

Eye on Washington by Paola de Santiago

Demilitarization scenario unfolds

Behind closed doors, they plot to de-nationalize, rent out, and otherwise eliminate developing countries' armed forces.

A group of academics, supposedly experts in questions of democracy and the military, met at a closed-door conference here in late March, to fine-tune plans to eliminate the armed forces of Ibero-America, Africa, Asia, and eastern Europe.

All discussion was "unofficial," but sources here have informed *EIR*, under condition of anonymity, that the organizers of the conference had the full backing of the Bush administration and of various government institutions, both for their meeting and for related publications.

Under the elegant name of "civil-military relations," the official theme of the conference, proposals were even submitted for the "renting out" or "leasing" of these national armies. One of the more psychotic speakers insisted that national security is "in large measure, a mental state," dependent upon whatever a government considers to be an external threat at any point in time. In the opinion of this speaker, development is dangerous since it can intensify differences among minorities and thereby set the basis for conflicts into which the armed forces would have to intervene.

The possibility of a more "efficient" Ibero-American-wide system of collective security through the Organization of American States should not be dismissed, he argued. However, he added "jokingly," with the end of the Cold War there is no longer such a pressing need to have an armed forces at all. Therefore, he suggested, it might be more cost-effective if cer-

tain nations were to "rent out" their armies to other nations in greater need, such as Ghana, Fiji, and so forth.

But this was not all. The news media are the ideal means for controlling the armed forces, said this expert, and granting the media wider power is therefore warranted. Further, a legislative system with dominion over the military institutions, and totally independent from the national security system, should be established.

Under the pretext of facilitating the "transition" of the military institutions to democracy, this expert urged total civilian control over the armed forces. This would be much easier to achieve once their budgets were reduced, he explained.

Another academic demanded that the interrogation and prosecution of the armed forces for human rights violations must follow the transition to democracy. The big question, he insisted, is, who will control the intelligence agencies? He demanded that all military personnel be retrained. "I don't think depoliticization can be achieved without demilitarization."

The next speaker said the issue of military professionalism depended entirely on the civilian government. That is, that military personnel had to be educated, ruled, and watched over by civilians. If they didn't like it, he said, they could look for a career elsewhere.

He also protested that military aid from the United States was not assisting the professionalization of the Ibero-American armed forces, al-

though he admitted that a professional military was no guarantee that the armed forces would submit to civilian control.

These "experts," not one of whom ever had responsibility for defending and protecting the sovereignty of their nation, then attempted to define the mission of the military institutions. For example, one warned that the greatest danger in Ibero-America today is not a return to military rule or coups d'état, but rather that the armed forces might become overseers of civilian government. Therefore, he argued, defining the mission of the armed forces is an imperative.

But, what about the military's secondary support operations? If there is a consolidated democracy, he said, then the military could be employed in building roads. If not, then they are going to compete with civilian rule, and then there exists the danger that the population will choose the military over civilians.

A proposal to bribe the military into abandoning its traditionally nationalist posture and permitting privatization of state companies was also put on the table. How? Through offering the troops stock in the privatized companies.

A major problem, he insisted, is that militaries have secret funds to deploy that the civilians know nothing about. Therefore, their very self-conception needed to be changed to assure their compliance with "democratic" goals. "Which do we change first," he asked, "their minds or their behavior?" Better not to talk about "demilitarization," he added, but rather of the military's "new role."

On the following day, one military officer in the audience who could stand it no longer, asked: Supposedly, we are here to talk about democracy, but all I've been hearing is that the military is the bad guys. How come?