

# Ensuring Friendship, Cooperation and a Shared Doctrine: U.S. Southern Command Checks in With Central, South American Partners



Adm. Craig Faller, commander of U.S. Southern Command (back row, fourth from left) and Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Bryan Zickefoose (back row, fifth from left), senior enlisted leader of SOUTHCOM, are flanked by U.S. military instructors of the 20th Special Forces Group of the Massachusetts Army National Guard at a Joint Combined Exchange Training on Aug. 23 at Vista Alegre Infantry Training School in Asuncion, Paraguay. Also pictured is Paraguayan Col. Bienvenido Silva (back row, second from left), commander of Paraguay's Joint Special Forces Battalion, whose 30-plus soldiers trained for more than a month this summer with the 20th Special Forces Group at Vista Alegre. Defense Department

A delegation from U.S.

Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) embarked on a three-nation, 10-day tour in South

America at the end of August, traveling along Brazil's coast for multi-nation

military exercises, then cutting across the continent to observe military

training in Paraguay followed by a diplomatic mission to Lima, Peru.

On its second multination trip this year to South America, the Miami-based SOUTHCOM staff, headed by its commander of 11 months, Adm. Craig Faller, has under Faller's concerted

guidance virtually landed running since his swearing-in in last November, overseeing a tireless travel itinerary to visit every nation and dependency in the central and southern reaches of the Western hemisphere while seeing to the implementation of programs, attending events and monitoring the well-being of the command's extended embassy and military staffs.

**Check out the digital edition of October's *Seapower* magazine [here](#).**

Even as Faller and his team are focused on commitments set forth in its May 2019 strategic plan, "Enduring Promise for the Americas," SOUTHCOM's achievements to date include a remarkable checklist of already-cemented programs, including medical and rescue operations, military training and civic and community development.

With an area of responsibility that includes 31 countries and 16 dependencies in Central America, South America and the Caribbean, the command's impact is playing out in Panama, Guatemala, Honduras and Columbia. In addition, SOUTHCOM governs the ongoing medical assistance mission of the USNS Comfort and operates in Brazil's Amazon rainforest, where a joint U.S. and Brazilian military medical team recently completed a 26-day riverine humanitarian mission to provide medical care to isolated communities along the Amazon.



U.S. Southern Command's Adm. Craig Faller speaks during the

South American Defense Conference Aug. 20-22. Military leaders from 14 nations met during the conference to discuss cooperation for humanitarian operations, disaster response and countering transnational threats. SOUTHCOM Public Affairs/Jose Ruiz

Meanwhile, Faller kicked off

the SOUTHCOM tour on Aug. 19 at Base Naval do Rio de Janeiro, where he and Adm.

Leonardo Puntel, commander of the Brazilian Operational Navy, presided over

opening ceremonies of UNITAS LX (60), an annual multinational maritime exercise

of more than 3,100 naval forces from 13 countries.

"I think you all should just savor the moment. Look around the room,

look at the group of like-minded professionals that you are with," said Faller,

underscoring a key theme of the SOUTHCOM's Enduring Promise, while sending a

clear message to the South American military teams whom he addressed throughout

his tour.

"We all have so much to learn from each other. Take every advantage of the

opportunity to teach, to make new friends, to build trust. This is how we are

going to fight. We are going to fight together. As like-minded democracies, as friends,"

he added.

In addition to the U.S. and

Brazil, UNITAS LX participants included naval forces, representatives and

observers from Argentina, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay,

Peru, Portugal, Great Britain and Japan. Unique to UNITAS LX

this year, the Brazilian navy, as host of the event, demonstrated regional maritime cooperation in a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) scenario.



USS Carter Hall moves into position on Aug. 23 behind Brazil's PHM Atlantico during Unitas LX. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Ian Parham

"This is the 60th [year] of UNITAS, and today we have more of an emphasis on disaster relief and humanitarian relief," said Puntel, who reflected on Brazil's longstanding maritime ties to the U.S. and Royal Navy dating back to World War I when, during the events of 1917, British Admiralty requested naval assistance from distant allies, including Japan. "The relationship between the Brazilian navy and the U.S. Navy is very important and started back in the first World War when the Brazilian navy sent a task force to Gibraltar to fight against the German navy, and we fought side-by-side with the U.S. Navy, the Royal Navy and the Japanese navy in the mouth of the Mediterranean."

In Rio later that day, Faller addressed students and faculty at the Brazilian Armed Forces' Escola Superior de Guerra (War College), where he discussed the significance of the U.S.-Brazil military alliance and the urgency to elevate the importance of Central and South American regional partners, which has led to Brazil's designation as a non-NATO major ally, as outlined in the Defense Department's National Defense Strategy. To that end, Faller explained how he views the region as a "shared neighborhood" – a notion that also illustrates the close partnership between

the U.S. and its South American allies.

“I say this neighborhood of the Western Hemisphere because we are neighbors, and we are close neighbors.

And, we’re partners. And, we’re friends,” Faller told students and instructors

at Brazil’s war college. “We share all the domains that we study – and we’re

fighting air, land, sea, space, cyber – but most importantly, we share values.

We share a belief in freedom. We share a belief in sovereignty, respect for

human rights and for democracies. The hemisphere is blessed with democracies.”

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*U.S. Southern Command’s Adm. Craig Faller*

In his remarks, Faller explained

how the United States and SOUTHCOM view regional security in terms of the

pervasive and ever-present threats that touch every South American nation,

among them anti-government political factions, counter-drug trafficking, illicit

mining, money laundering, the influence of violent extremist organizations, Russia’s

anti-U.S. crusade and criminal ties, China’s economic offensive, and to discuss

the reality of corruption across governments, militaries and communities in the

region.

“You look at what we share, and the opportunity that is

presented – it is also being challenged by the threats we share. The threats we share ... are characterized by a vicious circle that includes corruption,” Faller explained. “Yes, I do include that as a military threat. Because with corruption thrives criminal networks, transnational criminal networks ... that respect no laws, no boundaries and that are aiming at our way of life. And there are violent extremists – a fancy name that we made up in the United States for terrorists. They are operating here in this neighborhood and they thrive on those same conditions.”

At the South American Defense Conference (SOUTHDEC) in Natal, Brazil, SOUTHCOM met with members of the Brazilian Armed Forces for a forum that included defense leaders from Argentina, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname and Uruguay as well as representatives from Canada, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. With its theme of “regional defense cooperation in response to hemispheric challenges,” militaries attending the conference took part in two days of dialog, briefings, roundtables and meetings that focused on humanitarian assistance missions, disaster relief operations and international cooperation targeting transnational threats.

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*regional stability and lasting peace.”*

*Fernando Azevedo e Silva, Brazil’s minister of defense*

At the conference, Fernando Azevedo e Silva, Brazil’s minister of defense, noted the climate of present-day security challenges compared to a decade ago, and, like Faller, emphasized the need for South American countries and their allies to join forces.

“The world is undergoing transitions with a diversity of threats, demanding joint efforts to neutralize them for regional stability and lasting peace,” Azevedo said.

SOUTHCOM staff and delegations from other countries included senior enlisted leaders who met concurrently for the third consecutive year to discuss the meeting’s top line themes, while also dedicating time to the important role of the region’s professional enlisted corps, and examining more closely fitness, talent management, professional development, and the growing contributions of women to peace and security missions.

In a first visit to the region, Faller and the SOUTHCOM delegation traveled to Asuncion, Paraguay, where they met with Lee McClenny, U.S. ambassador to Paraguay, as well as U.S. Embassy and host nation officials. Together, they observed a Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) at Vista Alegre Infantry Training School in

which a team of trainees from a Paraguayan Joint Special Forces Battalion demonstrated an ambush. The exercise was as part of a 30-day bilateral training engagement between instructors from the 20th Special Forces Group of the Massachusetts Army National Guard and about 40 soldiers in Paraguay's special forces battalion.

Faller said Paraguay's challenges mirror the threats seen in other South and Central American countries. A landlocked country in the center of the continent, Paraguay, with its tri-border area where Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil meet, is lodged right in the middle of a critical area in South America that has served as a hub for narcotics trafficking, illegal mining, money laundering and that serves globally and transnationally in the flow illicit materials overseas, Faller said.

"When you look at transnational criminal organizations and the threats, there is a nexus in Paraguay," Faller explained. "A lot of the challenges that Paraguay faces are principally, for them, law enforcement-type challenges – police challenges, border challenges. As in all our countries, their military is very capable and there is a role for the military in support of those police efforts. So, we are focused on education and training and on these J-CETs. [Paraguay] is a small country with a small force. I think we saw how eager they

were, how motivated they were, and how important this was to them.”

SOUTHCOM’s final stop included meetings in Lima, Peru, at Peruvian army headquarters in Lima, where Faller met with Peru’s minister of defense, Peruvian navy Adm. Jorge Moscoso, and Krishna R. Urs, U.S. ambassador to Peru.

At Peru’s Centro Naval, Faller and his staff met with Gen. Cesar Astudillo Salcedo, head of the Peruvian Armed Forces Joint Command. Following the meeting, Faller received, on behalf of the country of Peru, the Medalla Gran Cruz (“Great Cross”), the highest award given to leaders as a show of gratitude and thanks and to honor the SOUTHCOM’s support in natural disasters, humanitarian aid and in multinational operations and training between both countries, while also honoring the commander’s military service.

At several meetings with South American leaders and military personnel, Faller discussed the importance of professionalism as a key concept for achieving unified, effective and enlightened partnerships among allies in Latin America and the Caribbean. A common theme in SOUTHCOM’s Enduring Promise, Faller returned time and again to the topic of professionalism as a means for remaining strong across the hemisphere.

“Building our team, it is about professionalism. No one here is going to argue about the concept of professionalism.

But what goes into it for a military force, for a security force?” Faller said.

“Whether you are a police force, whether you are foreign service, with professionalism, it is doing the right thing. It is integrity, it is legitimacy, it is human rights, it is

forces that respect talent, and gender integration. We can’t fight the future

without accepting the talent into our teams that makes us better and stronger.

We’ve all got to figure that out as we move forward.”

*To report this story, Daisy R. Khalifa traveled with the U.S. Southern Command delegation on its three-nation, 10-day tour of South America and the visits with their militaries. This is the first in a series of stories on her trip.*