

Andean Report by Cynthia Rush

Bolivia seeks to expel U.S. agents

The U.S. military presence in Bolivia, under the guise of "fighting drugs," creates a volatile situation.

The July 5 call by Bolivian Army chief Gen. Jorge Moreira for the expulsion of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents from the country, reflects the explosive situation which has developed in that country as a result of U.S. military and other "advisory" presence, to train police and military personnel in combatting drug trafficking.

Under Bush administration policy, deployment of U.S. military personnel to Bolivia, and involving the country's armed forces in "fighting drugs," actually has nothing to do with eradicating the drug trade. Combined with the application of the International Monetary Fund's economic policies, which have impoverished the region's people and in many cases forced them into coca cultivation as a livelihood, "fighting drugs" is merely the pretext for the U.S. to deploy troops to Ibero-American countries, limit their sovereignty, and transform their armed forces into domestic police forces to be deployed as Washington sees fit—certainly not to defend their national interests.

Under these conditions, U.S. military involvement in Bolivia, which has been going on for two years, is opposed by many in the country who fear it will lead to a domestic backlash and outbreaks of violence and social upheaval approximating a civil war.

General Moreira requested the DEA's expulsion after outgoing U.S. Ambassador Robert Gelbard accused members of the armed forces of providing information to drug kingpins which allowed them to escape a recent

Army raid on the town of Santa Ana del Yacuma. Gelbard maintained that there is vast corruption among the armed forces.

General Moreira responded that Gelbard's comments were an "affront to the armed forces," while *Presencia*, a Catholic newspaper, editorialized that Gelbard's period as ambassador left "a bitter taste of such recalcitrant interventionism that at times it took us back to the policies of the 'Big Stick.'"

Bolivia is now the number-two cocaine producer in the world after Colombia; an estimated 30% of its coca leaf output is processed into cocaine within the country. UPI reported on June 22 that the narcotics trade injects \$300 million into the country's financial system, equivalent to one-third of Bolivia's official 1990 exports.

The United States has used this fact to bludgeon the country into accepting Bush's phony "anti-drug" strategy for the Andean region. DEA chief Robert Bonner, who recently warned that Bolivia may be approaching the same type of violence which has afflicted neighboring Colombia, explained that the Paz Zamora government's decision to accept U.S. military personnel to train the Bolivian Army "was a sovereign decision. . . . We did not threaten to suspend aid. We did not pressure them in any way."

But Bolivian officials have admitted privately that if the government refuses to go along with U.S. policy, it would cease to receive \$600 million annually in foreign aid. Miguel Urioste, a leader of a small left-wing politi-

cal party, told UPI that Paz Zamora has signed so many agreements with George Bush, relating to drug policy, that he has left the American President "with the key to any decision on bilateral aid, assistance, or financing."

U.S. authorities insist that DEA personnel are only in the country as advisers to the elite Umopar police units, which carry out most drug raids. But General Moreira accuses the DEA of participating directly in raids and abusing Bolivian military personnel. After the June raid on Santa Ana del Yacuma, a program broadcast on Radio Fides in La Paz charged that the "special forces [Umopar] are becoming a military and police force at the service of the U.S. embassy." Numerous speakers charged that the country had been invaded by a "gringo" force which had abused citizens and trampled on their rights.

Further Army involvement in anti-drug actions is under discussion. Defense Minister Hector Ormachea stated that "if this [police] force is overwhelmed by narcotics traffickers, the Army would participate in a more open fight."

U.S. promotion of militarizing the drug war has created a dangerous backlash. Peasant farmers who cultivate coca have repeatedly blocked roads to protest the policy, and threaten to respond violently. Coca grower José Sánchez told a *Wall St. Journal* reporter, "We have arms and machetes and we are ready to use them."

Another potential point of friction between Bolivia and the United States is the fact that some drug kingpins are following the route of the Colombian counterparts and surrendering to authorities, on the condition that they be tried in Bolivia, and not extradited. The U.S. and Bolivia do not currently have an extradition treaty, and the Paz Zamora government has resisted U.S. pressure to sign one.