

Report from Rio by Geraldo Lino

An ambassador in sheep's clothing

The ongoing "encirclement" of Brazil is making the military more anxious than ever.

In recent months, troop maneuvers held by both the United States and Britain in countries bordering Brazil have become one of the main concerns of the Brazilian Armed Forces' command. Although some officials prefer to minimize the importance of the affair, to others the Anglo-American maneuvers are concrete evidence of Washington and London's intentions to move full steam ahead with implementation of their "new world order" in the western hemisphere.

During April, nearly 200 Special Forces troops from the U.S. Army carried out training maneuvers in Guyana, about 100 kilometers from the Brazilian border. At the time, Guyanese President Cheddi Jagan revealed that British troops had already carried out similar maneuvers earlier in the year.

In Leticia, Colombia, where the border with the Brazilian city of Tabatinga passes through a main thoroughfare of the city, sophisticated radar equipment donated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration was installed. According to the director of the Colombian security police in Leticia, the DEA is training members of the Colombian Army and narcotics police. A recent bilateral agreement will facilitate the installation of five U.S. military bases on Colombian territory.

Meanwhile, what has the Brazilian military most concerned was the presence of a group of U.S. "Red Berets" in the Argentine province of Misiones last May, for joint training with Argentine forces. Misiones, which borders the Brazilian state of

Rio Grande do Sul, was for a time an object of litigation between Brazil and Argentina, which is why certain Brazilian military chiefs consider the maneuvers there a "message" for Brazil.

The Brazilian reaction to the maneuvers in Guyana was immediate: In early June, the Brazilian Air Force carried out the first of a series of exercises to accelerate the military occupation of the Amazon. Nearly 400 men and 30 combat planes and helicopters participated in the week-long maneuvers. On Aug. 10, on his own initiative, President Itamar Franco called a meeting of the National Defense Council, primarily to discuss the implications of a Brazilian military presence in the Amazon.

Sensitivity among Brazilian nationalist sectors with regard to the Amazon has sharpened because of the Indian question. These sectors never "swallowed" Washington's pressures on former President Fernando Collor, which led to the "delimiting" of the Yanomami Indian reserve to a whopping 9.4 million hectares, for only a few thousand Indians surviving in primitive conditions. In late June, these groups got a new shock with the announcement that the United Nations proposed to establish a Universal Declaration of Indigenous Rights, which seeks to grant to "indigenous communities" throughout the world the right to self-determination. Brazilian authorities fear this could lead such groups as the Yanomami to declare their territory independent.

Such concerns were expressed by former President José Sarney, who

has been serving as a spokesman for influential military circles. In his weekly article in the daily *Folha de São Paulo* July 23, Sarney wrote: "Countries work on hypotheses. What is the mobilization in this area against? And to what end?" He answered himself: "It would appear that the old dream of the superpowers, of having a foothold in the Amazon, has arrived. The dagger that is going to give us many headaches, has been driven in."

The growing number of Brazilian reactions to this "encirclement" of the country forced U.S. Ambassador to Brazil Richard Melton to try to hide the obvious. In an Aug. 3 article published in *Jornal do Brasil*, Melton offered a modern version of the tale of the wolf disguised in sheep's clothing, by denying what he called "myths" about U.S. designs on the Brazilian Amazon. Melton said that the idea that the U.S. seeks to "internationalize" the Amazon is a "stupidity."

Unable to resist the temptation of using the diplomatic language of the new world order, Melton declared: "Sovereign decisions always belong to Brazil. However, we live in a mutually dependent world. . . . Far from being a threat, cooperation in helping a Brazilian agenda for the Amazon is a welcome manifestation of a new sense of shared world responsibility."

In conclusion, Melton warned that persisting in such ideas "could distract attention from real problems and undermine efforts under way to strengthen U.S.-Brazilian relations." It came as no surprise that, two days later, the traditional mouthpiece of the Brazilian elites linked to the Anglo-American establishment, *O Estado de São Paulo*, echoed Melton, stating that "whoever sees the U.S. as a threat to Brazil . . . can only be motivated by paranoia, bad faith, or deformed political ambition."