

War against narco-terrorism rages in Peru's Upper Huallaga

by Orlando Carrera Lázaro

On April 21, a "civic strike" began in Tarapoto, a leading city in the Central Huallaga Valley of Peru. The strike quickly spread to cities and towns in the surrounding valley, as local citizens demanded "better conditions" from the government. But on April 23, Peru citizens received the news that narco-terrorists in the Valley had assaulted a police patrol, near the town of Paucayacu. Five members of the Civil Guard anti-drug unit, and a special anti-drug prosecutor accompanying the patrol, were murdered when their vehicle was blown up by dynamite charges, and then riddled with bullets by a commando of drug traffickers armed with machine guns.

The zone of Central Huallaga is perhaps one of the most beautiful regions of Peru. These lands, where the original settlers succeeded with difficulty in pushing back the jungle in order to develop an incipient but fruitful agriculture, today hold tremendous potential for high-yield intensive cultivation. But at the present time, hope of converting the region into a breadbasket for Peru has been stopped by the infiltration of narco-terrorists, who have incited the food producers in the area to stage protests and attacks in towns like Tarapoto, Juanjui, Uchiza, Tocache, and Nuevo Progreso.

The motivation behind these insurgencies makes clear their origins, since they demand nothing less than the suspension of the government-sponsored coca eradication programs and the withdrawal from the region of Umopar, the U.S.-trained elite anti-drug unit within the Peruvian Civil Guard. Peruvian newspapers have begun to talk of a "Little Cocaine Republic" in the Huallaga Valley.

It should come as no surprise that we find narco-terrorists stirring up the population in outlying regions with the idea of creating a separate state, free of law or any other impediment to the traffic in drugs. The government of Peru, headed by President Alan García Pérez, has dealt a number of major blows against narco-terrorism in the Upper Huallaga region. Until García took office on July 28, 1985, this zone was completely under the thumb of the international drug mafia, and not accidentally, was also the "turf" of the Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) terrorists, who had established a perfect symbiosis with the narcotics mafia.

As a result of the complicity of the previous government of President Fernando Belaúnde Terry, and its criminal economic measures implemented by then-economics minister Manuel Ulloa Elías, Upper Huallaga was considered "liber-

ated territory" by the mafia. No rule of law existed, nor were any forces of public order permitted to enter the occupied zone; constant violations of Peruvian territorial sovereignty by unidentified airplanes were permitted; those airplanes not only smuggled drugs out of the country, but transported weapons and training personnel into the region to supply the bloody Shining Path narco-terrorists.

Operation Condor

Only 15 days after taking office, President García launched "Operation Condor," which, in close collaboration with the government of neighboring Colombia, uncovered and destroyed in the town of Caballococha a giant industrial complex for the production of cocaine. A vast quantity of the drug, refined to maximum purity and ready for export to the U.S. market, was seized—a hard blow to the drug mafia.

Following that initial success, the García government ordered a series of followup operations, penetrating the entire "red zone" of Upper Huallaga, where the largest coca plantations in the world were known to exist. Not only were plantations discovered, but also immense laboratories and infrastructure dedicated to the production of cocaine paste (PBC, *pasta basica de cocaína*), and gigantic clandestine airports from which the traffickers and their collaborators, the narco-terrorists, were able to operate with impunity.

During these operations, the García government seized more than 28 tons of PBC in the towns of Tocache, Nuevo Progreso, and Uchiza, with a value of several hundreds of millions of dollars on the international market. The police and armed forces destroyed laboratories and coca leaf soaking tanks, bombed two huge illegal airports, and captured airplanes and other craft utilized for the smuggling of drugs abroad.

These were bold interventions against a zone where "the law of the jungle" had always reigned supreme. For example, during the month of December 1985 alone, in the area of Uchiza, more than 200 assassinations directly linked to narco-terrorism were reported. From this region came the most notorious drug traffickers in Peru: the infamous Guillermo Porto Cárdenas ("Crazy Fly"), who in an audacious show of force had offered the government of President Francisco Morales Bermúdez to pay the country's foreign debt in exchange for release from jail to "work" for a year. Then there is the

bloodthirsty Catalino Escalante Calvo ("Cato"), whose presumed dead body was found in Bogota last December surrounded by propaganda of the Colombian M-19 narco-terrorists and the Shining Path of Peru. Escalante had gone to Bogota to negotiate a "pact" between the Peruvian drug mob and the M19, it was said.

Another case worthy of mention is that of Raul López Villar ("El Platanero"), who carried out dollar-sol exchange operations through the Tocache Credit Bank to the tune of over \$9 million—in less than a week's time! The dirty-money flows through the banks of the region are fantastic. For example, in the Tocache Credit Bank in 1982, an amount exceeding \$100 million was exchanged in less than 11 months of operations.

The drug mafia's takeover

At the beginning of the '80s, when a new democratic phase was launched in Peru, the sad truth came out about the Upper Huallaga Valley, where for a decade the drug trade had been wiping out the settlers who had conquered the virgin jungle. With the criminal complicity of the authorities, the drug traffickers had moved in, destroyed all food cultivation, and bankrupted the agricultural producers. The farmers were then offered a choice: Grow coca or die.

Later, during the early 1980s, the widespread corruption within the then ruling party Acción Popular (AP) provided certain important concessions to the drug mafia, concessions granted through the favor of such government officials as Manuel Ulloa Elías, prime minister and minister of economics and finance, and Luis Percovich Roca, an AP deputy. One such favor was Law 23556, Art. 201, which turned Peru into a fiscal paradise for the laundering of narco-dollars and established purely "contemplative" prison sentences for drug traffickers.

The concessions by the politicians were payment for the mafia financing of their electoral campaigns. Exemplary is the case of deputy Reynaldo Rivera of the coca center of Tingo María, tried by the Congress and judiciary for drug trafficking, and Sen. Eduardo Yashimura, lawyer and intimate friend of "Crazy Fly." Those concessions included suspension of all coca eradication programs in the country.

Then the narco-terrorists mobilized their forces to carry out pseudo-battles for the "rights" of the peasantry, implementing what was to become a pilot-project uprising, under the auspices of the Agrarian Federation of Selva Maestra (FASMA). FASMA was born as an arm of the pro-Cuban Confederation of Peruvian Peasants, headed at the time by the pro-Cuban agent Avelino Mar. At the head of FASMA was Segundo Centurion Pérez, trained in Cuba and arrested in 1982 as the intellectual author of seditious movements in the region. His arrest simultaneously revealed that many of the FASMA members were involved in the production of PBC.

The name "Agrarian Federation of Selva Maestra," by the way, is a product of Communist imagination, since in

Peru there is no region known as *selva maestra*; FASMA therefore draws its name from Cuba's famous Sierra Maestra.

It is this same FASMA which today incites the Peruvian peasantry, in the name of "civil rights" and "human rights," to demand the suspension of coca eradication programs, the legalization of coca cultivation, and the withdrawal of police forces—especially anti-drug units—from the region.

All of these factors have generated in the Upper Huallaga Valley the highest levels of corruption in the country. The local police "never see" drugs anywhere, and the mayors are

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pro-drug—like Tocache Mayor Eduardo Germani Terrorres who, together with his legal adviser Hernández Ninaquispe, proposes the legalization of drug cultivation. Ninaquispe spent the years 1981 to 1983 in the Lurigancho Penitentiary for drug trafficking and, during the investigation of his case, his close ties to the Maoist Communist Party were proven. An equally dramatic example is that of the penal judge of Tarpoto, Washington Castillo, protected by politicians of past and present regimes, who made a name for himself by freeing an entire band of drug traffickers made up of Colombian Air Force officials, who had been caught *in flagrante* with four airplanes loaded with two tons of PBS, valued at several hundred million dollars. Payment to the judge for facilitating their escape was one million dollars. Today, Washington Castillo is in jail, thanks to the anti-drug efforts of President García.

As President García has repeatedly declared, "My government will maintain a hard and fast battle against the drug trade." He has also pledged to continue with eradication of cultivation and smuggling, "because this is a decision adopted by my administration since taking power July 28, 1985." The war on drugs must be total war, President García says; but to accomplish this, the problem of laundering of drug money, which finances the entire cultivation-refining-trafficking network in the Upper Huallaga Valley, must be taken head-on. The Lima banks send two airplanes each week to the region, carrying shipments of clean money with which to wash the drug mafia's dirty profits. A dirty game, by the banks against the government of Alan García.