



The Darién Gap is a 10,000-square mile patch of nearly impenetrable mountainous rainforest. This remote jungle, inhabited by rare wildlife, exotic plants, and various indigenous groups spans the border between Panama and Colombia, making border enforcement extremely difficult. Despite the best efforts of Senafront, the Panamanian border patrol, the Darién is a major transit point for illicitly trafficked migrants, arms, and drugs heading from South America towards the United States' southern border. Due to an increase of illicit trafficking, the Darién Gap is an area of interest for the US Military.

As a result of increased enforcement and monitoring of traditional trafficking routes, smugglers are becoming more reliant on the Darién Gap. At the same time, competition in the drug trade is increasing activity and violence in the region as paramilitary groups and transnational criminal organizations vie for control. Colombian rebel groups – the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) – control the most direct path, but many criminal organizations and traffickers move freely across the border, often employing indigenous people to guide them through the dense rainforest.

The Darién Gap is also a popular migration route for those who are trying to find a pathway into the US. Thousands of Cubans, Somalis, Syrians, and others make the dangerous trek from Colombia through the gap, guided by human smugglers, aptly referred to as coyotes. For these migrants, the Darién is a treacherous path to a better life; however, for the United States, this flow of illicit and undocumented migration poses a potential threat, as criminals and extremists hide among the asylum seekers and refugees.

Stay tuned for more information on how Spirit of America will continue to provide assistance to our US military and diplomats as they bring stability and peace to this vulnerable region in Panama.

Rachael Mohr  
Program Assistant