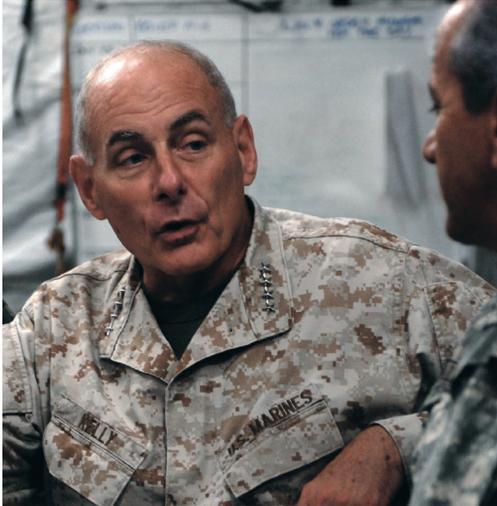


An Interview with

General John Kelly



At a recent meeting of the Organization of the American States, Secretary of State Kerry stated, "The era of the Monroe Doctrine is over." What's the replacement?

Gen. Kelly: The first thing is that the Latin Americans have put the Monroe Doctrine so far behind them they think it's unusual when we bring it up. The replacement is partnership. In the two years I have been in this job, the buzzwords or buzzphrase that I use that gets a very positive reception is not only "partners," but "equal partners." Our partnership with these countries is not just in the military realm, I have very close relationships with

many of the Ministers of Defense, but with the Presidents as well. We don't lecture them, we don't tell them what to do; by example they see what equal partnership is all about. So I would say that it's partnership that has replaced the previous doctrine.

Are our declining resources directed towards South America reducing our influence there and making the partnership less important to them than it is to us?

Gen. Kelly: I wouldn't say it's declining; we haven't paid much security attention to the region for 15 years. So we're at a normal steady state; almost no resources, with the exception of Colombia – and that's a minimal investment really – but almost no real resources for 15 years. They want to partner with us, they like the partnership, they want to be our friends for the most part. There are some countries that are not interested in a U.S. partnership and that is their loss. But others are confused because we don't really seem to care about them very much, while the Chinese are heavily investing in the region, albeit primarily economically. Our trade is very robust with this part of the world, and so is the Chinese. The Chinese tend to "invest and take:" the Latin Americans resent that to some extent. The Chinese will come in and invest in a copper mine and mine it dry. There's trade and there's mutual benefit, but they wish the Chinese were a little bit

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more interested in long-term investment as opposed to “invest and take.”

So the Chinese offer investment without partnership?

Gen. Kelly: Correct. That doesn’t make them unwelcome, believe me. The Russians are more interested in selling military equipment, which everyone in this part of the world acknowledges is really substandard compared to the U.S. equipment. They’re also very interested in promoting the perception of the U.S. as a pushy hegemon and a nation in decline. One of the interesting things about the Chinese is that they have now started to engage more and more with the regional militaries. While some people in Washington say, “We’re just as engaged as we always were,” there are certainly others in the part of the world that I talk to that see us as not very committed.

Are we sending the right messages in this hemisphere? For example in the Quadrennial Defense Review, there is very little acknowledgment of security concerns in this hemisphere.

Gen. Kelly: The message is very bad, and as I’ve said, they want to be our equal partners. They don’t require much commitment, but they need some love. But decisions are made in Washington that I wouldn’t even suggest to criticize; I just do the best I can to try to make people understand. It’s interesting many of these countries look at SOUTHCOM in Miami as their close friend because we engage with them a lot and more than Washington does.

What do you see as the most threatening possibilities that we face in the Western Hemisphere?

Gen. Kelly: The least likely, but most concerning to me is the threat to the U.S. coming through the illicit networks in this part of the world, that are so firmly established. For two years now I’ve been asked in hearings about what gets into the United States through this illicit network. These are international criminal networks – everything gets in. Hundreds and hundreds of tons of illicit narcotics. Relatively small amounts are taken out of the flow by our border controls. Tens of thousands of sex workers, in many cases adolescents, come into the United States every year through these networks to serve the sex industry. I spoke at a human rights conference at the University of South Florida, in Tampa. The audience was shocked when I talked about sex workers, but they were even more shocked to learn of the thousands of forced laborers that are brought in and are working in Florida in the agricultural industry. Anything can travel on this network; I’ve been asked two years in a row now, “Could someone come in with a weapon of mass destruction, biological weapon travel on this network?” Of course! Last year, this network carried 68,000 children into the United States. We are dealing with a very efficient network, which worries me. It is unlikely that a dirty bomb, right now, could travel into the U.S. through this network because Special Operations Command, the CIA, the FBI and others are deployed around the world preventing these things from happening. Over time, however, we need to be wary of the fact that this is an incredibly efficient network, it has starting points around the world and comes here, everything travels on it,

and all you have to do is be able to pay the fare.

The other issue in this part of the world is an increasing tendency in some countries away from democracy. It's fascinating that there are strong democratic institutions in many countries, such as Brazil and Chile, while others are going in the other direction, moving away from human rights, moving away from a free press, moving away from gender rights, and certainly moving away from democracy.

On that specific point, how would you assess the threat to the U.S. posed by the emergence of what seems to be an alignment of anti-American states that some refer to as the Bolivarian Alliance?

Gen. Kelly: My view is that if they are all functioning democracies – as we understand it with a functioning free press, with functioning human rights protections, with militaries subordinate to civilian control – they have every right to go in any direction they want and choose their alliances. I certainly would like to be their partners, but if they so choose to go in another direction that's their business. However, I fear that many of these countries' political elites are turning their backs on democracy and adjusting constitutions so they can do what they're not supposed to do. My concern is not for our security interests necessarily, but for the interests of the people who live in those countries—all of whom have shown a strong interest in democracy. Another threat comes from the massive corruption in many of these countries that you've mentioned. They're stealing the people blind, taking their democracy away, taking their free press away, and taking their human rights away; it's very disturbing.

Do you see any possibility of some of these states actually failing? We talk about failed states and we are often thinking about Africa or Central Asia or places like that; is there any possibility of state failure in the Western Hemisphere?

Gen. Kelly: Any country that is curtailing democracy, free press, and other civil liberties, in my mind, is by definition failing, and is on a road to destruction or total failure. However, there are other states, and I applaud places like Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, that are suffering terribly from the effects of drug trafficking networks fueled by drug demand from the United States. They are imperfect democracies, but they are also trying to address some of the long-standing obstacles to economic and political progress. Virtually all of the cocaine that comes to the United States originates in Latin America. The countries I just mentioned in Central America are doing their best to stem the flow. Virtually all the heroin consumed in the United States is now grown and produced in Mexico or Colombia. Roughly 87 percent now of the methamphetamines consumed in the United States are produced in Central America or Mexico. All of this drug production feeds the American drug habit, and the massive, illicit drug revenues are then used by criminal networks to buy off or murder police and judges, and allow for million dollar bounties to be put on a number of national leaders in Central America. These small countries are suffering terribly because of U.S. drug consumption. The risk of failure is not the result of anti-democratic behavior, on the contrary, these countries are committed to addressing past human rights violations; but they might fail because of the massive

amounts of crime and violence generated, to a large degree, by U.S. drug consumption.

What can they do to counter that and how can we help them?

Gen. Kelly: We have to build partnerships with these countries, and continue helping them consolidate their democratic gains. Many of them have very bad human rights records from 20-25 years ago. Nearly every time I travel to a country, I meet with local human rights groups; in virtually every country I visit, they give the military the highest marks. As a rule, after the Catholic Church, the military is the most admired, respected institution in the country. The police are often at the bottom of the pile. In most cases, these countries have no options but to use their military on the streets; it's worth noting that generally, the people like to see the military on the streets because the police are so ineffective or corrupt. In the United States we have a tradition of not using the military on the streets, though we've done it in the past. I've done it twice in my career. We've done it when we think we need it, when we're *in extremis*. I experienced it in Washington, D.C. in 1971 as a young enlisted Marine, and in Los Angeles when I was a battalion commander in the 1990s, during the Rodney King Riots.

But the United States in general doesn't like to use the military on the streets and since we don't like it, we tend to criticize others for doing it. To answer your question, we need to help them improve their police. We spend a lot of money and have a lot of good programs, but they don't touch, they don't reinforce each other; consequently, an awful lot of money is spent without the intended results. Over the past ten years, we've spent money trying to

improve the police forces of nearly every country in the region. Ask yourself, "do we have programs, in the sense of what they're trying to accomplish?" The answer is "yes." But you have to ask yourself, "have the police gotten better, are they the same, or are they worse?" And in every case you have to say "They're worse." In my culture you don't wait 10 years to say "Boy, it hasn't worked out very well." You step back from that, and if you're not reaching your metrics for success, then you change or adjust your program. There are a lot of programs out there, but none of them really reinforce or touch each other.

Is that a result of lack of coordination among agencies providing that support or is it lack of coordination among the host country nationals?

Gen. Kelly: It's a lack of coordination among the agencies, as well as within the agencies. One of the presidents of a Central American country vented his frustration to me one day saying "You know, I just read that America 'has put X millions of dollars into my country in 10 years,' and all of that money is wasted because the economy is worse than it ever was, the security is down, the violence is up, I'm being blamed for wasting that money, my country is being blamed for wasting the money; but they never asked us what programs we thought should be funded, nor did they ever give me the money to spend." At the end of 10 years of spending on programs, the police are worse, the economy is worse, their legal/justice system doesn't function well, leading some people to say "well, this country wasted the money." I was in a human rights roundtable in El Salvador five weeks ago where I was told "we appreciate all the things you

Americans do for us, but they're all 'make you feel good projects; you don't ask us what we think we need.' We were talking at the time about children at risk. We have a children at risk program that we've been funding for 10 years; by its nature it is a good program. The goal is to not have kids joining the gangs, which is a horrific problem in all of the countries in Central America, but particularly El Salvador. Still, this program ended when the kids were 12, 13, 14 years old. Unfortunately, that's the point at which kids go into the gangs; they don't go into the gangs at 5, 6, 10, 11, 12 years old. You have this great at risk program that isn't effective because the age-group that you're focusing on with this particular program doesn't go into gangs; but as soon as they hit 13 or 14, they're at risk of joining gangs.

And that's when the program ends?

Gen. Kelly: And that's when the program ends. The point was that there ought to be another program to get the kids into vocational school so they learn how to be electricians, or brick masons, or beauticians. You have to have programs that reinforce each other and "touch," as I say. We have this great program, which makes us feel good because it addresses children at risk, but it's really a waste of time because kids that age don't go into gangs.

One of the flagship programs that we have in Central America is the CARSI (Central America Regional Security Initiative) Program, but there's growing frustration with its results. How would you assess the CARSI Program at this point?

Gen. Kelly: How long have we had the CARSI Program? Six years? And what was it supposed to accomplish? Reduce violence? With regards to all of the things CARSI was designed to do, as I understand CARSI, things are not only worse, but they're geometrically worse. I think you go back to evaluating every program every step along the way; and within the program everything has got to touch. With a program like CARSI you have to ask yourself, not six years later, but six months after you put it in place, "what are the indicators of success or failure?" If CARSI was supposed to get at violence and rule of law and safe streets and citizen security, ask yourself, "has that gotten any better in Central America?" And the answer is that things are geometrically worse. In my opinion, CARSI has to be adjusted, which is what the U.S. is doing with the new Strategy for Central America. The administration has asked for a billion dollars to promote better governance and promote economic development. Without progress in these areas, it will be impossible to make sustained progress on the security front.

One of the successes in your region, Colombia, is now considered widely a great success, but here's another side to it. A European politician asked me "Why is it you Americans consider Colombia such a great success when there's still the same amount of cocaine coming into the United States, you still have very profound Colombian involvement in narcotics trafficking... What's the big success?" How should I have answered that question?

Gen. Kelly: You start with, "cocaine is our problem." If Americans didn't want to do a little blow on weekends, then Colombia

wouldn't be suffering and Central America wouldn't be suffering the way they are. Cocaine is our problem. But if you look at everything in Colombia from rule of law, to freedom of the press, professionalization of the military, human-rights protections, and civilian oversight of the military, then Colombia is a success. If you want to focus on cocaine, then you need to acknowledge that in 2014 Colombians affected -68,000 hectares of coca before it was harvested: that is cocaine not produced. That same year they intercepted 166 tons of finished cocaine before it left Colombia: that is cocaine that didn't get to America. The Colombian military destroyed 2600 jungle labs that turn coca into cocaine: that's cocaine that was never produced. The FARC, whom they've been fighting for 50 years, have an acceptance level inside Colombia near two percent, and they've been pushed to the outer parts of Colombia. I travel in Colombia quite a bit, and I visited one of the reintegration sites that the Colombian government runs. It was full of young people, all of whom have been in the FARC. The FARC would claim they are recruits into the FARC, but they weren't; they were kidnapped from the villages into the FARC when they were young – 11, 12, or 13 years old. Now, they're being reintegrated back into society and doing a great job. We spent the day there listening to their stories. Some had just come out of the jungle. I would answer the European politician by saying "cocaine is our problem. If we weren't consuming it, the Colombians wouldn't be producing it." The Colombians used to be the number one producer of cocaine in the world; now it's the number three, behind Peru (number one), and Bolivia (number two). That's how I would answer the question. The country is strong, it's

democratic, it has a free press, it is dealing with some of the past human rights problems, the military has been transformed, and the tax system has been transformed. They want to be our best partners in the region, they're thinking beyond FARC now, and we're working with them to envision what their military should look like after the FARC. Not a small, but a modest military. Because of what they've been through they want to share those experiences and help other people. With the Colombia Action Plan, they're in a number of Latin American and Caribbean countries teaching that everything begins and ends with human rights. That is one demand I always put down; it's what we do here in SOUTHCOM: every conversation begins and ends with human rights, so the Colombians carry that with them. They're also teaching others how to how to conduct counter drug operations, legally and effectively. They're in a lot of places, they play by the same rules as if they were U.S. forces, and they're doing a great job. That is the success of Colombia.

Sounds like a paradigm for the partnership approach that you were describing as the replacement for the Monroe Doctrine. Going back to the question of illicit networks, there has been discussion about the convergence of different kinds of illicit networks: terrorists, insurgents, and traffickers of various kinds. Do you see any evidence of that in your area of responsibility?

Gen. Kelly: I do though much of it is classified. There are two ways to look at it. When the narcotics traffickers touch worldwide terrorism, to me that's a convergence or a nexus. We know that there are international terrorist organizations making vast amounts of money

laundering drug proceeds that come out of the United States. The traffickers and cartels' problem is not getting drugs into the United States, their biggest problem is laundering the \$85 billion or so that comes from global cocaine sales every year. That's their problem: laundering money. There are terrorist organizations and other organizations that have close ties to terrorist organizations that do a lot of the money laundering. This isn't just in the Tri-Border region where Paraguay meets Argentina and Brazil. A fair number of Middle Easterners that live there have direct links to banks overseas and there's a lot of money laundering that goes on there. In fact, the President of Paraguay is most interested in help to addressing money laundering. Since that's the work of the FBI and Treasury, we alerted them; the President of Paraguay wants to get his arms around money laundering because he knows that it's not only detrimental to his country, but that it goes into the coffers of terrorist organizations. That's a convergence or a nexus. There are people that push back on that and say "when you tell me that the Sinaloa Cartel is funding the transportation costs of five guys from ISIS to get into the region then smuggle them up into the United States, hand them a dirty bomb, and let them set off the dirty bomb in an American city, detonate the bomb and then run for it, I'll believe there's a connection." But my belief is if they're "touching," this is convergence. Some people will say, the cartels will never allow that to happen because so much pressure would be brought to bear if they allowed a terrorist organization to get in. And maybe that's true. But many of these network people don't check IDs, they don't check passports, and they don't check what's in your bag. They're paid to move products, not ask questions. It's very easy to move along this

network. I was in Costa Rica at a conference when a member of the country team saw four, five, or six black gentlemen that were speaking English, but were obviously not Costa Rican, on their way through to the border position in Nicaragua. A member of the American Embassy went over and asked "Who are you guys?" They responded, "We're from Liberia. We were there a week ago and we're on our way to New York City." I'm sure they were great guys going up to start a new life for themselves. But remember, they were in Liberia a week ago, where Ebola is a big problem, so it's still only two weeks... There's a lot of potential for things to move along these networks. I shouldn't have to work hard to convince someone that there is an attack being planned by a terrorist organization and supported logistically and philosophically by the cartels. I'm paid to worry about things like that. In Martinique a few months ago, I was talking to the French regional coordinator of the French version of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). They see a huge amount of cocaine going to the west coast and they know that the al-Qaeda affiliates make a great deal of money letting that cocaine flow up through Mali, and the Maghreb and into western Europe. Is that a convergence or nexus of terrorism and drugs? I would argue it is, and the French certainly see it that way

Is there anything that you in your position can do to counter that phenomenon, the phenomenon of the convergence and the connectivity between Latin American and Africa and Europe?

Gen. Kelly: I think the first step is to be vocal about it and we've done that. I, Chuck

Jacoby, of Northern Command, and Bill McRaven from SOCOM have been very vocal about this and people have begun to recognize it as a threat. And again, I'm not suggesting that there are now conspiracies to move terrorists along the cartel networks into the United States, but the potential is there. If you're looking for terrorism and narcoterrorism or drug trafficking touching we see it right now in money laundering that is funding a great deal of international terrorism.

Finally, what do you think the future holds for U.S. defense cooperation with the region?

Gen Kelly: While our focus right now is on Central America, we can't lose sight of the opportunities and challenges in the region as a whole. Many countries are understandably concerned about the second and third order effects that will inevitably come with improvements in security in places like Honduras and Guatemala. We need to make sure that the successes we have in the Northern Triangle don't come at the expense of the rest of Central America...or the Caribbean and South America.

There are tremendous opportunities to partner on issues like cyber security, disaster response, mass migration, and of course on persistent challenges like violent extremism and illicit trafficking. In the majority of these missions, the U.S. military will be working side by side with our interagency partners, especially the courageous men and women of DHS, DEA, the FBI, the Treasury Department, and the CIA.

I also believe our cooperation won't just be in Latin America, but beyond... Brazil, along with Colombia, El Salvador, Uruguay,

and others are doing outstanding work in supporting international peacekeeping and stabilization missions around the world. For one terrific example: Colombia is exporting its security expertise, providing training in Central America and Mexico, and its navy is exploring the possibility of supporting anti-piracy efforts off the coast of Africa.

Finally, I think it's worth noting that if we want to maintain our partnerships in this hemisphere, we must remain engaged with this hemisphere. We're managing to keep the "pilot light" of regional engagement on—but just barely, and sequestration will completely extinguish that light. Why should we make such an effort to remain engaged, especially given the growing list of global challenges facing the United States? For the simple reason that a strong, secure, and prosperous Latin America is in all our interests. After all, the United States and our partners worked hard to ensure the Western Hemisphere is a beacon of freedom, democracy, and peace. In the face of the corrosive spread of criminal networks and other challenges, we must all work even harder to ensure it remains that way. This, in my view, is what the future of U.S. defense cooperation is all about. **PRISM**