

Peru bombs cocaine bases, as Ibero-America unites to fight drugs

by Ricardo Martín and Valerie Rush

The Peruvian government of Alan García made history on Aug. 9 when it ordered the first deployment ever of fighter bombers against drug traffickers' bases hidden in the Peruvian Amazon. Two giant complexes—including laboratories, warehouses, dormitories, and concrete airstrips—were strafed and bombed to smithereens by two squadrons of Peruvian Air Force war jets backed by helicopter gunships.

Peru has now set the example for an all-out military War on Drugs, very similar to that proposed by *EIR* contributing editor Lyndon LaRouche in March 1985, in a policy paper stressing that the Western Hemisphere's governments are under assault by *armies* of narco-terrorists that are well financed, well armed, and directly challenging legitimate governments.

'A scourge of vast dimensions'

Significantly, Peru's military assault was ordered on the final day of a conference on South American security matters taking place in Caracas, Venezuela (see Conference Report, page 40), where police commanders from throughout the continent had gathered for a five-day strategy session on the battle against drugs and terrorism—which, as the host, Venezuela Justice Minister Manzo González noted, "are intimately linked to each other."

The conference, among other points, proposed a multi-lateral extradition treaty for the continent, a unified anti-drug police force which could be called upon by any participating nation in need of its assistance, and the creation of police commissions to lobby with their respective governments for implementation of the conference proposals. Attendees were unanimous that nothing less than unified action could stop what one participant described as "a scourge of vast dimensions."

Peruvian delegate Gen. Landauro Yvascone emphasized to his colleagues at the conference that, since the drug trade destroys not only economies, but the "moral fiber" of nations and "that sense of national identity known as patriotism," nothing less than continent-wide collaboration to fight drugs would suffice. "Only thus," insisted the general, "can we face history, and say that we are nation-builders."

While urging mutual cooperation among the nations of Ibero-America, Gen. Landauro Yvascone was quick to note that his proposal "does not exclude the collaboration of non-

South American international organizations, including the United States." He especially thanked the Colombians for their collaboration in anti-drug operations along their shared border, and noted that Ecuador was being invited to do likewise. He also emphasized that past and future joint operations would take place within the framework of the regional Rodrigo Lara Bonilla Agreement signed last May 1, in commemoration of the Colombian Justice Minister slain in 1984 for his battle against the drug mob.

Numerous delegates at the conference emphasized the connection of economic development to ensuring that the drug trade does not gain a foothold within the citizenry and national institutions. Justice Minister Manzo urged the delegates to realize that "economic development is also a fundamental factor in the prevention of crime." He noted that the "critical poverty" in which the majority of Ibero-America's population lives makes it "practically impossible to create citizens apt for life in a republic."

A battle report

The Peruvian military offensive begun on Aug. 9 drew upon the combined forces of the Peruvian armed forces and civil guard, backed by Air Force bombers and helicopters. Deployed were 300 troops—between soldiers and police officers—backed by two combat squadrons of T-37 bombers from the air force base in Piura, and MI-81 and Bell 212 military helicopters, as well as a Buffalo airplane for troop transport and logistical matériel.

While the operation was under way, President García told the Argentine daily *El Tiempo* that "the drug trade from the production side is a matter that concerns several Latin American countries, including Peru, Colombia and Bolivia," and he urged that the three countries named "mount a joint operation" before "asking the intervention of U.S. troops which should be deployed to combat the consumption problem, which is the origin of the drama."

Peruvian Interior Minister Abel Salinas also told the press that "We want to show that Peru is using its own means to fight drug traffickers. . . ."

The base of operations of the combined military/civil guard force was in Caballococha, where just under one year ago a vast cocaine production complex was destroyed in

Peru's operation Condor I. The 2,000-meter runway had been preserved to serve as a base of operations for the police ever since. From Caballococha, the combined troops flew to their objective: Nueva Jerusalem, in the so-called "Amazon Trapezoid" near the common borders of Peru, Colombia, and Brazil. Nueva Jerusalem had been converted into the traffickers' key fortress in the region; the airport alone was provided a runway 1,500 meters long by 20 meters wide, and constructed of foot-thick concrete.

At 1215 hours, an intense bombardment of the Nueva Jerusalem complex was begun, using 500-pound bombs to pulverize the runway, while the armored helicopters piloted by Civil Guardsmen kept close guard at either end of the airstrip. The drug traffickers, who had tried to fend off the initial helicopter offensive with heavy machine-gun fire, fled into the dense jungle at the approach of the bombers, heading for the mafia strongholds of Leticia in Colombia, and the ports of Marco and Tabatinga in Brazil. By 1240, just 25 minutes later, the operation was terminated.

Deputy Interior Minister Agustín Mantilla visited the site on Aug. 12, and told the press that the local native Ticunas tribe had been enslaved by the traffickers over a three-year period to construct the installations and work in the cocaine processing facilities.

Also on Aug. 9, a second military offensive started at 1530 hours, targeting both the cocaine laboratory at San Pedro de Lago Yaucamayo and two clandestine runways in the region which serviced the facility. One, at Tierra Amarilla, was 1,500-meters long, and the other at San José de Loretoyacu, 1,200 meters long by 15 meters wide. Both were bombed into oblivion, together with the laboratory complex.

That operation terminated at 1600 hours, a complete success.

On Aug. 11, Interior Minister Salinas reported that another 10 trafficking bases had been discovered and destroyed the previous night, bringing the toll of the two days of operations to 12 complexes put out of business. He also reported that the Air Force helicopters were being used to scour the jungle for the fugitive traffickers.

According to his deputy, Agustín Mantilla, joint operations with Colombia, an extension of the "Condor IV" operations launched Aug. 9, were to be resumed the following week, focusing on eradication of all cocaine installations along the border region. Said Mantilla, "We are working together for anti-drug success within the terms of our bilateral agreement." He added that no U.S. aid would be sought for those operations: "We are prepared and trained to combat the drug trade and we don't need any U.S. pilots in our relentless battle" against drugs.

U.S. assistance sought

While the majority of Ibero-American countries are making it clear that the deployment of U.S. troops is unnecessary and would be viewed as a violation of their national sovereignty, they have also made it clear that U.S. assistance—

technical and financial—would be more than welcome.

In an Aug. 5 statement to the press following the first reports from "Operation Blast Furnace" in Bolivia, Ann Wroblewski of the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics Matters declared that future joint operations "may not involve the U.S. military." She said that her bureau and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) were now focusing their efforts "on building indigenous capability in the region, through acquisition of additional aircraft. . . .

The base of operations of the combined military/civil guard force was in Caballococha, where just under one year ago a vast cocaine production complex had been destroyed in Peru's operation "Condor I."

For example, [the bureau] is building a regional airwing, which can assist in airlifting troops in Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and elsewhere, and we also have plans to acquire additional spray aircraft for use throughout the Southern Hemisphere." Such planes would be used for aerial eradication efforts on the continent.

Also on Aug. 5, White House drug abuse adviser Carlton Turner told a group of foreign correspondents, "In Mexico, we have equipped them with a massive fleet of helicopters. We have equipped them with a good fleet of fixed-wing aircraft. The same thing in Colombia. So I think it is fair to say in those two cases they would not need the support to transport their troops."

The Bolivian government, meanwhile, has released a statement to the U.S. press outlining a proposed 60-day transition period for phasing out U.S. troop involvement in Operation Blast Furnace. The plan is to overcome technical problems, such as the inability of Bolivian pilots to handle the sophisticated U.S. helicopters being used in the anti-drug offensive. Bolivia's ambassador to the United States said that his government was prepared to take on phase two of the anti-drug war using the nation's own military and other resources. He expressed confidence that all illegal drug operations in the country would be eliminated within the remaining three years of the Paz Estenssoro government.

Meanwhile, the Bolivian police reported that on Aug. 9, the day of the Peruvian assault, 11 cocaine factories were destroyed in the coca zone of Chapare by the U.S.-trained anti-drug units known as UMOPAR (Mobile Units of Rural Patrol).