

Successes mark Peru's 1996 war on drugs

by Manuel Hidalgo and Dennis Small

Five years ago, the government of Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori delivered a major blow to the international drug cartels, by taking dramatic steps to dismantle their narco-terrorist shock troops, including the Shining Path and Túpac Amaru (MRTA) gangs. The Peruvian President did this by temporarily shutting down the narco-corrupted national Congress and Supreme Court in April 1992, arresting Shining Path capo Abimael Guzmán in September of that year, and proceeding to take down most of the remaining narco-terrorist apparatus over the succeeding year or so. As a result of these steps—along with the fortunate spread of the *Fusarium oxysporum* fungus, which is deadly to coca leaves—total coca cultivation in Peru fell by a dramatic 16%, from 129,000 hectares under cultivation in 1992, to 109,000 in 1993. Peru is the largest producer of coca leaves in the world, although most of the coca is ultimately processed into refined cocaine in neighboring Colombia, before export to the United States and Europe.

Back then, Fujimori achieved this over the howls of protest of the British financial establishment, their human rights and nongovernmental organization (NGO) lobbies, and the vociferous opposition of the Bush State Department.

In 1996, Peru achieved an even greater reduction, 18%, in hectares under coca cultivation, only this time it was done with U.S. help and cooperation, not hostility. Now the stage is set for a "Phase II" assault, which is designed to further dramatically reduce coca leaf production in the country.

The Clinton White House has taken public notice of these achievements. In his Feb. 25 public presentation of his administration's anti-drug strategy, Clinton said of Peruvian-U.S. cooperation: "We've made a start. . . . In Peru, coca cultivation dropped by 18%. In the next decade, we want to completely eliminate the cultivation of coca for illicit consumption. If we help with alternative crops, that is a viable policy in many cases," said Clinton, while flanked by White House drug policy adviser Gen. Barry McCaffrey. Underscoring that the anti-drug effort can't be done without adequate funding, McCaffrey took the opportunity to demand more anti-drug assistance for countries such as Peru. At present, he said, the United States is spending \$25 million in Peru, \$25 million in Colombia, and \$50 million in Bolivia, amounts far below what is necessary. Coca production will never be reduced, he

emphasized, unless there is serious support for alternative crop development.

And then on March 1, President Clinton certified Peru as fully cooperating with the United States in the anti-drug effort. President Fujimori saw the certification as recognition of the efforts made by his government, as well as by the Peruvian police and Armed Forces.

It is interesting to note that Peru achieved the 1996 reductions in coca production, despite the fact that it only began serious eradication efforts in October 1996. Rather, the U.S. and Peruvian cooperation centered on interdiction efforts against the all-important air-bridge between Peruvian coca and coca-paste operations, and the Colombian laboratories for refining into cocaine hydrochloride. The United States provided Peru with sophisticated radar facilities, and associated technical support. The Peruvian Air Force and the Army's offensive against narco-terrorism effectively were able to reduce the air-bridge's operations to a minimum.

The result was a drastic fall in the coca price, from \$60 to \$8 per 25 pounds; at various secret storage sites, coca was left to rot, due both to the fact that it couldn't be shipped and that peasants had ceased growing it. According to official U.S. government statistics, the number of hectares under coca cultivation dropped from 115,000 in 1995, to 94,700 in 1996. (*EIR* has estimated that actual hectares under cultivation in 1995 were 129,000 in 1995, based on interviews with well-informed Peruvian field experts; that would mean that 1996 cultivation dropped to about 106,000 hectares.)

By way of comparison, Bolivian coca cultivation dropped 10%, from 49,000 to 44,000 hectares in the last year, while in neighboring Colombia, it increased by 32% (from 51,000 to 67,000 hectares), replacing Bolivia as the world's second largest producer.

Second phase beginning

The Peruvian government and Armed Forces are now embarking on a second phase of their assault against drugs. Last October, they began fumigating coca fields; prior to that, they were only authorized to eradicate coca in seedbeds. Equally crucial, was the approval last December of a new banking law, which ended impunity for the crime of drug money-laundering.

On Feb. 13, the Peruvian government formally announced its goal of eradicating illegal coca production over the next ten years—an unprecedented policy statement—as well as a plan to dismantle, with U.S. assistance, the "riverine bridge" between Peru and Colombia, set up by the cartels to replace the preexisting air-bridge. On Feb. 14, President Fujimori delivered the first 60 patrol boats to the police, and announced that with U.S. help, Peru would win the "riverine war" against the cartels, just as it had won the air war. This is a daunting challenge. Riverine warfare on the Amazon and its tributaries is logistically very difficult, according to experts consulted by *EIR* in both Lima and Washington.