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Panetta Urges Brazil to Buy Fighter Jets From Boeing

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RIO DE JANEIRO — Defense Secretary [Leon E. Panetta](#) pushed [Brazil](#) on Wednesday to buy \$4 billion worth of Boeing-made [Super Hornet](#) fighter jets, saying the prospective sale reflected how important Brazil was to the United States.

During the first visit by an American defense secretary to the country in seven years, Mr. Panetta used a speech at Superior War College here to focus on smoothing a sometimes thorny relationship and promoting American weapons sales.

Brazil is deciding whether to buy 36 fighter jets worth about \$4 billion in a competition between Boeing in the United States, Dassault Aviation in France and Saab in Sweden. Boeing makes the F/A-18 E/6 Super Hornet, Dassault makes the Rafale and Saab makes the Grippen.

Mr. Panetta's appeal was unusually direct and reflected the Pentagon's new attention to Brazil after the country's president, [Dilma Rousseff](#), met this month with President Obama at the White House.

Mr. Panetta told an audience of Brazilian military officers at the war college that the Boeing offer had strong support in the United States Congress and "contains an unprecedented advanced technology sharing that is reserved for only our closest allies and partners."

The Boeing sale is a priority for the American government — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has been pushing it as well — in large part because it will provide jobs. Brazil wants the planes for air defense, including keeping watch over the Amazon, a major route for cocaine coming in from Bolivia.

It is unclear whether Mr. Panetta's appeal on the Super Hornet will work, however. Brazil is irritated at the Pentagon for canceling a \$380 million contract that called for the United States to buy turboprop aircraft from Brazil for the Afghan Air Force. The contract, with the Brazilian company Embraer and its American partner, Sierra Nevada Corporation for 20 AT-29 Super Tucano warplanes, was canceled in February after a legal challenge from a rival,

Hawker Beechcraft Corporation. The Pentagon has called for a new round of bidding on the contract.

American defense officials insisted that there was no quid pro quo in the contracts. But at a news conference on Tuesday in Brasília, Brazil's defense minister, Celso Amorim, pointedly said he was "sad" that the Embraer warplanes, "which were certainly the best," were not purchased.

Mr. Panetta, who is on a weeklong visit to Brazil, Colombia and Chile, also said that the United States and Brazil had to cooperate on cybersecurity and humanitarian assistance. The American and Brazilian Navies conduct joint exercises and United States Army Rangers train with Brazilian commandos.