

F-16s on Display at US-Southern Cone Training Exercises in Chile

The Salitre 2004 air combat training exercise in Iquique, Chile brought together air force personnel from the United States and three Southern Cone countries—Argentina, Brazil and Chile—to improve operational skills and promote inter-American military relations over a sixteen day period between September 25 to October 10.

Previously, the biannual event was limited to bilateral exercises between the United States and Chile. This year's expanded participation was designed as "a forum to strengthen ties between nations that have not historically worked together," according to a US Southern Command news release.

More than 600 service members participated in the exercises, including more than 100 from US Air Force bases. The planes used in the exercises included F-16s, like the 10 Chile has agreed to buy from the United States for \$700 million. The deal is the largest US arms sale to Latin America in two decades and the first authorized since President Clinton lifted a 1970s ban on such transfers to the region. Lockheed Martin, a US firm, clinched the sale over French (Mirage 2000-5) and Swedish (SAAB Gripen) rivals.

Iquique, the site of the air exercises, is part of territory that Peru lost to Chile in the War of the Pacific in 1879. Chilean officials were quick to assure Peruvian authorities that Salitre 2004 was in no way intended as a provocation to that country. In August, the governments of Peru and Bolivia complained when Chile held military exercises against a hypothetical alliance of two neighboring countries, one of which sought to gain an ocean port—a clear allusion to the nineteenth-century conflict between the three countries.

By Alisa Newman, LACC staff

<http://www.southcom.mil/pa/News/September%202004/News040930.htm>

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/f-16-fms.htm>

<http://www.salitre2004.cl/>

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