

## Why Can't Argentina Be More Like Brazil, French Minister Wants to Know

Contributed by Newsroom  
Tuesday, 03 November 2009

France's Defense minister Hervé Morin said that Argentina could increase its international influence following on the steps of Brazil, which is currently modernizing its military hardware and planning on the long term.

Morin currently in Buenos Aires where he met with his counterpart Nilda Garré and Foreign Secretary Jorge Taiana said that Argentina "currently has an essentially regional influence," but added he was convinced that some day the country will have the "political will to participate more fully in the big international discussions".

He then referred to the fact that Brazil has become a leading power, "the eighth world economy and its international influence has reached a stage with the reconstruction of its military hardware."

Argentina at some point will have to reconsider its international standing and military hardware, "at which stage France can be most useful", said Morin.

The Argentine Ministry of Defense in a release following the meeting said that although Argentina does not anticipate the purchase of military hardware, "it has nevertheless accepted the visit next year of a delegation from France's Defense Ministry Arms Department".

The release also points out that Argentina is one of the regional countries which have most drastically cut the defense budget, which has dropped from US\$ 9.2 billion in 1980 equivalent to 4.4% of GDP, under military rule, to US\$ 2.8 billion, 0.8% of GDP currently.

However military sources revealed that both defense ministers agreed on strengthening the continued cooperation between both countries and listed several possible projects to address in the future, particularly taking advantage of French technology.

Some of those projects could be the construction of an amphibian vehicle, patrol vessels, the refurbishing of the ageing Mirage Super Etendards and replacements for training aircraft.

Argentina is currently in a policy of taking distance from the United States in defense affairs and has been moving closer to neighboring Brazil and looking for other supply sources.

Brazil recently signed with France huge defense contracts for the construction of submarines, including one nuclear powered and possibly 36 fighter aircraft, plus other military hardware.

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