



ODUMUNC 2011
Issue Brief for the
Security Council

The Prevention of Escalating Tensions in South America

By: Carlos Teixeira





ODUMUNC 2011 Issue Brief for the Security Council

The Prevention of Escalating Tensions in South America

By: Carlos Teixeira

Current Situation

In comparison to other regions of the world, South America can be considered as being relatively peaceful, so much so that one scholar has studied South America as a case of a “zone of peace” since the end of the 19th century. In fact, there was no lack of disputes during the formative years of South American nations throughout the 1800s, when they engaged in at least six full-scale declared wars and several minor armed conflicts. But while the majority of those confrontations were based on territorial/boundary issues, more recent tensions revolved generally around matters of policy. Following is a brief summary of some of the most recent tensions in South America.

Ecuador-Peru: The last war fought in South America resembled the territorial disputes of the 19th century. Indeed, the most recent war between South American countries – the so called “Cenepa War” between Ecuador and Peru in 1995 – dated back to the days of the independence of those states. Both countries had gone to war in 1941 over a disputed area on the border between them, with Peru prevailing over Ecuador. Tensions rose again in the early 1990s until war finally broke out in 1995. A peace treaty was signed in the capital of Brazil, in which Chile, Argentina and the United States also participated. The Brazilian president had an important role in bringing the parts to the negotiation table.

Colombia-Ecuador-Venezuela: In the last decade, the sources of tensions in South America can mostly be found on political matters. The most significant was a diplomatic crisis in 2008 between Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela. The central aspect of this crisis has to do with the role of the FARC (Revolutionaries Armed Forces of Colombia) and the divergent ideological orientations of the Colombian government on one side, and the Ecuadorian and Venezuelan government on the other. The FARC is a Marxist guerrilla group, involved with drug trafficking and kidnapping, and described as a terrorist group by the Colombian government. When Colombian intelligence reports got the information that a FARC leader was near the Ecuadorian border, Colombia launched a military operation that ended up going a few miles inside Ecuadorian territory, which constituted a violation of Ecuadorian sovereignty. Ecuador vehemently condemned the action and cut diplomatic relations with Colombia. While the other South American governments just verbally condemned the Colombian incursion in Ecuadorian territory, Venezuela closed its embassy in Colombia, expelled the Colombian ambassador in Caracas, and moved its troops along the Colombian border. During this crisis, the Colombian government accused the Venezuelan president of financing FARC rebels and proposed to denounce him in the International Criminal Court. The crisis was resolved at a Rio Group meeting and tensions have been alleviated since then.



ODUMUNC 2011
Issue Brief for the
Security Council

The Prevention of Escalating Tensions in South America

By: Carlos Teixeira

Bolivia-Brazil: Also in 2008, Bolivia was a significant focus of tensions in South America. When the Bolivian president decided to hold a referendum for a new constitution, supporters and opponents violently clashed. While the UN Secretary-General voiced his “concern” on the Bolivian situation, the South American nations met in Chile to discuss the matter. This crisis followed a previous one, when the Bolivian government nationalized its hydrocarbons reserves, which affected the Brazilian oil company Petrobras, one of the largest investors in Bolivia. Brazil called the move “unfriendly” and reviewed its investments in Bolivia, and a diplomatic crisis between the two countries seemed imminent. But later Brazil toned down its protests and a bigger crisis was averted. Relations are back to normal today.

Chile-Peru: On January 2008, the Peruvian government instituted proceedings against Chile in the International Court of Justice over a maritime boundary dispute. The case is still under examination by the ICJ. Later, in November of 2009, the Peruvian government captured an officer of the Peruvian Air Force who allegedly was passing sensitive data about his country’s Armed Forces to Chile. The Chilean government denied the accusation and reacted angrily. The background for this crisis was given by previous Peruvian allegations that Chile was involved in an arms race because the Chilean government spent billions of dollars to purchase military equipment, including tanks, fighter planes and a submarine.

Argentina-Uruguay: Another South American dispute that ended up in the International Court of Justice was between Argentina and Uruguay over the construction of pulp mills on the Uruguay River, which is shared by both countries. The Argentinean government believed that the construction of the mills authorized by Uruguay would pollute the river. Tensions followed and in January 2006 the Argentine government took the case to the ICJ arguing that Uruguay had breached a treaty obligation to consult before doing anything that might affect the river. Judges at the ICJ voted 14–1 in Uruguay's favor, which prompted Argentina to protest and the crisis continued. The new Uruguayan president elected in 2009 met with the Argentinean president on July 2010 and created a binational commission to monitor the river pollution officially ending the dispute.

Argentina-United Kingdom: In February 2010, the Argentinean government protested when a British oil company began drilling for oil off the Falklands Islands, over which Argentina and the United Kingdom went to war in 1982. Although they lost the war, Argentina still claims sovereignty over the archipelago and has requested sovereignty talks with the British government. Although the United Nations General Assembly has called on both countries to begin sovereignty talks, Britain has refused to do so. In protest, the Argentinean president criticized the United Nations Security Council in the last meeting of the General Assembly for “not working properly”. South American nations unanimously supported the Argentinean claim.



ODUMUNC 2011 Issue Brief for the Security Council

The Prevention of Escalating Tensions in South America

By: Carlos Teixeira

Recent Tensions in Ecuador: On September 30, 2010, the Ecuadorian government declared a state of emergency after a tense standoff between the government and rebellious members of the security forces, which the president called a “coup attempt”. The president himself was hit by tear gas and had to be hospitalized. Because of the unstable situation, Peru closed its border with Ecuador. All governments in South America, plus the United States, declared their support to the Ecuadorian government.

Role of the United Nations

The most striking aspect of the aforementioned crises is how little the United Nations has been involved. Revitalizing the role of the UN and/or the Organization of American States (OAS) is a major issue for international diplomacy. Not all countries are in favor, sometimes regarding the organizations as interference in their own affairs. Jealous of their independence and resentful of prior meddling by the United States, they do not always welcome foreign intervention. Often the best that the UN or OAS can do is offer their good offices or mediation to help when wanted. Others regard greater institutionalization of regional conflict resolution as an essential step to creation of regional security community, among whom war is inconceivable.

The UN Security Council did not play any relevant role in those issues. Because of the relatively high degree of regional institutionalization, South American countries tend to deal with these tensions on a regional basis. The United Nations usually limits itself to make statements expressing “concern”, “urging restraint”, or welcoming the intervention by regional organizations. For example, the 2008 Andean crisis went first to the OAS, which could not produce a resolution. The crisis was ultimately handled by the Rio Group, which is a Latin American-only organization. One outcome of this particular crisis was that it gave the decisive push for the creation of a South American Defense Council under the auspices of the South American-only organization Unasur (Union of South American Countries). In fact, just four months after the signing of the Unasur’s constitutive treaty, the South American countries met in Chile to discuss proposals for the resolution of the Bolivian situation. The OAS - which is seen by some Latin American states as being dominated by the United States - had to content itself in sending an “observer” to the meeting, not without criticism from its Secretary-General that the hemispheric organization should have played a more preeminent role. This fact hasn’t gone unnoticed by leftist leaders in the region. The Bolivian President said that it was “the first time in history that we South Americans are deciding to solve the problems of South America” and the Venezuelan President echoed that “for the first time in our history, we, the South Americans, are demonstrating that we are capable of understanding each other and searching for common solutions.” Similarly, in regards to the recent Ecuadorian crisis, the Unasur convoked an urgent



ODUMUNC 2011 Issue Brief for the Security Council

The Prevention of Escalating Tensions in South America

By: Carlos Teixeira

meeting to discuss the issue, which took place on October 1st, 2010 in Buenos Ayres. Characteristically, the UN Secretary-General limited itself to an expression of “deep concern” and support to the Ecuadorian government, and praised the role of regional organizations in attempting to find a solution for the situation.

Bibliography

1. BBC. 23 February 2010. Argentina rallies regional support over Falklands <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8529605.stm>.
———. 28 March 2009. No talks on Falklands, says Brown
———. *Bolivia gas under state control* May 2, 2006. Available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4963348.stm>.
———. *Talks aim to end Bolivian crisis* September 15, 2008 Available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7615485.stm>.
2. CNN. *Ecuador declares emergency as police protest, president is attacked* September 30, 2010. Available from <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/09/30/ecuador.violence/?hpt=T1>.
3. Forero, Juan. March 8, 2008. Latin American Crisis Resolved. *Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2008/03/07/ST2008030703581.html>.
4. Ishmael, Odeen. September 27, 2008. UNASUR facilitates dialogue in Bolivian crisis. *PR-Inside.com*, <http://www.pr-inside.com/odeen-ishmael-unasur-facilitates-dialogue-r832118.htm>.
5. Infobae.com. October 1, 2010. Presidentes de la Unasur reunidos por la crisis de Ecuador. <http://www.infobae.com/mundo/539316-101275-0-Los-presidentes-la-region-se-reuniran-esta-noche-Buenos-Aires-la-crisis-Ecuador>
6. Infobae.com. September 30, 2010. La ONU respaldó al gobierno de Ecuador. <http://www.infobae.com/mundo/539343-101275-0-La-ONU-respaldo-al-gobierno-Ecuador>



ODUMUNC 2011
Issue Brief for the
Security Council

The Prevention of Escalating Tensions in South America

By: Carlos Teixeira

7. International Court of Justice. *Maritime Dispute (Peru v. Chile)*. Available from <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?p1=3&p2=3&code=pc&case=137&k=88>.

———. *Pulp Mills on the River Uruguay (Argentina v. Uruguay)*. Available from <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?&case=135&code=au&p3=5>.
8. Kacowicz, Arie Marcelo. 1998. *Zones of peace in the Third World: South America and West Africa in comparative perspective, SUNY series in global politics*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
9. Mercopress. *Chile denies conflict with Peru will be considered in Unasur defence meeting* November 24th 2009 Available from <http://en.mercopress.com/2009/11/23/chile-denies-conflict-with-peru-will-be-considered-in-unasur-defence-meetin>.

———. *Cristina blasts UK and UN Security Council for lack of progress in Falklands/Malvinas* September 24th 2010. Available from <http://en.mercopress.com/2010/09/24/cristina-blasts-uk-and-un-security-council-for-lack-of-progress-in-falklands-malvinas>.
10. Reuters. *Colombia spars with Venezuela in growing crisis* November 4, 2009 Available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5A340D20091104>.

———. *Colombia says FARC documents show Correa ties* March 2, 2008. Available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN0229738220080303>.
11. Sousa, Sarah-Lea John de. November 15, 2006. Brazil and Bolivia: the hydrocarbon "conflict". *FRIDE*, <http://www.fride.org/publication/152/brazil-and-bolivia:-the-hydrocarbon->.
12. UN News Centre. *Secretary-General welcomes peaceful agreement on new Bolivian constitution* October 21, 2008 Available from <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=28662&Cr=bolivia&Cr1=&Kw1=south+america&Kw2=&Kw3=>.
13. United Nations Secretary General. *Secretary-General Urges Restraint Following Rise In Tensions Involving Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela*. March 3, 2008. Available from <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/sgsm11446.doc.htm>.



ODUMUNC 2011
Issue Brief for the
Security Council

The Prevention of Escalating Tensions in South America

By: Carlos Teixeira

———. *Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on the Rio Group Summit* 10 March 2008 Available from <http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=3038>.

14. Welch, Teresa. 22 September 2010 Ecuador: Diplomatic thaw with Colombia irreversible *Colombia Reports*, <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/11994-ecuador-diplomatic-relations-colombia.html>.

Author's Biography: Carlos G. P. Teixeira is a doctoral candidate in International Studies at Old Dominion University, with sponsorship from Fulbright and the Brazilian Ministry of Education. He earned a Masters in International Relations from the Catholic University of Sao Paulo, and his thesis won the 2008 Franklin Delano Roosevelt Award for studies about the United States from the U.S. embassy in Brazil.