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Peru Suspends Military Ties with Chile

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Category/Department: Peru Chile
Published: 2005-04-08

Allegations that Chile delivered munitions to Ecuador during the brief border war between Ecuador and Peru has led to increased tensions between Chile and Peru, with the latter nation suspending a military cooperation agreement between them. Chile's Defense Minister Jaime Ravinet denies that Chile delivered 9 mm munitions to Ecuador in January 1995, when Ecuador and Peru were on the UN list of countries banned from receiving arms and Chile was one of four guarantors in the negotiations to end the conflict. The accusation came from an Ecuadoran general who is currently a fugitive from justice.

Accusation says Chile delivered ammo during UN ban

In 1995, Ecuador and Peru fought a brief border war over a 78-km strip of land in the Andes, ending the hostilities with a peace treaty signed in 1998 (see NotiSur, 1999-10-29, 1998-10-30, 1998-10-09, 1995-08-11, 1995-03-10, 1995-02-24). Four nations, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the US, served as guarantors in the effort to mediate the conflict. Ecuadoran Gen. Victor Bayas, on the run from Ecuadoran authorities, leveled accusations at Chile that the country delivered 9 mm munitions to Ecuador in January 1995, in the midst of the UN's ban against supplying arms to Ecuador and Peru.

Chilean defense officials said the contract was made in September 1994 and the munitions delivered shortly afterwards, prior to the conflict and subsequent UN ban. Chile has yet to deliver an exact date of when the munitions arrived in Ecuador. Bayas, former chief of the Comando Conjunto of the Ecuadoran armed forces, is wanted for alleged misappropriation of funds in the failed effort to purchase rifles from Argentina.

An order for his arrest was issued on Feb. 23. He has claimed that Ecuador received weapons from Argentina, Chile, and Russia during the conflict and that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was aware of the arms deals. While Chile's Ravinet and President Ricardo Lagos repeatedly said the matter was resolved, the two countries have scheduled a "two plus two" meeting, or meeting between defense and foreign relations ministers, for mid-April.

Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo is under intense political pressure at home and might take up the banner of patriotic indignation, although his rhetoric regarding the incident has been muted so far. Forced to give testimony to Congress about false signatures on campaign materials, Toledo was under extreme political pressure just as Bayas’ allegations appeared in the press. His sister is also under house arrest while dealing with corruption charges, and accusations against other Toledo family members are keeping the unpopular president's image in tatters before the Peruvian public.

Both former Presidents Sixto Duran Ballen (1992-1996) of Ecuador and Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) of Peru experienced political gains from fanning the flames of wartime nationalism in 1995 (see NotiSur, 1995-02-10), but Toledo has yet to openly take the route of xenophobia. He has not been
overly vocal, and the loudest statements of resentment against Chile have come from Gustavo Pacheco, head of the Foreign Relations Committee in Congress.

Peru canceled a military-cooperation agreement with Chile after the accusations surfaced. Chile's armed forces head Gen. Juan Emilio Cheyre had to cancel a planned trip to Peru where he intended to deliver a daguerreotype print of a Peruvian general who lost the Port city of Arica while fighting Chilean forces in the War of the Pacific in 1880s. The gesture was aimed at demonstrating Chile's recognition of Peruvian war heroes.

**Ecuador: accusations of bribery for 1998 peace vote**

Other revelations from the mid-1990s border war have recently hit the press. Ecuador's government is investigating whether Peruvian spymaster Vladimiro Montesinos paid bribes to Ecuadoran deputies who signed the 1998 peace treaty. Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzon just published a book in which he wrote that Montesinos confessed that he had paid US$20 million to the Ecuadoran government and a group of Ecuadoran deputies to ratify the 1998 peace treaty signed with Peru. Peace negotiations were going through rocky waters and Fujimori in particular had a political interest in having the treaty signed (see NotiSur, 1998-10-30 and 1998-10-09).

Ecuadoran President Lucio Gutiérrez called on the courts and prosecutors of his country to investigate the arms claim. He also asked Toledo to look into it, and Luis Narvaez, Peruvian ambassador to Quito, said that there would be cooperation and that the denunciation would do nothing to cause a rewriting of the 1998 peace treaty. Newspapers have also reported that Fujimori had plans in 1996 to conduct a massive aerial attack against his northern neighbor.

With the purchase of 18 MiG-29 interceptors and 18 Sukhoi-25 bombers, the president hoped to overcome Ecuador's superior air defenses, according to Peruvian daily La Republica. But Air Force technical reports from that time showed that the fleet, which cost Peru US$402 million along with US$43 million in maintenance contracts with the Belorussian suppliers, was too deficient to fight. The MiG-29s were not equipped for nighttime interceptions and not even half of them were operative. Few pilots had been trained to fly them and none had trained in the area of Ecuador where they would supposedly be deployed.

Fujimori has claimed from exile that, even though the fleet could not conduct a successful offensive, it deterred Ecuador from attacking. He has, however, acknowledged that Montesinos and some military commanders received bribes for the deal.

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