
Bolivia and Peru

Coca growers building a regional 'Chiapas'

by Manuel Hidalgo

After the defeat of Peru's narco-terrorist Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), few imagined that efforts to create new "Chiapas" in Peru and neighboring Bolivia could possibly be successful. Nonetheless, British networks are quickly and publicly building an armed movement of coca-producing peasants, which opposes the eradication of coca crops, advocates separatism, and which is performing exactly the same role as Shining Path and the MRTA once did.

This is a binational operation, consisting of a large and well-armed force. If successful, it will transform the coca-producing valleys of both nations into a separate "republic," made up of the continuous corridor of the eastern side of the Andes mountain range descending down into the Amazon Basin. This is a region virtually forgotten by the State, in which Castroite guerrillas operated in the mid-1960s. Throughout this region, there is a complete overlap of the zones dominated by drug-trafficking, terrorism, and the parks or ecological reserves established by networks associated with Prince Philip's World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) (Map 6).

Peasant self-defense groups

A key aspect of this strategy in Peru is the project to recruit and transform peasant self-defense groups (*rondas campesinas*) into shock troops in the coca-producing valleys. Originally, these groups were created and armed by the State, as a component of its offensive to defeat Shining Path. But now, spokesmen for the São Paulo Forum, such as Peruvian Carlos Tapia and myriad anthropologists, are trying to organize and recruit these self-defense groups into orchestrating a "new Chiapas," as they become incorporated into the coca-producers' fight. Currently, there are 240,000 peasants, with 16,500 weapons, belonging to 4,200 self-defense committees (Anti-Subversive Civil Defense), who have a dominant presence in this part of Peruvian territory.

The most recent conference of the São Paulo Forum in Buenos Aires, Argentina openly promoted this plan of organizing a coca-producers' insurgency in Bolivia and Peru, as the leading edge of the drive to legalize the narcotics trade

internationally. Bolivian Evo Morales, leader of the Andean Council of Coca Leaf Producers (CAPHC), was treated like a star, and loudly applauded when he proposed drug legalization and the strengthening of the coca-producers insurgency, which he characterized as "anti-imperialist." During his stay in Buenos Aires, Morales gave an interview to Bolivia's *Hoy* newspaper, in which he warned that the coca-producing Chapare region of Bolivia could easily become "another Chiapas." He praised Cuba's Fidel Castro as "a heroic figure. . . . I am ready to proclaim him commander of the liberation forces of America, or Latin America."

Morales has a base today, thanks to the work of Harvard University's punk economist, Jeffrey Sachs, who served as an adviser to the Bolivian government of Víctor Paz Estenssoro from 1985 to 1987. Finance minister in that government was Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, today Bolivia's President. As Sachs's monetarist, free-market policy directives were implemented by Sánchez de Lozada—Sachs described himself as having personal, "hands-on" control—they wiped out what little existed of the productive economy, and knowingly opened the doors for the international drug trade to come in and fill up the gap. Under Sachs's rule, entire new areas of the country, such as the Beni and Chapare regions, became major drug zones.

Sachs, in his 1988 study, *Bolivia: 1952-1986*, admits that he knew exactly what he was doing:

"To preserve fiscal balance, the government had to launch a brutal battle to reduce payrolls in Comibol [the State-run mining company]. . . . Comibol has reduced its employment from about 30,000 workers in 1985, to just 7,000, as of 1987. Many of these workers are still unemployed, or only marginally employed, or *have gone to the coca-growing region to find work*. The mining towns themselves have been decimated" (emphasis added).

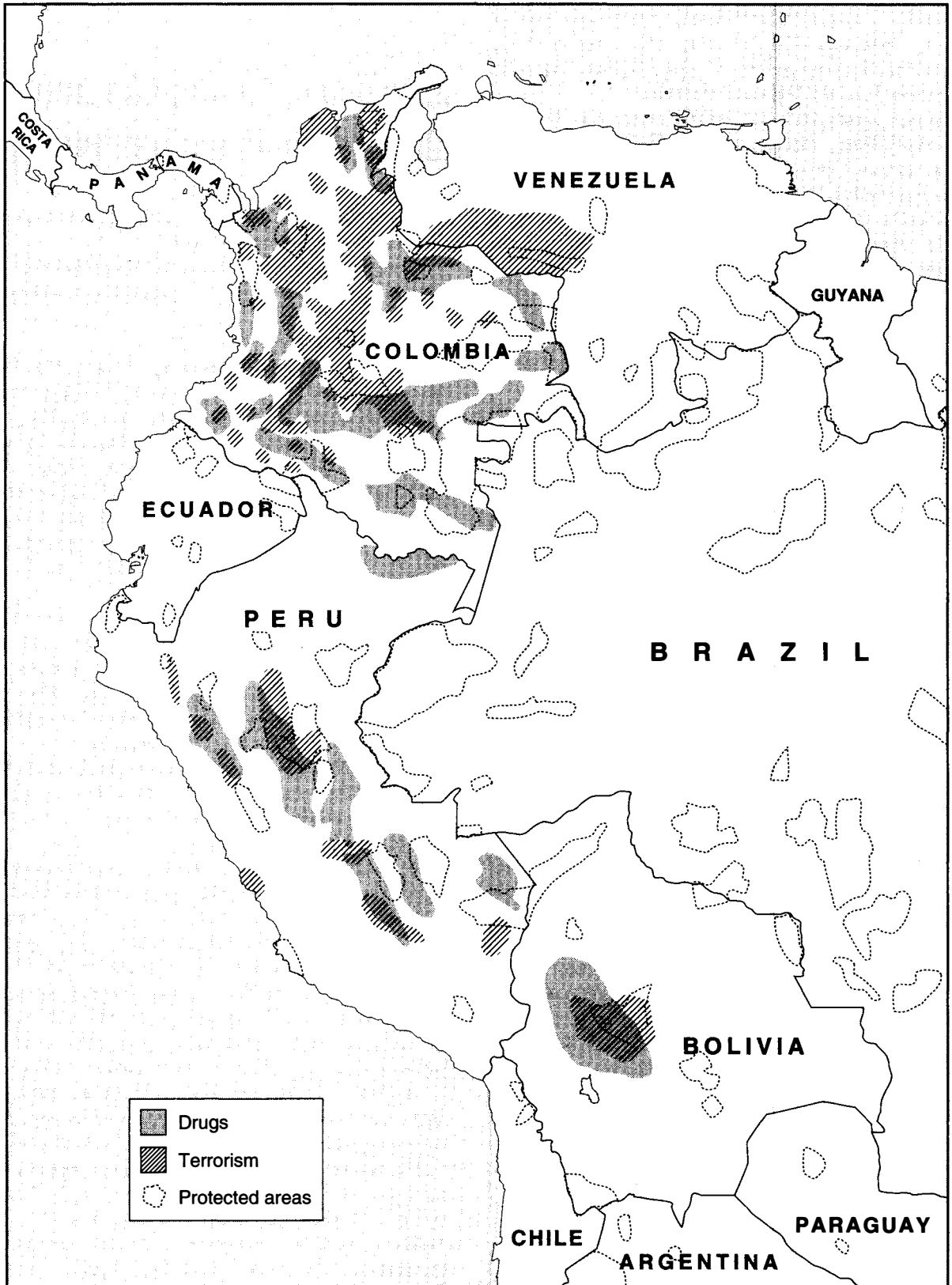
The Chapare front

Since August of 1993, confrontations between the coca producers controlled by Evo Morales and Bolivian anti-drug forces has escalated, forcing the government to decree states of emergency on more than one occasion. The government also accused Morales of receiving funds from drug traffickers and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to set up paramilitary groups to defend the drug trade. He has been arrested several times.

On March 23, 1995, Roger Rumrill, Peruvian adviser to CAPHC, announced that he and Morales would participate in the "Coca Campaign '95," organized by a "handful of European NGOs," of which he mentioned the Germany-based Society for Endangered Peoples. The campaign included a tour and conferences in Europe. On Sept. 19-20 of this year, in Vienna, Austria, non-governmental organizations organized a forum on "Indigenous Peoples, Drug Trafficking, and Development."

On April 18, in a town on the border with Peru, Bolivian

Drugs, terrorism, and protected areas in the Andes



authorities captured Evo Morales, together with the top leadership of CAPHC from both countries, who were ostensibly coordinating a new wave of resistance to coincide with the separatist efforts of six Bolivian states, occurring at precisely that moment. The foreign leaders, most of them Peruvian, were expelled and the Bolivians arrested.

Another deadly blow to CAPHC's base was delivered in June-July 1995, when joint anti-drug operations by the Clinton administration and Colombian law enforcement agencies virtually decapitated the Cali Cartel. Within weeks, the price of raw coca leaves in Peru and Bolivia had dropped by 95%—there was no one to buy their product. Nationalist anti-drug layers in Bolivia, Peru, and the United States all agreed: 200,000 families of Peruvian and other coca-producers were being left without income, and this was clearly the moment to move to replace coca with food production, and wipe out the problem once and for all throughout the Andean countryside.

But the CAPHC has also moved to exploit the crisis. On Aug. 10, a CAPHC spokesman threatened: "In [Peru's] Apurimac Valley, there are 25,000 people [from peasant self-defense groups] who fought Shining Path, and now they have been abandoned. . . . These people's misery can be the breeding ground for subversion. . . . This is a time bomb that can explode at any moment." On Aug. 10-11, CAPHC again met on the Peruvian side of the border and continued to threaten that uprisings would occur in Peru's two major coca-producing valleys, the Upper Huallaga and the Apurimac. The daily *La República* encouraged this with headlines such as "Less Coca, More Hunger."

The IMF and the narco-economy

The Andean Council of Cocoa Leaf Producers estimates that the combination of extreme poverty and corruption will push the peasant self-defense groups into confrontation with the State. Its spokesmen boast that the self-defense groups in what have now become coca-producing valleys, are infiltrated by the drug trade, to the point where they are protecting drug traffickers' activities in the same way that Shining Path used to do.

CAPHC strategy is premised on the expectation that the government of Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori will continue to implement the brutal economic policies of the International Monetary Fund. The IMF and World Bank have prohibited the creation of infrastructure, agricultural credit, or protection for agricultural production. CAPHC assumes, therefore, that no other crop can compete with coca, and that the drop in the coca leaf price will allow the rage and desperation of the coca-producers and self-defense groups to be directed against the State. Indigenist anthropologists have been patiently profiling this situation for a number of years, exemplified by the case of the American Otto Starn (see CAPHC profile, below).

Andean Coca Council: drugs and subversion

Name of group: Andean Council of Coca Leaf Producers (CAPHC); Andean Coca Council.

General headquarters and important fronts: Bolivia: Chapare region, La Paz. Peru: coca-producing valleys in the south, Lima.

Founding: early 1990s.

Locations of operations, areas active: Main base of operations is the Chapare region and the adjacent Esiboro-Secure National Park, in Bolivia, but it is spreading to other coca-producing valleys of Bolivia and Peru: La Convención (Cusco), Apurímac and Ené (Ayacucho, Junín, Cusco), Pichis Palcazu (Huánuco), Ucayali (Ucayali), Alto Huallaga (San Martín, Huánuco), Marañón (La Libertad, Huánuco, San Martín), and Mayo (San Martín). Also, along the border area are the coca valleys of Tambopata (Sandia, Puno) and the Manu National Park.

The Peruvian and Bolivian coca valleys form a nearly continuous corridor along the eastern slope of the Andes, surrounded by ecological reserves: the Esiboro-Secure National Park in Bolivia; the Tambopata Candamo Reserve, Manu National Park, and Pampas del Heath National Reserve in Peru.

The CAPHC also includes coca groups from Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador. Their coordinating meetings have been held in Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia.

Major terrorist actions:

● August 1994: CAPHC leader Evo Morales organized a march with thousands of coca-farmers from Villa Tunari (Chapare) to the capital of Bolivia, La Paz, to protest the coca-eradication efforts, assisted by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, known as Operation New Dawn, in the Chapare, Cochabamba. The march ended violently, and Morales was arrested and charged by the authorities with encouraging the formation of a paramilitary guards with funds from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

● April 18, 1995: The Bolivian government arrested 24 members of CAPHC, including Evo Morales, and declared the country under a state of siege to halt the "seditious subversive escalation." One day earlier, the government had used force to control a secessionist movement in the department of Tarija, arresting five leaders of that movement. The department created an "independent provisional government." On April 18, five departments joined Tarija.