

EIR Strategic Studies

Puerto Rico takes on bigger role in the war on drugs

by Iván Gutiérrez del Arroyo

As part of its strategy to defeat the drug cartels in the Caribbean and Andean regions, the Clinton administration last year announced its plan to set up a sophisticated radar on the island of Puerto Rico to detect and prevent aircraft loaded with drugs from entering the United States. Known as ROTH (Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar), the system scheduled to be installed on the island is part of a broader system which includes two other radars located in the states of Virginia and Texas, whose purpose is to detect and constantly track all air transport of drugs from Bolivia to the southern United States (see map). When the radar is set up in Puerto Rico, it will give U.S. agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Coast Guard, and police almost double the time now available to more efficiently detect, pursue, and confiscate air and sea shipments of drugs which reach Puerto Rico, on their way to the United States.

ROTHR's big advantage is that it has the ability to detect movement beyond the area of direct line of sight, that is, beyond the horizon, and, for this reason, it was used to detect Russian bombers in Europe. It is not a "magic bullet," but, as Puerto Rico Gov. Dr. Pedro Rosello told *EIR* in an interview, "it is a highly effective tool . . . which significantly enhances our efforts to control drug trafficking."

There is no question that the new Puerto Rican radar is of strategic importance.

Predictably, the announcement of the radar's coming installation provoked a violent campaign against it, led by Puerto Rican political forces associated with the São Paulo Forum, the narco-terrorist coalition created in 1990 by Fidel Castro. These forces say they have the support of the majority of

Puerto Rico's population. However, the daily *El Nuevo Día* reported at the end of last year that, in its survey, most Puerto Ricans support the radar's installation, while only 31% of respondents opposed it. The survey's results take on greater meaning, because it was conducted *after* the unfortunate and insensitive public relations campaign organized by the U.S. Navy in support of the radar system's installation. Because of the way it was handled, the Navy's campaign created more opposition to the radar than had existed originally, especially among members of the opposition Popular Democratic Party, whose president, Héctor Luis Acevedo, is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve.

Puerto Rican groups affiliated with the São Paulo Forum, and the pro-drug Inter-American Dialogue which supports it, include the New Independence Movement (NMIP), the Puerto Rico Independence Party (PIP), as well as avowedly terrorist groups such as the Nationalist Party and Los Macheteros. Their purpose is to make Puerto Rico a terrorist bridge for the São Paulo Forum to the United States, and among them, they have organized several protest demonstrations against President Bill Clinton's war on drugs.

Money-launderer of the Americas

After a lengthy stay on the U.S. mainland, this correspondent recently returned to his native Puerto Rico to conduct a series of interviews with important leaders in the war on drugs, including Gov. Pedro Rosello, the general in charge of ROTH, and the head of the DEA for the Caribbean region (see interviews which follow). As the governor told a Spanish-language daily in Miami, Puerto Rico "has the dubious

honor” of being the country with the highest rate of criminality and auto theft in the Americas. In addition, it is one of the primary launderers of drug money in the world, and holds first place in the United States for per capita confiscation of dirty money.

The island’s crime rate is so high, that it is unusual to see a home or apartment without iron gratings or some other form of protection, and police generally advise motorists not to stop at traffic lights after 10 p.m. Headlines in the local press regularly proclaim that there is an “unstoppable crime wave in Puerto Rico.” It is commonplace for 15 murders to occur during a single weekend. All of this is primarily a result of the drug trade.

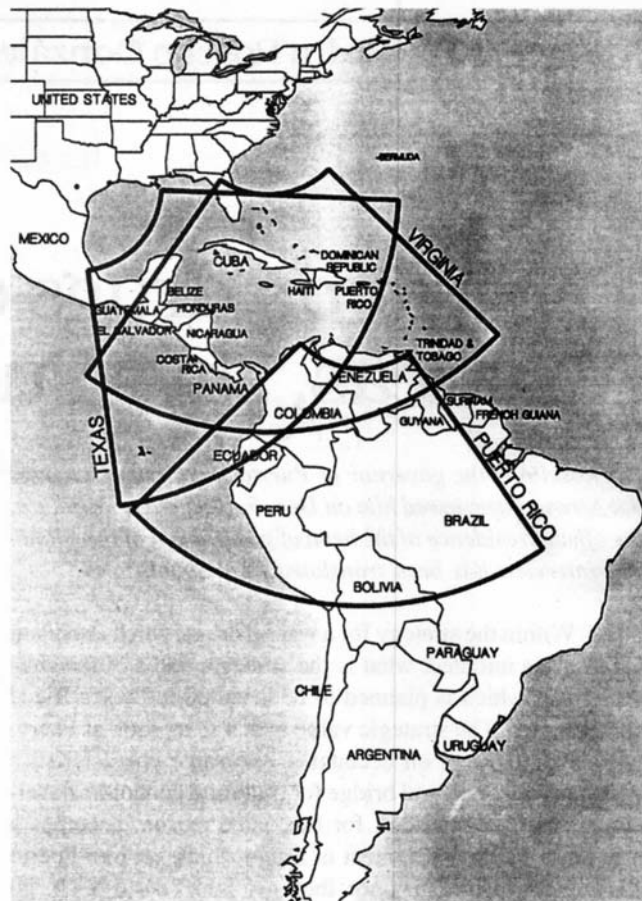
Despite this hellish picture, none of the officials interviewed repeated the line of the São Paulo Forum or the Dialogue that “the United States is losing the war on drugs,” and that, therefore, as the *Washington Post* and the *San Juan Star* insist, drugs must be legalized. On the contrary, all emphasized that illicit drug use can be, and is being fought, and that those who are proposing drug legalization are “throwing in the towel,” as Governor Rosello put it.

Beginning in 1993, the governor took a “hard line against crime,” including deploying the police and the National Guard to occupy public housing. The island was incorporated into those regions designated by the United States as “high-intensity drug-trafficking areas” (HIDTA), which not only means an increase in the allocation of federal funds for fighting drugs, but that federal and state personnel can also be brought in to combat the drug cartels. Federal agencies on the island, led by the DEA, have targetted the Colombian cartels’ money-laundering operations, and, through Operation Golden Trash, succeeded in dismantling 18 money-laundering organizations.

Despite these short-term achievements, Governor Rosello recently explained that “everything that we do here will be a waste, if we don’t extend a helping hand to our neighbors,” especially in the Americas, “which will allow us to consolidate a more effective and efficient joint force.” This year, this will include holding an anti-drug summit to launch “a concerted, continental action against crime and drugs.”

The vulnerable flank

In the interviews, however, I detected a few points of vulnerability among these otherwise committed anti-drug fighters. For example, Governor Rosello, who clearly maintains a firm personal and political commitment against drugs, is at the same time an admirer of the Chilean economic model and its guru, Milton Friedman, one of the leading promoters of drug legalization. As seen in the regimes of such corrupt former Presidents as Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico, Carlos Andrés Pérez of Venezuela, and current Colombian President Ernesto Samper Pizano, the neo-liberal model of “free trade” is based on speculation and money-laundering.



The Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar (ROTHR) planned for Puerto Rico, will dramatically expand the area (southern-most black-bordered figure) in which drug traffickers’ planes can be identified and intercepted.

Under this system, the so-called “informal economy” preys on and ultimately devours the productive physical economy.

In an *EIR* study (see July 21, 1995, “An Obituary for London’s ‘Chilean Economic Miracle’”), we revealed the real “achievements” of Milton Friedman and his Chilean “Chicago Boys”: destruction of all sectors of the physical economy, while increasing by six times the speculative bubble of the illegitimate foreign debt.

This same vulnerability to free trade ideology leads Dr. Rosello, a Democrat, and some of his advisers, to feel great admiration for aspects of House Speaker Newt Gingrich’s (R-Ga.) and Sen. Phil Gramm’s (R-Tex.) “Contract on America,” such as privatizing public services and drastically reducing benefits to Puerto Rican workers.

Another weak point, is the lack of understanding of how the so-called independence movement and its narco-terrorist allies are mere tools of the international oligarchy, whose puppets include Fidel Castro’s agents on the island, as well as the supporter of drug legalization, Milton Friedman.