



Admiral James Stavridis at U.S. Southern Command Headquarters

USSOUTHCOM (Mitch E. Miller)

## An Interview with James G. Stavridis

**JFQ:** *Many elements of the much-heralded reorganization of U.S. Southern Command Headquarters seem to have close parallels in the Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower. In fact, the majority of the issues addressed in the new naval strategy strike readers as the traditional focus areas of your command. Is there a relationship between these two developments?*

**Admiral Stavridis:** First, I would argue that there is great momentum across the entire

Department of Defense [DOD] to confront today's diverse security challenges through integration and coordination of efforts—be they military, interagency, multinational, or private sector efforts. The *Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower* is just one of many parallel efforts. For the first time, we have integrated our maritime forces under a unified cooperative strategy—a strategy that recognizes not only the obvious benefits of an over-arching maritime partnership for U.S. forces

but also the important role of international partners in 21<sup>st</sup>-century security.

Second, the maritime strategy rightly emphasizes the need to foster and sustain these international partnerships over time, building trust and capability for steady-state security cooperation as a matter of course, and the desire to respond together in the case of crisis. So it is no coincidence that the new maritime strategy runs in confluence with U.S. Southern Command's vision for the future of security in this part of the world. We clearly embrace the need to build

Col David H. Gurney, USMC (Ret.), of *Joint Force Quarterly* interviewed Admiral Stavridis at U.S. Southern Command Headquarters on April 4, 2008.

**Admiral James G. Stavridis, USN, is Commander, U.S. Southern Command.**

the capability and capacity of our neighbors to address the difficult security challenges we share together. As for the maritime role in our hemisphere, a simple look at geography highlights the importance of the maritime domain, since all but two of the nations of the Americas have borders with access to the sea—with a significant portion of their population densities within 100 miles of the coast. A flexible, scalable, and persistent maritime engagement capability is a welcomed and essential part of our security cooperation toolset.

Third, as part of DOD transformation priorities, U.S. Southern Command is reorganizing to become more of an interagency operation. Our reorganiza-

tion efforts include multinational and even limited private sector collaboration that will enhance our understanding of regional dynamics and magnify the benefits of our cooperation activities. Our new organizational structure and diverse representation will allow us to partner proactively with the U.S. Government interagency community and with the sovereign countries in the region—ultimately improving our collective response to regional and transnational security challenges. We lay out our approach in a document called “Command Strategy 2016,”<sup>1</sup> which is well grounded not only in the Navy’s future vision but also in that of the rest of the Services.

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**JFQ:** Please address the most significant changes that will be effected in your command’s reorganization and the contextual demands that inspired them.

**Admiral Stavridis:** The most significant change to our organization is a change in our cultural mindset. A reorganized structure is just one tool in our overall rethinking of U.S. Southern Command and its ultimate transformation for the future. This new thinking will take us from a culture of war to a culture of war and peace, from a culture of moving people and materiel to one of moving ideas. From a rigid, traditional staff structure (J1, J2, J3, and so

forth) optimized purely for warfighting to new internal structures designed for integration, collaboration, and understanding—all designed to compete in today’s instant strategic messaging market.

Now, changing mindsets is very difficult for any large, complex organization—perhaps it is even traumatic. As we proceed, we must respect and develop military Service cultures, shape and prepare our civilian workforce for new roles, convince our interagency partners of the benefit to their respective missions, and reassure our multinational partners of our continued commitment to partnering with them. Fortunately, U.S. Southern Command is well suited for this change.

As of this interview, we are already in our new provisional structure—a structure that is flatter and more responsive. We have a dual deputy-to-the-commander system, one military and one civilian. We are no longer organized in stovepiped J-codes, but now have six directorates—three mission directorates and three enabling or functional directorates. Interagency representatives are integrated throughout the new structure, their number and focus varying according to the function of the directorate, with many in key senior leadership roles. We have a fledgling partnering center, where international, academic, and private sector partners can plug into the organization’s current operations and collaborate on mutually beneficial initiatives, programs, and exercises.

In concert with our reorganization, we have instituted a new method for strategic planning that allows us to widen our focus and enables cultural change. This strategic planning process is an integral component in the new organization and provides the corporate structure to focus all command activities, prioritize critical resource requirements, and measure progress toward achieving our mission.

Of course, inherent in the new structure is our ability to conduct military operations with an unbroken and capable military chain of command and authority.

**JFQ:** Media pundits and some international security analysts have grumbled over the U.S. decision to establish a geographic combatant command in Africa, yet it seems as though the cooperative focus in that area of responsibility is very similar to that of U.S. Southern Command. Has there been significant interaction between your command and U.S. Africa Command over organizational architecture and strategy?

**Admiral Stavridis:** There are many similarities that all geographic combatant commands share as we focus on today’s security challenges within this century’s strategic environment. We all clearly benefit from a unique regional perspective and the ability to build cooperative partnerships and regional solutions to transnational problems. The establishment of U.S. Africa Command, with its specific focus on a region previously divided between three commands, will allow improved bilateral and multilateral security cooperation and will foster long-term beneficial relationships. Having essentially the entire African continent as a single focus region will allow General [William] Ward to combine the efforts of regional experts, both from DOD and various other agencies, and to use them in a coordinated manner with our partners in Africa.

All that being said, yes, there has been a mutually beneficial interaction between our two commands as U.S. Southern Command *reorganizes* and U.S. Africa Command *organizes*. From numerous staff visits and regular staff video teleconferences led by our chiefs of staff, to U.S. Joint Forces Command’s efforts to synchronize best practices and highlight areas for improved efficiencies, we are traveling similar paths and learning from each other. Of course, although similar in some respects, the different natures of our respective regions have naturally led to some variations in our structures and approaches, but I would say the similarities between our commands are in the majority.

**JFQ:** Given the emphasis of U.S. Southern Command on the “soft power” elements of national security, how does your reorganization incorporate interagency partners?

**Admiral Stavridis:** Although our reorganization will certainly take advantage of the soft power elements of national secu-

rity, U.S. Southern Command will remain a DOD geographic combatant command, with the majority of personnel and funding sourced by DOD. And our fundamental mission remains unchanged. However, through expanded interagency integration, we hope to improve our regional understanding and situational awareness in order to execute our mission more effectively. Ultimately, our new approach will position us to have an impact that is more lasting in all that we do with our partners in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Essentially, I think it is really not about soft power or hard power, but rather what some have called “smart power,” which is the ability to dial between the poles of hard and soft. After all, life is a rheostat, not an on-off switch, and we are trying to shape our organization along those lines. I strongly recommend reading the “Smart Power” study recently released by CSIS [the Center for Strategic and International Studies], headed up by [Richard] Armitage and [Joseph] Nye; it lays out a compelling view of this concept.<sup>2</sup>

As for how we incorporate inter-agency partners, right now, we already

have a sizeable interagency presence, with 17 departments and agencies represented. These personnel are integrated into our mission directorates based upon the needs of our interagency partners and the best use of their functions and specialties. One of our task forces, Joint Interagency Task Force–South, is a model of interagency and multinational integration and serves as a powerful example of the benefits of expanded cooperation. As U.S. Southern Command’s interagency partnerships grow and as our new cultural mindset and processes mature, we will continue to work with our interagency counterparts to ensure their integration at the command promotes their personnel’s professional development and increased capacity; that their inclusion is in consonance with their resource objectives; and that their efforts advance the achieve-

ment of their core missions and supporting activities.

I am sure that just about every commander throughout history has said, “These are exciting times of change and opportunity.” When it comes to U.S. Southern Command, the change this past year has been real and profound. We are operating with a transformed structure and a new cultural mindset to meet the security demands of a new world reality. The opportunities ahead of us seem more numerous and potentially more fruitful from our new perspective. **JFQ**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Available at <[www.southcom.mil](http://www.southcom.mil)>, under Mission page.

<sup>2</sup> Available at <[www.csis.org/smartpower](http://www.csis.org/smartpower)>.

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ADM Stavridis speaks with Soldiers and Airmen during joint humanitarian and training exercise

1<sup>st</sup> Combat Camera Squadron