

# Argentine, Brazilian armed forces axed

by Cynthia R. Rush

The Argentine and Brazilian Armed Forces are among the most technically advanced in Ibero-America, and for this reason have been targeted for dismantling by the Anglo-American establishment. They are numerically large, and they have been entrusted with the development of in-depth scientific and technological capabilities, particularly in the area of nuclear energy and weapons development. Their destruction will have far-reaching negative implications for their respective nations and economies.

In Argentina, the assault on the Armed Forces has been two-pronged. First, budgetary restrictions have dramatically reduced the size of the institution—as per orders from Washington to “restructure” it—ultimately transforming it into a type of national gendarmerie or constabulary whose primary task would be to purportedly fight drugs and internal “subversion.” On March 10, President Carlos Menem reversed earlier policy and signed a decree authorizing the Armed Forces to put down domestic social protest. In mid-May, then head of the U.S. Southern Command, Gen. Maxwell Thurman, visited Argentina to pressure the country’s military leaders to reorganize the Armed Forces, cut the defense budget, and get the military anti-drug involvement under way.

Currently, the Army has only 6,000 officers, 24,000 non-commissioned officers, and 15,000 troops. *Somos* magazine reported in its April 24 edition that the Army couldn’t afford to incorporate this year’s class of recruits for lack of funds.

The second aspect of Anglo-American policy has targeted the military’s in-depth scientific and technological capabilities, specifically the nuclear energy sector and the rocketry and advanced weapons programs. As repeatedly documented in the Argentine media, the International Monetary Fund-backed economic policies implemented for most of this decade have devastated the nuclear program, which operated for many years under Navy auspices. Nuclear plant construction is at a standstill; scientific institutes have been closed, leading to an enormous brain drain out of the country.

On April 21, the Argentine government succumbed to U.S. pressures and announced the decision to abandon the Air Force Condor II missile project. An example of technology transfer carried out in conjunction with Egypt and Iraq, it was intended to produce a 700-kilometer range rocket to place satellites in orbit. The Air Forces of Argentina and Brazil have also cooperated closely in rocketry programs,

which will also be affected, and the government plans to privatize 33 military companies, including the General Mosconi petrochemical complex and Military Industries (Fabricaciones Militares) which for years oversaw crucial projects for the development of the country’s basic industry and infrastructure.

## The Brazilian case

Since Iraq’s Aug. 2 move into Kuwait, the Anglo-Americans have used Brazil’s long-standing relationship of technology transfer and cooperation with Iraq, as a pretext to intensify the attack on Brazil’s Armed Forces and its involvement in several areas of national scientific and technological development, particularly the nuclear energy and aerospace sectors. National and international media have singled out for attack retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Hugo de Oliveira Piva, former head of the Aerospace Technical Center (CTA), who led a team of Brazilian specialists in Iraq in the development of air-to-air long-range missiles and other scientific and military projects.

That the campaign against Piva also has broader targets was indicated by Gary Milhollin, of the Wisconsin Project for Nuclear Arms Control, who complained that both CTA and the premier Brazilian aircraft manufacturer Embraer had for years worked as “extensions of Brazil’s nuclear and weapons industries” and that Piva still maintained ties to engineers and physicists of both institutions. Brazilian newspapers have depicted the military nationalists who developed Brazil’s space and nuclear programs virtually as enemies of the nation.

The Brazilian government has agreed to investigate Piva and to heighten “vigilance at the aeronautic-technological complex” at São José dos Campos near São Paulo. President Fernando Collor has also indicated he intends to halt all parallel military involvement in nuclear projects and has shelved the “GT-Pronen” report backed by the Armed Forces which calls for an aggressive development of nuclear energy over the next 15 years.

The gutting of the operational capability of Brazil’s Armed Forces is less than that of Argentina’s. Yet cuts in the defense budget and lack of funds recently caused the Army to cut short by one month the 12-month training period for recruits, and lay off 60,000 recruits, or 60% of the total number which entered the Army at the beginning of 1990. The Oct. 31 *O Estado de São Paulo* reported on unrest among Army, Air Force, and Navy noncommissioned officers over low wages. Air Force Minister Brig. Socrates Monteiro has described as “anguished” the decision to grant only a 30% wage increase to the Armed Forces. Embraer announced on Nov. 30 that it will dismiss 4,000 of its 12,538 employees, and cut executive salaries by 50%. Work on the first jet-powered passenger aircraft will be suspended, and production of the AMX ground-attack plane will be cut from 8 to 6 this year.