

Project Democracy tries military coup in Peru

by Gretchen Small

Investigations by the Peruvian government into the Nov. 13 attempted coup d'état against President Alberto Fujimori and the Army high command, have uncovered overwhelming evidence that this coup was a U.S.-directed operation, run through networks of the U.S. government's Project Democracy. Its goal was to achieve what seven months of economic warfare and diplomatic blackmail have failed to accomplish: to overturn the Fujimori government, whose all-out war against Shining Path since April 5 has inspired others in Ibero-America to demand that their governments, too, break with Washington and its phony "democratic" agenda.

The hypocrisy of Washington's endless verbiage on the sanctity of "democratic procedures" could not be clearer. The coup-plotters told the press that had they succeeded, their first act would have been to cancel the Nov. 22 national elections for a Constituent Assembly, where candidates supporting the Fujimori government are widely expected, by opponents and supporters alike, to win sweeping victories. The elections, combined with the dramatic blows against Shining Path since the Sept. 12 capture of its chief, Abimael Guzmán, were expected to consolidate the government's rule sufficiently to allow it to escalate its war against Shining Path, even if Washington tightens its international blockade of Peru.

Although the leader of the coup, Army Gen. Jaime Salinas Sedó (ret.), has stated that his objective was to reimpose the parliamentary regime which had ruled the country before April 5 when Fujimori dissolved Congress and put the country on a war-footing against the Shining Path, the government charged that the opening shot of the coup was to be the assassination of President Fujimori. As those who urged the

Peruvian general to act knew full well, had that occurred, or the coup advanced, the result would not have been a stable government, but the shattering of the country into civil war—creating precisely the conditions needed to justify supranational intervention to "reestablish peace."

The Army conspirators arrested, the APRA party and radical labor agitators linked with the Shining Path took over the campaign to derail the elections. Both APRA and Shining Path have been calling on people to boycott the election. One week before the election, APRA and the terrorists ordered their supporters to carry out street demonstrations and labor stoppages against the government, while Shining Path hit squads carried out some of the worst terrorism since the summer, including detonating several car bombs and exploding a "tricycle bomb" in a schoolyard full of children in Lima.

Does the OAS have a 'black hand'?

Five days before the coup attempt, two high-level U.S. Project Democracy operatives, the president of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Carl Gershman, and Inter-American Dialogue Senior Associate Peter Hakim, were in Peru, demanding that the Organization of American States (OAS) step up its efforts to "confront" governments where "democracy" had been violated. "Obviously, there has been a break in the democratic process in Peru," Hakim specified. Gershman told the press that the United States would do everything within its power to overthrow "pseudo-dictators."

Hundreds of foreign observers organized by the OAS had also arrived in Lima by that time, brought in to "oversee" Peru's Constituent Assembly elections. Under Washington's direction, the OAS has arrogated to itself the power to judge

whether the elections are fair or not.

The coup plot was set for the early morning hours of Nov. 13. Advised by military intelligence of the plot in advance, President Fujimori and his family were quietly escorted out of the presidential palace under heavy military guard that night to a military base, so that the plotters would proceed, but not succeed. Part of the commando unit allegedly assigned to kill the President to trigger the coup did not follow its rebel leader, but the major proceeded alone and was arrested at the palace. General Salinas Sedó arrived at a location pre-arranged by the plotters at 3 a.m., was arrested, and documents on the operation seized. The operation blown, other participants called off other deployments.

Twenty-five retired and active-duty Army officers have been jailed so far for participating in the plot. The leading figure was General Salinas Sedó, who had recently returned from Washington to lead the rebellion; he had been living there since serving as military attaché. The plotters planned to capture or assassinate President Fujimori and Army Commander and President of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Nicolás de Bari Hermoza; install former Vice President and U.S. favorite Máximo San Román as President; reseat the Congress which Fujimori had closed on April 5 because its members refused to permit war measures against Shining Path; and call general elections for a year later. The Constituent Assembly elections were to be canceled, under charges that the Fujimori regime had rigged them.

The first round of defense of Fujimori's political opponents in Peru was to denounce the reports of a coup attempt as an invention of the President to gain support before the elections, a charge dutifully reported by the world's media. That lie collapsed when General Salinas Sedó gave an interview to *Oiga* magazine detailing some of the plotters' plans, which he claimed were justified under Article 82 of the old Constitution which gave "the right of insurrection."

Nervous now about statements by Fujimori that there was "a black hand" of "political interests" behind the coup, politicians denounced the President for failing to provide "proof" that they were involved.

No comparison to Venezuela's CAP

"In their delirium," the conspirators "probably wished to imitate nationalist military who struggle in other parts of the world against corrupt regimes repudiated by their people," President Fujimori told Peruvians in a nationwide television address on Nov. 13, after the coup had been stopped. But they "got the wrong country." This President "enjoys the support of the majority of the population; he is not the President of a country which rejects him, and demands that he leave."

No one in Ibero-America could miss that description of the beleaguered President of Venezuela, Carlos Andrés Pérez (known as CAP). Pérez, who for months has been denouncing any military action as impermissible violations of "de-

mocracy," suddenly changed his tune, justifying this coup attempt as an expected result of the fact that "there is no democracy" in Peru. Pérez attempted to discredit the Peruvian elections in advance as manipulated by the military.

According to reports in various Ibero-American newspapers, Pérez has been meeting secretly for months with another principal in the coup attempt, former Peruvian President Alan García, now living in exile in Colombia. *El Nuevo País* of Venezuela claimed on Nov. 17 that Pérez and García had spent the very weekend following the coup attempt together on Venezuela's La Orchila Island.

Investigators have found that the coup plotters were financed by Venezuelan money, it is reported in Lima.

The hand of García and his APRA party is all over the coup attempt. Two of the three generals involved in the attempted coup had served García as head of his Military Household: Gen. Luis Palomino, who was to have become head of the Armed Forces had the coup succeeded, served García at that post for most of his regime, as did Gen. José Pastor Vivas, who succeeded Palomino at that post.

General Salinas Sedó, claiming the post of defense minister in this "new" government, had been named head of the powerful 2nd Army Division by García. His problems with Fujimori began, according to Peruvian press reports, when he sided with Mario Vargas Llosa, the radical pro-free trade presidential candidate financed by Gershman's NED; Fujimori defeated Vargas Llosa in the 1990 elections. His connections with García clearly did not end in 1990, however: Sedó attempted to flee loyal troops at the site of the rendezvous in an armored car belonging to Peruvian construction and media magnate Julio Vera Gutiérrez, a well-known friend and financial angel of Alan García. It was later reported that Salinas had chaired one of the planning meetings for the coup at a house owned by García's multimillionaire money-bags.

APRA's response to the coup was strikingly like that of General Salinas Sedó. Article 82 of the Constitution gives the right to insurrection, APRA Undersecretary General Mercedes Cabanillas told the press. Like Venezuela's Pérez, she charged that the "real coup-maker" in Peru is Fujimori. Not only does APRA intend to go ahead with a boycott of the Constituent Assembly elections, but it is calling for national protests against the government this week, she added.

What next?

Caught in the act, the Peruvian participants have called for supranational aid. On Nov. 17, the wife of General Salinas Sedó flew from Washington to Caracas, to meet with Marco Tulio Bruni Celli, the president of the OAS Inter-American Human Rights Commission and a Venezuelan and ally of President Pérez. Isabel de Salinas called a press conference afterwards to defend the coup attempt as justified against "the current dictatorship," and reported that she had requested the OAS to ensure the safety of her husband and son, also jailed in the coup plot.