

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

U.S. tries to block aerospace deal

Behind Washington's opposition to the Brazil-French aerospace program lies an agreement with Moscow.

President George Bush appears determined to destroy any possibility of mending the United States' unraveling relations with its most stable ally in the hemisphere, Brazil. First came the designs of international banks and corporations on the Brazilian Amazon, encouraged by the Bush administration, and then Washington's glaring indifference to the country's foreign debt problem. Now, U.S. diplomacy has taken upon itself the right to determine which countries may have access to modern technology, by launching a campaign to prevent France from striking a highly advantageous aerospace technology deal with Brazil.

The technological package in question is for the construction and launching of two new communications satellites. The European Arianespace consortium—of which France is a major partner—is offering, among other things, to transfer to Brazil the technology for producing Viking-style liquid fuel engines, which would provide Brazil independence in the construction of its own rocket-launching vehicles. This in turn would give Brazil a tremendous boost in its aerospace program, enabling it to join that elite group of nations which controls all phases—launching and operation—of space systems.

Before the French offer, Brazil had tremendous difficulty in acquiring this technology, since the “club” of the seven most industrialized nations, headed by the United States, has always refused to provide it. Brazil also sought out the Soviet Union for tech-

nological assistance, to no avail.

Brazil has persistently insisted upon its legitimate right of access to modern technology. On July 7, when the pact with France was being shaped behind closed doors, United Nations Ambassador Paulo Nogueira Batista declared in Geneva: “In the name of security, the developing-sector nations also suffer in regard to the transfer of know-how, especially in the area of high technology. They are often denied access to technologies which are of vital importance to their development.”

The Brazilian Armed Forces have been especially persistent on the technology question, and cannot be expected to view lightly ongoing attempts at U.S. sabotage of the Brazil-French accord.

On Oct. 4, U.S. Vice President Dan Quayle sent a diplomatic protest to the French government, citing the 1987 Missile Technology Control Treaty. Quayle demanded that the signator countries—Japan, West Germany, England, Italy, Canada, the United States, and France itself—respect the treaty clauses which prohibit transfer of aerospace technology to the nations of the South, under the pretext that this could provide them with dangerous war-making capabilities.

This is not the first time that such pressures have been aimed at France. In July, during the bicentennial celebration of the French Revolution, Bush took up the issue with President François Mitterrand, but the French President stuck firmly behind the Arianespace project. Bush then began to turn the screws on other countries.

According to Arianespace representative in Brazil, Jacques Mercier, in statements to the Oct. 5 *Gazeta Mercantil*, the United States “won the withdrawal of Germany, England, and Italy from the deal.”

In the face of Brazilian outrage at its constant interference, the Bush administration made a feeble effort to smooth the South American giant's ruffled feathers. On Aug. 24, after a meeting with U.S. Undersecretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, Brazil's number-two man at the Foreign Ministry, Paulo Tarso Flecha de Lima, declared that “a mechanism for special consultation with Brazil” had been established at the vice-ministerial level. He added that Brazil is “the first country with which the United States seeks to test the viability of this system.”

However, that “consultative mechanism” did not last long, given the Bush administration's unabashed interference with the France-Brazil aerospace deal. Washington's hypocritical dealings with its ally also make a farce out of the loudly proclaimed “success” of trade negotiations announced in early October by U.S. Special Trade Representative Carla Hills. According to Hills, those negotiations did away with the threat of U.S. trade sanctions against Brazil on the issue of computer technology.

It would appear that the priority of the Bush administration in its relations with Brazil is to preserve its condominium agreement with Moscow. Among the provisions of such a deal, is to prohibit the Third World from gaining access to modern technology, particularly technology that might have military applications. For to allow such strengthening of the national sovereignty of developing nations would be a fatal blow to the “one-world government” imperial schemes of both Mikhail Gorbachov and his interlocutors in the West.