



# EVENT REPORT

INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC STUDIES

<http://www.ndu.edu/inss>

## INSS Colleagues for the Americas Seminar “The Rearmament Debate in South America”

Ambassador Hugo de Zela, Permanent Representative of Peru to the Organization of American States

April 28, 2010

By *CSR Western Hemisphere Team*

The April Colleagues for the Americas Seminar called attention to “The Rearmament Debate in South America.” The principal speaker, Ambassador Hugo de Zela, Peru’s Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States (OAS), explained his government’s proposal, entitled “Peace, Security, and Cooperation in the Americas,” recently presented to the Union of South American States (UNASUR) and the OAS. To broaden the debate, the seminar included two commentators: Lucila Santos, an Argentine Visiting Fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America, and Rebecca Chavez, PhD, an Associate Professor at the U.S. Naval Academy. Over seventy participants attended from US and Latin American civilian, military and governmental agencies.

Ambassador de Zela divided his presentation into four parts. He began with a synopsis of the current economic and political trends in South America, highlighting the slow reduction of poverty in several countries as capital formulation increases, but noting the emergence of a competing model embodied in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), a left-leaning bloc aimed at integrating Latin America to counter U.S. influence. In regard to the United States, de Zela noted Washington’s policy and priorities in South America are not clearly spelled out. The Ambassador touched briefly on the sale or acquisition of conventional weapons by several

countries (among them the United States, Canada, Venezuela, Ecuador, Brazil, Chile, and Peru). He then turned to South American efforts to create mechanisms to address defense issues. He noted the creation of the South American Defense Council in UNASUR, the use of 2+2 bilateral meetings involving both foreign and defense ministers, and regional confidence- and security-building initiatives. Finally, he outlined President Garcia’s peace proposal. A copy of Ambassador de Zela’s Power Point presentation is attached.

The Peruvian objective is to strengthen the culture of peace between South American countries in order to enable the use of more resources for social welfare, taking into consideration the significant number of people still living in poverty. The message delivered to UNASUR seeks to commit the countries of South America to a binding agreement, whereas the proposal to the hemisphere-wide OAS seeks only a declaration of principles.

Ambassador de Zela explained that the proposal to UNASUR is to negotiate a legally binding agreement, the “Protocol of Peace, Security, and Cooperation,” committing all South American governments not to use force in settling disputes. The protocol would create a South American Peace and Mediation Force and commit the South American states to reduce annual military spending by 3% and new conventional weapons spending by

5%. The proposal envisions the South American Peace and Mediation Force being employed in three circumstances: in case of an actual conflict between states; if there is a need for the collective defense of South America from an extra-regional attack; and in the event of a natural disaster. The key is to pursue regional mediation and solutions without U.S. intervention and to work through broader international legal mechanisms only if necessary.

The proposal the Permanent Mission of Peru recently presented at the OAS is to adopt “Peace, Security, and Cooperation in the Americas” as a declaration of principles to be adopted at the Lima General Assembly in June. Ambassador de Zela noted that the non-binding Declaration of Lima emphasizes cooperation to further the development of a hemispheric culture of peace. As the draft is being negotiated, he did not give further details.

The commentators, Ms. Santos and Professor Chavez, accepted the need for military modernization. They stressed, however, the importance of transparency, accountability, and a clearer communication of intentions, especially explanations for weapons procurement, if South American neighbors are going to minimize misunderstandings and silence traditional suspicions. Ms. Santos noted that “One country’s security is another’s insecurity.” Washington also was criticized for its lack of timely transparency in recent Defense Cooperation Agreements with Colombia and Brazil. Professor Chavez highlighted the importance of distinguishing between spending for internal security and externally focused defense missions. She also encouraged the creation of multiple multilateral mechanisms to strengthen regional confidence.

An extensive series of questions and comments followed the panel demonstrating widespread and heated interest in the rearmament debate. A repeated concern was the absence of plausible rationales for spending large sums of money to purchase modern military systems and limited transparency of the acquisition processes. In effect, there is little evidence of coherent approaches to transforming national defense force structures and

little concern that purchases might stimulate expenditures by neighbors. Both South American buyers and international sellers contribute to potential regional friction and instability. Neither is held accountable. While Peru is not the first country to focus on conventional weapons spending that appears excessive, the government of President Alan Garcia is one of the first to propose a comprehensive approach to mitigating suspicions associated with regional armament purchases.

###

The Center for Strategic Research Western Hemisphere team includes Senior Fellow Jay Cope, Adjunct Fellow Ambassador Luigi Einaudi, Research Assistant Eva Silkwood, and Intern Karina Van der Plas. The views expressed are their own and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.