

# UNASUR: Developments in the Defense Area

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Since the Union of South American Nations<sup>1</sup> was established in 2008, important actions have been realized around several axes aiming to integrate the entire South America into a really new regional space. Among these axes we can highlight: political dialogue (to define common visions at South American level, independent of the influence of the United States); physical and energy interconnections (with a focus on common infrastructures like bio-oceanic tracing routes, oil and gas pipelines); financial integration (to establish a Bank of the South, which has not materialised yet); and cooperation in various matters, such as defense, education, social rights and migration. Contrary to other integration experiences in the region (like the Mercosur) – , the foreseen integration does not primarily target commercial integration<sup>2</sup>, but rather what is usually called “political integration”, a concept that encompasses several themes ranging from identity to the region’s infrastructures. In the defense area, recently there have been some interesting steps that seek not only to coordinate policies, but also to redefine the notion of defense and security for the region. So, the UNASUR Defense Council<sup>3</sup> made proposals on topics that have traditionally been covered by military secret. For example, representatives of the member countries convened to discuss a South American registry of defense spending, as well as “a methodology to standardize a mechanism of transparency in the military inventory”<sup>4</sup>. Even more, the perspective of the construction of the first South American aircraft of primary/basic military training is emerging.

A very widespread initiative was in 2010 the creation of the Center of Strategic Studies on Defense (CEED)<sup>5</sup>, located in Buenos Aires, which was considered a milestone in the creation of those new definitions and also of confidence-building among the countries of the region. Within the framework of the Center, UNASUR recently announced that the first South American School of Defence will be created for military training of the armed forces of its member countries<sup>6</sup>. The initiative is particularly relevant, since from the end of World War II the region has always been in line with the U.S. defense doctrines, which were broadcast on various channels, including the training in the School of the Americas<sup>7</sup>. The new school, according to the director of CEED, Alfredo Forti, would allow to deal with the regional issues with South America’s peculiar solutions, emphasizing the potential of the South American geostrategic dimension, and not only its conflicts, “as happened in the past”<sup>8</sup>. Giving priority to the development of a geostrategic approach is relevant, as the region covers an area of over 17 million square kilometers, which contains 20% of the world’s proven oil reserves, as well as large amounts of mineral reserves: lithium (65%), silver (42%), copper (38%), tin (33%), iron (21%) and bauxite (18%), among others<sup>9</sup>. Currently, representatives of the twelve countries work in the drafting of statutes and courses that will make up the program of study, which will be presented to the defense ministers of each country next November.

Translated by Laura Roscio

<sup>1</sup> Today take part of Unasur: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela

<sup>2</sup> Although its Constitutive Treaty include the objective of “economic and trade cooperation”. The Treaty is available at: <http://www.UNASURsg.org/inicio/documentos/UNASUR/tratado-constitutivo>

<sup>3</sup> Its Statute is available at:

<http://www.UNASURsg.org/uploads/11/27/11272dcbdad1a64e7b7daa8a627ed68/Estatutos-de-creacion-Consejo-de-Defensa-Suramericano.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Press release of the Undersecretary of Defence of Chile: "Consejo de Defensa Suramericano – Taller de Metodología para Transparentar el Inventario Militar", 4/26/2013. See also the axes of the Action Plan 2012, available at: <http://www.ceedcds.org.ar/Espanol/09-Downloads/Esp-PA/Plan-de-Accion-2012.pdf>

The full texts of the action plans are not yet available at the UNASUR Official Website

<sup>5</sup> Its Statute is available at:

<http://www.UNASURsg.org/uploads/19/43/1943af98206fbf76b556b8fbc772d77/Estatuto-Centro-Estudios-Estrategicos-de-defensa.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> The creation of this new school and the information about the construction of the aircraft were spread some days after Alfredo Forti's presence in the "Union of South American Nations Conference on natural resources and integral development of the region", carried out at the end of May in Caracas. UNASUR News: "UNASUR creará la Escuela Suramericana de Defensa para la formación de militares de países miembros", 6/6/2013 and "Escuela Suramericana de Defensa como instrumento para consolidar a la región en una zona de paz", 5/9/2013

<sup>7</sup> Accused of training the soldiers who led the military dictatorships and their actions of torture in many countries of the region. Among the references to these practices, see Gill Lesley, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas*, Duke University Press, 2004

<sup>8</sup> "Anuncian la creación de una nueva versión de la Escuela de las Américas, pero esta vez para el Cono Sur", *Tiempo Militar*, 05/10/2013

<sup>9</sup> UNASUR News: "Con una estrategia articuladora, UNASUR será un proyecto irreversible para la región", 05/10/2013