives are accomplished by maintaining or expanding influence, which can be achieved by becoming another nation's partner of choice. Partnership requires understanding the priorities of other nations so that mutually beneficial policy can be developed. This thesis examines how drug interdiction operations support the United States' strategic GPC objectives. By identifying the national priorities for Latin American partners and assessing the importance of counter-drug policy, this thesis concludes that drug interdiction operations have the potential to support the United States' GPC objectives only if a partner nation places similar importance on counter-drug policy. As the regional hegemon, the United States must determine the risk of not becoming or not remaining the partner of choice in exchange for accomplishing U.S. policy goals without considering the priorities of partner nations.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AMLO	Andrés Manuel López Obrador
APOE	aerial port of embarkation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CBSI	Caribbean Basin Security Initiative
CELAC	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
CEPAL	Comisión Económica para América Latina
CFE	Comisión Federal de Electricidad
CN	counternarcotics
CPTTP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOD	Department of Defense
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ELN	National Liberation Army
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FDI	foreign direct investment
GCC	Geographic Combatant Commander
GDP	gross domestic product
GPC	great power competition
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JLP	Jamaican Labour Party
Morena	Movimiento Regeneración Nacional
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
OAS	Organization of American States
Pemex	Petróleos Mexicanos
PNP	People's National Party

PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional
SOUTHCOM	U.S. Southern Command
TAFT	Technical Assistance Field Team
TCO	transnational criminal organization
UN	United Nations
USCG	United States Coast Guard
USMCA	United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement
USN	United States Navy
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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I. GREAT POWER COMPETITION AND DRUG INTERDICTION

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

Between April and September 2020, an average of six Aegis destroyers conducted counter-narcotics operations at any one time in the United States Southern Command's (SOUTHCOM) area of operations.¹ Partnering with 22 other Latin American nations, the United States Coast Guard (USCG), supported by the U.S. Navy, apprehended nearly \$2 billion worth of cocaine by September.² By comparison, nearly \$6 billion worth of cocaine had been apprehended in 2018 with an average of only two naval warships operating in SOUTHCOM. The increased number of military assets in 2020 did not stop more drugs from crossing through Caribbean and eastern Pacific waters.

In President Trump's July 2020 briefing with SOUTHCOM leadership, he highlighted the importance of working with Latin American nations as a way of sharing responsibility for combatting drug trafficking and demonstrating the United States' stance on illegal drugs.³ However, the U.S. *National Security Strategy* is oriented around great power competition (GPC) with China and Russia, while Latin America is mentioned only once in the strategy.⁴

These facts beg the following questions: if more warships apprehended fewer drugs and national security priorities are focused on GPC, is an increased naval presence in

¹ Sam LaGrone, "Destroyers Continue to Prowl 4th Fleet as Coast Guard, Navy Rack Up \$1B in Drug Seizures," *USNI News*, July 2, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/07/02/destroyers-continue-to-prowl-4th-fleet-as-coast-guard-navy-rack-up-1b-in-drug-seizures>.

² Donald J. Trump, "Presidential Determination on Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries for Fiscal Year 2021" (Official memorandum. Washington, DC: Department of State, 2020), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-determination-major-drug-transit-major-illicit-drug-producing-countries-fiscal-year-2021/>.

³ Donald J. Trump, "Remarks by President Trump in Briefing on SOUTHCOM Enhanced Counternarcotics Operations" (speech, Doral, FL, July 10, 2020), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-briefing-southcom-enhanced-counternarcotics-operations/>.

⁴ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), 39, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

SOUTHCOM for drug interdiction the best way to accomplish national security priorities? If there are benefits to using the U.S. Navy for counternarcotics (CN) operations, and do they align with the GPC priorities outlined by the National Security Strategy? This thesis analyzes the benefits of conducting maritime drug operations with U.S. Navy assets and determine if these kinds of operations support the goals of GPC. It answers the key research question: Do drug interdiction operations in the Western Hemisphere support great power competition objectives and the greater national security strategy?

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

As U.S. policy adjusts back toward GPC, national security concerns in Latin America are shifting from the war on drugs, which has been the primary national security concern in the region since the Cold War. The U.S. military and decision makers must evaluate emerging priorities against existing missions, including drug interdiction operations. Drug interdiction operations are conducted by joint U.S. military forces, law enforcement, and partner nations in Latin America, but the benefits of these cooperative efforts need to be assessed in the context of international relationships with Latin American partners, civil-military relations, and especially GPC.

Great power competition focuses on China and Russia as rising powers, but regions like Latin America with many developing countries will become arenas of diplomatic, economic, and possibly military conflict as the United States attempts to maintain its influence against Chinese and Russian growth.⁵ During the Cold War, United States policy lacked an understanding of Latin American priorities, only seeing the region in reference to itself or the Soviet Union.⁶ U.S. policy makers should avoid the same approach and account for Latin American governments' priorities in the way they attempt to manage Chinese and Russian influence in the Western Hemisphere. This thesis demonstrates the importance of considering Latin American priorities in developing United States strategy.

⁵ Mark D. Miles and Charles R. Miller, "Global Risks and Opportunities: The Great Power Competition Paradigm," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 94 (2018): 81.

⁶ Christopher Darnton, "Latin America" (presentation, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, Summer 2020); and R. Evan Ellis, *The Strategic Dimensions of Chinese Engagement with Latin America* (Washington, DC: William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, 2013), 137.

Ultimately this thesis makes recommendations the use of military resources that enable the United States to maintain a positive influence in Latin America while being used efficiently for GPC.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to thoroughly analyze this question, I examine the academic research on GPC and drug trafficking operations in Latin America. GPC deals with the international system in reference to the United States, China, and Russia, and most other nations are considered in the light of how their policies impact the relative global power of these three states. The literature for drug trafficking in Latin America indicates that drug trafficking is not only a hemispheric problem, but also that there are objections to drug trafficking's categorization as a security issue. This literature review provides a foundation for understanding the complex intersection between the interests of GPC and counter-drug trafficking operations. The debates within both topics about the use of resources will influence future policy decisions.

1. Great Power Competition

Great power competition is central to U.S. national security strategy.⁷ Most scholars and U.S. defense leaders argue that GPC focuses on the expansion and growth of China and Russia, who are both world powers seeking more influence. Sometimes North Korea and Iran are categorized as great powers, but authors concerned about North Korea and Iran consider them to be "rogue" powers and are better understood as regional actors.⁸ In his posture statement to the House Armed Services Committee, General Kenneth McKenzie, Commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), still made a point to mention China as a threat in his area of responsibility (AOR) after detailing the ways Iran

⁷ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*.

⁸ Patrick Porter, "Advice for a Dark Age: Managing Great Power Competition," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (January 2019): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2019.1590079>; and Lauren A. Courchaine, Alexis G. Grynkeiwich, and Brian D. Courchaine, "Structuring for Competition: Rethinking the Area of Responsibility Concept for Great Power," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 98 (September 2020): 5.

as a non-peer still threatens regional security and U.S. interests.⁹ By comparison, Admiral Phil Davidson only mentioned North Korea (DPRK) in his posture statement to state that a nuclear capable North Korea is the “most immediate threat”¹⁰ to U.S. interests in the region. North Korea’s power growth is centered on military power, and Iran’s priority is nuclear proliferation.¹¹ Professor R. Evan Ellis is one of many who consider both states a real threat, but not on the level of China and Russia. According to Ellis, Russia and China are exploiting Cold War strategy by pursuing economic expansion and soft power growth to drive out American influence while building up their own military power.¹²

In terms of military power, experts note that Russia has expanded territorially through military exercises and put pressure on other nations in the former Soviet bloc through cyber-attacks.¹³ Their naval operations in Sixth Fleet are increasingly aggressive and designed to create propaganda in which it appears American ships are failing to comply with accepted maritime rules. In global economic markets, Russia appears to be less

⁹ *Posture Statement of Commander, United States Central Command: Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee*, 116th Cong. (2020) (statement of General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr., Commander, USCENTCOM).

¹⁰ *Posture Statement of Commander, United States Indo-Pacific Command: Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee*, 116th Cong. (2019) (statement of Admiral Philip Davidson, Commander, USINDOPACCOM).

¹¹ Eugene Rumer, *Russia in the Middle East: Jack of All Trades, Master of None* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019), 18, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/31/russia-in-middle-east-jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none-pub-80233>; and Porter, “Advice for a Dark Age,” 8; and Anna Péczeli, “The Trump Administration’s Nuclear Posture Review: Back to Great Power Competition,” *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 1, no. 2 (October 2018): 241, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2018.1530741>.

¹² R. Evan Ellis, “Understanding and Responding to Chinese Activities in Latin America and the Caribbean,” in *China’s Global Influence: Perspectives and Recommendations*, ed. Scott D. McDonald and Michael C. Burgoyne (Honolulu: Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2019), 152, <https://apcss.org/chinasglobalinfluence/>.

¹³ Steven Pifer, “Crimea: Six Years After Illegal Annexation,” *Order from Chaos* (blog), March 17, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/03/17/crimea-six-years-after-illegal-annexation/>; and Alison Lawlor Russell, *Cyber Blockades* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), ch 4–5; and Jeffrey Larsen, “Principles of Russian Foreign Policy” (presentation, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, Summer 2020).

aggressive toward the United States while attempting to establish trade markets in Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.¹⁴

Scholars and experts on China's increasing capabilities detail its rapidly expanding military and international presence. China's maritime tactics in Seventh Fleet are escort and surveillance because the primary focus is on territorial water disputes and developing a blue-water navy.¹⁵ China's industrial base is rapidly building ships and updating technology in order to achieve this goal. China has been aggressive in domestic and global economic expansion with a long-term goal outlined in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁶ China is also expanding its trade network in Latin America, Africa, and South East Asia, choosing to work with international organization where the United States is not involved like the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), instead of the Organization of American States (OAS).¹⁷ China is the predominant threat for those concerned with GPC.

While there is general consensus that China and Russia are great powers and peer competitors with the United States in global markets and industry, not all scholars consider this competition a serious threat to American power or influence. From an economic standpoint, historians like Peter Smith argue that Russian and Chinese expansion and investment in developing nations have the potential to introduce or increase prosperity and

¹⁴ Alexander Bratersky, "Sudan to Host Russian Military Base," *Defense News*, November 13, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/mideast-africa/2020/11/13/sudan-to-host-russian-military-base/>; and Andrew S. Natsios, "Foreign Aid in an Era of Great Power Competition," *Prism: A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations* 8, no. 4 (2020): 101–19.

¹⁵ Timothy R. Heath, Kristen Gunness, and Cortez A. Cooper, *The PLA and China's Rejuvenation: National Security and Military Strategies, Deterrence Concepts, and Combat Capabilities*, RR-1402-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), 31–32, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1402.html.

¹⁶ Rachel Sigman, "Africa" (presentation, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, Summer 2020); and Lindsey Ford et al., "What Would a Larger Chinese Presence Mean for the Middle East?," *ChinaFile* (blog), August 20, 2019, <https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/what-would-larger-chinese-presence-mean-middle-east/>; and Darnton, "Latin America"; and R. Evan Ellis, "China's Security Challenge to the United State in Latin American and the Caribbean," in *China, the United States, and the Future of Latin America*, ed. Daniel Denoon (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

¹⁷ Ellis, "China's Security Challenge to the United State in Latin American and the Caribbean," 353.

stability in states where one or both are absent.¹⁸ Increased state stability is one of the goals of all international organizations, according to this view, so it seems that American concern with Russian and Chinese influence is a neo-imperialist objection.¹⁹

Another reason some scholars are not concerned with GPC is due to the improbability of the outbreak of a conventional war between the United States and China or Russia. First, the globalization of the developed world means great powers are members of the same international organizations.²⁰ Second, great power economies are dependent on each other through supply chains and the global market.²¹ Finally, there is no popular or political desire to engage in conventional warfare, so conflict will most likely occur in cyberspace or, like during the Cold War, in developing states through proxies.²² Given these factors, experts across multiple disciplines do not anticipate GPC significantly impacting the international status quo.

Like during the Cold War, nations tend to be grouped into categories; but instead of first, second, or third world designations, nations classified as a great power, a non-great power, or a developing nation. Great powers focus on developing states in order to increase influence, but a significant gap in GPC literature is to examine the impact of great power competition on non-great powers like India, Brazil, and South Africa who are not developing nations, but not great powers. Latin American scholars like Peter Smith predict that Latin America states (and some in Africa and the Middle East, too) will be caught between conflicting great powers and their need for international support to continue

¹⁸ Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 283–90; and Richard L. Harris, “China’s Relations with the Latin American and Caribbean Countries: A Peaceful Panda Bear Instead of a Roaring Dragon,” *Latin American Perspectives* 42, no. 6 (2015): 153–90.

¹⁹ Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*.

²⁰ Darnton, “Latin America”; and Ellis, “Understanding and Responding to Chinese Activities in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

²¹ Harris, “China’s Relations with the Latin American and Caribbean Countries”; and Darnton, “Latin America.”

²² Ford et al., “What Would a Larger Chinese Presence Mean for the Middle East?”; and Miles and Miller, “Global Risks and Opportunities”; and R. Evan Ellis, “America’s Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean,” *Air Space Power Journal - Africa and Francophonie* 8, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 10–32.

developing.²³ According to economist Richard Harris, the scholars who interpret all international activity through a GPC lens falsely assume that these regions have the same concerns as the United States about China and Russia.²⁴ For instance, Harris points out that Latin America and Caribbean nations benefitted from Chinese investment in 2015 and would likely to continue from increased foreign direct investment (FDI). For these countries, Chinese influence is a secondary concern to socio-economic stability made possible by investment.²⁵ While developing nations are more likely to feel the impact of tensions between great powers, the literature does not discuss how non-great powers might respond to those increased tensions.

As the discussion and implementation of GPC strategies in military operations continues, aligning resources to meet GPC goals will influence which missions and commands receive attention and funding. As previously observed, Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC) recognize the preeminence of the threat from Russia and China, but these leaders are required to focus on closer geographic threats like Iran for CENTCOM or drug trafficking for SOUTHCOM. R. Evan Ellis argues that the diversification of missions within each geographic region may be a better approach to maintaining American influence in regions where Russian and Chinese presence is increasing because an indirect result of relationship building is the consolidation of American influence.²⁶ Alternatively stated, commands like SOUTHCOM have operations in place designed to strengthen partner nations which allows the United States to become the partner of choice, diminishing the appeal of Russian or Chinese investments. Ellis reasons that not all missions need to have a direct alignment with the goals of GPC in order to accomplish its goals. Using this lens, this thesis will examine if and how drug interdiction operations in Latin America support GPC strategy.

²³ Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*.

²⁴ Harris, "China's Relations with the Latin American and Caribbean Countries"; and Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*.

²⁵ Harris, "China's Relations with the Latin American and Caribbean Countries," 154.

²⁶ R. Evan Ellis, "The U.S. Military in Support of Strategic Objectives in Latin America and the Caribbean," *Prism* 8, no. 1 (February 19, 2019): 37.

2. Drug Trafficking in Latin America

Even though illegal drug trade is a dilemma in many parts of the world, the literature reviewed here focuses on the character of drug trafficking in Latin America. Because of its proximity to the United States, drug trafficking in this region is of greater interest to American politicians and citizens. Drugs trafficked across national borders in the western hemisphere are typically cocaine, methamphetamines, fentanyl, and heroin.²⁷

The only thing almost every scholar agrees on within this literature is that drug trafficking is a problem. Professor Menno Vellinga's extensive research states that the prevalence of drug production in certain Latin American regions indicates the instability of the socio-economic infrastructure—peasants need an income and politicians are susceptible to bribes.²⁸ Dr. Bruce Bagley and Dr. Jonathan Rosen conclude that the demand for drugs in the United States and Western Europe indicates a health and social crisis caused by both the side effects of addiction and the political means used to try to disincentivize consumption.²⁹ The transit routes between suppliers and consumers indicate a potential border control issue that is not limited to the United States-Mexico border.³⁰

The first source of disagreement in the literature is whether or not to classify drug trafficking as a security problem. U.S. policy has been to categorize it as an issue of national security since President Nixon. Nixon declared a “war on drugs” and established the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in 1973 to organize the national effort to

²⁷ David Vergun, “U.S., Mexico Cooperate to Reduce Cross-Border Drug Flow,” *DOD News*, November 6, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2408588/us-mexico-cooperate-to-reduce-cross-border-drug-flow/>; and *Drug Trafficking Violence in Mexico: Implications for the United States before the U.S. Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control*, 111th Cong. (2010) (statement of Kevin L. Perkins, Assistant Director, Criminal Investigative Division, and Anthony P. Placido, Assistant Administrator for Intelligence Drug Enforcement Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation).

²⁸ Menno Vellinga, ed., *The Political Economy of the Drug Industry: Latin America and the International System* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004). Many of Dr. Vellinga's collaborators suggest that the problem with the drug economy in Latin America is that it fills a void in state-sponsored projects to improve infrastructure in remote regions.

²⁹ Bruce M. Bagley and Jonathan D. Rosen, *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2015), 418, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/39885>.

³⁰ Jorge I. Domínguez and Rafael Fernández de Castro, eds., *Contemporary U.S. - Latin American Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 37–38.

address the problems of drug use.³¹ In 1982 President Reagan affirmed that drug trafficking remained a national security priority and further militarized the United States' efforts to combat it.³²

After the 9/11 attacks, the war on terror replaced the war on drugs as the primary national security focus. Professor Jorge Domínguez and others point out that most of American foreign policy was securitized after the attacks, which is how Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and al-Qaeda are both designated terrorist organizations.³³ The war on drugs may no longer be the primary focus of national security, but counter-narcotics remains one of the primary roles for SOUTHCOM. In 2015 SOUTHCOM Commander General John Kelly reported that narcoterrorism was responsible for 40,000 deaths per year since 9/11. While he acknowledged that this threat is not exclusively military, he insisted the lethal impact of drugs equated a security concern.³⁴ Campaign Martillo, a multinational operation targeting drug trafficking, has been ongoing since 2012, the same year General Kelly assumed command of SOUTHCOM.³⁵

While military leadership and national leaders consider drug trafficking to be a security issue, others argue that the securitization of drug trafficking misses the heart of the problem. Bruce Bagley is one of many who argue that the militarization of the United States' response to drugs has exacerbated the problem.³⁶ Instead, drug abuse, and the consequential demand for drug trafficking, should be considered a health, social, and/or

³¹ "History of the DEA," Drug Enforcement Administration, accessed November 24, 2020, <https://www.dea.gov/history>.

³² Bagley and Rosen, *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today*, xv–xvi; and Andrew Glass, "Reagan Declares 'War on Drugs,' October 14, 1982," *POLITICO*, October 14, 2010, <https://www.politico.com/story/2010/10/reagan-declares-war-on-drugs-october-14-1982-043552>.

³³ Domínguez and Fernández de Castro, *Contemporary U.S. - Latin American Relations*, 14.

³⁴ "Lee Questions Commanders of U.S. NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM on Southern Border Threats," March 16, 2015, Senator Mike Lee, video, 5:47, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTFwOjpeBeE>.

³⁵ "SOUTHCOM Lines of Effort," U.S. Southern Command, accessed October 22, 2020, <https://www.southcom.mil/Lines-of-Effort/>.

³⁶ Bagley and Rosen, *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today*, 329.

economic problem. A nuance of this position is presented by multiple contributors in Menno Vellinga's *The Political Economy of the Drug Industry*. Professor Francisco Thoumi and Dr. Ivelaw Griffith both report that drug cultivation and trade have been means to break poverty cycles in multiple states in the region. Cartels introduced societal order outside of government authority, undermining the government's legitimacy and taking control of remote regions.³⁷ If the demand for drugs indicates a health crisis and the supply of drugs indicates socio-economic weakness, the solution to the problem is not going to be in the realm of national security.

The second major area of divergence is how to address the problem. The divisions in this literature are two-fold. The first division depends on whether or not an author considers drug trafficking a security or non-security issue, and the second on how to address supply and demand for drugs. Leaders and scholars who consider drug trafficking primarily as a security issue continue to emphasize the importance of military operations like Campaign Martillo and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), a joint agency effort providing law enforcement training to Caribbean states.³⁸ Outside police, politicians, and judiciaries, there is a small group of academics who still consider drug trafficking a security issue. Among them is Paul Stares, who published an article in 1996 when he was the director of research for the United States Institute of Peace to caution against academia's calls to desecuritize the national response to drug trafficking.³⁹ His caution about desecuritizing the drug crisis was had more to do with the logistics of changing long-standing policy rather than an analysis of the drug trade itself. The lack of current academic work identifying the drug crisis as a security issue with a military or law enforcement solution is a significant gap both in the literature and between academia and public policy.

The scholars who do not consider drug trafficking as a security issue offer an alternative. The first step is to decriminalize or legalize the use of drugs. Decriminalization does not legalize drugs, rather it turns drug possession into something comparable to a

³⁷ Vellinga, *The Political Economy of the Drug Industry*, 71,74, 117.

³⁸ U.S. Southern Command, "SOUTHCOM Lines of Effort."

³⁹ Paul Stares, "Drug Legalization? Time for a Real Debate," *Brookings Review*, Spring 1996, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/drug-legalization-time-for-a-real-debate/>.

traffic violation instead of a felony. This does not eradicate black-market trade, legalization would allow for regulation and taxation of drugs while decriminalization would reduce the social cost of prosecuting drug offenses, and reframe drug abuse into a health problem rather than a law enforcement one.⁴⁰ Scholars like Dr. Bagley and organizations like the Human Rights Watch point to Europe as an example where multiple countries have decriminalized and/or legalized drugs and then used funds to support health treatment for the addicted and rural development for source countries.⁴¹ Investing in rural development in drug sourcing countries is critical according to Peruvian sociologist Mariano Valderrama and economist Hugo Cabieses because rural peasants, not the drug cartels, are negatively affected by current policy.⁴² There is a much stronger scholarly voice supporting the idea that drug production is symptomatic of larger problems like education, health, socio-political infrastructure, or weak economies, which are on both the supply and demand side of the drug economy.⁴³ Drug trafficking and drug consumption are similarly considered indicative of socio-economic problems.

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

There are two possible answers to the question of whether or not drug interdiction operations in the Western Hemisphere support GPC objectives. First, it is possible that military drug operations do not support a GPC centric national security strategy. The would be the case if the campaigns, training, and education that are part of the overall military endeavor do not result in either maintaining or strengthening American influence as the partner of choice in Latin America. If this is the case, SOUTHCOM may need to reevaluate how it conducts and funds operations, especially due to the close integration of the

⁴⁰ Bagley and Rosen, *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today*, 420.

⁴¹ Vellinga, *The Political Economy of the Drug Industry*, 321.

⁴² Bagley and Rosen, *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today*, 54.

⁴³ Bagley and Rosen, *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today*; and Domínguez and Fernández de Castro, *Contemporary U.S. - Latin American Relations*; and Vellinga, *The Political Economy of the Drug Industry*. These editors and their collaborators almost entirely argue that the securitization of combatting drugs falsely makes a political and military problem out of a health and infrastructure problem.

Departments of State and Homeland Security (DHS) with the Department of Defense (DOD) in its drug trafficking role.

Second, it is possible that the goals of GPC are achieved through military drug interdiction operations in the SOUTHCOM AOR. During the Cold War, SOUTHCOM focused on the defense of the Panama Canal and contingency operations for the possibility of war with communist powers.⁴⁴ When the Cold War ended, SOUTHCOM reorganized itself around counter-drug operations, and it has spent the past 30 years developing a concept of joint and international operations that addresses drug trafficking, responding to natural disasters, and supporting infrastructure projects. The military has played an integral role in these operations and built relationships with partner militaries. Today SOUTHCOM's mission is oriented around building partner capacity. Cooperation in reducing drug trafficking has been a primary means of building other navies' capacities and developing military relationships that balance against perceived growth in Russian and Chinese influence.⁴⁵ Additionally, the overt investment of American military resources in a hemispheric problem is a tangible indication to Latin American and Caribbean states that the United States is both invested in regional security and wants to be the "partner of choice" for these nations.⁴⁶ Being the partner of choice for Latin America effectively prevents Russia and China from gaining a greater foothold in the Western Hemisphere, which is an essential part of American GPC strategy.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is designed as a comparative case study of the relationship between GPC and U.S. maritime counternarcotics efforts in three countries: Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica. These states are not compared with each other, instead this thesis compares the goals of national security policy with the outcome of military missions in specific geographic areas in order to analyze how counternarcotics operations might support or

⁴⁴ "History of U.S. Southern Command," U.S. Southern Command, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://www.southcom.mil/About/History/>.

⁴⁵ U.S. Southern Command, "SOUTHCOM Lines of Effort."

⁴⁶ "SOUTHCOM Lines of Effort: Counter Threats," August 6, 2020, U.S. Southern Command, video, 2:11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAXEe-cVrcY>.

undermine American policy goals of GPC. The three selected case studies come from different Latin American subregions, have connections to drug trafficking, and are countries which receive Chinese and/or Russian investment. Colombia is leading producer of drugs as well as a primary partner in SOUTHCOM's maritime anti-drug efforts. Mexico's importance in this study is due to its role as home base to cartels involved in drug trafficking and its geographic location on the United States' southern border. Jamaica is relevant to this study because illegal drug trafficking is a significant part of its economy and a major transit point for drugs going to the United States and Europe. China maintains numerous investment projects while illegally fishing in poorly policed Caribbean territorial waters. Drug interdiction operations occur in the sea lanes between these countries and especially along the Central American isthmus. The comparison between these regions is intended to determine if and where GPC strategy would have the most significant impact.

In order to explain the historical context of my question, my research first examines how GPC influences U.S. relations with Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica. After examining the impact of GPC, my research identified each states' priorities and determined if and how U.S. drug policy was a shared priority. Where a similar emphasis is placed on counternarcotics, U.S. interdiction operations help achieve GPC objectives. Where the priorities are different, U.S. policy makers need to assess if a continued emphasis on drug trafficking will impede the accomplishment of GPC goals.

This thesis does not include an assessment of the overall efficacy of drug interdiction operations. Recognizing that these military operations are part of a larger regional effort, my analysis is restricted to the indirect effects of military participation in drug trafficking on GPC. The controversy around the efficacy of drug trafficking efforts is not a factor in my research by may impact follow-on research.

Ultimately, considering where GPC priorities and counternarcotics operations conflict or complement each other is essential to efficiently allocating resources to accomplish both national security goals. By qualitatively analyzing the demands of GPC and maritime drug operations, this research concludes that the current use of naval assets in SOUTHCOM for drug operations also support the overarching concerns of GPC if partner nations place a similar priority on counter-drug policy.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis includes four chapters. After this introduction, Chapter II focuses on GPC, including an historical analysis of how GPC affected Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica during the Cold War and how GPC powers are currently pursuing their strategy in these countries. Chapter III is organized by country and provides an analysis of how Colombian, Mexican, and Jamaican national priorities and compares them to U.S. goals. Chapter IV assesses how GPC objectives and maritime drug operations intersect and provide policy recommendations for SOUTHCOM's use of military capabilities.

II. MODERN GREAT POWER COMPETITION IN LATIN AMERICA

This chapter analyzes the rise of modern great power competition (GPC) and sets the historical context for understanding how U.S. military drug interdiction operations support U.S. national security objectives in outpacing competitors in Latin America. The first section covers a brief general history of modern GPC. The second part examines GPC case studies in Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica through the Cold War. The final section looks at the renewed emphasis on GPC in the United States, China, and Russia. It discusses the transitions in U.S. policy focus in Latin America after the Cold War and reviews the rise of China and Russia as great powers with a competitive interest in Latin America.

A. THE RISE OF MODERN GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Great power competition today has its origin in the nineteenth century when European empires, having conquered and divided most of the known world, competed with each other for supremacy. Until the world wars these great powers rarely engaged in overt military conflict.⁴⁷ Leading up to World War I, these powers preferred to use statecraft, diplomacy, and economic treaties to achieve political ends and firmly establish nation-state identities. Liberal ideals and convictions about the inevitable progress of humanity convinced many Europeans that all-out war would be relegated to history even though military actions and encounters in colonies and frontier lands were frequent, bloody, and brutal.

Before the World Wars, the military and physical conflict between great powers took place in the periphery of great powers, usually in colonial territory.⁴⁸ The World Wars shifted the military conflict to the center of great power administration in Europe, but the location of physical conflict in GPC moved back to the periphery after 1945. Two major changes occurred in the nature of GPC after the World Wars: a shift in the number of actors and a change in motivation. Historically, GPC usually took place in a multilateral

⁴⁷ Miles and Miller, “Global Risks and Opportunities,” 80.

⁴⁸ Miles and Miller, 80.

environment and focused on control of materials.⁴⁹ The first change was the shift from a multilateral political arena to a bilateral one. The United States and the USSR emerged at the end of World War II in more powerful positions than their allies, resulting in a bipolar international arena. The second change in modern GPC was great powers' emphasis on ideology over material control. In other words, the United States and USSR continued competing for control of good and materials, but successes on both sides were considered proof that one ideology was better than the other. Both the United States and the USSR wanted to influence the reconstruction of Europe, but they had vastly different visions: the United States supported a capitalist framework for the economy and democratic governance while the USSR backed the principles of a communist system. As far as these bilateral powers were concerned, the Cold War was an ideological conflict they fought in an economic arena.⁵⁰

The United States and the USSR never fought outright, but tension between them boiled over in other locations. In the 1960s and 1970s, the geographic center of gravity for conflict shifted to the Third World. Proxy wars in Southeast Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East cost thousands of lives as states were pressured to pick a side. The question of state survival in these areas was exacerbated by the conflict between the United States and the USSR because their ideological conflict failed to directly translate into the Third World countries.⁵¹ Leaders in these areas were not always ideological zealots, but often “political actors that [were] more than happy to exchange military assistance for pro forma loyalty.”⁵² Especially in Latin America, local interests received minimal consideration, and leaders had to cater to either U.S. or Soviet policy. Tensions in Latin America resulted in a significant drain of financial resources to the USSR and political outcomes that damaged the United States' credibility. Among many important lessons of

⁴⁹ Daniel Moran, “The Cold War” (presentation, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, Summer 2020).

⁵⁰ Moran, “The Cold War.”

⁵¹ Moran.

⁵² Moran.

the Cold War, not least should be the recognition that the stakes in diplomatic conflict are far more complex but just as destabilizing as military conflict.

B. GPC IN LATIN AMERICA DURING THE COLD WAR

American policy in Latin America went through three phases between 1800–1990. The first phase was driven by the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary, the second by the Good Neighbor Policy, and the third by the Cold War. In the first phase, the Monroe Doctrine marked the Western Hemisphere as off limits to European imperial expansion. The Roosevelt Corollary of the Monroe Doctrine justified U.S. intervention in the Caribbean when European governments began using force to collect debts. Interventionism maintained some support as an effective policy, but it “also led to a firestorm of criticism from many who saw the U.S. presence as an unwarranted intrusion into the domestic affairs of sovereign nation-states.”⁵³

The second era was guided by the Good Neighbor Policy developed by Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt where the United States formally adopted a noninterventionist policy for hemispheric relations. The Good Neighbor Policy could not prevent every intervention, but it significantly decreased the frequency of United States intervention in Latin America.

During the third era, Cold War policy included the establishment of the OAS in 1948 and the Alliance for Progress under President Kennedy, and U.S. policy toward Latin America mostly combined neglect and an anticommunist agenda. Some nations were wholly ignored, and some were courted by the Soviet Union and pressured to take a side. Neither power was particularly invested in the growth of Latin America outside its impact on their rival. The following sections review the overall impact of U.S. Cold War policy in Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica.

⁵³ Charles H. Blake, *Politics in Latin America*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008), 52.

1. Colombia

Colombia aligned itself closely with the United States during the Cold War but attempted to establish economic connections with the USSR to diversify its export markets. The Soviet Union purchased Colombian coffee and invested in a hydroelectric plant in Alto Sinú.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Colombia typically supported the United States in international and regional issues, sending troops to Korea and supporting Cuba's expulsion from the OAS in 1962.

Domestically, significant guerilla violence prevented Colombia's democratic institutions from expanding out to rural regions that lacked government presence. The FARC, responsible for most of the guerrilla violence, controlled a substantial percent of the rural areas in Colombia and received financial support from the Soviet Union in the 1970s until it expanded its involvement in drug trafficking to establish financial independence.⁵⁵ Formally organized in 1964, the FARC's opposition to the Colombian government had its origins in protests beginning in the 1940s and 1950s. Peasants organized themselves into self-defense groups and protested their marginalization and inequality in socio-political life. The FARC began as a leftist, Marxist guerilla insurgency who acted to undermine Colombian government in Bogotá.⁵⁶ After the peasant groups consolidated into one organization, FARC maintained a regime of terror, using kidnappings and violence to prove the government's incapacity.

Even though the official government in Colombia failed to establish control of rural areas, its democratic institutions maintained stability and economic growth through the latter half of the twentieth century. The stability of the government and democratic institutions in urban areas encouraged the United States to support the official Colombian

⁵⁴ Cole Blasier, *The Giant's Rival: The USSR and Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 48.

⁵⁵ Kevin E. Grisham, "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," in *Transforming Violent Political Movements: Rebels Today, What Tomorrow?* (London: Routledge, 2014), 79, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315850542>.

⁵⁶ Grisham, 77; and June S. Beittel, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. R43813 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 2, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43813/29>.

government. Because pressure from the United States stunted Soviet influence on the official government, and because income from drug trafficking made the FARC financially independent from Soviet support, the collapse of the USSR had no significant impact on Colombia.

2. Mexico

Following Mexican independence from Spain in 1810, Mexico experienced civil war, the Mexican-American war, two attempts to establish empires, and eventually a restoration of the republic codified in 1857. Eventually, General Porfirio Díaz became president, and his 35 years in office were relatively stable but characterized by oligarchic rather than democratic policies. After a contested election in 1910, fighting broke out and Díaz was pressured to step down. Francisco Madero took power, Díaz went into exile, but the fighting did not stop. The ten years after the 1910 election were some of the most tumultuous in Mexican history, and a tense relationship with the United States exacerbated its bloody civil war.⁵⁷

Between Madero's presidency in 1910 and Álvaro Obregón's election in 1920, the next decade of civil war included eight presidents (elected or interim) and shifting political alliances between Mexican leaders. Regional leaders like Obregón, Victoriano Huerta, Pancho Villa, Venustiano Carranza, and Emiliano Zapata formed and broke alliances frequently. Additionally, U.S. intervention by Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson, the occupation of Veracruz by the U.S. Navy in 1914, and U.S. General John Pershing's unsuccessful pursuit of Pancho Villa in 1916 after Villa's raid on Columbus, New Mexico, heightened domestic and international tensions.

In 1917, Carranza became president and loosely presided over the drafting of a new constitution. This update to the 1857 Constitution gave the president dictatorial power and the government power to confiscate land, establish workers' rights, and limit the rights of

⁵⁷ Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, 81.

the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁸ Carranza was ousted in 1920, and Obregón was elected. Although the revolution ended in 1920, outbursts of violence remained part of the political cycle until the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR: National Revolutionary Party)⁵⁹ began consolidating power. In 1934 Lázaro Cárdenas took office and began to institutionalize the reforms set by the 1917 constitution.⁶⁰ Cárdenas' solidified his power within his party and gained international attention for nationalizing Mexican oil in 1938.

Cárdenas' decision to expropriate Dutch, British, and American oil companies followed protests and strikes concerning Mexican workers' conditions and the money flowing out of the country. On one hand, Mexican nationalists were pleased and considered the move to be a break from imperialist powers.⁶¹ On the other hand, the United States boycotted Mexican oil to pressure Mexico to go to international arbitration, rather than pursue bilateral arrangements. The onset of World War II, however, redirected American attention. When Germany took control of France in 1940, the United States suspended its boycott and worked with Mexico to arrange compensation. Meanwhile, Mexico's oil revenue increased after making crude oil deals with Axis powers in 1939. Mexico attempted to remain neutral, but Mexico declared war on Germany in 1942 after Germans sank two Mexican tankers.

In the same year, Mexico established diplomatic relations with the USSR. Mexico maintained diplomatic ties with the USSR throughout the Cold War, unlike most Latin American nations, even though the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI: Institutional Revolutionary Party) heavily restricted communist party activities in 1947.⁶² In 1947,

⁵⁸ John Patrick McHenry, *A Short History of Mexico* (New York: Dolphin Books, 1970), 170–71; and Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 404–5.

⁵⁹ Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) was renamed Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) before becoming the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). This political party held power in Mexico from 1928–2000.

⁶⁰ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Mexican Revolution,” accessed April 15, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Mexican-Revolution>; and

⁶¹ Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, 105.

⁶² Blasier, *The Giant's Rival: The USSR and Latin America*, 22–23; and Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, 179.

Mexico also signed the Rio Treaty along with 23 other Latin American and Caribbean nations. The treaty was concerned with hemispheric defense, and signatories agreed that an attack on one of them was an attack against all of them.

As Cold War tensions escalated between the United States and the USSR, Mexican leaders became more interested in being part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to avoid overtly choosing a side. Although Mexico had an observer status in NAM, it but never became a full member because of pressure from the United States.

Mexican leaders resisted U.S. pressure in 1962 during a vote for Cuba's expulsion from the OAS. Mexico not only voted against Cuba's expulsion but maintained a noninterventionist policy in Cuban internal affairs. Mexico was the only nation in the Western Hemisphere to continue diplomatic relations and air services to Cuba.⁶³ During the Cuban Missile Crisis, however, the Mexican president condemned the Soviet Union for positioning missiles in Cuba.

Another example of U.S. pressure on Mexico concerned the United Nations (UN) vote in 1975 on Resolution 3379. The resolution was part of the UN's attempt to deal with the question of Palestine and declared Zionism a form of racism. Mexico attempted to distance itself from the United States and supported the resolution. The United States was strongly against it while the Soviet Union was for it. In response to Mexico's vote, the United States and other pro-Israel states boycotted Mexican tourism resulting in a loss of millions of dollars. Caught between great powers, Mexico voted with the United States or abstained in every following vote on Zionism or Israel.⁶⁴ Mexico's geographic proximity to the United States ensured both that the Soviet Union was interested in undermining U.S. hegemony and that the United States would have a decided interest in Mexican international relations.

By the end of the Cold War, Mexico had become the United States' third largest trading partner. The collapse of the Soviet Union alleviated a degree of international

⁶³ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, 492.

⁶⁴ Smith, 199.

pressure on Mexico because the threat to the United States' position as the regional hegemon had disappeared.

3. Jamaica

The Caribbean's colonial history is tightly woven with GPC. Post-independence and during the Cold War, some Caribbean states like Cuba were at the forefront of the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Others like Jamaica were pressured to pick a side in order to receive investments or aid. As European states relinquished the remainders of their empires following World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union kept watchful eyes on the region.

Jamaica was conquered first by Spain and then by Britain, and it remained under British control until 1962 when it was granted independence after a 17-year transition, remaining a member of the Commonwealth. During the transition to independence, Jamaica experienced unrest from pockets of labor-movement leaders and trade unionists. Several members were identified as "potential future dictators,"⁶⁵ and Britain formed a strategy to ensure that an independent Jamaica would not be susceptible to communism. One tactic to contain communism involved restricting the movement of pro-communist activists. Local leaders in Jamaica were influenced by the McCarthyism coming out of the United States, and communist literature was suppressed alongside a counter-propaganda campaign. According to one analysis of Jamaica in the Cold War, the neuroticism of the British and American governments concerning the supposed vulnerability of new nations to communism, regardless of popular sentiment, added tension to its independence process.⁶⁶

Following independence in July 1962, Jamaica joined the United Nations in September. Jamaica also joined NAM in 1970 when the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) was elected, hoping to avoid the conflicts in which neighboring regions were embroiled. In 1972, Michael Manley of the People's National Party (PNP) attempted to convince the

⁶⁵ Spencer Mawby, "Mr. Smith Goes to Vienna: Britain's Cold War in the Caribbean 1951–1954," *Cold War History* 13, no. 4 (November 2013): 545, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2012.756474>.

⁶⁶ Mawby, 557, 561.

Soviet Union to invest in Jamaica and developed a close relationship with Fidel Castro in Cuba, roughly 90 miles north of Jamaica. Although he was not a supporter of Jamaican communists, he distrusted United States hegemony.⁶⁷ Edward Seaga replaced Manley in 1980, and Seaga was firmly anti-communist and sent troops to support the U.S. invasion of Grenada. The fall of the Soviet Union minimally impacted Jamaica due to domestic economic troubles from deficit, international debt, and the devastation from Hurricane Gilbert in 1989.

C. GPC RESURGENCE

This section first discussed the transition of U.S. national security priorities in Latin America after the Cold War, beginning with drugs, followed by terrorism, and then a transition back to GPC in response to Chinese and Russian policies. The second part examines China's rise as a great power and its interest in Latin America. The final part reviews Russian resurgence to great power status and its policy focus in Latin America.

1. United States

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States had no near-peer competitors involved in Latin America, and Cuba, the only remaining communist state, was a negligible threat now supported by communist China, which was not a concern to U.S. leaders at that point. U.S. national security shifted focus to drugs. Drug abuse became a focus of domestic policy in 1973 when President Nixon established the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Nixon coined the phrase "war on drugs," hoping to mobilize the national support against drug abuse.⁶⁸ In 1982 President Reagan affirmed that drug trafficking remained a national security priority and further militarized the United States' efforts to combat it.⁶⁹ Following the launch of Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign

⁶⁷ Blasier, *The Giant's Rival: The USSR and Latin America*, 48.

⁶⁸ Drug Enforcement Administration, "History of the DEA."

⁶⁹ Bagley and Rosen, *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today*, xv-xvi; and Glass, "Reagan Declares 'War on Drugs,' October 14, 1982."

in 1985, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act in 1986 established drug possession penalties, increased drug trafficking penalties, and allocated increased funding for counterdrug efforts.⁷⁰

Nine years later, President Clinton also passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 which also increased penalties for possession and distribution.⁷¹ Domestic policy merged with Latin American foreign policy at the end of the Clinton administration in 1999 when Colombian President Andrés Pastrana, frustrated by a failed attempt at peace negotiation with FARC, submitted Plan Colombia to the United States government. His plan requested support to strengthen Colombian infrastructure in order to diminish FARC influence. By the time Plan Colombia was ratified by the United States in 2000, Congress had altered Pastrana's proposals it to match its own international goals in the region. According to Tom Long, "the United States' redesign of Plan Colombia turned it from a peace plan into a battle plan."⁷² Needing the foreign investment, Colombia adopted the changes and received over \$1 billion, \$7.7 million of which went to military and police aid.⁷³ Álvaro Uribe replaced Pastrana as president, and Plan Colombia became a hallmark of both counternarcotics policy and the strength of United States-Colombia relations.⁷⁴ Plan Colombia remained active until 2015. Although the U.S. federal government continues to take a punitive approach to the abuse of drugs, some state governments began taking a different approach in 1996 with the legalization of medical marijuana, followed by recreational marijuana in 2012.

Drugs would likely have remained a priority, but the 9/11 attacks suddenly shifted national security focus to counterterrorism. Even though counter drug policy remained important, the war on terrorism replaced the war on drugs. Terms like "narcoterrorism"

⁷⁰ Anti-Drug Abuse Act, 21 U.S.C. § 801 (1986).

⁷¹ Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, 42 U.S.C. § 131 (1994).

⁷² Tom Long, "An Urgent Opportunity: The Birth of Plan Colombia," in *Latin America Confronts the United States: Asymmetry and Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 177. Long quotes this from Grace Livingstone's book *Inside Colombia: Drugs, Democracy and War* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004), pp. 124, 128.

⁷³ Jennifer S. Holmes and Sheila Amin Gutiérrez de Piñeres, "Violence and the State: Lessons from Colombia," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, no. 2 (June 2014): 381, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2013.857939>.

⁷⁴ Bagley and Rosen, *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today*, 51.

emerged in discussions to keep counternarcotics efforts relevant to the new national security strategy.⁷⁵ After 2001, Plan Colombia received additional funding. In Mexico, the Mérida Initiative was developed in 2007 between the Bush and Calderón administrations, emphasizing each nation's shared responsibility to combat drug trafficking as the industry responsible for funding terrorist activity.⁷⁶ Although not explicitly established to deter narcoterrorism, the United States and 12 Caribbean nations approved the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) to fund training for security and law enforcement organizations to combat drug trafficking.⁷⁷ Counterterrorism continued to be the primary national security focus of the Bush and Obama administrations, but the 2015 National Security Strategy elevated a focus on building partner capacity in Latin America and the Middle East as well as the American relationship with Asia and the Pacific.⁷⁸

With the elevation of building partner capacity and focusing on economic ties, the 2015 National Security Strategy marked a shift away from a terrorism-centered focus. Part of the shift included a return to longer term strategies to account for Chinese and Russian long-term goals.⁷⁹ The 2017 National Security Strategy directly mentions a return to great power competition, which was central to the Trump administration strategy. President Biden's interim guidance also set the focus for national security to outpacing every challenger to maintain America's current position in the international community.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Bagley and Rosen, 54, 79–80; and Adrián Bonilla, "U.S. Andean Policy, the Colombian Conflict, and Security in Ecuador," in *Addicted to Failure: U.S. Security Policy in Latin America and the Andean Region*, ed. Brian Loveman (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 103; and *Narco-Terrorism: International Drug Trafficking and Terrorism - A Dangerous Mix before the Committee on the Judiciary*, 108th Cong. (2003) (statement of Steven W. Casteel, Assistant Administrator for Intelligence Drug Enforcement Administration).

⁷⁶ Bagley and Rosen, *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today*, 55; and Clare Ribando Seelke, *Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007–2021*, CRS Report No. IF10578 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2021), 1, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10578>.

⁷⁷ "Caribbean Basin Security Initiative," United States Department of State, accessed October 10, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/caribbean-basin-security-initiative/>.

⁷⁸ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC, 2015), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy_2.pdf.

⁷⁹ White House, 4.

⁸⁰ White House, *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* (Washington, DC, March 3, 2021), 23, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

Although each administration phrases the challenge differently, the past three presidents have acknowledged the need to develop a strategy to maintain a competitive position among great powers as nations like China and Russia grow and gain regional and global influence.

While the United States focused on terrorism from 2001 to 2015, China and Russia both experienced significant growth in the early twenty first century. The next sections will briefly review how China and Russia expanded and grew into great powers, including how those transformations led to each state's current policies toward Latin America and the Caribbean.

2. China

When the Soviet Union collapsed, China was attempting to build and expand its economy. Under Paramount Leader Jiang Zemin, China increased its FDI in other developing nations and continued the previously implemented policies that moved away from collectivism. Between 1992 and 2002, China's GDP increased from \$0.6 trillion to \$1.5 trillion.⁸¹ Hu Jintao took over after Zemin, and China's growth remained exponential as "managed political reforms"⁸² introduced aspects of capitalism and decentralization into the Chinese economy. As China's economy grew, it began expanding its investments in other developing countries, hoping to provide its own model for growth as an alternative to western democracy.

In 2004, China became a permanent observer member of the OAS in order to "actively promote its cooperation with the OAS so as to realize common development,"⁸³ according to Chinese Ambassador Yang Jiechi. Common development, according to China's model, included expanding economic and diplomatic relationships in Latin America. Developing military ties with other nations to create space for Chinese investment in military infrastructure played a role in consolidating these new economic and diplomatic ties. In 2008

⁸¹ Michael Glosny, "Chinese Domestic Politics (and Economics)" (presentation, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, Summer 2020).

⁸² Glosny. "Chinese Domestic Politics (and Economics)."

⁸³ "People's Republic of China Is Newest Permanent Observer to OAS," Organization of American States, May 26, 2004, https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=e-087/04.

China published its intended strategy to expand military ties with Latin America as a result of the deepening relationships.⁸⁴ Xi Jinping continued to encourage the expansion of China's global economic ties when he became the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012. A year later he published his strategy to reestablish a sinocentric trade network in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Although BRI does not include Latin America in its plan, BRI reflects China's global strategy, and Latin American resources are of significant interest to China.⁸⁵

Although Latin America is not an explicit part of the BRI, the region holds significant potential as a supplier of raw materials, a location to assemble manufactured goods, and a source of energy.⁸⁶ Chinese economic strategy depends on subregional assets, and its diplomatic strategy is influenced by its goal of isolating Taiwan and establishing influence in a geographic region near the United States.⁸⁷

3. Russia

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian president Boris Yeltsin ran for and won reelection in 1991. He attempted to decommunize the economy through shock therapy, but the reforms were ineffective and caused a collapse later that year. Yeltsin also attempted to decentralize the Russian government and allowed local governments to “take as much sovereignty as [they could] swallow.”⁸⁸ Chechnya, a province on the border of Georgia declared independence in 1991. In 1994, Yeltsin directed the Russian army to invade Chechnya, but the army was beaten by guerrilla forces in 1996. Many Russians held Yeltsin responsible for the army's defeat and blamed him for the death of over 100,000 Russians in

⁸⁴ R. Evan Ellis, “China-Latin America Military Engagement: Good Will, Good Business, and Strategic Position” (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, August 2011), 8.

⁸⁵ David Dollar, “Seven Years into China's Belt and Road,” *Order from Chaos* (blog), October 1, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/10/01/seven-years-into-chinas-belt-and-road/>.

⁸⁶ R. Evan Ellis, *China in Latin America: The Whats and Wherefores* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 107, 165.

⁸⁷ Ellis, *China in Latin America*, 9.

⁸⁸ Anne Clunan, “Russia's Rebirth: From Imperial Collapse to Crisis to Stability and Resurgency” (presentation, Great Power Competition: Current Policy and Strategy, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, Summer 2020).

Chechnya.⁸⁹ The final blow to Yeltsin's administration was a second economic collapse due to an Asian market failure in 1998. In 1999, Yeltsin stepped down and named Vladimir Putin, an unknown political figure at the time, as his replacement.

After winning election in 2000, Putin's three stated goals were to recentralize political control, rebuild Russia's economy, and restore national pride in Russia.⁹⁰ In terms of recentralizing political authority in Moscow, Putin was able to capitalize on terrorist activity in Chechnya and multiple revolutions in various former-Soviet states between 2003 and 2009. He considered most of the revolutions to be western sponsored efforts to undermine pro-Russian and communist governments, and he responded to these events by retaking control of various institutions. Economically, Putin's government benefitted from high oil prices between 2000–2019 and an economic boom before the global financial crisis in 2008. Putin was also successful in merging czarist and Soviet Russian culture to help rebuild Russian citizens' self-perception, eventually reminding the international community of Russia's resurgence by hosting major events like the Olympics in 2014 and the World Cup in 2018.⁹¹ Russia's position as a military power and potential threat was solidified when Russia invaded Georgia in 2008 and annexed Crimea in 2014 in response to NATO signaling that both Georgia and Ukraine were candidates for joining the organization.⁹²

Russia's resurgence as a great power is due largely to its increased economic prosperity and international activity in opposition to the United States. Russia backed the Syrian leader Assad's regime in 2011 because it determined the rebels were backed by western powers, indicating Russia's intention to "stand up to what it sees as western democracy promotion as a subversion of sovereignty abroad."⁹³ While Russia's primary focus in international relations is in Asia and Eastern Europe, Russian foreign policy has

⁸⁹ Clunan, "Russia's Rebirth."

⁹⁰ Clunan.

⁹¹ Marlène Laruelle, and Jean Radvanyi, "Society: Fragmented but Reinvented," in *Understanding Russia: The Challenges of Transformation* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), 42.

⁹² Anne L. Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*, ed. Roger E. Kanet, 1st ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 10, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351181242-2>.

⁹³ Clunan, "Russia's Rebirth."

been invested in Latin America since the early years of the Federation, becoming a permanent observer of the OAS in 1992.

Current Russian policy currently divides Latin America into three subcategories: former Soviet allies, nations willing to work with Russia to undermine U.S. influence, and neutral states of commercial interest to Russia.⁹⁴ The Russian military is also interested in building relationship with Latin American nations in order to expand military ties and industrial military complex and pressure the United States in its own geographic region.

D. CONCLUSION

Latin America has historically been a competing ground for great powers, beginning with the establishment of colonies. Great power policy toward Latin American nations has historically been concerned with how these powers could benefit from the myriad resources in the region. The view of Latin America as a pawn between powers is evident in the way the United States and the Soviet Union approached diplomacy in Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica. A regional reluctance to firmly ally with either side is evidenced by the multitude of states in Latin America that joined NAM. The pressure many nations felt from the United States and USSR plays a role in current tensions and some states' hesitation to unilaterally side with the United States (or other great powers), fearing an incursion on the national right to self-determination.

The recent shifts in language in U.S. foreign policy to discuss shared responsibility and build partner capacity reflect at least a philosophical recognition of the importance of viewing other nations as partners rather than pawns in the international community. Military organizations like SOUTHCOM now have as a stated mission to work with other nations in such a way that establishes the United States as a partner of choice in the region. Becoming the partner of choice of any nation requires great powers to consider the priorities of that nation and consider how their priorities overlap. The following chapter will conduct a case study of Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica to determine their national priorities and where (or if) U.S. security goals overlap with them.

⁹⁴ R. Evan Ellis, "The New Russian Engagement with Latin America: Strategic Position, Commerce, and Dreams of the Past" (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2015), 10.

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III. UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND GREAT POWER COMPETITION

The previous chapter provided an historical understanding of the Colombian, Mexican, and Jamaican relationship to great powers and GPC. This chapter identifies their national security priorities. Because I am limited by language, I used official statements, news articles, academic articles, and data analysis reports to determine what the top two or three national priorities are for each case study. Typically, this aligns with the policy priorities of the elected head of state, but where popular priorities are noticeably different, I address those.

Following the discussion of each state's priorities, I review U.S. policy for and SOUTHCOM operations with that nation in order to determine if the mission being conducted supports the United States' objective of becoming the partner of choice in the Western Hemisphere in support of our overarching national security strategy. Becoming a nation's partner of choice does not necessarily prevent diplomatic or economic relationship with U.S. competitors, but it solidifies the United States' soft power and influence, which must be maintained in order for the United States to meet its goals for GPC.

A. COLOMBIA

Colombia is an important regional ally to the United States. Colombia generally aligned itself with the United States during the Cold War, and the United States is one of Colombia's primary foreign investors, evidenced by the development of Plan Colombia in 2000. While U.S. perception of Colombia is stereotypically limited to its production of drugs, Colombia security priorities are more diverse. Colombia's security priorities are implementing and maintaining the FARC peace deal, stopping anti-government protests, and navigating its tense relationship with Venezuela. Following a review of these priorities, I will examine Colombia's relationship with current great powers.

1. Internal Peace – The FARC Peace Deal

Colombia is considered one of the region's most firmly established democracies, even though the nation spent the greater part of six decades in a civil war between the

official government and FARC. At the height of its influence in 2002, FARC controlled almost 16 percent of the nation's territory in regions where the official government had minimal or no presence.⁹⁵ In 2016 after four years of negotiations, an historic peace deal was reached between the government and FARC. The Colombian people voted to ratify the deal in October 2016 by slim margin after it was previously rejected by a similarly thin margin.⁹⁶ Iván Duque was elected in 2018, and his party ran the campaign encouraging Colombians to reject the peace deal. One of his election platforms was to modify the peace deal, and the modifications he promised his voters added uncertainty to the transition process.

Two of the compromises Duque's government have been most reluctant to implement are allowing former FARC members a role in government and the cessation of aerial fumigation of coca fields. In the case of FARC's political participation, the International Crisis Group determined in 2018 that this was the most unpopular compromise, and that it failed to generate any significant public support.⁹⁷ However, the negotiators agreed on this compromise, requiring some reparations and minimal sentencing for FARC leaders who would enter government. Colombian courts have been slow in implementing the transitional justice measures for FARC, so its inclusion in government continues to be a subject of debate. By contrast, the Duque administration quickly resumed aerial fumigation since coming to office.

Although the president objected to stopping the aerial fumigation of coca crops, this tenant of the peace deal generated wide public support. Aerial fumigation was effective at eradicating coca plants but destroyed legal crops in the process. Human rights activists were also concerned with health side effects of pesticides. Stopping fumigation, combined with proposed land reforms and investment in rural infrastructure, was part of the plan to

⁹⁵ June S. Beittel, *Colombia's Peace Process Through 2016*, CRS Report No. R42982 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016), 4–5, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/details?prodcode=R42982>.

⁹⁶ International Crisis Group, *Risky Business: The Duque Government's Approach to Peace in Colombia*, Latin America Report No. 67 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2018), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/67-risky-business-duque-governments-approach-peace-colombia>.

⁹⁷ International Crisis Group, *Risky Business*.

address the socio-economic heart of coca cultivation. Poor or non-existent rural infrastructure makes it hard for peasant farmers to participate in the legal economy because farming and transportation costs are inhibitive. Coca cultivation and processing is cheap and easy. After the peace deal was signed, the government implemented a crop substitution program, subsidizing farmers who voluntarily gave up coca cultivation and guaranteeing them land rights after five years.⁹⁸ However, Duque, already in favor of the fumigation method, found himself under some pressure from the United States. Colombia was at risk of decertification for what the Trump administration considered “inadequate cooperation on counternarcotics,”⁹⁹ so Duque resumed fumigation rather than risk U.S. funding being cut.

With the ratification of the peace deal and the end of a 60-year civil war, issues that were previously of secondary focus gained new importance.¹⁰⁰ While maintaining peace and preventing former FARC members regrouping remains important, the Colombian people have shifted their focus from wanting peace to wanting socio-economic reform. The ongoing Colombian protests, discussed in the following section, are a result of the change in popular priorities.

2. Anti-Government Protests

A second national priority for Colombia concerns the causes of the mass protests that first broke out in November 2019. Protestors demanded the Duque government address problems in education, welfare, and healthcare.¹⁰¹ Socio-economic problems like inequality, education, infrastructure, humanitarian causes are now more central issues. The outbreak of COVID-19 further highlighted these social problems because of the shortage of supplies like oxygen and protective gear. Colombia also tasked nearly 60,000 police and

⁹⁸ Vox, “Why Colombia Is Losing the Cocaine War.”

⁹⁹ Sebastian Bitar and Tom Long, “Domestic Politics and U.S.-Colombia Relations,” *AULA Blog* (blog), July 31, 2019, <https://aulablog.net/2019/07/31/domestic-politics-and-u-s-colombia-relations/>.

¹⁰⁰ Jen Kirby, “Colombia’s Protests Are a Product of Its Post-Peace-Deal Reality,” *Vox* (blog), June 12, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/22518904/colombia-protests-cali-duque-police-brutality>.

¹⁰¹ Sergio Guzmán and Cameron Wilson, “Five Challenges Facing Iván Duque at His Presidency’s Halfway Point,” *Americas Quarterly* (blog), August 3, 2020, <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/five-challenges-facing-ivan-duque-at-his-presidencys-halfway-point/>.

soldiers with enforcing lockdown in March 2020.¹⁰² Protests stopped during the height of the pandemic, but the frustrations that led to them were intensified by economic struggles, especially in isolated areas.¹⁰³

Protests broke out again in April 2021 after the Duque administration proposed a tax reform to lower the taxable income threshold.¹⁰⁴ Facing significant pressure, the government rescinded the proposal, but protests continued. Some protests became violent, and law enforcement and security forces were mobilized to control them, but some of those encounters were deadly. By early June, over 50 protestors were killed in encounters with police.¹⁰⁵ Organizations like Inter-American Commission on Human Rights are increasingly critical of the Colombian government for failing to prevent unnecessary use of force.¹⁰⁶ Police violence joined taxation and inequality as causes of the ongoing protests.

Colombia will elect a new president in 2022. The ongoing internal unrest will likely force the next administration to reckon more with domestic issues, which are impacted by another of Colombia's national priorities: Venezuela.

3. Relations with Venezuela

Colombia shares a border with Venezuela, and Venezuela's crumbling socio-political environment concerns Colombian leaders because millions of Venezuelans are fleeing to Colombia. While the Colombian people in border cities have been sympathetic to migrants and refugees, the mass movement of people into Colombia presents its

¹⁰² Paul J. Angelo, "The Pandemic Could Bring Power to Latin America's Criminal Gangs," *Foreign Affairs*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/americas/2020-04-21/pandemic-could-bring-power-latin-americas-criminal-gangs>.

¹⁰³ Angelo, "The Pandemic Could Bring Power to Latin America's Criminal Gangs."

¹⁰⁴ "Colombia Protests: UN Calls for Investigation into Cali Deaths," *BBC News*, May 30, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57300639>.

¹⁰⁵ Manuel Rueda, "Human Rights Ombudsman Says 58 Killed in Colombia Protests," *AP NEWS*, June 7, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/latin-america-colombia-health-coronavirus-pandemic-019009da2e4051556a3b6968bce96b70>.

¹⁰⁶ "IACHR Completes Working Visit to Colombia and Issues Observations and Recommendations," Organization of American States, July 7, 2021, http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/preleases/2021/167.asp.

challenges. President Duque is anti-Maduro, and he and his party recognize Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's president. Duque's voice is one of the loudest in condemning Maduro, and frequently reminds people that the international community agrees with him. In an interview with the Council on Foreign Relations in 2020, Duque pointed out that 50 nations and OAS recognize Guaidó as the legitimate head of government.¹⁰⁷

Beyond simple political disagreement with Maduro, the chaos in Venezuela affects Colombia primarily through mass migration out of the country—almost 40 percent of the 4.5 million people who left the country are going to Colombia.¹⁰⁸ Duque demonstrated his interest in assisting Venezuelans and announce in February 2021 that Venezuelan migrants and refugees would be given temporary protection status.¹⁰⁹ The protection status will last for 10 years, and all Venezuelans currently in the country became eligible for some healthcare and COVID-19 vaccines. The government's choice to support migrants and refugees is considered by some a humanitarian necessity. Others, however, categorize this policy as a diversion of resources, placing additional stress on the current state of unrest.

4. Colombia and the United States

The United States considers Colombia a critical partner in the region, and similarly, Colombia relies on U.S. investment, especially in its security sector. According to the Congressional Research Service, the Departments of State and Defense allocated over \$10 billion in aid with congressional approval between fiscal years 2000–2016.¹¹⁰ Colombia and the United States frequently conduct training exchanges, and both nations regularly

¹⁰⁷ Iván Duque, interview by Roberta S. Jacobson, *A Conversation with Iván Duque of Colombia*, Council on Foreign Relations, July 15, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-president-ivan-duque-colombia-0>

¹⁰⁸ Camila Hernandez, "Colombia Is Pioneering a New Model for Integrating Migrants and Refugees. Will It Work?," *Atlantic Council* (blog), February 19, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/colombia-is-pioneering-a-new-model-for-integrating-migrants-and-refugees-will-it-work/>; and Iván Duque, interview by Roberta S. Jacobson, *A Conversation with Iván Duque of Colombia*, Council on Foreign Relations, July 15, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-president-ivan-duque-colombia-0>; and Vox, "Why Colombia Has Taken in 1 Million Venezuelans."

¹⁰⁹ Hernandez, "Colombia Is Pioneering a New Model for Integrating Migrants and Refugees. Will It Work?"

¹¹⁰ Beittel, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, 26. This number includes funding for Plan Colombia.

participate in annual regional security exercises like UNITAS (maritime exercise), Fuerzas Comando (special operations skills competition), and Tradewinds (natural disaster response). According to R. Evan Ellis, the close ties between Colombia and the United States make Colombia avoid purchasing military and law enforcement equipment from U.S. competitors like China and Russia. However, Colombia accepts anywhere from \$1 million to \$7 million of equipment donations from China every year.¹¹¹ It is unlikely that Colombia will jeopardize its relationship with the United States by forming closer military ties with China. However, Colombia is forming stronger economic ties with China with the goal of diversifying its investors.

Colombia's political and macroeconomic stability make it an appealing investment and trade partner for other nations, and China is taking advantage of the opportunity. President Duque also made a point of visiting China within the first year of his administration.¹¹² Increased FDI is a good thing for the Colombian economy, but China is facing criticism for poor business practices relating to working conditions.¹¹³ By comparison, businesses receiving U.S. investments undergo annual review to prevent human rights violations. While this is a good business practice, the price of integrity is the limitation of investment opportunities outside security.¹¹⁴ While China invests in infrastructure, the majority of U.S. investment is still in security.

President Duque has one more year in office, but it is unlikely that the national priorities will change when the administration does. However, social infrastructure seems to be a more serious concern to Colombia. The United States should consider shifting some of its investments from hard security through military training to supporting investments

¹¹¹ R. Evan Ellis, *Chinese Security Engagement in Latin America* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinese-security-engagement-latin-america>.

¹¹² Steven Grattan, "China's Strong Push into Colombia," *Al Jazeera*, February 22, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/2/22/chinas-strong-push-into-colombia>.

¹¹³ Grattan; "China's Strong Push into Colombia;" and Beittel, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, 33.

¹¹⁴ Beittel, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, 31; and Michael Stott, "'Foreign Investment in Colombia Holds Firm,' Says Trade Minister," *Financial Times*, October 7, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/9fa69fba-a4a2-48bc-a928-ef5c1793fe9b>.

in rural infrastructure. This kind of investment would more effectively address the issues that directly lead to coca growth and cultivation. U.S. investment in hard security has been beneficial in developing close ties with the Colombian military, but in the middle of high domestic tensions and accusations of human rights abuses at the hands of security and law enforcement, continued investment primarily in hard security does not necessarily assist the United States in supporting one of its most significant partners in Latin America.

B. MEXICO

As neighbors, Mexico and the United States are also closely connected on economic issues in addition to security ones. Geographic proximity and shared interests, however, have not necessarily facilitated an easy economic or security relationship between Mexico and the United States, due in part to shared history and in part to personality conflicts of leaders. Much of the United States tends to view its relationship with Mexico in terms of immigration and drug trafficking. This paper does not discuss immigration, but one reason there is a focus on drug trafficking is that the U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported 84% of the drugs apprehended entering the United States between 2018 and June 2021 entered through Mexico.¹¹⁵ For Mexico, the border represents many things, but the drugs and migrants flowing out of Mexico are less important than the violence caused by drug cartels. In order for the United States to effectively maintain and improve its security and economic relationship with Mexico, policy makers need to understand Mexican national priorities.

Mexican national priorities are closely tied to the current President of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). He was elected in December 2018, and he built both his party and platform around the idea of bringing Mexico through a national transformation, establishing Mexico's energy independence, and addressing cartel violence.¹¹⁶ This section examines AMLO's vision for the Fourth Transformation, his

¹¹⁵ "Drug Seizure Statistics," U.S. Customs and Border Protection, accessed July 1, 2021, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>.

¹¹⁶ Roberta S. Jacobson et al., interview by Charles T. Call, *AMLO's First Year: Mexico's Political, Economic, and Security Trends*, Brookings, December 13, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/events/amlos-first-year-mexicos-political-economic-and-security-trends/>.

energy policy, and his stated objectives for reducing violence in Mexico. After reviewing Mexican national priorities, this section reviews where Mexican and U.S. leaders have identified compatible security priorities and evaluate if SOUTHCOM's counternarcotics missions support those objectives and the greater goals of U.S. national security.

1. Fourth Transformation

AMLO's vision for Mexico is summed up by what he called the Fourth Transformation. By numbering it the "fourth," AMLO couched his campaign and administration within previous periods of reform in Mexican history: independence from Spain, the Reform period, and the Mexican Revolution.¹¹⁷ This fourth period is intended to peacefully bring to fruition the changes the revolution attempted, but never realized: peace, equality, and prosperity. AMLO founded his current party, Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena – National Regeneration Movement), out of frustration with cronyism in AMLO's former party, the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). His campaign targeted independent voters and ran on a platform of anti-corruption, promises to address inequality and economic growth, and emphasis on strengthening local rule of law.¹¹⁸ In 2018 AMLO won the election against the incumbent party, and Morena won a majority the upper and lower houses of the Mexican Congress.

The Fourth Transformation was an effective campaign slogan, but since taking office, AMLO's meaning of the Fourth Transformation remains vague. No single policy summarizes the Fourth Transformation, but AMLO pushed several projects he was certain would both fight poverty, help the economy, and assert Mexican sovereignty: the Mayan Train, the Mexico City airport, and the Dos Bocas oil refinery. This section touches on the

¹¹⁷ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Andrés Manuel López Obrador and a New Era of Politics in Mexico," *Order from Chaos* (blog), July 3, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/07/03/andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-and-a-new-era-of-politics-in-mexico/>; and Ynggrid Fuentes, "AMLO Presidente: ¿Qué Es La 'Cuarta Transformación' Que Propone Andrés Manuel López Obrador Para México?," *BBC News Mundo*, November 26, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-45712329>; and Roberto Salinas-León, "AMLO and the 'Fourth Transformation' in Mexico," *Cato Policy Report*, Winter 2019, <https://www.cato.org/policy-report/november/december-2019/amlo-fourth-transformation-mexico>.

¹¹⁸ Felbab-Brown, "Andrés Manuel López Obrador and a New Era of Politics in Mexico."

Mayan Train and the Mexico City airport, and the next section discusses the Dos Bocas oil refinery.

The Mayan Train is a project designed to facilitate tourist access to communities and destinations on the Yucatán Peninsula and to connect these smaller communities to the larger economy. According to the *American University International Law Review*, the plans for the Mayan Train are likely going to result in the violation of indigenous people's rights for a failure to consult them under the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.¹¹⁹ Besides this, the train has low public support, the plans do not account for the potential environmental damage in a region with endangered species, the project will cost more than the projected \$6.5 billion, and multiple companies have suggested that AMLO's timeline for completion of the train is not enough time to do it safely.¹²⁰ Construction began in 2018, and AMLO insists that the rail will be complete before his term expires.

Multiple presidents attempted to begin construction on a newer, larger international airport in Mexico City since the current Benito Juárez International Airport is the busiest airport in Latin America. Construction of a single larger airport began in Texcoco in 2014 under AMLO's predecessor, but AMLO halted construction of the airport in 2018 in favor of expanding the military airfield in Santa Lucía. Although the Texcoco field was roughly 30 percent complete, AMLO calculated that halting construction at Texcoco and expanding the Santa Lucía airbase in the name of fiscal austerity. Redirecting construction efforts would cost less than \$5 billion and save billions. His plan was to expand an existing airfield that would work in conjunction with two other airports in the Mexico City area.¹²¹ An

¹¹⁹ Jared Green, "Going Off the Rails on the Mayan Train: How AMLO's Development Project Is on a Fast Track to Multiple Violations of Indigenous Rights," *American University International Law Review* 36, no. 4 (2021): 848.

¹²⁰ Green, 849; and "Shades of Line 12: Maya Train Timelines Not Realistic, Say Private Firms," *Mexico News Daily*, June 28, 2021, sec. News, <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/shades-of-line-12-maya-train-timelines-not-realistic-say-private-firms/>; and Sally Jensen, "Mexico's Mayan Train Suspension Divides Indigenous Community," *Al Jazeera*, April 21, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/21/tren-maya-suspension-fuels-indigenous-community-rift>.

¹²¹ Kendrick Foster, "Building (and Canceling) an Airport for Mexico City," *Harvard Political Review* (blog), April 12, 2021, <https://harvardpolitics.com/mexico-city-airports/>; Anthony Esposito, "Mexican President's Airport Project Pushes Full Steam Ahead Despite Coronavirus," *Reuters*, Jun 15, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-airport-idUSKBN23M2VC>.

independent audit, however, recently determined that halting construction at Texcoco will cost Mexico over \$16 billion.¹²² The principal auditor agreed to reaudit the cost of the halt after AMLO insisted that \$16 billion was an exaggeration. Construction continues at Santa Lucía and, like the Mayan Train, AMLO is determined that construction will be done before he leaves office.

Besides starting the infrastructure projects of the Fourth Transformation, AMLO tried early on to fulfill his campaign promises to show he was addressing political corruption and cronyism, as well as income inequalities. He disbanded the 8,000-member guard unit tasked with presidential security to reduce spending and show he was approachable. He also put the presidential jet up for sale, promising to fly commercial when he travels internationally for the same reasons. However, AMLO made fewer international visits in the first two and half years of his tenure than both of the previous presidents made in their first six months in office.¹²³ In fact, his first international visit was in July 2020 to the United States to meet with former President Trump concerning the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). AMLO's decision to sell the plane (although no one has purchased it) was gesture to demonstrate his commitment to break away from previous administrations' excesses, but it also reflects his idea that good foreign policy is good domestic policy. The Fourth Transformation's focus is entirely domestic, centered on the development of infrastructure with the goal of fighting poverty. AMLO's intentions and ideas, have not had the desired results.

¹²² Daniel Martinez Garbuno, "Scrapping Mexico City's New Airport Is Costing Over \$16 Billion," Simple Flying, last modified February 23, 2021, <https://simpleflying.com/scrapping-mexico-citys-new-airport-cost/>.

¹²³ Carin Zissis, "Six Things to Know about Mexican President AMLO's Trip to Washington," AS/COA, last modified July 7, 2020, <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/six-things-know-about-mexican-president-amlos-trip-washington>.

Since AMLO took office, the Mexican economy has shrunk, and violence has increased.¹²⁴ During Mexico's midterm elections in June 2021, Morena lost control of the lower congress, its two-thirds majority, and the mayoral race in Mexico City.¹²⁵ Halfway through his term, AMLO's Fourth Transformation has produced no clearly positive results. In spite of AMLO's lack of tangible progress and loss of congressional control, former Ambassador to Mexico Earl Anthony Wayne anticipates that AMLO's final three years as president will likely be similar to the first three.¹²⁶ AMLO will continue to emphasize his vague and poorly defined Fourth Transformation policy and only partially completing the projects he started.

2. Energy

Energy security—specifically energy independence—is one of AMLO's primary focuses. Contributors at Brookings Institute assessed after AMLO's first year in office that he wants his efforts to bolster Mexican oil to be the hallmark of his presidency.¹²⁷ First, AMLO renationalized Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex), the state-owned company that controls oil production. Pemex has been a symbol of Mexican nationalism since the 1930s, but the previous administration opened the company to private investors because oil production was on the decline. This decision brought in much needed capital and increased Pemex's productivity. According to Samantha Gross, a fellow and director of the Energy Security and Climate Initiative, the introduction of competition lowered energy costs for Mexicans, enabled efficient replacement of aging oil and power infrastructure, and

¹²⁴ Ashley Ahrens-Viquez, "Mexico's 2021 Elections Rocked by Political Violence," Justice in Mexico (blog), June 29, 2021, <https://justiceinmexico.org/category/crime-and-violence/>; and Mark Stevenson and María Verza, "Mexico President Appears to Hold Key Majority in Elections," AP NEWS, June 7, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/mexico-health-coronavirus-pandemic-elections-55eb6674995d73bdf675f922ab78e5ee>; and Earl Anthony Wayne, "Mexico's AMLO Presses for Victory and Country's 'Fourth Transformation,'" The Hill, June 2, 2021, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/555943-mexicos-amlo-presses-for-victory-and-countrys-fourth-transformation>.

¹²⁵ Tony Payan, "Mexico's Midterm Elections: Winners and Losers and Their Impact on U.S.-Mexico Relations," *Baker Institute Blog* (blog), June 7, 2021, <http://blog.bakerinstitute.org/2021/06/07/mexicos-midterm-elections-winners-and-losers-and-their-impact-on-u-s-mexico-relations/>.

¹²⁶ Wayne, "Mexico's AMLO Presses for Victory and Country's 'Fourth Transformation.'"

¹²⁷ Jacobson et al., *AMLO's First Year*.

contributed to the Mexican economy.¹²⁸ Motivated by an interest in insulating Mexico from the volatility of the international energy market, AMLO returned Pemex to a state-run structure.

In addition to renationalizing Pemex, AMLO ordered construction of the Dos Bocas oil refinery. The Dos Bocas refinery, located in AMLO's home state Tabasco, was funded by the Bank of China and is projected to begin refining in 2022.¹²⁹ Mexico has several other refineries, all of which are scheduled to be upgraded by the end of AMLO's term. As infrastructure projects, these play a role in AMLO's Fourth Transformation, but the upgrades, construction, and acquisition of the majority share of Deer Park refinery in Houston, Texas, in 2021 are all part of AMLO's drive toward Mexican energy independence and an affirmation of Mexican sovereignty.

While AMLO orients Mexican energy around oil, he does so at the expense of developing renewables. When Pemex was renationalized, AMLO suspended open auctions that allowed for new capital investment, even from domestic actors, to support research and development in alternate and renewable energy. Gross expressed disappointment because of Mexico's potential renewable energy development and because AMLO's movement away from renewables will cost Mexicans and place them at a disadvantage while alternate technology develops elsewhere.¹³⁰ Besides the lost opportunities in research and development of renewables, the international community's increasing interest in reducing carbon emissions has caused AMLO's policies to come under some scrutiny.

AMLO's position on energy as a matter of national sovereignty was recently reflected in his expressed resentment of the international community, especially the United

¹²⁸ Jacobson et al., *AMLO's First Year*.

¹²⁹ "The Dos Bocas Refinery Project, Paraíso, Tabasco, Mexico," NS Energy, accessed September 8, 2021, <https://www.nsenergybusiness.com/projects/dos-bocas-refinery-project/>; and "Mexico's Plans to Upgrade Existing New Oil Refineries and Build a New Facility," Oxford Business Group, October 18, 2019, <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/analysis/capacity-boost-government-plans-upgrade-country%E2%80%99s-six-refineries-and-construct-new-facility>.

¹³⁰ Pamela K. Starr, "What AMLO Really Thinks About Biden," *Foreign Policy* (blog), February 2, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/02/what-amlo-really-thinks-about-biden/>; and Jacobson et al., *AMLO's First Year*.

States, trying to pressure Mexican energy policy. Before a meeting between the Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard, Economy Minister Tatiana Clouthier, and U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, AMLO stated that Mexican energy was an issue of sovereignty and that United States should not try to get involved.¹³¹ The Biden administration is reemphasizing a commitment to renewable energy and combatting climate change and hopes to influence partners to do the same.

3. Violence

One of AMLO's other stated goals upon election was to reduce violent crimes, specifically shrinking the homicide rate from 20 to four per 100,000 deaths by 2021.¹³² A year after taking office, however, the homicide rate increased by nearly three percent, and almost 1000 more people were killed in 2019 than in 2018.¹³³ Similarly, according to research done by Justice in Mexico, the recent midterm elections were exceptionally violent: "the 2020–2021 campaign cycle saw the second-highest number of politically-linked homicides ever, with this latest election only falling behind the 2018 electoral process in which 152 politically-active individuals were murdered. The total number of 910 acts of political violence, however, represented a 17.5% increase over the 774 incidents recorded in the 2018 election."¹³⁴

In spite of the increase in violence, AMLO continues to have a policy of "hugs, not bullets" and is reluctant to meet violence with force. AMLO is an advocate for addressing the economic and social pressures that make young people more likely to join cartel and criminal organizations. He implemented several education and employment programs for

¹³¹ Daina Beth Solomon and Humeyra Pamuk, "Ahead of Blinken Meeting, Mexico President Says Energy Policy Is a Sovereign Matter," *Reuters*, February 26, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/ahead-blinken-meeting-mexico-president-says-energy-policy-is-sovereign-matter-2021-02-26/>.

¹³² Jacobson et al., *AMLO's First Year*.

¹³³ "Mexico Murder Rate Hits Record High in 2019," *Al Jazeera*, January 21, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/1/21/mexico-murder-rate-hits-record-high-in-2019>; and "Mexico Homicide Rate Edges up in 2019; Rate of Rise Slows," *AP News*, January 21, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/86acd349ffd6713f9d485ce9ab169a06>.

¹³⁴ Ahrens-Viquez, "Mexico's 2021 Elections Rocked by Political Violence" Etellekt is the risk analysis agency based in Mexico City which compiled this data.

youth between 18–29 who are out of school and unemployed.¹³⁵ The emphasis on socioeconomic factors rather than hard security strategies is not a new approach, but AMLO found it was insufficient. AMLO initially rejected the use of the kingpin strategy to counter cartel violence, targeting leaders or high value members. However, after unsuccessful attempts to reform the police system, AMLO reverted to a kingpin strategy.¹³⁶ He authorized the establishment of a civilian-controlled National Guard which he intended to use against cartels, but much of the force was deployed to the Guatemala border in order to help control migrant traffic.¹³⁷ Like his energy strategy, AMLO's security strategy is unlikely to change during his last three years in office. While AMLO reluctantly allows the use of force against violence, Mexican citizens are killed by gangs or caught in the crossfires of fighting cartels.

4. Mexico and the United States

Mexican and U.S. leaders meet frequently to determine combined strategies on mutual issues. On June 8, 2021, AMLO met with President Biden to discuss the bilateral relationship between Mexico and the United States. Out of that meeting, the two presidents established seven mutual priorities. First, the presidents agreed to hold a High-Level Economic Dialogue in September 2021 to discuss the U.S.-Mexico trade relationship and infrastructure to support cooperation and collaboration. Mexico's largest trade partner is the United States, while Mexico is second to Canada for the United States. Second, both leaders agreed to have a cabinet-level discussion about security and countering transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) that disregard national borders. According to the statement released by the White House following their meeting, "the United States and Mexico are committed to working together to reduce homicides and drug-related deaths on

¹³⁵ David Shirk, "AMLO, Violent Crime, and Public Security in Mexico," *Mexico Institute* (blog), November 30, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/amlo-violent-crime-and-public-security-mexico>.

¹³⁶ Shirk, "AMLO, Violent Crime, and Public Security in Mexico"; and Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Crime and Anti-Crime Security Policy in Mexico in 2020," *Order from Chaos* (blog), January 4, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/01/04/crime-and-anti-crime-security-policy-in-mexico-in-2020/>.

¹³⁷ Jihan Abdalla, "Mexico 'More Violent' and 'Worse' Two Years After AMLO Election," *Al Jazeera*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/7/1/mexico-more-violent-and-worse-two-years-after-amlo-election>.

both sides of the border and counter the illicit forces that drive them.”¹³⁸ Third, the United States agreed to increase its investment in technical assistance as Mexico implements new labor legislation. Fourth, both nations agreed to collaborate on addressing the root causes of migration from Central America. Fifth, Mexican and U.S. law enforcement agencies will continue to cooperate in countering human trafficking and combatting human rights abuses by smuggling rings. Central to this is the promise of continued information sharing. Sixth, in support of strengthening Mexico’s southern border, the U.S. government developed grants and loans to incentivize growth in the southern states of Mexico with the intent of addressing income inequality. The focus of these financial investments is to support housing efforts and strengthening eco-tourism and the cacao and coffee industries. Finally, in addition to cooperating on CN and human trafficking, the United States promised to support Mexico’s effort to investigate the significant number of missing persons and disappearances that have resulted from cartel violence.¹³⁹ Former U.S. Ambassador Wayne described the nature of mutual priorities between Mexico and the United States as an indication that the relationship between the nations has become “intermestic.”¹⁴⁰ In other words, the mutual interests between Mexico and the United States cannot be categorized as only international or domestic policy, but as something in between.

Although the U.S. military groups Mexico in U.S. Northern Command’s (NORTHCOM) AOR, another indication of its unique position in U.S. policy, the Mexican military often conducts joint exercises with SOUTHCOM like Tradewinds and UNITAS. While Mexico represents a unique portion of U.S. foreign policy, the United States remains

¹³⁸ “U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Cooperation,” White House, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/08/fact-sheet-u-s-mexico-bilateral-cooperation-2/>.

¹³⁹ Joseph Biden and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, “U.S.-Mexico Joint Declaration” (official memorandum, Washington, DC: White House, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/01/u-s-mexico-joint-declaration/>.

¹⁴⁰ Arturo Sarukhan, *A Reset in U.S.-Mexico Relations Also Requires Re-Engagement on Global and Regional Issues* (Washington, DC: Mexico Institute at Wilson Center, 2021), 1, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/A%20Reset%20in%20U.S.-Mexico%20Relations%20Also%20Requires%20Re-Engagement%20on%20Global%20and%20Regional%20Issues.pdf>.

Mexico's most important partner in the international community.¹⁴¹ It is unlikely that other great powers will replace the United States as Mexico's primary partner, but according to NORTHCOM Commander, General VanHerck, China's presence in Mexico is continually increasing in the economic sector and spilling over into the security sector.¹⁴² Arturo Sarukhan, formerly the Ambassador to the United States from Mexico, wrote about his concerns with China's increasing competitiveness and recommended an emphasis on multilateral trade agreements like the USMCA and possibly re-engaging with the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) to "provide the template for a much more realistic discussion of how Mexico, with the United States and Canada, needs to think of strategic relationships and economic competitiveness vis-à-vis China."¹⁴³ Counterdrug and law enforcement operations are the primary ways the Mexican and U.S. militaries cooperate, and while the discussion of the efficacy of those operations is a separate topic, the scope of U.S. military operations with Mexico is appropriate for the stated priorities of the Mexican government.

C. JAMAICA

Jamaica is positioned at the crossroads of maritime traffic, and Jamaica's economy is primarily built on services: tourism and finance.¹⁴⁴ Because of the national reliance on these services, Jamaica has been struggling through the impact of COVID-19. Strengthening and developing the Jamaican economy has been Prime Minister Andrew Holness' main priority since his election in 2016, and the challenges of COVID-19 have increased his determination to achieve economic success. In addition to the economy, both Holness and the opposition party are interested in developing Jamaican security strategy

¹⁴¹ Jesús Velasco, *The Future of U.S.-Mexico Relations: A Tale of Two Crises* (Houston: James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, 2018), <https://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/102785>.

¹⁴² *Statement of General Glen VanHerck, Commander of North American Aerospace Defense Command and United States Northern Command, before the House Armed Services Committee*, 117th Cong. (2021) (statement of Glen VanHerck, Commander NORAD and U.S. NORTHCOM).

¹⁴³ Sarukhan, *A Reset in U.S.-Mexico Relations Also Requires Re-Engagement on Global and Regional Issues*, 4–5.

¹⁴⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Jamaica," accessed July 3, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Jamaica>.

with respect to drug trafficking and disturbing levels of violence. This section will provide an overview of two of Jamaica's national priorities, economic growth and reducing violence, followed by a discussion of Jamaica's relationship with great powers.

1. Economic Development

The Jamaican economy only recently began recovering from failed socialist policies in the 1970s.¹⁴⁵ After decades of being unable to diminish national debt through International Monetary Fund (IMF) programs, Jamaica succeeded in 2013 in conducting economic reforms that enabled the government to buy public debt.¹⁴⁶ According to economist Robert Looney, the government's purchase of debt, while risky because it diverted funds from public spending, proved to potential investors that Jamaica was committed to creating a stable macroeconomic environment.¹⁴⁷ Although Holness was not the head of government when the agreement was made with IMF, he continued with the IMF's program to Jamaica's success.

Holness was—and remains—committed to economic development. In a 2019 address to the UN General Assembly on the topic of multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, education, climate action, and inclusion, his opening remarks included that his plan to support these goals was by pursuing policy that would lead to a more robust economy. He said, “Our major goals are the promotion of inclusive sustainable growth, economic opportunities, peaceful society, social harmony and citizen security.”¹⁴⁸ Holness reaffirmed his commitment to economic development a year later during his swearing-in speech after the 2020 elections in which his party won reelection. He made 10 promises to

¹⁴⁵ Robert Looney, “Is Jamaica Poised for a Turn-Around?,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), February 12, 2014, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/02/12/is-jamaica-poised-for-a-turn-around/>.

¹⁴⁶ Looney, “Is Jamaica Poised for a Turn-Around?”; and Robert Looney, “Why IMF-Driven Economic Reforms Paid Off for Jamaica This Time,” *World Politics Review*, October 3, 2016, <https://cle.nps.edu/access/content/group/5baa78b7-3d60-4966-a183-998bd8f82bc8/World%20Politics%20Review/WPR-Jamaica.pdf>; and Axel van Trotsenburg, “Jamaica Has Made an ‘Extraordinary’ Economic Turnaround,” *World Bank*, May 16, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2019/05/16/jamaica-has-made-an-extraordinary-economic-turnaround>.

¹⁴⁷ Looney, “Why IMF-Driven Economic Reforms Paid Off for Jamaica This Time.”

¹⁴⁸ Andrew Holness, “Policy Statement by the Prime Minister of Jamaica, The Most Honourable Andrew Holness, ON, MP” (speech, New York, September 27, 2019), https://www.un.int/jamaica/sites/www.un.int/files/Jamaica/policy_statement_sept_27_final.pdf.

the country, six of which were overtly related to bolstering the economy.¹⁴⁹ In his communication to international partners, fellow leaders, and Jamaica, Holness is committed to economic growth as Jamaica's first priority.

2. Security

In Jamaica, the two main targets of security policies are drug trafficking and violence. Due in part to its geographic position, Jamaica is a transit point for many illicit drugs. According to Professor Bruce Bagley, “the ‘partial victories’ [in counter drug trafficking] in Colombia and in reinforcing the border with Mexico had unintended consequences for the Caribbean,”¹⁵⁰ meaning that nations like Jamaica became more important locations along smuggling routes. Jamaica is one of the largest sources of illegal marijuana in the United States and Canada, and data from apprehended cocaine shipments indicates that it is an important transit point between Colombia and the United States and Europe.¹⁵¹ In the 2019 address to the UN previously mentioned, Holness acknowledged that the drug trafficking and resulting crime problem in Jamaica was at a level that required international assistance.¹⁵² Jamaica receives international assistance from the United States through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) by training local law enforcement and assisting with equipment.¹⁵³ Regional cooperation through the CARICOM also plays a role in Jamaican security, which has been effective in deterring some illegal activity.

Jamaica manages its external security with partner assistance, but internally Jamaican law enforcement is less effective at deterring violence. The Caribbean is one of

¹⁴⁹ Andrew Holness, “The Most Hon Andrew Holness Swearing in Speech” (speech, Kingston, September 7, 2020), <https://opm.gov.jm/speech/the-most-hon-andrew-holness-swearing-in-speech-september-7-2020/>.

¹⁵⁰ Bagley and Rosen, *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today*, 295.

¹⁵¹ “Jamaica Remains Major Source of Illegal Drugs to U.S.,” *Jamaica Observer*, April 1, 2019, https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/latestnews/Jamaica_major_source_of_illegal_drugs_to_US.

¹⁵² Holness, “Policy Statement by the Prime Minister of Jamaica, The Most Honourable Andrew Holness, ON, MP.”

¹⁵³ Matthew R. Conners, “Caribbean and Eastern Pacific Maritime Security: Regional Cooperation in Bridge and Insular States” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2019), 70, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/58287>.

the most violent regions in the world, and Jamaica has the highest number of homicides in the region. As drug traffickers shifted their routes to transit through the region when the United States placed pressure on Colombia and Mexico to combat trafficking, island nations like Jamaica experienced an increase of gang-related violence. In addition to cocaine smuggling, some gangs began participating in weapons-for-marijuana smuggling with other Caribbean nations.¹⁵⁴ Jamaica's homicide rate in 2020 was the highest in Latin American and the Caribbean—46.5 homicides per 100,000 deaths, with the next country at 45.6.¹⁵⁵ Under Holness, the primary tactic to reduce violence has been to establish special zones of operations in especially rough areas. These zones were placed under emergency powers, and law enforcement personnel may detain people indefinitely. Over 100 people were murdered in Jamaica by February 2021, and Holness requested Parliament to continue to recognize the state of emergency. His long-term goal is to continue to build a prosperous economy that elbows out the profitability of illicit activity and continue programs that create community connections with the police force.

3. Jamaica and the United States

Jamaica relies heavily on foreign investment to remain competitive in the global economy. It has fewer resources available for diplomacy, and so considers foreign policy an extension of economic policy. Consequently, the center of Jamaica's foreign policy is economic growth. The end of the Cold resulted in less direct focus on Caribbean countries by the United States, who then chose to interact with the region as a smaller part of the Latin American community since there was no longer a Soviet threat to U.S. hegemony.¹⁵⁶ The imbalance of importance in the relationship between Jamaica and the United States is reflected by the fact that the United States remains Jamaica's primary trading partner, but the United States' primary involvement in Jamaica is through CBSI, rather than directly

¹⁵⁴ "Jamaica Remains Major Source of Illegal Drugs to U.S."

¹⁵⁵ "Latin America & the Caribbean: Homicide Rates 2020, by Country," Statista, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/947781/homicide-rates-latin-america-caribbean-country/>. Venezuela had the second highest homicide rate.

¹⁵⁶ Diana Thorburn and Dana Marie Morris, *Jamaica's Foreign Policy: Making the Economic Development Link* (Kingston: Caribbean Policy Research Institute, 2007), 26, <https://www.capricaribbean.org/documents/jamaicas-foreign-policy-making-economic-development-link>.

investing in Jamaica. Over \$670 million has been invested into CBSI in the past decade, and the bulk of the funding was split between development assistance, international narcotics control and law enforcement, and foreign military financing, with roughly 44% of the budget going toward narcotics control.¹⁵⁷ SOUTHCOM's CBSI Technical Assistance Field Team (TAFT) plays a practical role by supporting the material readiness of Caribbean maritime law enforcement. TAFT conducts and trains on maintenance, logistics, and upkeep of patrol boats. While CBSI has been the primary means of U.S. investment in Jamaica, in 2018 the Growth in the Americas Initiative was established to encourage investment in energy infrastructure in Jamaica and several other Central and South American countries.

Jamaica's economic growth goals include attracting private investors beyond the United States and the United Kingdom. Jamaica and other Caribbean nations are expanding their relationships with nations like China, who Holness call a "non-traditional partner."¹⁵⁸ China's investment in Jamaica has been increasing since 2013 when a Chinese company funded and led construction on the North South Highway in Jamaica. In 2016 China purchased a Russian aluminum mining company located in Jamaica, further solidifying economic ties with the country. Jamaica formalized its economic relationship with China by signing a memorandum of understanding under BRI in 2019. Although China's investments are increasing, according to a 2020 U.S. State Department report on investments, China accounts for 6.4% of Jamaica's FDI compared to 31.7% from the United States.¹⁵⁹ The United States will likely remain Jamaica's primary investor, but China's importance is increasing.

¹⁵⁷ Mark P Sullivan, *Caribbean Basin Security Initiative*, CRS Report No. IF10789 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2021), 2, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10789>.

¹⁵⁸ Andrew Holness, "Paths to Prosperity: Forging Deeper Cooperation and Integration Between the Caribbean and Latin America" (speech, Santiago, August 30, 2017), https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/pr/files/pm_jamaica_speech_-_eclac.pdf.

¹⁵⁹ "Jamaica," United States Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-investment-climate-statements/jamaica/>.

D. CONCLUSION

In determining whether or not drug trafficking operations support the goals of great power competition and the United States' overall national security strategy, I base my assessment on the principle that GPC objectives are met when a nation maintains more influence than its competitors. Influence is gained by not interfering with another nation's sovereignty and supporting its national security or economic objectives. These objectives were determined through analysis of government statements, news articles, and academic journals. This section summarizes the national goals of Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica and discusses their current relationship with the United States. These nations were chosen in part because they come from different subregions in Latin America, but none of the case studies are wholly representative of their subregions. The next chapter will assess if military counter drug operations are an effective way of gaining or maintaining influence and provide recommendations for adjusting military operations based on overlapping priorities between the United States and the nations assessed in my case studies.

1. Colombia

Colombia's national priorities can be summarized as social infrastructure and mitigating popular unrest. Counternarcotics policy in Colombia is largely U.S.-driven; and because the United States is willing to invest money in supply-side tactics to prevent cocaine entering the country, Colombian leaders are willing to develop policy eliminating coca plants quickly rather than addressing the larger issues around coca cultivation. Drug trafficking and cocaine production are problems for Colombia because of the social issues that come with trafficking and illicit economies. Nevertheless, coca cultivation should be understood as symptomatic of a lack of rural infrastructure—like navigable roads—and an absence of official government representation in rural areas.

Duque's decision to resume aerial fumigation of coca crops is an instance of policy motivated by U.S. investment. The issue is not that an investor had influence on how money was spent, but that aerial fumigation is not the kind of solution that has positive long-term results in reducing the amount of cocaine coming out of Colombia. It is also in direct opposition to Colombia's peace deal agreements with FARC.

Military involvement in CN operations is a visible way to partner with the Colombian military, but the efficacy of involving the U.S. military or using defense spending in efforts to eradicate coca plants should be evaluated against Colombian national priorities. In Colombia's case, CN operations may support some U.S. interests, but they do not support the maintenance of U.S. influence in the way that meets GPC objectives.

2. Mexico

In Mexico, AMLO personally drives the national priorities, and they are centered on his vision of Mexican sovereignty. His vaguely defined Fourth Transformation policy includes significant and highly visible infrastructure projects touted as solutions in fighting poverty. Expanding Pemex and taking steps toward Mexican energy independence is also a primary goal for AMLO's administration. The resources devoted to infrastructure and energy leave minimal bandwidth for addressing the violence that characterizes many places. Political violence is rampant, as demonstrated by Mexico's midterm elections, and so is violence motivated by gangs or cartels. AMLO's popular appeal was built on political promises to make policies that would generate wealth and peace. Halfway through his term, AMLO's policies have yet to create wealth or peace.

AMLO has demonstrated he is unwilling to cooperate with the United States if he determined it would diminish Mexican sovereignty. Nevertheless, the White House statement after the bilateral meeting between AMLO and President Biden in June 2021 summarized the areas in which AMLO seems willing to cooperate with the United States, which included working together to reduce drug-related crime. The most successful strategy for Mexican law enforcement has focused on attempting to break up cartels, and the United States should continue to support these operations. While AMLO remains sensitive to the idea of U.S. influence on Mexican policy, it will be difficult to partner with Mexico in a way that meaningfully achieves GPC objectives.

3. Jamaica

Economic growth, security, and foreign policy are tightly connected in Jamaica. Jamaican leadership has requested international support in addressing trafficking. Regional

cooperation through CARICOM is effective and strengthens partnerships between Caribbean nations. The United States invests in Caribbean security—and by extension, Jamaican security—through CBSI. SOUTHCOM conducts training and supports equipment maintenance through its Technical Assistance Field Team (TAFT). CBSI and the TAFT under SOUTHCOM have improved Jamaica's ability to patrol its territorial waters and prevent some traffickers from bringing drugs to shore. This means if a smuggler is not apprehended in the open ocean by U.S. or coalition forces, Jamaica's defense forces are capable of intercepting smugglers on shared intelligence. Military engagement through training continues to be an effective way to build rapport with nations like Jamaica, and the United States should continue to invest in the strategy to support its GPC goal of being the partner of choice.

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IV. CONCLUSION: THE INFLUENCE OF DRUG INTERDICTION OPERATIONS ON GREAT POWER COMPETITION

This thesis thus far reviewed the history of GPC in and identified the national priorities for three countries that are Latin American partners of the United States, and this chapter discusses the findings. In attempting to measure the impact of counterdrug operations on the United States GPC objectives, I defined becoming—or remaining—the partner of choice as achieving that objective. If U.S. policy facilitates or strengthens its position as a preferential partner, then that policy is effective for the purposes of this analysis. By taking into consideration the priorities of partner nations, the United States is more likely to come up with bilateral or multilateral policy that consolidates U.S. influence.

A. GREAT POWER COMPETITION AND DRUG TRAFFICKING

In the first Chapter, I discussed the academic work on GPC and drug trafficking. GPC is not a new phenomenon, but the United States had no near peer competitors for nearly three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union. China and Russia are now both economic and military competitors with the United States. The most recent literature attempts to take lessons from the Cold War and apply principles to navigating foreign and military policy to retain influence. The literature on drug trafficking acknowledges the societal problems that accompany it, but the literature is divided on the efficacy of counterdrug trafficking efforts and policy. Couching my research in these two academic discussions, I evaluated the impact of U.S. counter-drug trafficking efforts on GPC goals by comparing U.S. priorities with the national priorities of Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica. The nature of GPC is that every policy decision or military action has an impact on the influence a great power maintains. This research shows that drug policy and counter-drug operations can positively or negatively impact the United States' GPC objectives.

In the second chapter, this thesis analyzed the history of GPC in three case studies in order to show how the Colombian, Mexican, and Jamaican governments navigated the Cold War. This both provided historical context for the national priorities discussed in the third chapter and established a precedent for how each government might behave in the

current GPC environment. China and Russia have become great powers, and they have a competitive interest in Latin American and the Caribbean. The United States' historical approach to Latin America has been to have a general policy—like the Monroe Doctrine or Good Neighbor Policy—and interact through organizations like the OAS. Great powers tend to develop policy and relationships with other great powers in mind. This tendency has the potential to treat other nations as pawns, which does not help create a relationship where a potential partner has agency. Where agency—or sovereignty—is not supported, the United States is a partner by necessity, not the partner of choice.

The third chapter identified the national priorities for each of my case studies and summarized their relationship with the United States. In conducting these case studies, this thesis determined that drugs and drug trafficking were at different levels of priority in Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica. For Colombia drug production is a factor of larger issues like the peace deal and rural isolation from the central that need to be resolved. The situation is similar in Mexico, where policy makers consider drug trafficking to be symptomatic of poverty. To put it another way, the lack of access to the legal market and stable income drives many people into the illegal market. In Jamaica, the high levels of violence are tied to drug trafficking, but government leaders. While Jamaica is open to assistance in counter-drug trafficking, most of its aid from the United States is indirect through CBSI or through CARICOM arrangements. Of these three case studies, only Jamaica, with whom the United States deals most indirectly, is the nation that places drug trafficking on a similar level of importance.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Tailored policy

The variation in national priorities between the three case studies indicated that blanket regional policies are not as likely to be as effective as tailored policy agreements between the United States and individual nations. U.S. decision makers need to identify the priorities of partner nations because it provides information for developing mutually beneficial policy, facilitates cooperation, and establishes a sense of equality between the United States and its partners.

U.S. policy in Latin America since the 1970s has been influenced by war on drugs rhetoric, whether addressing growth and production or trafficking across borders, and the U.S. military has played a significant role in the application of counter-drug policy. In the SOUTHCOM AOR, drugs drive the primary security threat to the United States in the form of narco trafficking or narcoterrorism. The problem of drugs is real, but not the same priority to all U.S. partners in Latin America and the Caribbean; however, the United States has been able to elevate its importance as the regional hegemon. In organizational and bilateral relationships, U.S. priorities almost always take precedence. The United States benefits in the short term by exercising this kind of influence, but lessons from the Cold War indicate that the heavy hand of the United States in international affairs caused resentment. In order to avoid repeating the same mistakes, decision makers need to consider where compromise is possible, even if it means that U.S. goals are not accomplished through negotiated agreements.

GPC objectives are met when partner nations are treated as sovereign. A nation's partner of choice is going to be the one that facilitates accomplishing their priorities. China and Russia are willing to invest in developing nations in the Western Hemisphere, and the diversification of investment is beneficial to those nations. U.S. decision makers need to weigh the risk of not achieving all of their policy goals against the risk of growing Chinese and Russian influence.

2. Maintain Training Focus for Military Operations

In Colombia and Jamaica U.S. military involvement in training has been beneficial to building up security capabilities. The frequent execution of multinational training exercises also provides regional militaries opportunities to collaborate with each other and the United States. Operation Martillo, UNITAS, Fuerzas Comando, and Tradewinds all provide opportunities for collaboration and discussion about the training needs of partner militaries. SOUTHCOM accomplishes its mission to strengthen partners primarily through these regular multinational training missions while emphasizing the protection of human rights. The military's key role in supporting GPC objectives in Latin America is through training and education.

C. FUTURE STUDIES

1. Organizational Relationships

Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica all belong to at least six regional organizations like OAS or CELAC. My research focused on bilateral relationships and not how these organizations impact GPC. One variable that this study did not consider was the role of international organizations in Latin America. Security agreements and regional alliances are regularly established. These organizations make general regional policies easier to develop than bilateral ones, which I argue is not conducive for meeting GPC objectives since it distances the priorities of individual nations from policy that ought to be mutually beneficial. Further research could be done to account for the impact of organizational relationships to policy or its influence on achieving GPC objectives.

2. Efficacy of Drug Trafficking Operations

This research intentionally avoided the discussion of the efficacy of drug interdiction operations. The literature on drug trafficking is divided on whether or not interdiction helps the combat the domestic drug problem. Drugs are an important domestic issue, and drug interdiction operations will continue while drugs remain a political and social priority that influences elections. Regardless of efficacy, drug interdiction operations are a simple way for militaries to interact, train, and produce quantifiable results in the amount of drugs apprehended. Other research could be conducted on alternate military operations that have the potential to support GPC objectives.

3. Alternate Case Studies

This thesis considered only three nations in a large and diverse region. An alternate study could choose case studies from the same subregion, or simply different case studies without regard to subregion.

D. FINAL THOUGHTS

In attempting to measure the impact of drug interdiction operations on GPC objectives through case studies on Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica, the answer to the research question depended how important counter-drug policy was to the partner nation. If the United States and its partner placed it on a similar level of priority, GPC objectives are likely to be met by cooperating to reach a mutual goal. If there was a significant variation in the emphasis placed on combatting drug trade, investing U.S. resources will likely be unsuccessful in achieving GPC goals.

Governments, especially democracies, are obligated to organize national priorities in a way that best facilitates their own citizens' ability to live in freedom. In the United States, drug legislation is a domestic issue that impacts elections. Drug policy is also a domestic concern that drives foreign policy for the United States. Similarly, domestic policy in Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica drives their foreign policy, and it is appropriate for them to conduct their international affairs in a way that best suits them. As the regional hegemon, the United States has been able to orchestrate many arrangements to its own benefit, which is ideal for any government. However, in a GPC environment with an interconnected international community, the manner in which the United States achieves policy goals may conflict with achieving its strategic objectives.

The United States should continue to prefer policy that is better for U.S. citizens, but only if that policy also meets the nation's overall strategic objectives. In this case, the strategic objective is to become the partner of choice in the Western Hemisphere, thereby preventing China and Russia from gaining significant influence. Becoming the partner of choice may require more compromising with partner nations. The United States may not always get its way, but that may ensure there is a preference for the United States over other great powers, achieving strategic success. If the United States is unwilling to allow partners the agency to pursue their national interests, policy makers must either learn to make appealing arrangements or be willing to run the risk that another great power has a better offer. An international system where the United States maintains its position as the global hegemon is the best-case scenario for the endurance of freedom and democracy around the world.

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