

**Testimony of Frank O. Mora
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Global Narcotics
The Committee on Foreign Relations
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I would like to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for your interest in U.S. defense policy in the Americas. I value the insights and work of this committee in advancing U.S. interests in the hemisphere. Indeed, my hope is that I can help you better do your job by being transparent in mine, and that my testimony today is responsive in this regard.

Mr. Chairman, the Defense Department is focused on strengthening its relationships in the Americas by using defense diplomacy to institutionalize ties. This approach is a by-product of the Obama Administration's commitment to equal partnership in the region, as the President made clear in his remarks at the Summit of the Americas in 2009.

From a defense standpoint, the framework of partnership makes perfect sense because interdependence goes beyond economics and culture; it also includes security and defense. In an age of transnational security challenges, nations can no longer afford to go it alone. In fact, we act unilaterally at our own peril because these problems require multinational solutions. Collective action is essential for our homeland security and for the security of our neighbors. U.S. defense policy in the region is therefore guided by one principal objective: To be a partner of choice.

The institutionalization of relationships is critical to the security of the region because we require continuity to make progress in countering transnational challenges. For this reason, we have chosen to forge defense cooperation agreements (DCAs) with countries such as Brazil and Colombia.

DCAs provide long-term, umbrella frameworks for security relationships. They also have the added benefit of providing transparency, a key element of building trust and confidence on defense issues, and a point that Brazil and Colombia have understood well.

Bilateral Working Groups (BWGs) are another important formal mechanism for sustaining our relationships in the region. Since I became the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, we have participated in BWGs with countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru.

Each BWG is different, with a specific emphasis on those issues or areas of most importance to the bilateral relationship, but they all allow for senior-level discussion. These discussions normally result in a structure and plan for how we should move forward and cooperate. I believe BWGs provide an important blueprint for our strategic engagement in the region.

Of particular note, I will travel in March to Uruguay to participate in a first-ever bilateral Strategic Dialogue with Uruguay, so our list of BWGs will soon increase. A BWG with Mexico was held for the first time in 2010 – an indication of our increasing collaboration against a shared threat. In addition, we are working closely with Mexico to develop a strategy to tackle the emerging threats along its southern border with Guatemala and Belize. In 2010, we also held the first Binational Human Rights dialogue with Mexico, an initiative we are working to establish on an annual basis.

Similarly, our BWG with Brazil has been revitalized. After a six-year lull, the BWG was reconvened in November 2008 in Brasilia and has met regularly ever since. In addition to the BWG and DCA, we signed a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in November 2010 to facilitate the exchange of classified military information. In sum, U.S.-Brazil defense cooperation is closer today than at any time since 1977, when Brazil unilaterally withdrew from a military cooperation agreement with the United States.

Of course, Brazil's selection of the Super Hornet would be another key element in broadening our cooperation for the future. As part of this proposal, the U.S. Government has allowed for significant technology sharing with Brazil. In fact, this is technology that has been provided only to our closest allies and partners, which is a clear indication of the strength of our partnership with Brazil.

Our diplomatic approach is also yielding impressive results with regards to natural disaster response. At the 2010 Conference of Defense Ministers of the Americas (CDMA) in Bolivia, Secretary Gates spearheaded a proposal -- co-sponsored by thirteen other countries -- that seeks to develop a framework for military support to civilian-led disaster relief operations and to standardize a system for facilitating collaboration among militaries during these crises. Clearly, the region is coming together to ensure we are best prepared when another Haiti-like disaster strikes.

Finally, I would like to underscore that U.S. Southern Command and U.S. Northern Command are vital to our efforts in building partnerships by supporting humanitarian assistance, security assistance, training, military education, peacekeeping, exercises, and multinational operations like that of Joint Inter-Agency Task Force-South (JIATF-South), which brings together many nations to confront illicit trafficking in a collaborative environment.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to close by reiterating that this is just a snapshot of our activities in the Americas, but I hope it has provided you with a sense of how we approach engagement in the region. I very much look forward to your questions.