

Rumsfeld Prepares 'One, Two, Many Pinochets' in the Americas

by Gretchen Small

With the Bush Administration advocating the use of indefinite detention without trial, torture, and the use of "hunter-killer" death squads to hunt down terrorists wherever they be, should it come as a surprise that the same Administration has begun laying the groundwork for a return to military rule in the Americas? Or, that it is out to transform the militaries of its neighbors from being national institutions into regional divisions of the Administration's modern version of the foreign legions of Hitler's Waffen SS?

This policy drive is the context in which to evaluate the battle which erupted at the VI Defense Ministerial of the Americas, in Quito, Ecuador Nov. 17-18, 2004. Since the first such ministerial was held in Williamsburg, Va. in 1995, these biennial summits of the Defense Ministers of the region have been used to set a hemisphere-wide security and defense agenda.

A well-informed professor at a U.S. military academy warned *EIR* in December that what he had heard about the discussions at the Quito Defense Ministerial, indicated to him a move by the Bush Administration to back a series of right-wing military coups in the region. Consulted on this evaluation, a South American military officer based in Washington, D.C., but with access to the discussions in Quito, responded adamantly: "That's right."

Others, fearful of facing up to the fascist nature of the Bush Administration, insist no such intent is conceivable. But clinging to less frightening interpretations of plain facts will induce leaders of the Americas to walk into the traps set for them.

Rumsfeld Leads the Charge

The discussion at the Quito defense summit was held largely behind closed doors, but U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's brief, carefully worded public address to the meeting reveals precisely the above intention.

Under the banner of "fighting terrorism," Rumsfeld marched in with two demands:

1. The military in the region must play a role in domestic law enforcement, and police forces must be militarized, to join with them in "the battle against terrorism." Several South American countries banned any such domestic military role in the aftermath of the 1970s military governments. The Bush

team argues that the time has come to reverse this. Nor is the United States excluded from this dictatorship drive: In his public address, Rumsfeld cited the United States's own "re-examination of the relationships between our military and our law enforcement responsibilities" in the wake of Sept. 11, 2001, as exemplary of what is needed.

2. A standing, inter-American military force must be created to police the region. Rumsfeld cited the earlier PANAMAX 2004 exercises, in which nine nations held naval "anti-terrorism" exercises around the Panama Canal, and the fact that Ibero-American nations had joined to form the United Nations peacekeeping force operating in Haiti today, as important precedents for what must come next.

That the policy is to create a force of jackals to level the ground for the "economic hitmen," was essentially admitted by a senior U.S. defense official travelling with Rumsfeld, who briefed reporters on Nov. 17: "This bodes well for a free-trade agreement. . . . Security is what creates the conditions for investment."

As he had in the previous Defense Ministerial in Santiago, Chile in 2002, Rumsfeld raised the specter of terrorists lurking in "ungoverned areas" of countries, as the pretext for the creation of a supranational regional military force. "The new threats of the 21st Century recognize no borders," Rumsfeld reiterated in Quito. "Terrorists, drug-traffickers, hostage-takers, and criminal gangs form an anti-social combination that increasingly seeks to destabilize civil societies. These enemies often find shelter in border regions or areas beyond the effective reach of government. They watch, they probe, looking for areas of vulnerability, for weaknesses, and for seams in our collective security arrangements that they can try to exploit." Thus, the "seams in our collective security arrangements" must be sealed.

In Santiago, Rumsfeld made explicit that a regional "capability" was required to target the "unoccupied parts of countries." To get this underway, he proposed an initiative to foster regional naval cooperation. Two years later, he happily announced that the naval initiative, in which PANAMAX was but a start, had now been formalized under the name of "Enduring Friendship."

His call in Santiago for the region to "explore" the possibility of a standing regional military "capability" ran into a

brick wall. No country, two years ago, could politically afford to back the latter proposal, which foreign financier interests have been trying to force down the throats of the Ibero-American nations since the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The idea was defeated again at Quito, but its adherents are growing. The Colombian government—facing the gravest narcoterrorist insurgency on the continent, and dependent upon U.S. aid for even the gasoline needed to fly its airplanes—fronted for Rumsfeld's proposal. Colombian Defense Minister Jorge Uribe told a press conference on Nov. 18 that "sooner or later, we in the Americas will have to form a group made up of different countries to defend ourselves from narco-terrorism, and to fight it mutually." He suggested the force be "made up of military personnel from different countries, who want to collaborate" in what he called "globalized security."

U.S. military sources favorable to the Rumsfeld plan insist Chile's Lagos government is coming on board, seduced by the belief that Chile will attain a more important role in global politics by playing ball with the Bush-Cheney military plan. They have yet to publicly endorse the supranational military force, but Chilean Defense Minister Jaime Ravinet de la Fuente took the lead in echoing Rumsfeld at Quito, saying "new threats" lurking in places left unprotected by governments require that the Organization of American States create new permanent structures for collective security.

According to one U.S. military source, Rumsfeld's message to South America at Quito was: Play ball, or else. The Central Americans obeyed, announcing in Quito they will form a composite battalion to deploy into Haiti as a single unit. That's a first, setting a precedent Rumsfeld likes, the source said. Rumsfeld's message to the South Americans was: Do what the Central Americans are doing. You Brazilians want a seat on the UN Security Council? Put your money where your mouth is. Brazil heads the Ibero-American forces which make up the UN peacekeeping force in Haiti, but that's not enough. "They need to do something more formal, and something more permanent than the ad-hoc, piecemeal sort of thing which exists now."

No Security Without Economic Progress

Playing into the hands of the Cheney-Rumsfeld drive, is the reality that economic breakdown has brought whole sections of Ibero-America and the Caribbean to the point of disintegration and civil war. The Christmas massacre in Honduras of dozens of innocent women and children on a public bus, exemplifies the collapse of civilized life which is terrifying peoples across the Americas, as hundreds of thousands of abandoned youth are recruited as shocktroops for organized crime. Disintegration has reached the point in several cases, that the continued existence of the nation itself is called into question, as seen most dramatically in Bolivia's battle against the efforts of foreign financier forces to split it apart. Out of

desperation, discussion has resumed of turning to the military to attempt to restore a semblance of order.

Yet, while the past three decades of International Monetary Fund dictates have eliminated the effective sovereignty of the Ibero-American nations, the concept of sovereignty as a *right* of all nations, is still fiercely defended; most recognize that the creation of a standing supranational military force in the region would deal the final death blow to national sovereignty in the Americas. Thus, Rumsfeld ran into militant opposition in Quito from the majority of the countries of the region.

Brazil took the point in opposing Rumsfeld, with support from Argentina, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela. Heading the Brazilian delegation was Vice President José Alençar, who had been named Defense Minister just nine days before the Quito summit. One by one, leaders from these countries, and others, stood to insist that the only way to fight terrorism is to increase democracy, and relieve the misery and hunger afflicting the majority of their peoples. "Just as terrorism is a threat, so, also, is hunger and social inequality. When we eliminate these, we will have better days," Panamanian Defense Minister Héctor Alemán summarized the case.

In his formal address to the summit, Alençar delivered a point-by-point answer to those proposing the Ibero-American military and police be turned into domestic and regional strikeforces against 'terrorism.' "Some favor the use of force to combat the so-called 'new threats' represented by international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction," he declared. "Others, such as ourselves, defend cooperation to fight structural threats, reflected in extreme poverty, hunger, increase in inequality, humanitarian crises, propagation of infectious diseases. As has been pointed out by President Lula, 'a world where hunger and poverty predominate, cannot be a peaceful world.'"

Echoing the philosophy inspiring Franklin Roosevelt's drive to defeat Nazism in World War II, Alençar argued that the fight against terrorism must be carried out in the framework of "strict observance of international law, especially humanitarian law and the universally recognized basic freedoms. The fight against terrorism, to be effective, must transcend merely repressive aspects, driving against certain situations of exclusion and injustice which feed—but in no way justify—extremist attitudes. There is no political security without economic security, and there is no sustainable economic security without social justice."

Thus, he specified, Brazil is opposed to expanding the powers of the Inter-American Defense Board beyond the role for which it was designed: "a technical-military advisory body to the Organization of American States, without operational functions." We have decided multilaterally that there would be "no body in the Inter-American area with a mandate to deliberate on military interventions or to establish peace-keeping missions. These attributes are the exclusive prerogative of the United Nations Security Council."