

SECURITY AND DEFENSE MONITOR



Zambian Peacekeepers in the Central African Republic. (UN Photo/Hervé Serefio, 8 November 2018).
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/unpeacekeeping/49940941691>

SPOTLIGHT

THE U.S. ANNUAL THREAT ASSESSMENT 2025. IMPACT ON LATIN AMERICA

The U.S. Intelligence Community presented its annual threat report in March. The possible impact to the region is noted.

By Dolores Bermeo-Lara

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THE ANTARCTIC TREATY AND PROJECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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CHALLENGES IN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE OPERATIONS

Challenges are being observed that need to be addressed.

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Photo: Djina Nedovic / Nova Ekonomija

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Serbia: The student uprising that unites the country

By Marija Ignjatijevic

KEY DATES

(May to June)

May 13th to 14th: 2025 United Nations Ministerial Meeting on Peacekeeping. *Berlin, Germany.*

June 2nd to 6th: 8th Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction UNDRR. *Geneva, Switzerland.*

June 9th to 13th: 2025 UN Ocean Conference. *Nice, France*

June 24th to 26th: 2025 NATO Summit. Meeting of the 32 heads of state and government. *The Hague, Netherlands.*



UN PEACEKEEPING MINISTERIAL

13–14 MAY 2025 BERLIN, GERMANY

Photo: Pascual Gorriz/UNFIL <https://trello.com/b/LQ3Nx0EM/un-peacekeeping-ministerial-2025>

Welcome to the first edition of the *Security and Defense Monitor*.

As we face an ever-changing global security landscape, we wish to contribute to the observation and analysis of issues and concerns on the security and defense agenda. The publication is bimonthly one and consists of three sections: Spotlight, Commentary and Analysis, and Observer.

This month's edition deals with the scope of the recent annual document on threats to the United States prepared by the Intelligence Community, and the observation of its possible impact on Latin America. It also includes an analysis of the future projections of the peaceful permanence in Antarctica, for which possible scenarios are presented.

This edition also shares an opinion on the challenges of women's participation in peace operations, considering situations that could affect such participation. And finally, we include an observation on the student uprising in Serbia and the factors and circumstances that may explain the context.

We thank the contributors to this issue and the RESDAL team that made the publication possible. We also value your comments and invite you to share your views and participate in future editions.

Thank you for your continued support.

Best regards,

Andrea Chiappini
President



REPORTS

The Global Risks Report 2025

World Economic Forum.

Published: January 15, 2025 [Click here](#)

Annual Threat Assessment of The U.S. Intelligence Community.

Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Published: March 2025. [Click here](#)

Women's Rights in Review 30 Years After Beijing

UN-Women.

Published: March 6, 2025. [Click here](#)

Curbing Violence in Latin America's Drug Trafficking Hotspots

International Crisis Group (ICG).

Published: March 11, 2025. [Click here](#)

Human Development Report 2025.

A matter of choice: People and possibilities in the age of AI

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Published: May 6, 2025. [Click here](#)

The Future of United Nations Peace Operations

Global Alliance for Peace Operations.

Published: May 6, 2025. [Click here](#)

THE U.S. ANNUAL THREAT ASSESSMENT 2025

Impact on Latin America

Dolores Bermeo-Lara

Last March, the Director of National Intelligence of the United States presented the Annual Threat Assessment (ATA).¹ The ATA is an unclassified document that evaluates threats to national security; its preparation is coordinated by the Intelligence Community, which is composed of 18 agencies and organizations within the Executive Branch whose mission is to provide intelligence for decision-making on national security issues.

Through the ATA, we can observe the political orientation of the current administration regarding the issues it considers threats to security, the actors responsible for such insecurity, and what is being protected. In general, the document refers to state and non-state actors that threaten citizens, the nation, and the state's interests. The threatened assets are both tangible and intangible, such as: "health and safety, critical infrastructure, industries, wealth and government" (ATA 2025, p.4), as well as the economic and military power of the United States at both regional and global levels.

Threats and actors challenging the security of the United States

If the order of the document's content reflects the administration's priorities, it can be inferred that the U.S. Intelligence Community identifies non-state actors (transnational criminals, terrorists, and other non-state actors) as the main threat to the country. This marks a clear difference from the previous year's assessment (ATA 2024), which placed the discussion of non-state actors' actions in the final section of the document.

Regarding state actors that threaten U.S. national interests, the document highlights China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, outlining the key strategic areas in which these countries challenge U.S. capabilities and interests—mainly in terms of security and the economy.

In this context, China is noted as the actor most capable of threatening U.S. interests. The document addresses several

issues of particular concern, including military modernization and projection, cyber capabilities that could compromise critical infrastructure, the development of Artificial Intelligence and the production of advanced semiconductor chips, as well as the modernization and expansion of nuclear posture and capabilities for chemical and biological warfare (CBW).

About transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), the ATA 2025 states that these groups produce and traffic large quantities of illicit drugs, which endanger the lives and livelihoods of Americans. They also engage in other illegal activities that challenge U.S. security, such as human trafficking, cyber operations, money laundering, and incitement to violence.

The Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel from Mexico are identified as the main producers and suppliers of illicit drugs, including fentanyl—a substance that, along with other synthetic opioids, caused the deaths of more than 52,000 people over 12 months, according to the document. It also notes that since 2020, there has been a rise in independent fentanyl producers based in Mexico, with China being the primary source of illicit fentanyl precursor chemicals and pressed pills.

The document also refers to TCOs and illegal armed groups based in Colombia as responsible for exporting cocaine to the United States, using Ecuador as a transit route—a development that has contributed to increased violence. It further highlights the lethal attacks by TCOs in Mexico against security forces, noting that in 2024 there were 1,600 such attacks, posing a significant threat to law enforcement personnel (ATA 2025, pp. 5-6).

Unlike the ATA 2024, which included a specific section on migration, the ATA 2025 does not address migration as a dedicated topic. What the new report does instead is link migration to the activities of transnational non-state criminals and terrorists. In this regard, it states: "Large-scale illegal immigration has strained local and national infrastructure and resources and enabled known or suspected terrorists to cross into the United States" (ATA, 2025, p. 5), without addressing the root causes of migration—which ATA 2024 did consider. These include conflict, violence, political instability, insecurity, poor economic conditions, and natural disasters.

Regarding the link between migration and criminal activity, the Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, stated in her congressional testimony on the ATA 2025 and on behalf of the Intelligence Community, that "cartels profit from human-trafficking, and likely facilitated more than 2 million illegal immigrants encountered by law enforcement at the U.S. southwest

¹ Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, March 2025, available at: <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2025-Unclassified-Report.pdf>

encountered by law enforcement at the U.S. southwest border in 2024”.² She also highlighted the current administration’s migration policies, which are described as deterrent in nature, noting that Border Patrol apprehensions in January 2025 fell by 85% compared to January 2024.

These statements align with the current U.S. government policy of reinforcing the southern border and assigning the Armed Forces to border security. Executive Order 14167, dated January 20, 2025, specifically tasks the United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) with “the mission to seal the borders and maintain the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security of the United States by repelling forms of invasion, including unlawful mass migration, narcotics trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, and other criminal activities.”³

This Executive Order has been accompanied by the recent Memorandum/NSPM-4, which instructs the Secretaries of Defense, Interior, Agriculture, and Homeland Security to take appropriate actions “to accomplish the military missions described in Executive Order 14167, and to ensure the safety of the Armed Forces and other Federal personnel in areas of military operations within Federal lands along the southern border”.⁴ It also transfers the use and jurisdiction of federal lands along the southern border to the Department of Defense to facilitate military operations and the construction of border barriers, designating these areas as National Defense Areas.⁵

Concluding Remarks

The content of the 2025 Annual Threat Assessment (ATA) of the U.S. Intelligence Community reflects a paradigm shift in the country’s security framework, wherein

transnational criminal organizations are now considered the main threat to national security. This threat is linked to irregular immigration at the southern border, thereby justifying the military presence and operations now framed as a National Defense Area under the jurisdiction of the Department of Defense.

While acknowledging the criminal activity and violence perpetrated by transnational organized groups throughout the region—including their involvement in the trafficking and exploitation of migrants and their control over transit routes, such as the Darién Gap⁶—the most pressing concern lies in the increasing securitization and potential criminalization of migration. This trend not only heightens the risk of disregarding fundamental human rights, but also undermines the opportunity to address the problem from a strategic, people-center approach, and long-term perspective, as well as to promote comprehensive immigration reform that considers the multiple factors driving south-to-north migration flows.

Given that majority migrants originate from Latin America, the populations in this region will be the most directly affected. This raises the following questions for decision-makers and regional actors:

- To what extent will U.S. migration and security policies affect the Latin American region?
- What actions will countries in the region take at the national level to protect their citizens who are undocumented in the United States, as well as those who decide to migrate irregularly?
- What role will international organizations focused on the protection of migrants play?
- Although the military presence at the U.S. southern border is considered a deterrent, is it possible that conflict scenarios could emerge?

In general, and despite the remaining questions, the ATA 2025 allows us to glimpse, to some extent, the current U.S. administration's trajectory in national security policy. This is essential for shaping forecasts and the development of national strategies, as well as the initiatives of civil society organizations, to manage the potential impacts on countries in the region and to strengthen cooperation among them.

² Opening Statement for the SSCI as Prepared on the 2025 Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, March 25, 2025, available at: <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/congressional-testimonies/congressional-testimonies-2025/4059-ata-opening-statement-as-prepared>

³ Presidential Actions. Clarifying the Military’s Role in Protecting the Territorial Integrity of the United States. The White House, January 20, 2025, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/clarifying-the-militarys-role-in-protecting-the-territorial-integrity-of-the-united-states/>

⁴ Military Mission for Sealing the Southern Border of the United States and Repelling Invasions. Presidential Memoranda, April 11, 2025, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/military-mission-for-sealing-the-southern-border-of-the-united-states-and-repelling-invasions/>

⁵ During a recent visit to the New Mexico National Defense Area, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth stated, “This is Department of Defense property. Any illegal [attempt] to enter that zone is entering a military base – a federal protected area. You will be detained. You will be interdicted by U.S. troops and border patrol working together.” See At Southern Border, Defense Secretary Visits Newly Created National Defense Area, April 25, 2025, available at: <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4166835/at-southern-border-defense-secretary-visits-newly-created-national-defense-area/#pop9164890>

⁶In 2024, approximately 300,000 people crossed the Darién Gap. See: Game Changers 2024: Organized Crime Profits from the Migration Boom in Latin America. Insight Crime, December 2024, available at: <https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/gamechangers-2024-crimen-organizado-se-beneficia-auge-migratorio-latinoamerica/>

THE ANTARCTIC TREATY AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS

VC. Leandro Pérez Rigoldi

The Antarctic Treaty System¹ emerged as a solution to the territorial disputes of the mid-20th century, within the framework of the Cold War. The twelve signatory countries of the Treaty signed in 1959 and in force since 1961,² agreed that the Antarctic region would be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, prohibiting military measures, but allowing the use of military personnel or equipment for scientific research, logistics or for any other peaceful purpose (Art.1).

In general, the purposes of the Treaty are:

- To use Antarctica for exclusively peaceful purposes.
- To facilitate scientific research in Antarctica.
- To promote international scientific cooperation.
- The right of mutual inspections as a system of mutual trust between the parties.
- Matters relating to the exercise of jurisdiction.
- Protection and conservation of Antarctica's living resources.

Although the purposes of the Treaty are exclusively peaceful and the military presence in Antarctica is through scientific and logistical operations, it is appropriate to point out that seven of the twelve signatory countries maintain territorial claims: Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, Norway, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. In the case of Argentina, Chile and the United Kingdom, the claimed sectors overlap totally or partially. Meanwhile, the United States and Russia do not have territorial claims but reserve the right to make them. Belgium, Japan, and South Africa do not recognize any claims.

In the 1990s, the Antarctic System shifted focus to prioritize environmental and species protection. Thus, on October 4, 1991, the Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty on

Environmental Protection —commonly known as the Madrid Protocol— was signed in Madrid, which states that "the Parties commit themselves to the comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment and dependent and associated ecosystems and hereby designate Antarctica as a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science" (Art.2).³

Interactive Map of Stations and Observatories in Antarctica



Source: Information provided by the Antarctic Treaty Parties through the Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES).
<https://antarctic-treaty.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/8b7f855247074c339a2710fdbdd8450f>

Overall, the Antarctic Treaty, the Protocol and its Annexes created the framework that consolidated this part of the globe as a zone of cooperation. However, as the date approaches when the Protocol can be modified or amended —namely 2048— uncertainty about its validity increases. Despite interdependence and cooperation in various areas, we are witnessing a world increasingly fragmented by conflicting political visions regarding global order. Thus, it is likely we will see a series of international actions of different types and intensity, in the face of which state actors will have to resort to alliances and alignments around the possible scenarios. This makes it timely to pay attention to this issue of regional and global interest.

As an approximation to the subject, the following scenarios are proposed:

¹ The Antarctic Treaty System "means the Antarctic Treaty, the measures in effect under that Treaty, its associated separated international instruments in force and the measures in effect under those instruments". See Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, Definitions (Art.1), available at: <https://www.ats.aq/e/protocol.html>

² The signatory countries of the Antarctic Treaty are: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, the Union of South African Republics (now the South African Republic), the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (now Russia), the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Since 1959, 46 countries have acceded to the Treaty, available at: <https://www.ats.aq/devAS/Parties?lang=e>

³ The Madrid Protocol was opened for signature on October 4, 1991. It entered into force on January 14, 1998. The Protocol may be modified or amended fifty years after the entry into force (Art. 25.2), that is, in 2048, available at: <https://www.ats.aq/e/protocol.html>

1. Continuity Scenario

Despite the possibility that the Madrid Protocol will be subject to revision from 2048, the parties decide to maintain the scope of its objective "designate Antarctica as a nature reserve, devoted to peace and science" (Art.2), so that the status quo in the region would be maintained.

2. End of Peaceful Conditions and Environmental Protection

This scenario would generate a range of crises regarding control of the territory and its resources. Sovereignty claims would be debated, considering new global actors that have emerged since the mid-20th century, as well as the possible exploitation of Antarctic natural resources.

3. Withdrawal from the Treaty by One of the Signatory States

This would generate uncertainty about the continuity of the agreements and the risk of conflict, favoring the previously mentioned scenario.

A variable to consider when discussing future scenarios in Antarctica is the effect of climate change, which could trigger territorial and resource exploitation disputes in the region even before 2048.

These scenarios would generate a series of tensions in the region and the hemisphere, considering that the area with the greatest natural resources is located in the projection of the American continent. This would also create expectations related to the exploitation of vital natural resources that exist in Antarctica (freshwater, fauna, hydrocarbons, and minerals), whose extraction is currently suspended under the Madrid Protocol.

Hence the importance of strengthening the mechanisms of cooperation and mutual trust among the State Parties to the Treaty and the Protocol—particularly those in the region—to continue with the use and presence in Antarctica for exclusively peaceful purposes.



Orcadas Joint Antarctic Base, founded on February 22, 1904. It is Argentina first Antarctic base.

Source: The Ministry of Defense in Argentina:

<https://www.argentina.gob.ar/armada/antartida/bases-permanentes>

"The twelve signatory countries of the Treaty signed in 1959 and in force since 1961 agreed that the Antarctic region would be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, prohibiting military measures"

THE CHALLENGES IN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE OPERATIONS

Major EP Cintya Díaz Romero

The implementation of policies that seek to promote structural equality between men and women in the military is a positive process. However, despite the achievements in this regard, there are ongoing concerns about the improper use and potential misuse of the "gender" variable to access certain benefits or privileges, which ultimately undermines the effective implementation of gender policies, as well as overcoming the barriers that hinder meaningful participation in peace operations.

This commentary is not intended to feed harmful stereotypes about gender roles such as the notion that "women gain access to certain opportunities because of their gender." Rather, it seeks to highlight the attitudes and behaviors that may harm or distort the implementation of inclusive policies. In this regard, some studies in social psychology have explored how women and men can exploit gender stereotypes to their advantage.¹ In the case of women, the use of fragility stereotypes can be strategically employed in specific contexts —this is what I refer to as "feminism of convenience". This ultimately has a negative impact on women, as its use can reinforce social conceptions that hinder the implementation of policies that promote equality between men and women.

It is undeniable that there are numerous situations in which women are subjected to discriminatory treatment, which highlights the complexity of distinguishing between actual instances of discrimination and abuse, and those in which the use of gender is used improperly and conveniently, compromising ethical and moral standards. However, it is also inappropriate to generalize these attitudes, as doing so can foster misconceptions about actions that —regardless of the "gender" factor— would reveal a problem of individual ethical and moral integrity. This is the complexity at the root of the cultural and mental barriers that hinder further progress for women.

In this context, it is relevant to support and promote the implementation of the *barrier assessment* study, promoted within the framework of the Elsie Initiative, in compliance with the objectives of the United Nations Women, Peace and Security Agenda. This study could include an analysis of the issues discussed here, which would allow for a deeper understanding of the dynamics that hinder the meaningful participation of military women in peace operations. It would also contribute to the development of policies and mechanism aimed at identifying behaviors that act as barriers, thereby ensuring equal opportunities based on merit and limiting the space for inappropriate practices.

Likewise, the diagnosis of barriers can help to understand the scope and impact of possible situations that affect the meaningful participation of women in peace operations, including the following:

1. The potential existence of interpersonal relationships that conflict with professional roles, leading some men to adopt a utilitarian view of their female colleagues.
2. Recruiting and selection systems for female personnel in peace operations that may rely on non-operational criteria.
3. Demotivation among personnel due to the perception that non-professional factors influence access to career development opportunities.

As can be seen, this is a complex issue. However, due to space limitations, this paper does not address other important aspects such as leadership capacity and role profiles, the range reactions among uniformed women to inappropriate proposals, or cultural elements that influence workplace dynamics —among other situations that represent challenges to the effective participation of military women in peace operations.

Hence, the aim of this commentary is to motivate deeper study and reflection on the subject, as well as to encourage other women to share their concerns and experiences. Only through a comprehensive approach will it be possible to achieve more inclusive and effective participation of women in peace operations and, more broadly, within the armed forces wherever applicable.

¹See Eagly, A. H., y Wood, W. (2012). *Social role theory*. En P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, y E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 458–476). Sage Publication, available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222.n49>

SERBIA: The student uprising that unites the country

Marija Ignjatijevic

Belgrade's streets were flooded on March 15th of 2025 as hundreds of thousands travelled from the entire country to join the [largest protest](#) the country has seen. For hours, the student-organized protest was entirely peaceful until one moment disrupted the silent tribute to the victims — a massive crowd was abruptly split in two, as if making way for an invisible wave that rushed through them, causing a moment of panic and a brief stampede. Videos and [testimonies](#) made it clear that some sort of acoustic weapon was used against peaceful protesters. As public pressure intensified in the following days, the government admitted to possessing the long-range acoustic device (LRAD) but [denied](#) using it during the protests. Most recently, the European Court of Human Rights issued an [interim measure](#) ordering the Republic of Serbia to refrain from using sound devices to control citizens during protests, following a request filed by civil society organizations on behalf of 47 citizens.

The protest was part of a nationwide student-led uprising that lasted for 6 months, triggered by the recently renovated train station's [canopy collapse](#) in Novi Sad on November 1st of 2024, which left 16 people dead. This tragedy, linked with systemic corruption, sparked protests under slogans "Your Hands Are Bloody" and "Corruption Kills". At the beginning, a violent attack on students from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts by government supporters sparked a wave of blockades at universities across Serbia that has lasted to this day. Student demands are simple and rooted in common sense: publication of documents on the train station renovation, accountability for the attacks on students, release of detained protesters, and increased educational funding. Yet, these demands strike directly at the regime's core - impunity that maintains the loyalty of party henchmen.

The strength of the student movement lies in its direct democracy practices, particularly [plenums](#) - democratic assemblies on each faculty, where all students can participate in decision-making through majority vote. With no formal leadership, the movement is resilient and hard to crack down on, as it prevents co-optation or targeting of individual leaders. Using direct democracy and focusing on widely supported demands, students have mobilized large sections of society, fostering solidarity with workers, farmers, educators, and others. Students have organized different actions like daily commemorations of victims, [large protests in different cities](#), [marches throughout the country](#), [general strike](#), [blockades of roads](#), [blockades of public broadcasters](#), etc.

In March alone, there were [1697 protests in 378 locations](#) across Serbia, and polls show that student protests are [supported by 59% of citizens](#).

Government response has been rather erratic since the beginning, shifting from the carrot (like affordable housing for young people) to the stick (arrests, attacks, and smear campaigns against protesters). After a violent attack on a female student by a ruling party member in January, the [prime minister resigned](#). However, since the resignation had no impact on their demands, students kept protesting. Since none of the government actions or narratives have proven to be successful but rather counterproductive, they have increasingly resorted to repression in the past weeks. Besides the alleged use of a sound cannon during the protest, there have been [arrests of activists](#), testimonies and videos of [police brutality](#), [increased pressures on civil society](#), [use of para-state groups to attack protesters](#), and [use of pro-regime media to target protesters and students](#).

International reactions have been rather lukewarm, with the EU maintaining its business-as-usual stance with the government, allowing the autocracy to deepen in favor of its [political and economic interests](#). As part of their resistance, students embarked on a 1,300 km [cycling route](#) from Belgrade to Strasbourg and delivered letters on human rights violations to the representatives of EU institutions, precisely to boost their fight on the international stage.

The protests of unprecedented size in Serbia continue, with students still in blockades and citizens protesting and organizing themselves into local assemblies across the country. Although it is unclear whether it will be translated into concrete political action, the Serbian students' fight is a powerful example of grassroots activism and should make us question whether democracy is being rethought from the ground up globally.

CONTRIBUTORS

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