



UNITED STATES SOUTHERN COMMAND

PARTNERSHIP FOR THE AMERICAS

March 30, 2011

Gen. Fraser's opening remarks to the House Armed Services Committee

The following is the prepared opening remarks of Air Force Gen. Douglas Fraser, commander of U.S. Southern Command, submitted to the House Armed Services Committee. Gen. Fraser testified alongside NORTHCOM commander, Admiral James A. Winnefeld Jr., and EUCOM commander, Adm. James Stavridis, before the House Armed Services Committee March 30, 2011.

Chairman McKeon, Congressman Smith, and distinguished members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss United States Southern Command's accomplishments and future efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean. Over the past year, we worked in close collaboration with U.S. governmental agencies and our partner nations to respond to the natural disaster in Haiti and to the ongoing threats to regional security. This year, with the support of Congress, we will build on our achievements and continue to promote U.S. national and regional security through enduring partnerships.

I'm pleased to share this table with my friends and counterparts from U.S. Northern Command and U.S. European Command. Admiral Stavridis was my predecessor at U.S. Southern Command, and his legacy of interagency integration is a vital part of our organization. Admiral Winnefeld and I have worked closely and diligently to coordinate our collective efforts in Mexico and Central America. From my standpoint, our efforts ensure there is no disconnect or seam in U.S. military engagement in the region.

U.S. Southern Command focuses on two challenges: the inevitability of natural disasters and the ongoing threat posed by transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). While we remain prepared to conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations whenever the need arises, TCOs represent an evolving challenge to regional and hemispheric security. TCOs engage in the illicit trafficking of drugs, arms, money, and people through porous borders throughout the region, into the United States or abroad to Europe and Africa. They do not respect national sovereignty, laws, governments, or human life. Nowhere is this more evident than in Central America and Mexico, which are besieged by gangs, TCOs, and drug traffickers who operate with near impunity. The direct result is unprecedented levels of violence and a complete erosion of citizen safety. The Northern Triangle of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras is the deadliest zone in the world and far more dangerous than active war zones like Iraq and Afghanistan.

TCOs construct sophisticated international networks and employ innovative methods to conduct their illicit activities. In response to our increased success in detecting and monitoring traditional transit routes, TCOs have begun using self-propelled fully submersibles (SPFSs) capable of transporting upwards of 8 tons of cocaine between South America and Mexico. In conjunction with our interagency colleagues and our partner nation armed forces, U.S. Southern Command is committed to confronting these challenges to regional stability and security. I look forward to discussing this topic and many others with you today.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for your support in funding the construction of our new headquarters in Miami. This state-of-the-art building enhances internal and external collaboration, improves our ability to conduct interagency operations, and raises quality of life for assigned personnel. On behalf of the men and women of U.S. Southern Command, thank you.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize the absence of Congresswoman Giffords from this committee. U.S. Southern Command appreciates her long-standing support for our component commands, Air Force Southern/12 Air Force. I join Admiral Stavridis and Admiral Winnefeld in wishing her a quick recovery.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to answering your questions.