

# 'Mad Max' unleashed on Argentina

by Peter Rush and Cynthia Rush

The Bush administration sent Gen. "Mad Max" Thurman, the butcher of Panama, on a tour of South America's Southern Cone in the middle of May, to peddle the Trilateral Commission's recommendations that the armed forces of the continent begin to dismantle themselves. As reported by the Argentine daily *Clarín* May 17 and 18, Thurman recommended that all of the Ibero-American armed forces slash their budgets and reduce their costs, and that there should be a "re-dimensioning" of each country's armed forces. There are only two main enemies in Ibero-America, Thurman explained—drug traffickers and internal subversion—and armies should reorganize themselves accordingly.

*Clarín* commented that some local analysts see Thurman's proposals as a rewarmed version of the "McNamara Doctrine" of the 1960s, which demanded that Ibero-American militaries be organized and equipped only as counterinsurgency forces, since U.S. military might would take care of any extra-hemispheric threat to these nations. Defying U.S. advice, at that time Argentina beefed up its armed forces in order to be able to defend itself from any external or internal threat. Now, the U.S. administration wants to make sure that this institution is eliminated altogether, citing "an end to the Cold War" as its rationale.

Today's policies are part of the broader project being carried out in the economic realm to eliminate all effective economic sovereignty from every country, making the entire continent "safe for American investment"—meaning not productive investment, but arrangements to make Ibero-America little more than a slave labor haven for U.S. run-away shops. The strategic context for Thurman's proposals are the condominium arrangements between Washington and Moscow, which see the existence of sovereign national institutions in the Third World as unnecessary and unwanted. And so, the Anglo-American policy elites are determined to reduce Ibero-America's military institution to a mere constabulary—Panama-style—whose role will be to wage war against its own population. This is what the Trilateral Commission calls "defending democracy."

Thurman's tour also made clear that, using the pretext of the anti-drug fight, the United States intends to station its own troops in as many Ibero-American nations as possible. U.S. Green Berets are already scheduled to be sent to Peru, to train Peruvian commandos in anti-subversive techniques.

While he was in Argentina, Thurman, who is the U.S. Southern Command's officer responsible for anti-narcotics policy, arranged for a company of U.S. Army commandos to carry out "anti-drug" exercises with their Argentine counterparts in June, centered around techniques for fighting narco-terrorists such as Peru's Shining Path subversives. A May 20 communiqué of the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires admitted that there were already U.S. troops inside Argentina carrying out exercises, and that 40 Green Berets will arrive in September for further anti-subversion maneuvers in Argentina's northern jungle region.

## Panama is just the beginning

The justification for this is the Thornburgh Doctrine, which says that U.S. law enforcement and military personnel can hunt down those whom the U.S. deems criminals in other countries, in total disregard of national sovereignty or international law. One proof that the U.S. is planning to introduce its own troops came from the May 13 crash in Panama of a U.S. helicopter, participating in what was admitted to be "classified maneuvers to prepare offensive incursions into the jungles of South America." The exercises, in Panama's Darien jungle, were carried out by the U.S. Special Operations Command involving Green Berets, the Delta Force, and other U.S. special forces out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

In Argentina, as reported by *Clarín*, and despite earlier denials by President George Bush, General Thurman let slip out that the United States intends to intervene "practically directly" into Colombia, because the situation there is considered to be so "grave."

Similar proposals have recently been aired in the U.S. media. *New York Times* columnist Flora Lewis on May 21 argued that there was no reason for the Argentine—or any other Latin American—military to exist. The Public Broadcasting System's program "Frontline" May 23 featured a call for an international police force, and attacked the Colombian military for allegedly misusing U.S. military equipment in a "dirty war" against civilians.

After Thurman's departure, reflecting dissatisfaction from Argentina's top brass, Foreign Minister Domingo Cavallo and Defense Minister Humberto Romero both tried to downplay the arrival of Green Berets, saying that no joint maneuvers were even planned. Argentina's military leaders see any Green Beret deployment to their country as U.S. intervention into their internal affairs; but according to local press reports, no one dared to tell that to Thurman when he was in Buenos Aires. The May 11 *El Informador Público* reported that U.S. troops already in Buenos Aires, many of them veterans of the Panama invasion, have been granted a surprising degree of freedom to take pictures and film military installations, including air strips, shooting ranges, and layout of the large Campo de Mayo army base in Buenos Aires.