

# Hegseth Promotes Regional Border Security, Signs Joint Security Declaration



By Matthew Olay Pentagon News, March 5, 2026

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth underscored the importance of strong, regional border security today during the inaugural Americas Counter Cartel Conference at U.S. Southern Command headquarters in Doral, Florida.

The operational conference brought together regional defense and security leaders from the Caribbean, Central America and South America to achieve shared security objectives. Hegseth, along with representatives from 17 countries from throughout the Western Hemisphere, signed a joint security declaration, reaffirming their commitment to peace, sovereignty and stability in the region.

“This conference is about you; this conference is about us. This conference is not called the ‘America’s Counter Cartel Conference’; it’s the ‘Americas Counter Cartel Conference,’” Hegseth told the group at the beginning of his remarks.

The secretary drew comparisons between the current administration’s prioritization of homeland security and that of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, in which President James Monroe declared that the Western Hemisphere was off-limits to any new attempts at colonization by European nations, and that any interference by those powers would be viewed as a hostile act against the United States.

“Today, some 200 years later, we still marvel at the wisdom of President Monroe’s declaration. We, like you, want borders and sovereign territories that are secure; we want unfettered access to key terrain and trade so that our nations can industrialize; and we want to prevent external powers from threatening our peace and independence in our shared neighborhood,” Hegseth said, adding that the Western Hemisphere needs to be a region of strong, sovereign nations.

He described past U.S. foreign policy as a flawed form of “benign neglect,” in that it prioritized other overseas theaters and the borders of other countries before prioritizing its own.

As an example, Hegseth said that the human smuggling industry grew by as much as 2,000% over a five-year span, soaring from being a \$500 million enterprise in 2018 to one that brought in \$13 billion in 2022.

He also noted that the Western Hemisphere contains one-eighth of the world’s population but one-third of the violent crime.

In contrast, Hegseth said that under President Donald J. Trump and the recently released National Defense Strategy, all of those trends are reversing.

“The president’s historic National Defense Strategy ensures that the Department of War will prioritize resources around the threats and objectives that are core to homeland defense ... and prosperity of the American people,” he said.

To illustrate this, Hegseth pointed to the drastic reduction in illegal crossings at the U.S. southern border, as well as the successful deterrence of narco-terrorists in the Caribbean region, which has been ongoing since September 2025.

He also highlighted that the flow of fentanyl into the U.S. is down 56%.

Hegseth then appealed to the other represented countries in the room.

“America is prepared to take on these threats and go on the offense alone, if necessary. However, it is our preference – and it is the goal of this conference – that in the interests of this [hemisphere], we all do it together; with you, with our neighbors and with our allies who are eager and willing and capable to do this,” Hegseth told the group.

He emphasized the importance of maintaining shared Western values, stating that the nations of the Western Hemisphere have always been united by heritage, history and geography.

The secretary also called for the strengthening of partnerships through increased burden sharing among all partner countries south of the equator.

“This is what we did in World War II. We called it the ‘quarter sphere defense,’ and we will do this again if we’re serious about our national security [and] if we prioritize geography,” Hegseth explained.

“This means that for every country in this hemisphere, border security must be your top priority,” he added.

Hegseth wrapped his remarks up by circling back to the

Monroe Doctrine.

“With Donald Trump in the Oval Office, and with all of you here, we can still realize that long-ago dream of James Monroe, [and] in our time, we will make the Americas great again,” he said.