

Dan Rather Reports

Episode Number: 406

Episode Title: Yankee, Go Home!

Description: The new President of Bolivia promotes coca growth and expels US drug agents. A military school with a questionable past is training soldiers from Latin America. Plus, the US Ambassador to Afghanistan.

TEASE:

KATHRYN LEDEBUR, DIRECTOR, ANDEAN INFORMATION NETWORK

The Morales government has worked hard to distinguish between the coca leaf which is a legal, traditional crop and cocaine and the illegal narcotic which is something that takes a great deal of processing.

RATHER

What do you teach, if anything about torture? Is that part of the curriculum here?

COL. FELIX SANTIAGO, COMMANDANT OF WHINSEC

I can assure you that that is not something that we pursue in this kind of environment.

WILLIAM B. WOOD, US AMBASSADOR TO AFGHANISTAN

This is the most complicated problem, and the most important problem, we're facing. If we can get Afghanistan right, I believe that other problems in the future will turn out to be a subset of this one. This is the big game.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE'LL BRING YOU THE NEWS TONIGHT, ON DAN RATHER REPORTS.

YANKEE, GO HOME!

DAN RATHER (ON CAMERA)

GOOD EVENING. TONIGHT WE BEGIN WITH A LOOK AT HOW THE UNITED STATES TRIES TO EXERT ITS POWER AND PRINCIPALS ABROAD. NOT IN THE MIDDLE EAST OR SOUTH ASIA, BUT SOUTH AMERICA. OUR FIRST STORY COMES FROM BOLIVIA - A DESPERATELY POOR COUNTRY THAT'S ALSO ONE OF THE WORLD'S MAJOR COCAINE SUPPLIERS. FOR YEARS U.S. ANTI-DRUG AGENTS HAD FREE RUN OF THE COUNTRY. THEIR TARGET: THE COCA PLANT, THE RAW MATERIAL FOR COCAINE. AND BOLIVIA'S GOVERNMENTS LET THE AMERICAN AGENTS IN AS PART OF A DEAL WHERE WASHINGTON SHOWERED THE COUNTRY WITH FOREIGN AID. THIS COZY RELATIONSHIP WAS SHATTERED WHEN A COCA GROWER, EVO MORALES WAS SWEEPED INTO OFFICE AS BOLIVIA'S PRESIDENT IN 2005. HE STOPPED U.S. LED EFFORTS TO ERADICATE COCA, AND LAST FALL, EXPELLED AMERICAN ANTI-DRUG FORCES AND THE U.S. AMBASSADOR. BUT THAT WAS JUST THE BEGINNING.

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE'RE AT THE EDGE OF A THICK RAIN FOREST IN CENTRAL BOLIVIA WITH A SPECIAL ANTI-DRUG FORCE OF THE NATIONAL POLICE. THIS IS A REMOTE WILDERNESS HOURS FROM ANY BIG CITY, AND 4,300 MILES FROM WASHINGTON. BUT FOR YEARS THIS AREA CALLED EL CHAPARE HAS BEEN UNDER THE CLOSE WATCH OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. THAT'S BECAUSE WE'RE IN ONE OF THE WORLD'S MAJOR COCAINE PRODUCING REGIONS. HUNDREDS OF MAKESHIFT LABS LIKE THIS ARE SCATTERED BENEATH THE HARDWOOD CANOPY, WHERE LOCALLY GROWN COCA LEAVES ARE PROCESSED INTO THE EXPENSIVE WHITE POWDER FOR EXPORT ABROAD.

BOLIVIAN POLICE OFFICER (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

In our patrol we found a mobile cocaine production laboratory. Note we found ingredients, including crushed coca leaves that is ready to be processed.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE SIZE OF THIS PILE OF PROCESSED COCA SUGGESTS THE LAB HAS BEEN RUNNING UNNOTICED FOR WEEKS. A SMALL ENGINE, POWERED BY DRUMS OF GASOLINE, CHURNED OUT GALLONS OF LIQUID COCAINE. ONCE MADE INTO A POWDER, IT WOULD BE WORTH TENS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS. BOLIVIA IS THE WORLD'S THIRD LARGEST PRODUCER OF COCAINE, THANKS TO AN ENDLESS SUPPLY OF COCA GROWING IN ITS TWO LUSH VALLEYS. BOLIVIAN INDIANS REVERED COCA AS A SACRED PLANT LONG BEFORE THE U.S. DECLARED ITS WAR ON DRUGS. FOR CENTURIES, THEY CHEWED THE TEA-LIKE COCA LEAVES TO STAVE OFF HUNGER AND GET A BOOST LIKE A CUP OF COFFEE. BUT THE UNITED STATES SEES DANGER IN THESE COCA FIELDS. AFTER ALL, AMERICA CONSUMES MORE COCAINE THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY, AND HAS SPENT TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS ON ITS WAR ON DRUGS HERE. FOR YEARS, OFFICIALS FROM THE U.S. DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION, OR D.E.A., HAVE PROVIDED INTELLIGENCE, EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING TO THESE BOLIVIAN POLICE - CRUCIAL HELP THAT LED AUTHORITIES TO FIND AND TORCH THOUSANDS COCA FIELDS AND LABS LIKE THIS EACH YEAR. NOW ALL THAT HAS CHANGED.

BOLIVIAN PRESIDENT EVO MORALES (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

We have woken up to defend our land. We have woken up to defend our natural resources. We have woken up to defend our coca leaves. We are moving forward. We are here today to say together that in Bolivia and in Latin America we will free ourselves forever.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EVO MORALES WAS A LEADER AND ORGANIZER OF COCA GROWERS AND NOW PRESIDENT OF BOLIVIA. HE WAS ELECTED IN 2006 AND PROMPTLY HALTED COCA ERADICATION. LATE LAST YEAR, HE EXPELLED D.E.A. AGENTS. MORALES, BOLIVIA'S FIRST INDIAN PRESIDENT, HAS PROMOTED THE COCA PLANT AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF HIS COUNTRY'S ETHNIC AND ECONOMIC IDENTITY AND HE MADE IT CLEAR ON DAY ONE OF HIS PRESIDENCY THAT HE WOULD DO SO IN OPEN DEFIANCE OF THE UNITED STATES.

KATHRYN LEDEBUR, DIRECTOR, ANDEAN INFORMATION NETWORK

The Morales government has worked hard to distinguish between the coca leaf which is a legal, traditional crop. And to distinguish that from cocaine and the illegal narcotic which is something that takes a great deal of processing.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AMERICAN EX-PATRIOT KATHRYN LEDEBUR IS DIRECTOR OF THE ANDEAN INFORMATION NETWORK, A RESEARCH GROUP THAT STUDIES THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN ANTI-DRUG EFFORTS IN BOLIVIA. SHE SAYS THAT WHILE MORALES MAY BE A THORN IN THE SIDE OF THE UNITED STATES, IT'S THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT THAT ACTUALLY HELPED PUT HIM ON THE WORLD STAGE.

LEDEBUR

A lot of his rise to prominence is based on systematically trying to resist U.S. forced eradication efforts, U.S. pressure, U.S. violations of national sovereignty. That is something that's felt by all Bolivians. This is not something that's specifically affected the coca growers, although it affected them most acutely.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MORALES HAS ADOPTED A POLICY THAT HE CALLS COCA YES, COCAINE NO. AND THERE IS NO BETTER PLACE TO SEE THE NEW COCA-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPE THAN THIS ANTI-COCAINE CHECKPOINT. NOT TOO LONG AGO, POLICE WOULD BE SEARCHING THESE VEHICLES FOR COCA LEAVES, IN ADDITION TO COCAINE, AND THE CHEMICALS USED TO PROCESS IT. BUT NOW, JUST 50 YARDS AWAY FROM A CHECKPOINT THAT U.S. TAXPAYERS HELPED TO BUILD, A SURPRISING BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT - THIS VENDOR IS SELLING COCA LEAVES TO TRUCKERS PASSING THROUGH.

LEDEBUR

The coca leaf is such an integral part of life in Bolivia that it's not considered at all a contradiction to have it on sale right here where the drug police are working. In fact the drug police often chew it themselves to get them stamina and truck drivers and bus drivers on long trips chew coca because like coffee it's a stimulant that keeps them awake for the long ride.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND AS YOU CAN SEE IN THIS WAREHOUSE, THERE'S ENOUGH COCA LEAVES FOR A LOT OF TRUCKERS. RIMER AGREDA, A MAYOR IN THE THIS COCA GROWING REGION WANTED TO SHOW THAT IT'S NO MORE HARMFUL THAN ANY OTHER CROP.

MAYOR RIMER AGREDA (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

We heard that in the U.S. they say that by simply having touched this coca leaf that we will get high. Definitely not. You can see that we can chew this and practically nothing happens. But this isn't what they say outside of Bolivia, especially not the U.S.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS SHOWS THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM FOR THE UNITED STATES. HERE WORKERS FROM A COCA GROWING COLLECTIVE ARE FILLING BAG AFTER BAG OF THE LEAVES TO BE SOLD AT A NEARBY MARKET. THE UNITED STATES SPENT MILLIONS HERE TRYING TO CONVINCING FARMERS TO GROW OTHER CROPS, LIKE PINEAPPLES. BUT BOLIVIANS WANT THEIR COCA. AGREDA TOLD US THIS U.S. FUNDED PINEAPPLE PACKING PLANT COST \$250,000, BUT NEVER HAD A CHANCE OF COMPETING WITH THE COCA FARMS.

AGREDA (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

It's been more than eight years since they packed one box, one pineapple to export.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THAT'S BECAUSE UNLIKE PINEAPPLES, COCA IS EASY TO GROW AND ONE HUNDRED POUNDS OF LEAVES WILL SELL FOR ROUGHLY \$250, ABOUT TWICE WHAT THE AVERAGE BOLIVIAN FACTORY WORKER WILL EARN IN A MONTH. PRESIDENT MORALES HAS MADE IT A PRIORITY TO DEVELOP A LEGITIMATE COCA INDUSTRY, PRODUCING EVERYTHING FROM COCA-BASED TEA TO TOOTHPASTE. HE SAYS HIS GOVERNMENT CLOSELY MONITORS THE LINE OF PRODUCTION TO MAKE SURE NO COCA LEAVES GO TO DRUG TRAFFICKERS. THE U.S., HOWEVER, SEES NO ROOM FOR LEGAL COCA GROWTH. AND THIS FUNDAMENTAL CONFLICT IS AT THE HEART OF ESCALATING U.S. TENSIONS WITH MORALES. AT 14-THOUSAND FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL, THIS PLATEAU IS ONE OF THE BEST VIEWS OF BOLIVIA'S CAPITAL, LA PAZ. IT'S ALSO A GOOD PLACE TO VISUALIZE AMERICA'S GREATEST CHALLENGE IN LATIN AMERICA: HOW TO BALANCE U.S. INTERESTS WITH ENOUGH LOCAL GOOD WILL TO PREVENT RESENTMENT FROM BOILING OVER AGAIN. TWO BOLIVIAN PRESIDENTS HAVE BEEN FORCED FROM OFFICE IN RECENT YEARS, AFTER THOUSANDS OF PROTESTORS LED BY A COCA FARMER NAMED EVO MORALES, ACCUSED THEM OF BEING PUPPETS OF THE WHITE HOUSE IN PART BECAUSE THEY SUPPORTED U.S. LED COCA ERADICATION EFFORTS.

MORALES SAYS HE WON'T FORGET THE COCA GROWERS WHO HELPED SWEEP HIM INTO OFFICE. BUT HE SAYS HE WILL NOT ALLOW THEM TO TAKE PART IN ANY ILLICIT DRUG TRADE.

FORMER ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE THOMAS PICKERING

It's important to-- judge not just what he's saying, but what he does.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FORMER ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE THOMAS PICKERING WAS ONE OF AMERICA'S HIGHEST RANKING DIPLOMATS DURING THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION. HE PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN SETTING POLICY ON THE U.S WAR ON DRUGS, BUT SAYS NOW THAT AMERICA'S FOCUS ON ERADICATION HAS FAILED.

PICKERING

Unfortunately, we have seen a highly flexible, highly agile opponent. So that when we sprayed large fields, it was inevitable that they moved deeper into the jungle, into smaller patches, often hidden by at least partially the jungle canopy.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PICKERING WROTE A REPORT, RELEASED BY THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION LAST FALL, THAT SAID STEADILY DROPPING COCAINE PRICES IN THE U.S. MEANT IMPORTS OF COCAINE WERE AS HIGH AS EVER. BUT WASHINGTON IS STILL TRYING TO FIND WAYS TO PRESSURE BOLIVIA INTO REDUCING COCA GROWTH. PRESIDENT BUSH IN OCTOBER PUT BOLIVIA ON A BLACKLIST AND SUSPENDED A TRADE DEAL.

PRESIDENT BUSH, AT BILL SIGNING

The Andean Trade Preference Act allows us to suspend trade preferences with countries that do not live up to their promises. And unfortunately, Bolivia has failed to cooperate with the United States on important efforts to fight drug trafficking.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT PLAYING TOUGH DIDN'T SLOW COCAINE PRODUCTION. AND WITHOUT THE TRADE DEAL, HUNDREDS OF FACTORY WORKERS IN BOLIVIA WILL BE OUT OF JOBS.

RATHER

Fairly recently, the United States put-- Bolivia on this list of countries not cooperating with the war on drugs. And in hoping to punish or make it pay a price with President Morales in Bolivia-- ending trade benefits. Is this an effective approach?

PICKERING

Bolivia has what we would call quaint ideas about coca production and consumption. Some of them have to do with their own culture and their own society and that's probably their business. But others have now begun to impinge on others, including our economy as they becoming an increasingly larger exporter. And if the government aids and abets this, which has been contrary to Bolivian policy in the past, then I think we have to recognize it.

RATHER

I recently interviewed President Morales.

PICKERING

Yeah.

RATHER

And among the things that he seemed to want to get across saying, "Listen, because I'm pro-coca doesn't mean I'm not anti-cocaine." And this is not a direct quote, "But I'm strongly anti-cocaine". Are we to believe that? What are we to make of that?

PICKERING

I don't know, I think that we ought to go back and say, "If that's what you really mean, Mr. President, we would like to watch the situation in - in Bolivia and have it become clear to us that you're not, in a sense, aiding and abetting both the production of-- of cocaine and its export to the United States and, indeed, elsewhere, to our friends around the world."

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT BOLIVIA EXPERT KATHRYN LEDEBUR DOUBTS MORALES WOULD FEEL THE NEED TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF TO WASHINGTON THESE DAYS.

LEDEBUR

With the Morales vision of coca, yes, cocaine, no, certainly in the upper echelons of Washington there's not acceptance for this policy. But the influence of the U.S. in Bolivia which used to be able to dictate policy and especially drug policy, has diminished a great deal. And there are other governments that are willing to help Bolivia and fund Bolivia: Venezuela, other European governments.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THAT'S RIGHT, VENEZUELA. PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ HAS PROMISED TO BUY LEGAL COCA-BASED PRODUCTS PRODUCED IN BOLIVIA – AND UNDERWRITE THE GROWTH OF ABOUT 4,000 TONS OF BOLIVIAN COCA LEAVES. AND CHAVEZ IS JUST ONE OF A GROWING LIST OF LEADERS HOSTILE TO THE U.S. THAT ARE HELPING MORALES BYPASS WASHINGTON. IN A SHOW OF SOLIDARITY FOR MORALES' SOCIALIST MOVEMENT, CUBA'S CASTRO BROTHERS HAVE SENT BOLIVIA HUNDREDS OF VOLUNTEER DOCTORS. IRAN'S PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD PUBLICLY APPLAUDED MORALES FOR STANDING UP TO THE U.S. AND HE PLEDGED \$1 BILLION IN INVESTMENTS. AND RUSSIA HAS MADE IT'S MOST SIGNIFICANT RETURN TO THE HEMISPHERE SINCE THE COLD WAR, OFFERING TO HELP TRAIN BOLIVIA'S ANTI-DRUG POLICE AND REPLACE AGING HELICOPTERS. PRESIDENT MORALES CAME TO NEW YORK IN NOVEMBER 2008 TO ADDRESS THE UNITED NATIONS.

MORALES (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

I am not defending cocaine, nor am I going to defend cocaine. We will not transform coca to cocaine. But yes, consuming coca is part of the indigenous Andean culture. And I am very sorry that international anti-drug agencies refuse to recognize that.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

I HAD A CHANCE TO SPEAK WITH PRESIDENT MORALES WHEN HE WAS IN NEW YORK. HE HAD JUST EXPELLED THE D.E.A. FROM BOLIVIA, KNOWING HIS ANTI-AMERICAN ALLIES WOULD SUPPORT HIM.

RATHER

There is this conception that Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez and yourself are one in the same in terms of their – of your desires. Is that true?

MORALES (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

To say that we are the same, well, we are not the same. But we've bet on the same idea for improving humanity and we are working together.

RATHER

What is the situation with Iran? There are these reports that you are getting help from Iran. Where do you stand with Iran? They are now getting involved in Bolivia.

MORALES (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

We are starting to have diplomatic relations. We are going to have diplomatic relations, but we are also going to have business relations. I received a visit from the president of Iran and he received me in Iran. For now, many of the conversations are about investments, related to the oil sector.

RATHER

There are credible reports that Russia is increasing its contacts, its influence with your government. Is that true? What is the situation with the Russians?

MORALES (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

I think we had lost diplomatic relations between Bolivia and Russia. Now we want to accelerate them to complement the two countries.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT DMITRI MEDVEDEV'S OUTREACH TO BOLIVIA IS IN FACT PART OF A LARGER RUSSIAN PUSH INTO LATIN AMERICA. LATE LAST YEAR, MOSCOW SAILED THESE WARSHIPS TO VENEZUELA AND CUBA. SOME SAW THIS AS A TIT FOR TAT SHOW OF DEFIANCE TO THE U.S. - PAYBACK FOR LAST SUMMER, THAT'S WHEN AMERICAN WARSHIPS DELIVERED HUMANITARIAN AID TO THE COUNTRY OF GEORGIA, AFTER ITS HIGH PROFILE WAR RUSSIA. AT THAT TIME, RUSSIA MADE IT CLEAR IT WAS UNHAPPY HAVING THE U.S. IN ITS BACKYARD. AS FOR MORALES, HE SAID HE WOULD WELCOME FOREIGN AID FROM ANY COUNTRY WILLING TO HELP, AS LONG AS IT DOESN'T EXPECT TOO MUCH IN RETURN. FOR TOO LONG, HE SAYS, THE U.S. USED ITS DONATIONS AS A LICENSE TO TREAT BOLIVIA LIKE A COLONIAL TERRITORY.

RATHER

Mr. President, clearly relations have been deteriorating between the United States and Bolivia. Why?

MORALES (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

Through a series of ambassadors, the U.S. has constantly meddled in Bolivia's political matters and conspired against our government. The ambassadors have accused the social movements of being terrorists and called (coca growing) union leaders drug traffickers. This comes from the U.S. embassy.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

OFFICIALS FROM THE U.S. EMBASSY IN BOLIVIA DECLINED OUR REQUESTS FOR AN INTERVIEW, AS DID THE STATE DEPARTMENT. AMERICAN DIPLOMATS HAVE LARGELY REMAINED SILENT ON BOLIVIA SINCE MORALES EXPELLED THE D.E.A. AGENTS, AND FOLLOWED UP LAST FALL BY KICKING OUT THE U-S AMBASSADOR.

MORALES (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

I know that the American people and the people in the US want to distribute aid to many countries in the world. But at this moment, this aid is going to a conspiracy against my government.

RATHER

What proof do you have of the conspiracy Mr. President?

MORALES

The funds from USAID are going to support nonprofits and foundations run by ex ministers who support free trade. But the only thing these groups are doing is plan how to bring down the Indian, Evo Morales.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SOME SAY MORALES IS SIMPLY FOLLOWING THE POPULIST SCRIPT OF HIS SOCIALIST MENTOR HUGO CHAVEZ: WHEN THINGS GET BAD AT HOME, BUILD UP THE UNITED STATES AS A LOOMING ENEMY. AND USE THE THREAT AS AN EXCUSE TO CONSOLIDATE POWER. VOTERS EARLY THIS YEAR APPROVED A NEW CONSTITUTION THAT WILL ALLOW MORALES TO SEEK A SECOND TERM IN OFFICE. CHAVEZ HAS MADE IT A LOT EASIER FOR MORALES TO STAND UP TO THE UNITED STATES. HE'S GIVING THE U.S. A RUN FOR ITS MONEY BY NEARLY MATCHING THE \$100 MILLION IN AMERICAN AID DELIVERED IN 2007, FUNDING NEW HOSPITALS, OIL PROJECTS AND MICROLOAN ENTERPRISES. VENEZUELAN OIL MONEY WILL PAY FOR DOZENS OF NEW AFFORDABLE HOMES BEING BUILT IN THIS AYAMARA INDIAN COMMUNITY OUTSIDE LA PAZ. HUNDREDS TURNED OUT FOR THIS GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY. CHAVEZ'S GOAL IS CLEAR: BY BOLSTERING MORALES' POPULARITY, HE HOPES TO KEEP A FRIEND IN OFFICE WHO'S SYMPATHETIC TO HIS ANTI-AMERICAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT. MORALES HAS BECOME A POWERFUL ALLY TO THE VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT. DESPITE BOLIVIA'S SMALL SIZE AND ECONOMY, THE COUNTRY'S FIRST INDIAN PRESIDENT HAS RISEN TO BECOME A HERO TO MANY ACROSS THE CONTINENT. THEY SEE HIM AS A FEARLESS ADVOCATE OF THE VOICELESS POOR. WHEN MORALES SPEAKS, THE WORLD LISTENS. SO IT'S INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE BOLIVIAN PRESIDENT SAYS HE ADMIRES AND IDENTIFIES WITH PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA. AND HE SAYS HE IS CONFIDENT U.S./BOLIVIAN RELATIONS WILL IMPROVE NOW THAT OBAMA HAS TAKEN OFFICE.

MORALES (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

Well you can see the change already. An Indian who is president of Bolivia and a black person who is president of the U.S. You've never seen that in the history of Bolivia or the history of the U.S. The most vilified people in the world now, we can be Presidents. My greatest hope, not only towards the U.S. but with all the countries of the world is to have good relations and to be able to compliment each other to do a good job.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

BOLIVIAN PRESIDENT EVO MORALES. NOW, WHEN WE COME BACK, WE TAKE YOU TO AN ARMY BASE IN GEORGIA TO SEE HOW U.S. INFLUENCE IN LATIN AMERICA IS BEING TESTED.

WHINSEC

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

OUR NEXT STORY IS THE RESULT OF A SIX-MONTH INVESTIGATION. THE SUBJECT IS ONCE AGAIN LATIN AMERICA- ONLY WE'LL SPEND THE NEXT FEW MINUTES AT A U.S. MILITARY TRAINING FACILITY IN THE OAK FORESTS OF GEORGIA. IT'S CALLED THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY COOPERATION, OR WHINSEC. FOR DECADES SOLDIERS AND POLICE FROM ALL OVER LATIN AMERICA, INCLUDING BOLIVIA, HAVE COME TO THIS ACADEMY FOR TRAINING AT THE INVITATION OF THE PENTAGON. THE QUESTION IS WHAT KIND OF TRAINING, FOR WHAT PURPOSE, AND TO WHAT EFFECT? THE ACADEMY WAS STARTED TO FIGHT COMMUNISM BUT WITH THE END OF THE COLD WAR, THE MISSION OFFICALLY SHIFTED TO ANTI-NARCOTICS AND STABILITY OPERATIONS. BUT REGARDLESS OF THE KIND OF OPERATION, THE ACADEMY HAS HAD A REPUTATION FOR TEACHING SOLDIERS FROM ALL OVER CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA, ONES WITH HISTORIES OF REPRESSION, TO BE EVEN DEADLIER. CRITICS SAY THE STUDENTS WERE TAUGHT TO USE THE HARSHTEST OF INTERROGATION TECHNIQUES. SIMPLY PUT-- TORTURE. SO NOW, ARE OR ARE NOT U.S. TAX DOLLARS HELPING TRAIN LATIN AMERICAN SOLDIERS TO ABUSE HUMAN RIGHTS? THE PENTAGON FLATLY, STRONGLY DENIES THIS BUT IN THE ERA OF GUANTANAMO AND ABU GHRAIB, RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY, THEY ARE QUESTIONS THAT WON'T GO AWAY.

RATHER

What do you teach, if anything about torture, and extreme interrogation techniques? Is that part of the curriculum here? Does that come up in the teaching?

COL. FELIX SANTIAGO, COMMANDANT OF WHINSEC

Sir, absolutely not. I don't think that anyone-- that wears a-- U.S. military uniform will espouse-- torture in any way. I can assure you that that is not something that we pursue in this kind of environment

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

COLONEL FELIX SANTIAGO IS COMMANDANT OF WHINSEC, WHICH SITS ON A SMALL CORNER OF THE MASSIVE U.S. MILITARY BASE AT FT. BENNING GEORGIA, AND THESE ARE SOME HIS STUDENTS - ARMY CADETS FROM HONDURAS WHO ARE TAKING PART IN A TWO-DAY TACTICAL TRAINING EXERCISE. WHILE THIS PROGRAM HAS FACED CRITICISM IN THE PAST, COLONEL SANTIAGO SAYS IT IS NOW A MODEL MODERN DAY MILITARY ACADEMY - ONE THAT HAS TAUGHT CORE AMERICAN VALUES TO THOUSANDS OF SOLDIERS FROM MORE THAN A DOZEN LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES.

SANTIAGO

We are-- pursuing professional training. You have seen it yourself throughout the day today. And I think if you ask any student out there that they realize that they can apply what we teach over here in terms of human rights into their own reality, that when you go into a particular real situation whether in-- in Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, you name the country. You know, that when you're challenged and you're challenged by the conditions that you do the right thing.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TRAINING LATIN AMERICAN TROOPS TO DO THE RIGHT THING COSTS TAXPAYERS SOME \$13 MILLION EACH YEAR. BUT WEST POINT GRADUATE AND U.S. ARMY CAPTAIN BRAD MILLER, AN INSTRUCTOR HERE, SAYS IT IS WORTH EVERY PENNY.

RATHER

In this group of people who's faces we see here in the camouflage uniforms, there is some future generals—

CPT. BRAD MILLER

Absolutely.

RATHER

--and high ranking colonels who'll be in command.

MILLER

Absolutely. And that is why it is so important, really, something I always tell my instructors and I also have to tell myself repeatedly is that, we are, we're looking into the future. And we have to realize that in the faces of this young individuals, who right now are 19 and 20 year old cadets, but if we were to fast forward 25, 30 years, these are gonna be the leaders of their nation.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS ISN'T IDLE SPECULATION. STUDENTS ARE HANDPICKED BY THEIR SUPERIORS AT HOME. AND SCORES OF GRADUATES HAVE GONE ON TO ENJOY DECORATED MILITARY CAREERS. THE IDEA BEHIND WHINSEC IS THAT GRADUATES WILL USE THEIR TRAINING TO ASSIST THE U.S. IN TAKING ON SOME THE HEMISPHERE'S GREATEST THREATS: EVERYTHING FROM TERRORISM, TO NATURAL DISASTERS, TO THE WAR ON DRUGS. WE SPENT TWO DAYS OBSERVING A NUMBER OF CLASSES, AND WE SAW A WIDE RANGE OF SKILLS BEING TAUGHT TO PREPARE A PROFESSIONAL, 21st CENTURY SOLDIER. THE COUNTRIES THAT COME HERE REFLECT AMERICAN INTERESTS IN THE HEMISPHERE. THESE DAYS MOST STUDENTS COME FROM COLOMBIA, THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PRODUCER OF COCAINE, A COUNTRY THAT, UNLIKE BOLIVIA, IS COOPERATING IN AMERICA'S WAR ON DRUGS. CADETS CAN EVEN PRACTICE RAIDING A FAKE DRUG LAB, LIKE THE REAL ONE WE SAW IN BOLIVIA. AND THEY WILL GET EXPERT INSTRUCTION FROM A SERGEANT ON LOAN FROM COLOMBIA'S NATIONAL POLICE FORCE.

COLOMBIAN SERGEANT (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

Here we can teach the students the process for producing cocaine and the components that make up this kind of laboratory.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT THAT'S NOT ALL. STUDENTS HERE LEARN EVERYTHING FROM EMERGENCY FIELD MEDICINE, TO RESPOND IN THE EVENT OF A HURRICANE OR EARTHQUAKE - TO TACTICAL EXERCISES IN THE FIELD, AND A SIMULATION OF A PLANNED RAID, THE KINDS THAT WOULD BE USED IN AN ANTI-DRUG OPERATION. THIS IS JUAN PINO, A CAPTAIN IN THE PANAMANIAN NAVY.

RATHER

What's the most important thing you've learned here so far, Captain?

CPT. JUAN PINO (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

I am learning many new things that I can apply in my own country. We, in Panama, face some of the same risks as the U.S. And here we can practice multinational exercises that will help us confront worldwide threats.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS IS THE OFFICIAL MISSION OF WHINSEC, BUT THIS ARMY BASE IN GEORGIA IS NOT ISOLATED FROM LARGER GEOPOLITICAL CURRENTS. SOME STUDENTS COME FROM MILITARIES WITH TAINTED HUMAN RIGHTS RECORDS. AND IN THE WAKE OF GUANTANAMO, ABU GHRAIB, AND THE WAR IN IRAQ, U.S. MILITARY OBJECTIVES, RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY, ARE VIEWED WITH SUSPICION IN LATIN AMERICA.

FATHER ROY BOURGEOIS, SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS WATCH

You do not teach democracy behind the barrel of a gun.

PROTESTERS

Shut it down! Shut it down!

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FATHER ROY BOURGEOIS LEADS A MOVEMENT TO CLOSE WHINSEC – SHUT IT DOWN. HE DESCRIBES THE SCHOOL AS AN OUTDATED RELIC OF THE COLDEST DAYS OF THE COLD WAR. THIS PROTEST WAS OUTSIDE FORT BENNING LAST NOVEMBER. WHEN THE CATHOLIC PRIEST STARTED ALL THIS 20 YEARS AGO, WHINSEC WAS KNOWN AS THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS, AND ITS FOCUS WAS TRAINING LATIN AMERICAN ALLIES TO BEAT BACK THE THREAT OF COMMUNISM, PERCEIVED OR OTHERWISE. SOMETIMES TO BEAT IT BACK QUITE BRUTALLY. BOURGEOIS SAYS WHINSEC TRAINED SOME OF LATIN AMERICA’S WORST HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS.

BOURGEOIS

I’m not saying all of the soldiers here who are trained go back and commit these crimes against their people but many have.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BOURGEOIS CALLS THE ACADEMY THE “SCHOOL OF THE ASSASSINS” AND HE CITES AS WHAT HE SAYS IS PROOF A LARGE ROSTER OF FORMER STUDENTS THAT INCLUDE SOME OF THE REGION’S MOST NOTORIOUS DESPOTS AND DICTATORS. ALUMNI LIKE PANAMA’S MANUEL NORIEGA, NOW BEING HELD IN MIAMI FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING; ARGENTINE DICTATOR LEOPOLDO GALTIERI, WHOSE DEATH SQUADS SLAUGHTERED THOUSANDS OF LEFTISTS IN THE 1970s AND 80s ; AND SEVERAL SALVADORAN SOLDIERS IMPLICATED IN A MASSACRE OF SIX JESUIT PRIESTS, THAT’S JUST TO NAME A FEW.

BOURGEOIS

They simply say we cannot take responsibility for their crimes but yet if you bring from El Salvador in those days, Guatemala, Chile, soldiers who have a human rights record that they have, known to be killers, you bring them here and give them, you know, combat training and they go back and kill. There is this issue called complicity.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS OPENED IN PANAMA IN 1946 AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COLD WAR, AND THEN IT MOVED TO FORT BENNING IN 1984, AS PART OF THE PANAMA CANAL TREATY. ABOUT FIVE YEARS LATER, AFTER THE MURDER OF THE PRIESTS IN EL SALVADOR, BOURGEOIS SETTLED INTO AN APARTMENT WITH A VIEW OF THE BASE. FROM THERE, HE FOUNDED THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS WATCH.

BOURGEOIS

We came here in 1990, just months after the Congressional task force reported that those responsible for the massacre of the two women and the six Jesuits were trained at the U.S. Army School of the Americas. We came here with a group of 10. This is when we started.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FROM THIS OFFICE, BOURGEOIS HAS TIRELESSLY RESEARCHED THE ACADEMY, KEEPING CLOSE TABS ON GRADUATES. HE'S CROSS REFERENCED STUDENTS' NAMES WITH DOZENS OF TROOPS TIED TO HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, AND HE REGULARLY UPDATES THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS WATCH WEB SITE WITH THESE NEW DISCOVERIES.

BOURGEOIS

What we have learned is that over 50,000 soldiers from Latin America came to this combat school to learn counterinsurgency, commando tactics and what we learned was that many of those graduates went to their - back to their home countries and caused a lot of suffering and death.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BOURGEOIS SAYS BRUTALITY WAS PART OF SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS' CURRICULUM. AND HE CITES AS EVIDENCE SEVERAL TRAINING MANUALS THAT HAD BEEN USED THERE IN THE 1980S, GUIDES THAT ADVOCATED HARSH COUNTERINSURGENCY TECHNIQUES FORBIDDEN UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW. THEY WERE MADE PUBLIC BY THE PENTAGON IN 1996, BUT ONLY AFTER INTENSE PRESSURE FROM BOURGEOIS AND OTHER SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS CRITICS. THIS GUIDE TO RECRUITING AND CONTROLLING INFORMANTS ADVOCATES USING QUOTE "ARRESTS OR EXECUTIONS."

WE ASKED COL. SANTIAGO, WHO TOOK COMMAND OF WHINSEC LAST SUMMER, TO EXPLAIN THE SO-CALLED TORTURE MANUALS. HE TOLD US THAT THE BOOKS HAD BEEN IN A CLASS LIBRARY, BUT WERE NEVER ASSIGNED READING.

SANTIAGO

It is my understanding that-- the manuals-- that-- that are claimed to-- to have-- torture techniques-- certainly were not used in the instruction of -- of students going through School of the Americas.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PUBLIC OUTCRY FOLLOWING THE RELEASE OF THE MANUALS LED CONGRESS TO CLOSE THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS IN DECEMBER 2000. BUT A MONTH LATER, IN THE SAME BUILDINGS, MANY OF THE SAME INSTRUCTORS TAUGHT THE SAME CLASSES TO THE SAME POOL OF LATIN AMERICAN TROOPS. ONLY NOW IT WAS CALLED WHINSEC - AND THE SCHOOL HAD A NEW PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT WHO'S JOB IT WAS TO TELL AMERICAN TAXPAYERS THAT THEIR MONEY WASN'T GOING TO TRAINING TYRANTS.

LEE RIALS, WHINSEC PUBLIC RELATIONS

What goes on in this building is very precisely, exactly U.S. doctrine taught morally, legally and ethically. And the students who come out of here, for the most part, perform legally, morally and ethically.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS IS LEE RIALS. HE'S THE HEAD OF WHINSEC'S PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT. HIS MISSION IS TO HIGHLIGHT WHINSEC'S DIFFERENCES FROM THE OLD SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS. RIALS SAYS WHINSEC IS OPEN TO VISITORS -- EVEN THE SCHOOL'S HARSHTEST CRITICS. HE SAYS THERE'S NOTHING TO HIDE.

RIALS

People are welcome to sit in classes. They're welcome to talk with any students or faculty they desire. They're-- they're welcome to-- review our instructional materials. This is, perhaps, the most open place in the-- in the Department of Defense.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT ONLY UP TO A POINT. A FEW YEARS AGO, THE PENTAGON STOPPED RELEASING THE NAMES OF WHINSEC STUDENTS, CITING SECURITY CONCERNS - THAT PUT AN END TO BOURGEOIS' RESEARCH OF GRADUATES. BUT WE WANTED TO TRY AND SEE IF WE COULD GET THE NAMES OF RECENT STUDENTS, AND INVESTIGATE WHETHER THEY WERE TIED TO ANY HUMAN RIGHTS CRIMES. SO WE SENT A FORMAL RECORDS REQUEST TO WHINSEC. AND THIS IS WHAT WE GOT: PAGE AFTER PAGE OF BLACKED OUT NAMES. BUT WHINSEC WAS ONLY TOO HAPPY TO SHOW US THIS. HERE, COLOMBIAN POLICE ARE PRACTICING HOW TO RESPOND TO PROTESTORS. INSTRUCTOR TONY RAIMONDO IS WHINSEC'S CHIEF HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERT, A POSITION THAT WAS CREATED WHEN THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS BECAME WHINSEC.

TONY RAIMONDO, WHINSEC INSTRUCTOR

They face a situation, a real life situation, that's projected onto a screen.

RATHER

Okay, so oh, here's a situation.

VOICE OVER

THIS SIMULATION IS DESIGNED TO TEACH RESTRAINT. THE GUNS ARE OUTFITTED WITH LASERS, AND UP ON THE SCREEN, ACTORS ARE PORTRAYING A POTENTIALLY HAIRY SCENARIO: WE ARE GUARDING A CHECKPOINT, WHEN DEMONSTRATORS APPROACH AND SUDDENLY BEGIN TO THROW ROCKS. THEN THE SITUATION ESCALATES. NOTICE IN THE CORNER OF THE SCREEN: ONE OF THE PROTESTERS PULLS OUT A HANDGUN, AND STARTS TO SHOOT AT US.

RAIMONDO

International law will not allow you to shoot because you're jeopardizing the people that are fleeing.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE RULE IS YOU CAN ONLY OPEN FIRE WHEN YOU HAVE A CLEAN SHOT OF THE ARMED PROTESTER. BUT SOME OF THE COLOMBIAN SOLDIERS FIRED INTO THE CROWD AND THAT WAS THE POINT OF THE LESSON.

RATHER

Well, I held off when he started to run. But I think we dropped him over here.

RAIMONDO

Right, right. Well, you did good, you did well.

RATHER

What's the single most important thing you want American tax payers to know-- U.S. tax payers to know, about what's being done, here?

RAIMONDO

Our education is top quality, which means that our students are learning human rights in a manner that they can apply and conduct military and police operations in accordance with human rights.

RATHER

Is this a success? Or, is it too early to call it a success?

RAIMONDO

I-- I-- I would say that it is a success. And-- and-- and I would cite the Amnesty International study, where one of the recommendations they made to the U.S. Government is that the program that we have here at WHINSEC be used as a model for the other military educational facilities in this country that are teaching foreign officers.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHEN WE CONTACTED AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, THE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION BACKPEDALLED. IN AN EMAIL, A SPOKESMAN WROTE THAT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL QUOTE "HAS CALLED ON THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE MORE HOURS OF HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING TO FOREIGN SECURITY FORCES AS WHINSEC NOW DOES, BUT WE HAVE NOT ENDORSED THEIR SPECIFIC TRAINING." UNQUOTE. BUT COLONEL SANTIAGO SAYS HE'S SEEN FIRST HAND THE BENEFITS OF WHINSEC'S TRAINING. PRIOR TO TAKING COMAND HERE, HE SERVED IN IRAQ, LEADING TROOPS FROM EL SALVADOR THAT WERE PART OF THE U.S. LED COALITION -- INCLUDING SOME WHINSEC GRADUATES.

RATHER

Well, is that, or is that not what you see the value of the school. You develop relationships with the military in other countries, help train them, and then, when some emergency a-- comes about, you have a better chance of explaining the U.S. position, and getting the help.

SANTIAGO

Yes, sir, absolutely. I think-- the-- the school develops-- a relationships throughout the hemisphere, and-- they are put to work when crisis hits. There's just no question about it. Those-- those are long lasting.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND HE SAYS WHAT'S LONG-LASTING ISN'T JUST RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE HEMISPHERE, BUT ALSO A CHANGE IN THE VALUES OF MILITARIES IN LATIN AMERICA, WHERE HUMAN RIGHTS HAVE SELDOM BEEN A PRIORITY - AND THERE HAVE BEEN A LONG HISTORY OF TORTURE.

RATHER

Point is, do you teach just that? That, listen, torture is out of bounds, torture is not

SANTIAGO

Oh, absolutely-- absolutely.

RATHER

It's part of the teaching here.

SANTIAGO

Yes, sir. And we are required to teach the full spectrum of human rights, so torture is out of the question. All the students that come through here have to opportunity to reflect on what it means to have—strong convictions about right or wrong. A higher priority is what we all support, which is our freedoms.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

BUT AN INCREASING NUMBER OF COUNTRIES IN LATIN AMERICA SAY WHINSEC IS THE WRONG APPROACH. BOLIVIAN PRESIDENT EVO MORALES WAS THE LATEST TO SAY HE WOULD PULL HIS TROOPS. HE JOINS THE PRESIDENTS OF VENEZUELA, ARGENTINA, URUGUAY AND COSTA RICA WHO HAVE WITHDRAWN TROOPS FROM WHINSEC, BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY DESCRIBE AS ITS VIOLENT LEGACY. NEXT UP ON OUR PROGRAM, UNDERSTANDING AFGHANISTAN. SO STAY WITH US.

AFGHANISTAN AMBASSADOR:

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

FINALLY TONIGHT, UNDERSTANDING AFGHANISTAN. GIVING YOU INFORMATION TO BETTER UNDERSTAND WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON IN AFGHANISTAN IS A LONG STANDING GOAL OF OUR PROGRAM. THE MISSION OF THE UNITED STATES AND ITS ALLIES IS COMPLICATED, MUCH MORE SO THAN YOU ROUTINELY SEE ON TELEVISION. IT'S MORE COMPLICATED THAN THE OCCASIONAL FIREFIGHT CAPTURED ON VIDEO THAT CERTAINLY MAKES FOR GOOD VISUALS BUT OFTEN LENDS LITTLE TO THE BIG PICTURE OF WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING ON THE GROUND. THE REAL AFGHANISTAN IS A MAJOR PRODUCER OF OPIUM. IT'S ALSO A MULTI-CULTURAL LANDSCAPE MADE UP OF HUNDREDS OF TRIBES THAT THE UNITED STATES AND ITS PARTNERS ARE TRYING TO WEAVE INTO A CENTRALLY CONTROLLED DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT. IT HASN'T BEEN EASY AND IT ISN'T GOING TO BE AS THE LAST EIGHT YEARS ATTEST. AFGHANISTAN IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT STORY. TO HELP EXPLAIN THE COMPLEXITIES, I HAD A CHANCE TO TALK RECENTLY WITH THE UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO AFGHANISTAN, WILLIAM WOOD.

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HE'S A CAREER DIPLOMAT WHO BEFORE HIS APPOINTMENT TO KABUL TWO YEARS AGO HELD ANOTHER TOUGH ASSIGNMENT AS THE TOP US DIPLOMAT IN COLUMBIA. WE MET ATOP THE SPRAWLING COMPLEX THAT IS THE NEW UNITED STATES EMBASSY IN KABUL, A GOOD PLACE TO LOOK OVER A COUNTRY THAT HAS DEFIED INVADING ARMIES FOR CENTURIES.

WILLIAM B. WOOD, US AMBASSADOR TO AFGHANISTAN

The British Empire was stopped east of Afghanistan. The Soviet Empire was stopped north of Afghanistan. They've been resisting Iranian Shiism for hundreds of years. This is a diverse country with major ethnic groups: Pashtuns, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Tajiks. It is a complicated country. It's got Shiism, it's got Sunnism, it's got Suffiism. But it's Afghanistan. President Karzai is fond of saying it may have a weak government, but it has a strong nation. And I think that that's a-- a fair characterization.

RATHER

Well, bluntly put, what are we doing here? Given that history, why are we here? What's the mission?

WOOD

Well, of course Afghanistan was the country where the 9-11 attacks were planned, organized, and launched. And some of those who were responsible for the 9-11 attacks are still around. So we have a very definite homeland security reason for being here, to insure that Afghanistan doesn't return to being that kind of launching pad. There's also, of course, a strategic interest. Afghanistan is bordered on directly by Iran, Pakistan, and China. Russia and India have direct and important interests, both historical and current, in Afghanistan. That's four nuclear weapons nations, one nation that, contrary to international law, is trying to acquire nuclear weapons. It's five of the most dynamic societies in the world defining themselves. And the way they define themselves is going to determine a large part of the personality of the geopolitical 21st century. Afghanistan is in the middle of all of them. It is either going to be a source of stability for all of them, or, as it has been for the last 30 years, a source of instability. We want it to be a source of stability, good governance, development, and-- and regional cooperation.

RATHER

Fair enough. But is that an achievable goal, realistically? Can that be achieved?

WOOD

I think that stability in Afghanistan certainly can be achieved. There are big challenges. And I don't want to minimize them. There is the Taliban that operates under the brand label of Islam. But of course most of its victims are also Islamic. There is an imbedded and quite consolidated criminal narcotics industry. Afghanistan is the largest source of heroin in the world. There are some legacy warlords left over from 30 years of internal conflict, people who have gained power in a conflict environment based on their personal abilities, but also, abilities that don't necessarily fit with a stable, peaceful society.

RATHER

Give me a tour. Where are the best places? Where are the worst places in terms of stability?

WOOD

It's a complicated question, simply because, in some of the best places, you have some of the worst problems. And let me start out with an example. Afghanistan is divided into five regional commands-- north, south, east and west, and capital. The United States is in command of Regional Command East. We picked that because it was one of the most violent regions, and because it was closest to the corridors of major infiltrations by Al Qaeda and the global terrorists. In Regional Command East, you have some of the best progress anywhere in the country: more roads built, more schools built, more hospitals built, stronger local government, better dialogue between internationals and the local leaders. In Nangahar Province the governor himself led an eradication program which reduced poppy cultivation in Nangahar from the f-- I think the fourth largest in the country to zero last year. So there are big pluses in the east. There is still a problem with infiltration. There are still important sectors of the east-- where the Taliban-- is no longer challenging militarily, but challenges with infiltration, subversion and terrorism. And I think it's important to recognize that the Taliban doesn't challenge militarily very often. In a military to military confrontation, it always loses. So it is no longer trying to win the hearts and minds of the people. It is simply trying to make their life a little crummier every day in hopes that the Afghan people and the international community will lose faith. If you move to the south, the other Pashtun dominated area in the country, and the Pashtuns are very important, the largest single ethnic group in the country. Kandahar is the spiritual home of the Pashtun people. It was also the spiritual capital of the Taliban. It's a big, important-- in many cases, wealthy province. But in other in other parts of it, it's desert and poor. It's seen a lot of violence.

The Canadians are very active there. Canadians, as you know, have taken proportionately more casualties than any other international contingent in the country. If you come next door to Helmand -- this is one of the richest provinces in Afghanistan, one of the most fertile provinces in Afghanistan. And unfortunately, that fertility has been devoted to growing poison rather than food. Helmand is the largest producer of opium poppy, not simply in Afghanistan, but in the world. It alone accounts for about 60 percent of the heroin in the world. The British and the-- Danes are there. And for the first time in 2008, the United States put about 2,500 or 3,000 Marines there. It is not fully under government control, by any means. I think that this is a place where we can look to see additional U.S. troops and-- and additional international troops to secure the province for governance, for development, and for elections. Moving to the west, you have provinces that have a close cultural affinity to Iran. Herat City is historically the city where travelers from Europe had to decide, were they going to go north over the Himalayas to China or were they gonna go south, under the Himalayas, to India? And for that reason, Herat is a city of enormous antiquity and great historical importance.

It is also a city that bridges the cultural divide between largely Sunni Afghanistan and largely Shiite Iran. The north -- the north is by far the most peaceful part of the country. That's largely Tajik and Uzbek ethnic groups. And real development is occurring there. Real political consolidation is occurring there. The north is what we hope the rest of Afghanistan will be very soon in terms of stability, in terms of development, in terms of governance. And then lastly, there's the capital military region dominated by the French at the moment. There's been lots of talk about Kabul City and Kabul Province. The fact is IEDs, suicide bombs, are down this year in-- in Kabul. In spite of a few high profile events, which you always get in capital cities in these kinds of circumstances, in fact, security is better. I don't wanna say that everything is going perfectly. I don't even wanna say that-- we're satisfied. I think it can go better. I think it should go better. I think with additional troops, I think with higher levels of assistance, and I think with more focus on governance, and I think with the energy of elections, it will go better. It's a hard problem.

RATHER

You talked about the Taliban militarily cannot prevail. But, for example, the Taliban blows up schools. We build a school, or we rebuild a school. They come right behind, in some cases, and blow it up. For the person who says, "Listen, this is, I'm pulling, hopeless. Every time we build something, they come in behind and blow it up," you would say what?

WOOD

Well first, it's not every time. Something on the order of 10,000 schools have been built and something like 150 schools may have been closed. So-- so-- there's-- there's a overwhelming net gain. But on -- at a more analytical level, when Secretary Rice first offered me this job in September of 2006, people were genuinely concerned about a Taliban offensive in 2007. They thought that the Taliban might be able to take a provincial capital, or even take and hold a province. As a result, the U.S. Congress-- voted the highest levels of assistance-- in 2007 ever. Nobody's talking about those threats anymore. Those threats have passed. Today the threat is terrorism. The Taliban has shifted from those traditional insurgent goals of taking and holding territory, establishing alternative government, winning the hearts and minds of the people, to a terroristic strategy, which is the Taliban against the citizens, it's the Taliban against the government, it's the Taliban against the internationals, and the Taliban's going to lose.

RATHER

Let's talk about the border problems. The world knows the border is – between Pakistan and Afghanistan – is a problem.

WOOD

Terrorist networks have been operating in the tribal areas in the west of Pakistan, for some time. They've been threatening legitimate tribal leaders and the legitimate institutions of government of Pakistan for some time. Pakistan had made some-- some headway against them-- but hadn't done as much, and perhaps, hadn't tried as hard, as some thought it should have. Right now, there's a better relationship between the President of Afghanistan and the President of Pakistan than there has ever been. There is a more intense level of-- consultation going on. But this is a really hard problem. The tribal areas are just like our tribal areas in the United States, that is, like our Indian reservations. They operate under a different legal regime. And Afghanistan and Pakistan want to respect that legal regime

RATHER

Another reminder how complicated a place Afghanistan is.

WOOD

I've been in this business for 31 years. One of the reasons why, personally, I'd like to-- to see us get this right and be successful is because, if you combine the unbelievable poverty of Afghanistan, and it's a country with 28 percent literacy, 45 year life expectancy, a GDP per capita of under \$400, as if you d-- if you dropped Afghanistan into Africa, the Africans would think this was a poor country. If you add to that the 30 years of strife that have exhausted the society, have-- have destroyed or perverted many of its traditional institutions-- if you add into that-- the ethnic diversity, cultural diversity, inside of Afghanistan, if you add to that these great-- the great power interests in Afghanistan, and you add on top of that the very complex international presence here, NATO, the U.N., Non-NATO members-- non-- NATO economic donors. If you add all of this together for-- for a professional diplomat, this is the big game. This is the most complicated problem, and the most important problem, we're facing. We have a government we can work with. We have resources we can spend. And we have a problem worth getting right. If we can get Afghanistan right, I believe that other problems in the future will turn out to be a subset of this one. It's going to take time. We may even have been a bit optimistic in the beginning. But we can get this right. We're on a positive trajectory. And we shouldn't be afraid or defeatist. This is going to come out just fine.

RATHER

Mr. Ambassador, thank you.

WOOD

Thank you.

RATHER

Appreciate it very much.

WOOD

Pleasure.

DAN RATHER (ON CAMERA)

AMBASSADOR WOOD'S TOUR IS UP AND PRESIDENT OBAMA HAS NOMINATED A RETIRING THREE-STAR ARMY GENERAL, KARL EIKENBERRY, TO SUCCEED HIM. EIKENBERRY IS A COMBAT VETERAN OF THE CONFLICT HAVING SERVED TWICE IN AFGHANISTAN.

AND THAT'S OUR PROGRAM FOR TONIGHT. FOR HD NET, FROM NEW YORK, DAN RATHER REPORTING. GOOD NIGHT.