



COLLEAGUES FOR THE AMERICAS SEMINAR SERIES
"Political Trends and Security Issues in Peru"

September 3, 2003

Featured Guest: Mr. Michael Shifter, Vice President for Policy at the Inter-American Dialogue

On September 3, INSS hosted the seventh 2003 "Colleagues for the Americas" seminar. The seminar, titled "Political Trends and Security Issues in Toledo's Peru," focused on recent events in Peru, challenges faced by its leadership, and possible scenarios for the country's future. The following report summarizes Mr. Shifter's key points.

Peru lends itself to various interpretations. Years ago I wrote an article about Peru that I started with one word: 'Precarious'. It appeared in *Debate*, a Peruvian magazine. That characterization of Peru holds true today. The number one destabilizing force in the country still remains ineffective institutions. Weak presidential leadership exacerbates the situation. President Alejandro Toledo does not enjoy broad popular support. Although he is the first self-identified indigenous elected leader, people are disappointed that after his first two years in office the expectations he raised have not been met. Negative allegations and bad news seem to stick to him; good news does not. His lack of popularity, however, defies the conventional political wisdom that a president's popularity rises with the economy -- Peru led the region in economic growth last year.

Dissatisfaction with President Toledo's performance is symptomatic of broad Peruvian revulsion towards the political class. Contrary to conventional wisdom, for example, Alan García's popularity does not rise when President Toledo's support falls. In fact, García's approval has declined with Toledo's. While Peruvians genuinely feel let down by Mr. Toledo, they appear resigned to 'politics as usual'. Another controversial former President, Alberto Fujimori, surprisingly maintains a 34% popularity rating and is rumored to be planning a come back in 2006, assuming he can get around the existing legal obstacles that stand in the way of a possible presidential bid. While Fujimori's return seems somewhat unlikely and unrealistic given his undemocratic practices as president, the one thing I've learned is that one cannot rule anything out in Peru.



**Stephen Flanagan, INSS Director,
opens the Colleagues seminar.**



Jay Cope, INSS, moderates as Michael Shifter takes questions.

There is a sense of growing domestic turmoil and unrest in Peru. Protests by schoolteachers, farmers and other workers often greet the president when he travels throughout the country. The infamous Shining Path is once again becoming a force to be reckoned with, although it's certainly not as powerful as it was in the 1980s. There are signs of some contact between the Shining Path and the FARC and ELN, Colombia's leading guerrilla groups, but there is no evidence yet of systematic support or collaboration. A recent Truth Commission Report exposing the realities of two decades of abuse by state and non-state actors, which has just been publicized with great fanfare, points to Peru's social tensions. Even if one adjusts for statistical error, the count of 69,000 dead or disappeared people far exceeds expert estimates. Of the victims, seventy-five percent were Quechua speaking and over 40 percent were from Ayacucho, a largely indigenous province. These statistics illustrate the sharp divisions that exist within Peruvian society.

Polls show that only a slight majority of Peruvians supported the Truth Commission's work. The Truth Commission Report reveals a need and demand for social justice. The political parties should engage in self-examination and self-reflection regarding their past mistakes and indifference and take corrective actions. Not surprisingly, the armed forces are nervous about possible prosecutions as an outcome of the report. The report could possibly have costly repercussions for many groups and individuals. Nonetheless, it is much easier to achieve truth than justice. We will have to wait and see how the report is handled and to what extent the recommendations are carried out. It would help if some political leaders stand up and take responsibility for past actions, or inaction. More important than trials are acknowledgements that mistakes were made. This would help the country move forward. The media (El Comercio in particular) has shown strong support for the Commission's findings and is pushing for genuine reconciliation.

Toledo's foreign policy has been a relative bright spot. He has been the only South American president to host President George W. Bush. The American president's visit in March 2002 helped boost Toledo's popularity, at least temporarily, and signaled to the region the importance of good relations with the United States.

How does Peru's future look? It's very hard to tell with certainty. One should never rule out surprises in Peru. The possibilities are wide open. I believe it is wrong to assume that, due to his past success and formidable political skills, Alan García will be the next president. As I mentioned, his popularity appears to have a ceiling. President Toledo will most likely complete his term. I believe the best situation for Peru is for Toledo to complete his term. There already is enough turmoil in the country without additional instability in the presidency. Toledo will most likely muddle through the next few years. Fortunately for him and his country, the relatively sound economy has prevented further disarray and deterioration. Things are better than they were under Fujimori's rule, but not as good as they could be. More effective leadership by the president and Peru's political class is essential.

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The INSS Colleagues for the Americas Seminar Series is a program of monthly meetings that commenced in 1994 to further research on hemispheric security and defense issues and to contribute to the professional education of United States and foreign practitioners.

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The next meeting in the INSS Colleagues for the America Seminar Series will be [date]. For more information, please contact Janie Hulse, NDU-INSS, (202) 685-3849, email: hulsej@ndu.edu. For more information about this report or the "Colleagues for the Americas" program, please contact Mr. John Cope, tel.: 202-685-2373, e-mail: copej@ndu.edu.

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