

3-5-2004

## Peru and Chile Deny Arms Race

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur>

---

### Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Peru and Chile Deny Arms Race." (2004). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/13237>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

## Peru and Chile Deny Arms Race

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Peru Chile

Published: 2004-03-05

Peruvian and Chilean officials alternately complained about and denied an arms race as both countries made military purchases from European nations in February. One Peruvian congressman accused the US of fomenting an arms race in the region, while many of his compatriots and the Peruvian press complained loudly about Chile's arming itself.

Chilean President Ricardo Lagos denied that Chile is driving an arms race on the continent by acquiring new ships for its naval fleet. Such criticisms came from Peruvian authorities who maintained that Chile was creating a regional "imbalance" with the arms purchases. The most worrying part about the war materiel for Peru is its technological advancement.

### *Calls for disarmament, accusations against US*

Seventy Peruvian legislators signed a document to request a summit to deal with disarmament in Latin America, announced opposition legislator and former foreign minister Luis Gonzales Posada. The document will be sent to the US, Europe, and the Organization of American States (OAS) and asks for the regulation of arms purchases in Latin America.

The current outcry mirrors one that broke out one year ago when Chile purchased 10 F-16 fighter jets from the US, the first time a Latin American government had been allowed to buy advanced military equipment from the US since President Jimmy Carter banned such sales in the 1970s (see NotiSur, 2002-02-01, 1997-08-08).

In December, Gonzales accused the US of stimulating regional tension with its half-billion dollar sale of the ten fighter jets and a destroyer to Chile. "The Washington government is provoking an arms race in the region," he said, pointing to those sales and also to the Chilean purchase of two French submarines, 200 German tanks, and other equipment worth hundreds of millions of dollars. He said the equipment has "a high destructive power and can only be used in an international war."

Gonzales proposed that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suspend credits for regional governments that buy weapons. "The US should renew the policy of President Jimmy Carter who prohibited arms sales in the region, a policy that the government of William Clinton made powerless in response to pressure from arms manufacturers," he added.

### *New military purchases spur distrust*

Chile decided to begin negotiating with the Netherlands to buy four secondhand L-class anti-aircraft frigates, which were upgraded in 2000, along with two multipurpose M-class frigates that have been in service since 1993. This comes in addition to Chile's recent purchase from Britain of the

HMS Sheffield, now Almirante Williams, also a frigate. Chile's official rationale for the negotiations is that it needs to renew its fleet, whose ships are an average of 32 years old.

Peru similarly announced its intention to buy two secondhand missile-equipped Lupo frigates at the cost of about US\$38 million. It also has taken an option to purchase two more Lupo frigates in 2005. Peru bought the frigates from Italy, trying in part to prevent their sale to Ecuador.

In 1995, Peru and Ecuador engaged in the last of many border conflicts (see NotiSur, 1995-04-28). In addition, regarding Chile, in 1879 Peru lost its nitrate deserts in the War of the Pacific, largely a naval conflict. Peruvian military and government officials portrayed the purchases as necessary replacements for aging equipment. The official rationale for Peru's purchase of the Lupo frigates was that they will replace two obsolete ships that have already been decommissioned and another that is to be mothballed this year, along with the destroyer Almirante Grau, to be withdrawn from service in 2008.

The Peruvian Defense Ministry also announced it would be increasing the "potential" of its armed forces' jet and helicopter fleet. Defense Minister Roberto Chiabra again argued that the plan was "to renew obsolete equipment," not to advance an arms race.

Regional tensions have increased since Bolivia renewed its push to gain sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean from Chile (see NotiSur, 2004-01-23), leading some Peruvian and Bolivian political figures to accuse Chile of reinforcing its borders as a bellicose response to Bolivian pressure.

Another source of tension was the shooting death of a Peruvian immigrant trying to enter Chile illegally from the border department of Tacna. Chilean military men in the zone of Arica shot Jose Segundo Rubio Paredes to death on Jan. 25, leading the Peruvian government to demand explanations for the "disproportionate and excessive use of force" by the soldiers.

Chilean Foreign Minister Manuel Rodriguez announced that Paredes' body would be returned to Tacna and said the governments of both countries should complete changes in rules governing the actions of military forces on the common border.

### *Strategic imbalance?*

Peruvian Defense Minister Chiabra said a "storm" was building in relations between the two countries regarding the issue of a "strategic imbalance." "I believe we should lower the volume," Chiabra said, while front-page headlines in newspapers like La Republica screamed "Chile Arms Itself." "That's why I don't like dealing with defense issues in a public forum," said Chiabra on Radio RPP, "because any answer can cause a storm where it's really just a light breeze."

### *Can Peru afford to compete with Chile in arms purchases?*

Chilean television reports that Chile spends US\$1 billion more per year than does Peru on arms, although military spending was never made public under President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000),

and a good deal of hardware was acquired under his presidency. Controversy over Peru's lean defense budget led to public quarreling among ministers of President Alejandro Toledo's Cabinet last year, and public employees have regularly protested about the inadequacy of their pay (see NotiSur, 2003-12-12), so it is hard to see how Peru will realistically be able to compete with its economically stronger southern neighbor, especially now that copper prices are rising.

During the dictatorial reign of Gen. Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990), a Chilean law was passed requiring the state-run Corporacion Nacional de Cobre de Chile (CODELCO) to give the armed forces a 10% cut of all its sales. This led Chilean military chief Juan Emilio Cheyre to say the recent purchases were not "outstanding, but rather we will only keep adequate materiel available" and use copper revenues appropriately. He dismissed claims of a military buildup and border reinforcement.

"Just the opposite, we are reducing units." Cheyre said that, in the region, "there is integration, cooperation, and peace." But Gonzales Posada would not be mollified, saying, "These purchases represent an incredible waste of resources that could very well be directed toward social and developmental programs.

For the price of one F-16 plane, we could build 17,000 affordable homes. They also generate distrust among Latin American countries and affect the efforts to create an integrated Latin America."

-- End --