

Latin America questions US bases in Colombia

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Brazil, Chile and Spain have challenged a US decision to use and expand military bases in Colombia, saying they fear heightened tensions in Latin America.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil and Michelle Bachelet of Chile said in Sao Paulo they would put the issue before an August 10 meeting of the South American Defense Council in Ecuador.

Spain's foreign minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos, and his Brazilian counterpart, Celso Amorim, simultaneously told reporters in Brasilia that they would demand explanations from Washington over the bases.

The Colombian government's announcement on July 15 that three of its military air bases were to be used by the United States as part of joint anti-drug operations has ignited concerns and anger among Colombia's neighbors.

Venezuela and its ally Ecuador have also warned that the move could aggravate already deep tensions with Colombia.

The two countries almost went to war last year against Colombia over a raid its army made into Ecuador to destroy a FARC rebel camp.

Venezuela's...Hugo Chavez, said he viewed the bases as a sign that a 'Yankee military force' was preparing to invade his country from Colombia.

Chavez this week signed deals with Russia reinforcing military ties that have already seen him acquire new tanks, combat helicopters and fighter jets.

He also on Tuesday froze diplomatic ties with Colombia over allegations from Bogota that weapons Venezuela bought from Sweden in the 1980s ended up in the hands of the rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

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