

Bush administration's drug policy is 'Vietnamizing' the Andes

by Luis Vásquez Medina

Dr. Luigi Einaudi, the U.S. ambassador to the Organization of American States, ran into trouble during his presentation at a Nov. 6 forum on U.S. policies toward the Americas at Lima's Peruvian Center for International Studies. At the very moment when Einaudi, for years a close associate of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, emphasized the need for the Peruvian government to reverse its refusal to sign a military aid agreement with the United States, a car bomb exploded with great force just outside the conference hall.

Einaudi had begun by stressing that now that the Cold War is over, all U.S. relations with the Americas must be set in terms of the new condominium among the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. Einaudi said they must be seen "in the same light as the Gulf and other problems, including Central America, are now seen." His implication was that the Soviet Union agrees with U.S. insistence on Peru signing the military agreement.

Regaining his composure after the blast, Einaudi said that in the United States, "relations with Peru are viewed almost entirely in terms of cocaine." He added that he thinks Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori's proposals on narcotics are coherent with those of the Cartagena Accords which Bush signed back in February with Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia. But he stated that if Peru wants any non-military aid, it has no choice but to accept the terms now being offered by Bush.

Einaudi's comments revealed how much Washington has been irritated by Peru's reticence. So did statements by Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics Affairs Melvin Levitsky. Levitsky was dispatched to Lima in early November by the Bush administration in place of Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Bernard Aronson, who was to have gone to Lima in late October to sign the aid accords. In his lecture to President Fujimori, Levitsky left no doubt that the United States would insist on Peru's acceptance of the military aid pact.

U.S. Special Forces into the jungles

The actual intent of the package is to pressure Peru into accepting the deployment of U.S. Special Forces and CIA-

linked mercenaries into the drug-producing areas of Peru, and other Ibero-American nations. In fact, this process has already begun, according to revelations in both the Peruvian and the U.S. press, and involves individuals linked to Oliver North and his illegal Iran-Contra operations, which have been documented to be involved with drug trafficking.

According to an article by Frank Greve in the May 30 *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "about a dozen veterans of the Reagan administration's illicit effort to aid Nicaragua's Contra rebels have volunteered to fight the Bush administration's cocaine war in Peru." Standing out among those dreaming of another Vietnam in Peru, is one Richard J. Meadows, a mercenary from the hosts of Maj. Gen. Richard Secord. Meadows has been operating in Peru since 1983, and according to the *Inquirer* article was the one who recruited the Drug Enforcement Administration's anti-drug combat forces. Meadows "directs security at a 19,000-acre palm oil plantation adjacent to the U.S.-Peruvian counter-narcotics base at Santa Lucía in the Upper Huallaga Valley. A guard force of 150, most former Peruvian marines, is based at the plantation."

Greve reports that many of the U.S. operatives in the Peruvian jungles are "Contra hands" who worked directly with North and Secord. They are also reportedly associated with the Betac Corp. of Rosslyn, Virginia, "which specializes in intelligence technology and clandestine operations. . . . Among the Betac executives pursuing the drug-war 'business' is former CIA director of operations Clair George," who resigned from the CIA in 1987 after 32 years. "Betac also employs retired Army Gen. Paul Gorman as a 'consultant,' " according to the *Inquirer* exposé.

The palm oil plantation where Meadows is nominally employed belongs to the Romero family, oligarchs who own the powerful Banco de Crédito, which until recently was the country's biggest launderer of cocaine dollars. (Today, the central bank itself performs that function.) Charges that the Romero plantation's private airport is used with impunity for cocaine transport have appeared repeatedly in the Peruvian press.

Some sources in Peru have charged that Meadows and

his men are re-exporting some of the cocaine they seize, for their own benefit; but as yet there has been no independent confirmation of these charges.

Bush's pressure tactics

Pressures on the Fujimori government are not merely verbal. Press dispatches from Lima report that Peru's chances for a \$2 billion bridge loan to clean up its foreign credit standing dropped after Fujimori rejected military aid. Central bank president Dr. Jorge Chávez revealed upon his return from London on Oct. 31, that he had failed to obtain a bridge loan to alleviate arrears with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. He added that Peru would not get the loan for at least another six months.

The Peruvian government's decision to reject the proffered U.S. anti-drug package of \$36 million won the support of nearly every political and military sector in the country. Mistrust of U.S. intentions is a general sentiment throughout the country, and is in fact justified when one takes into account such recent developments as the bloody U.S. invasion of Panama, where the Bush administration's so-called war on drugs was shown to be a pretext for seizing permanent control of the Panama Canal and wiping out military opponents to Project Democracy and the drug cartels.

The United States' proposed "anti-drug" effort regarding Peru reflects this same deceit. The military aid package contains such abusive and unacceptable conditions that affixing Peru's signature to the agreement would constitute surrendering a major portion of Peru's national sovereignty to the United States. According to the Peruvian press, the U.S. is demanding in return for its \$36 million: 1) the presence of U.S. "advisers" in Peru's battle zones, with the option of entering into combat as considered appropriate; 2) construction of three military bases in the Peruvian jungle, which would both logistically and militarily depend directly for their commands on the United States; 3) that in the event of a conflict of interest in implementation of the agreement, Peru would place itself under the jurisdiction of the U.S. courts; and 4) that "suspected Peruvian drug traffickers" would be extradited to the United States without *any* investigation or trial by Peruvian courts—i.e., the same treatment meted out to Panama's Gen. Manuel Noriega.

Drug legalization in disguise

President Fujimori issued a public rejection of the U.S. aid package, alleging that the Bush administration's proposal was "insufficient and partial," and that it failed to address the need for economic assistance which would enable the more than 600,000 coca-growing peasants to substitute their crops.

Fujimori presented his alternative on Oct. 27, with what he dubbed a "global solution" to the drug trafficking problem in Peru. He incorporated the thesis of Gen. Alberto Arciniegas with that of Hernando de Soto, an Ibero-American economist who has been publicly singled out for praise by George

Bush. Fujimori placed military repression on a lower priority, arguing instead for a progressive process of crop substitution, to be launched with a judicial reform consisting of granting property titles to the coca-growers. As Hernando de Soto, charged with explaining the proposal to the Bush administration, put it, the plan would legalize the "informal" coca farmers, giving them access to credit and making the presence of the state viable in those zones where state power has de facto been nonexistent.

Fujimori justified his proposal by arguing that it would separate the informal coca growers from the influence of the Shining Path and Tupac Amaru terrorists. This, he argued, would correct "the U.S. error in Vietnam," where the strategy was not to ally or give land to the Mekong Delta peasantry, forcing them to ally with the communist guerrillas. What Fujimori's proposal conveniently overlooks is the total integration of the Shining Path narco-terrorists with the drug traffickers: They are one and the same apparatus.

The U.S. government has made an unconvincing display of "opposition" to this de facto legalization strategy. The *Washington Post* admitted on Nov. 4 that "Fujimori's new policy confirms what U.S. officials have gradually come to accept—that the prospect of wiping out the coca fields . . . is unrealistic."

The irony of the situation is that Fujimori's proposal is inspired—as he is the first to assert—"in the spirit of unrestrained free enterprise" presented in President Bush's Enterprise for the Americas initiative.

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