

**39th IFPA-Fletcher Conference on National Security Strategy and Policy:
The Marine Corps: America's Expeditionary Force in Readiness**

April 14 – 15, 2011

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Panelist. Session 5, "Regional Challenges and Opportunities"

MAJOR GENERAL JUAN G. AYALA: Well, good afternoon. General Amos stated earlier, I'm the last man on the last panel in the last hour on Friday. But I'm really glad to be here.

AUDIENCE: We're here for you.

MAJOR GENERAL JUAN G. AYALA: I know you are, thank you, sir. [laughter] On behalf of General Frazier, thank you for the invitation. It really is a privilege for me to be here.

I'm going to talk about Southern Command, and Southern Command is something that we have not discussed at least today, but I think it's important for us. They're our neighbors, it's our back yard. And General Frazier is an Air Force general and, of course, he understands the MAGTF, he understands our capabilities and he is very interested in the Marine Corps as was seen during the disaster in Haiti. Most importantly, he's a big fan of ours.

We're not new to this AOR. We have conducted since 1776, since we landed in the Bahamas. About 63 landings in this part of the world. And I think at the request of our partner nations, of course, we'll continue to do so. And this has been discussed today, a lot of the population centers exist in the littorals in this part of the world. This is an interesting slide, please take a look at it. This AOR is very important to our national interests. It's our shared home and we're connected to the region by a lot more than physical proximity. We have increasing trade, shared challenges and there's a lot of travel between our collective citizens. And our countries, wherever they are, remain connected culturally, socially, politically, and economically. And as you see on this slide, the region has very extensive ties with the U.S. In a ten year period, trade increased with this AOR, recent ten year period, by about 82 percent. Forty percent of U.S. trade stays in the

Americas. That's more than goes to Europe or Asia. And our trade with countries in the region grew at a faster rate than with China who's growing with a faster rate, than with China or the European Union.

And as you read in the news, the expansion of the Panama Canal is ongoing, and this is important because nearly 70 percent of all the cargo in the region that transits in the Americas goes through that canal. And the growing impacts of nations that are emerging such as Brazil and Chile really add importance to this, strategic importance, to this AOR.

I don't mean to put this chart up to scare anybody, but I'm just going to tell you the facts. By 2050, about a quarter of the population of the U.S. will be of Hispanic descent. The U.S. will be the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. Now, the first time I saw that I said, "So what?" Well, because it will affect how our government engages with these populations' countries of origin and because these populations, as we've already seen, will grow not only as an economic power, but as a political power.

But you know, we really still face a lot of challenges in this region; illicit trafficking, poverty, corruption, violence, gangs. I read that there's about 100,000 gang members in Central America. There are very many gangs, organized gangs, very violent gangs in Kingston, Jamaica, in Rio de Janeiro, who's going to host the Olympics and the World Cup here pretty soon. And all these challenges translate into security concerns. And if you notice, these are not traditional military threats. So, these are important to take a look at.

In addition, and this has been discussed today, we're no longer the only "product" in the AOR. China, Iran, and Russia's influence have continued to grow. Chinese trade with Latin America has increased by 73 percent. And every time I travel through the region, or any of the directors or the combatant commander travels through the region, it is very prevalent. Iran has built about 11 new embassies within the region in the last few years. They have a very close relationship with Venezuela. As a matter of fact, they don't require visas for them to travel from Iran to Caracas and back. So, you don't know who's getting on those planes. And Russia continues to consider our AOR as an expanding market for arms.

Now, that is good and bad. The bad is those arms, who do they end up with? Well, they might end up in the hands of smugglers or the FARC or organizations such as Sendero Luminoso or some of those organizations. Or, as Peru used some of their helicopters to fight drugs. But again, we don't know where that is going.

Just a real quick vision, mission and objectives. This was mentioned earlier this morning by General Jones, and it's been mentioned. We are truly an interagency organization. The admiral mentioned it earlier with JIAT South, that we do enable our partner nations, but also we work with the interagency and with other governments and NGOs.

We work with those 31 countries in the AOR and while state violence is very unlikely, we're nevertheless ready to conduct those full spectrum operations. The last time we had a state on state violence was, if you can call it that, was 1989. And our inherent joint nature, the Marines inherent joint nature is particularly important for our operations. The MAGTF integrates well with other services, with other nations' services and it's been interesting to note that the Marine Corps has been led by two marine combatant commanders, Generals Wilhelm and Pace.

Illicit trafficking, I haven't heard a lot about that today, but of drugs, weapons, humans, bulk cash, begins in the Andean Ridge, traverses numerous countries and territories via air, land and sea. Cocaine cultivation and production occurs in the rural remote areas. It's packaged, processed, prepared for shipment under cover of thick jungles in remote mountainous areas. We've seen a shift as we stop the flow in one area, it's like the balloon effect, they'll go into another area. The success of Plan Colombia, Mexico's recent efforts to combat drug trafficking, now has made Central America the prime transshipment point for drugs. And traffickers use everything; they use littorals, short distance aerial routes to conduct their illegal activities. Look at the map, look at the chart. The rural provinces in Central America are dotted with hundreds, literally hundreds, of illegal airstrips where these traffickers coordinate delivery and transshipment of drugs.

Not only do the U.S., but as you can see, the U.K. is number one consumer per capita. A few years ago, when I was working at Joint Task Force 6, I remember I was a Spanish briefer. I got up, I was given a brief, this was about ten years ago, and we had some Colombian officers in the audience and I put up a chart, General Pickler was next to me, Major Ayala was giving the brief. As I was giving the brief in Spanish, I said, "The drug problem in Colombia," at that point the Colombian officer stood up and looked at me and he says, in a lot of profanity, "You SOB's. We don't have a GD problem in Colombia. The problem is the demand and hungry noses in the United States of America." Turned to General Pickler and I said, "Sir, he didn't like the slide." [laughter] Translated, that has changed. Since I left Joint Task Force 6 in '93, and now that I'm at SOUTHCOM, I hear a lot of these officers. And if you look at that, it's starting to become an internal problem in these countries. So now when I said shared challenges, that's what I mean. They're really taking it to heart.

The flexibility of expeditionary forces, of marine forces, is also very, very important to us because it provides humanitarian assistance for disaster relief, particularly in the countries in the Caribbean basin. I mean, these countries six months out of the year are prone to natural disasters; hurricanes, volcanoes, flooding. And the ability, our ability, to conduct the full range of operations is really key to our success. Many of the populations' infrastructures are very vulnerable. I'll give you an example. Chile had an earthquake in February which was larger in magnitude than the hurricane in Haiti. Yet we sent almost 20,000 troops, 23 ships on and on and on for the support of that island, whereas Chile, less than 200 troops and a few airplanes. The building codes are a lot different. And that also tells you how different the countries in our AOR are.

Another very important point on the need of expeditionary marine forces is securing access. And this has been covered today. Self sustaining capability enables our combatant commander to compensate for the lack of bases. In that part of the region, and I think I talked to Mr. Cook earlier this morning, is they want us there but then they don't want us there. So, that's very important to those political sensitivities and it's very sensitive to put FA 4 to operating locations there. But yet, we can do that from maritime platforms with maximum force projection.

Additionally, we're not limited by infrastructure throughout the region or in those countries, so we don't overwhelm them with logistical or an operational footprint.

But the lack of these forces really constrains our missions. So that necessitates a force that can respond quickly from either CONUS or from those maritime assets I just mentioned. In our AOR, these tragedies and these disasters come upon us just like in PACOM, rapidly and immediately. Prime example was our response to the earthquake in Haiti. With no forces assigned, it took a few days, as Admiral Papp had mentioned-- I think it took them a day, we were there the next day-- to source the assets to open the airfield. Air Force special forces opened the airfield in Port-au-Prince, and then we quickly responded with two marine expeditionary units, two MEUs, to accomplish that mission.

The Deputy Commander at SOUTHCOM, General Keane, Lieutenant General Keane, Army Lieutenant General Keane, always, always praises the ability of the marines not only to have a minimum footprint, but they were able to go to places that were not Port-au-Prince and out to the outlying areas. And that's very important in our part of the world.

We conduct many security cooperation activities, as has been mentioned today. During fiscal year 2011, marine forces south, our marine component, will conduct about 93 of these engagements with 15 partner nation Marine Corps, naval infantries and fusileros, which are the marines naval infantry in Brazil. We'll assess relevant partner nation capacities, develop their skills and sustainment abilities that will introduce the introduction of follow on forces, promote regional interoperability, especially in our drug fighting efforts, and support initial HA response. I think more importantly than that, or as important, is demonstrating U.S. resolve to promote peace and stability in the region. But it also allows our partner nations to see for themselves an example of what a professional military looks like and what a professional military can be and what they can be like.

And we just had a sergeants major graduation in Colombia where our sergeant major, Sergeant Major Espinol, went down along with Sergeant Major Fitzgerald, who's at ALMAR Force South

[?], sergeant major, and they have a great relationship. As you know in some of these countries, the NCO corps are not very strong.

These are some of the security cooperation things that we do exercises that we do, and I'm not going to go through all of them. I think we're pretty familiar with them. But I'll talk a little bit about continuing promise. Later this year, we'll conduct continuing promise. It's an annual humanitarian civic assistance exercise that takes place in the Atlantic during the Atlantic hurricane season. It will employ about 500 marines, conduct security cooperation activities and will provide air/ground logistical support, HCA activities. HCA activities, we get benefit out of it because we do our medals or our training and at the same time we leave a tangible product or a tangible school, clinic, in the host country. And again, that goes to the good will. But it also goes to the access and influence that we have in those nations.

Again, the MAGTF gives us flexible forces that directly help our partner nations. And we are always able to swiftly shift from training, which we have done, to full spectrum operational missions like we did in Haiti. I want to say again that marines aboard amphibious ship put forces in the AOR, and this has been said already, without a land based footprint, which is very powerful and this is a very politically sensitive region. The COCOM General Frazier is unequivocal in his desire, and he sees a need for an amphibious based MAGTF in the AOR at a minimum during the hurricane season.

And as we speak, ALMAR Force South is continuing to develop an enduring MAGTF concept, a special MAGTF concept that would help meet those commitments in our AOR. Finally, as U.S. commitment in other places in the world winds down, the future of our national security may very well center, and this has been said again, around those nontraditional threats which are pervasive in our AOR. Natural disasters are inevitable, and we're ready to provide HADR wherever and whenever the need arises. The illicit trafficking networks that I mentioned traverse a region and follow directly into the United States and beyond. And we believe it represents a direct threat to the United States national defense and our national interests. And as I said, external actors could always seek to limit our U.S. influence or hinder our partnerships in the coming years.

We at SOUTHCOM remain vigilant to these evolving threats, and I think the Marine Corps will continue to play an integral role in this. Thank you. [applause]