

Peru bombarded with new threats

by Cynthia R. Rush

The U.S. State Department and Washington think-tanks such as the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD) haven't let up on their arrogant insistence that Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori meet their phony criteria for what constitutes "democracy." They want him to roll back the gains made after he closed down the corrupt Congress in April 1992 and launched a successful war against the narco-terrorist Shining Path.

On Jan. 18, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Alexander Watson, and former IAD president Richard Feinberg, now at the National Security Council, arrived in Lima to reiterate their demands that Peru dismantle its Armed Forces, emasculate its tough anti-terrorist legislation, and purge the Armed Forces of officers such as Army Gen. Hermoza de Bari Rios, the leading architect of Peru's successful anti-subversion strategy. "There are still legitimate concerns about Peru's protection of human rights," Watson said prior to leaving Washington. To underscore this point, the U.S. Embassy in Lima scheduled the duo's first meeting not with the President, as protocol would dictate, but with the pro-terrorist National Human Rights Coordinator and members of the political opposition.

In fact, Washington's policy toward Peru in the recent period has been characterized by insults and offensive behavior. On Jan. 12, several Lima newspapers reported on the early December letter sent by U.S. chargé d'affaires Charles Brayshaw to Justice Minister Fernando Vega, ordering the latter to meet with the "Goldman Commission," an inter-American delegation led by American University professor Robert Goldman. Brayshaw explained that the commission had proposals on how to "immediately" reform Peru's justice system to make it "respected and respectable."

Justice Minister Vega handed the letter back to Brayshaw, characterizing it as "insolent," and angrily demanded "respect for Peru's right to govern itself, especially when it comes to the administration of justice." As the daily *Expreso* editorialized Jan. 12, "Peru doesn't need lessons and much less orders on respecting human rights or judicial improvement." Despite poor wages and difficult conditions, Peru's Armed Forces captured Shining Path leader Abimael Guzmán "with refined and intelligent methods," the daily added, "to be compared with the [U.S.] strategy used, for example,

to combat the group of Davidians entrenched in Waco, Texas. Let's see who should give lessons to whom."

Defense of terrorism

At the center of Washington's policy is the premise that everything Fujimori has done to combat narco-terrorism and defend Peru's sovereignty is "undemocratic" and should be reversed. Speaking at a Washington congressional seminar on Jan. 7, Watson said that Fujimori's 1992 closing of the Congress was "a terrible mistake which cannot be justified." This, despite the fact that the Congress itself had prevented the Army from pursuing Shining Path by sabotaging anti-terrorist legislation. According to the daily *Gestión*, behind the U.S. demand that the government weaken its new anti-terrorist legislation through "judicial reform," stands longtime State Department strategist and "Peru expert" Luigi Einaudi.

Fujimori has responded feistily to these affronts to his government. Responding to Watson's comments on his 1992 "self-coup," Fujimori said Jan. 17, "I reaffirm [that action] and insist that the measures of April 5 [1992] were not only necessary for Peru but for regional security, which is so often debated in international forums." He said that Watson would find an excellent environment in Peru in terms of respect for human rights, and added, "I bet that in some of our jails there is greater respect for human rights than in American jails."

But the "accidental" death Jan. 11 of one of Peru's leading anti-terrorist strategists, Gen. José Picón Salas, was a grim reminder that bucking the Anglo-Americans may exact a high price. Picón Salas and 12 others died when their Army helicopter crashed under mysterious circumstances at the Cuzco international airport. Fujimori immediately called for a thorough investigation of the crash, saying that he thought that explanations such as a fuel leak or poor maintenance made little sense. He had traveled on the same helicopter just a week before, he reported, and added that there were many "who might have sought vengeance" against the general.

Indeed. Like General Hermoza Rios, commander of Peru's Armed Forces, General Picón Salas was a thorn in the side of Washington "democrats." As head of the Supreme Council of Military Justice, he was not only the person responsible for trying and sentencing the top leaders of Shining Path through the system of "anonymous judges" he set up. He also prosecuted and sentenced those Army officers who plotted to overthrow Fujimori in November 1992 with the backing of factions in Washington. One of those officers, Gen. Rodolfo Robles, flaunted his foreign backing when he took refuge at the U.S. Embassy in Lima, where he gave a press conference charging the Army high command, and particularly General Hermoza Rios, with setting up a death squad and violating human rights. In May 1993, General Picón took the unusual step of granting an interview refuting Robles's accusations and suggesting that Robles was mentally unbalanced.