

Andean Report by Ana M. Mendoza-Phau

'Anti-drug' accords to militarize Andes

The new military accords will put U.S. troops in Bolivia and Peru . . . but won't end the drug trade.

Under the cover of "anti-drug" agreements to fight a "war on drugs" that the U.S. has no real intention of waging, the Bush administration has moved to militarily "occupy" the Andean region of South America.

On March 29, Bolivian President Jaime Paz Zamora asked the Bolivian legislature to authorize using the Army to combat drugs and to allow 112 U.S. military advisers to train Bolivian troops in anti-narcotics operations.

Paz Zamora's government agreed to the Panama-style "occupation" only after the Bush administration suspended \$66 million in aid to Bolivia, in response to the appointment of Col. Fausto Rico Toro, a man of dubious reputation, as chief of the anti-drug police of that country. The U.S. accused Rico Toro of involvement in the drug trade, and added that Interior Minister Guillermo Capobianco and police commander Felipe Carvajal were guilty of corruption, and virtually demanded their resignations. Information Minister Mario Rueda protested the U.S. intervention in Bolivia's internal affairs, telling AP that "the appointment of the commander of the special anti-drug force is an . . . exercise of national sovereignty."

However, the three government officials did resign shortly thereafter, and only then was the U.S. aid released to Bolivia. The U.S. government announced that it was "pleased" with Bolivia's anti-drug efforts, and U.S. officials praised "Paz Zamora's decision to fire high-level officials accused of corruption, and announced it was expanding economic aid to Boliv-

ia," according to the *Washington Post*.

A week later, Bolivia's congress approved a resolution that will allow nearly 600 U.S. military advisers to participate in the "war on drugs." The agreement establishes that the Bolivian Special Anti-Narcotics Force (Umopar), will be placed under the orders of the Army, which in turn is being trained by the U.S. military.

The dangers implicit in such an accord were apparently evident even to the U.S. Congress, which reportedly issued a confidential study criticizing the agreement. Bolivian Deputy Ernesto Machicado confirmed the existence of the report, and said that the "U.S. Congress tells us that militarization will result in an escalation of violence in Bolivia. . . . They also tell us that militarization will debilitate the legitimacy of the government" of Bolivia.

Peru is in the same boat as Bolivia. They will sign a similar agreement at the end of April, according to Peruvian Prime Minister Carlos Torres y Torres-Lara.

The U.S.-Peru accord has been officially described as a "joint venture" between the two countries. Peru's representative in the negotiations has been Hernando de Soto, founder of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy and advocate of the pro-drug "informal economy." One is hard put to describe the accord as an agreement between two sovereign nations, since De Soto is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the CIA's Smith Richardson

Foundation. Incredibly enough, the agreement has not even been discussed in the Peruvian Congress, making it absolutely unconstitutional.

The alleged goal of the accord, is to create mechanisms to achieve "a substantial reduction or total elimination of the illegal coca crops in Peru and the commercialization of its by-products," through the introduction of the so-called "alternative development" in the coca-growing regions, i.e., free market policies.

As De Soto himself admitted during a recent trip to Washington, the program would not cut coca cultivation, and in fact has a broader objective. He said the accord "entails an entire revamping of the Peruvian police force and Army," and "provides an opportunity to put the right reforms in place for the nation. The enemies of change in Peru are formidable. The real opposition to our reforms has come from the Peruvian private sector, which hides behind protective legislation. These vested interests can be beaten with the reforms proposed for fighting drugs. People will rally around a program to fight terrorism and drugs and the dissolution of the Peruvian state."

In other words, the purpose of the "joint venture" against drugs is to destroy the Peruvian military, business sector, and the nation-state itself—exactly the institutional forces needed to effectively resist the drug traffickers in that country.

But the irony is that the best-organized resistance to the accords has come, not from these layers, but from coca-producing peasants. For example, Peruvian and Bolivian coca farmers issued a joint resolution on March 31 from La Paz, saying that they will "forcibly expel" the U.S. advisers from the two countries and set up "self-defense patrols" to protect their crop.