

Argentina to be U.S. policeman?

by Cynthia R. Rush

When Argentine President Carlos Menem traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with President Bill Clinton June 29, he came prepared to make any concessions the U.S. President wanted, in exchange for Clinton's recognition of him as "an important regional leader." As one local analyst put it, he was willing to give "more than the boss asked for."

Menem hoped that by proving that he enjoys a close relationship with the new American President, he would be able to confront an increasingly difficult political situation at home. Uppermost in his mind is the desire to seek reelection in 1995, which he can only do if he obtains congressional approval for an amendment to eliminate the constitutional prohibition of two-term presidencies. This means winning key political battles and doing very well in congressional elections in October.

President Clinton lived up to Menem's expectations, and praised him effusively. "Under President Menem's administration," he said on June 29, "Argentina has become an international leader on the great issues of the post-Cold War period, a leader in this hemisphere in defense of democracy and human rights, a trusted and valued partner and friend of the United States."

Pointing to the participation of Argentine troops in U.N. peacekeeping efforts, Clinton emphasized that the Menem government "has consistently taken a strong stand in favor of collective defenses of democracy. . . . With Argentina's support, the Organization of American States has worked to defend democratic institutions in Peru, reverse the coup in Guatemala, and I am confident together we can restore democracy in Haiti."

In terms of substantive results, Menem didn't return home with much to offer those Argentine producers and businessmen who are worried about such issues as U.S. agricultural subsidies and what they perceive as unfair U.S. trading practices and sharp pressures for policy changes that will hurt Argentina. One example of this is the intellectual property law which the United States has been demanding. Members of Menem's entourage promised that the law would definitely be approved this year in Congress, but U.S. National Security Council official Richard Feinberg threatened in an interview with *Somos* magazine that the U.S. would not hesitate to impose sanctions, authorized by the Super 301 legislation, if the Argentine Congress fails to act as the U.S. desires.

Anglo-American strategic goals

The treatment accorded Menem in Washington might help Menem's electoral aspirations, which is of secondary importance to the Clinton administration at this point. More importantly, it will guarantee Argentina's continuing support for Anglo-American strategic policy goals in the region: suppressing national sovereignty and ensuring application of the International Monetary Fund's brand of "democracy" in order to pay the foreign debt. If multinational military force is required to achieve these goals, the Clinton administration is prepared to deploy it.

To prove his willingness to collaborate with the Anglo-American establishment, Menem proposed on June 29 that Clinton consider a United Nations-led military intervention into Haiti in the event that U.N.-brokered negotiations between deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and military commander Gen. Raoul Cedras failed to produce results.

Just a day earlier, Argentine Defense Minister Oscar Camilion had announced from Buenos Aires that Menem would propose to Clinton that Argentina should become the headquarters of a base to train United Nations peacekeeping forces. Its purpose, according to the June 29 issue of *El Cronista*, would be to ensure "enforcement of U.N. resolutions in the region within the framework of an unprecedented plan to create a global military intervention network which the United States would propose to the U.N. Security Council."

As reported in the daily *Clarín* July 1, a high-level State Department official remarked that "after Mexico, Argentina could be the one to bring our vision to Latin America." This perception is causing alarm among Argentina's Southern Cone neighbors, especially Brazil. Brazil's military leadership has been firm in its defense of national sovereignty, and has also resisted the Anglo-American policy of technological apartheid, which denies developing nations access to advanced technology and scientific capabilities. This has not endeared the country to Washington policymakers.

According to the July 2 issue of the Buenos Aires intelligence weekly *El Informador Público*, Brazilian military and civilian leaders fear that, following the Clinton-Menem meeting, Argentina will embark on a policy to destabilize Brazil on behalf of the United States. Brazilian military leaders are particularly concerned about international designs on the Amazon region, following U.S. military maneuvers in neighboring Guyana a few months ago. Some warn of a "Somalia"-style intervention.

El Informador correctly points out, however, that the unstable situation in Ibero-America, and the reluctance on the part of several governments and national institutions such as the armed forces to embrace Anglo-American policies, could backfire on Menem. "Brazil is not Panama," the weekly warns, and Menem might want to think twice about serving as a U.S. policeman against its neighbors.