

Coming Soon to the United States? Plan Condor, the Sequel

by Toni Solo

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When Shimon Peres celebrated his 80th birthday on September 22nd, there at the top of the guest list, ahead of Bill Clinton, Mikhail Gorbachev, South Africa's F.W. De Klerk, and Australia's Bob Hawke was Carlos Bulgheroni. Bulgheroni is head of the Argentinian energy company Bridas. [1] If terrorism cropped up in their conversation, Bulgheroni and Peres had plenty to reminisce about. Israel and Argentina served as US proxies training terrorists in Central America through the 1970s and 1980s.

Argentinian death squad trainers based in Guatemala were reported to have masqueraded as Bridas employees. During that time Peres served as Israel's Defence Minister, Prime Minister, deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister – well aware of Israeli military commitments in the Americas. Reviewing the background to US sponsored Argentinian and Israeli terrorism reveals how the fictional "war on terror" is just another pretext for the pillage of Latin America by the US government and its favoured multinational corporations.

Argentina – 30,000 reasons to cry

Three years after destroying democracy by instigating the military coup against Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, Henry Kissinger was in Santiago for a meeting of the Organization of American States. There he met the Argentinian military junta's foreign minister. According to Robert Hill, then U.S. Ambassador in Argentina, "Kissinger asked how long it would take ... to clean up the (terrorist) problem....Kissinger gave the Argentines the green light ... The Secretary wanted Argentina to finish its terrorist plan before year end." [2] Hill should know. It was he who served as intermediary between organizers of the Guatemalan death squads and leading figures in the Argentinian government. [3]

Between 1976 and 1983, under the military dictatorship, the Argentinian armed forces killed over 30,000 civilian members of the country's political opposition. Around 500 babies of women who gave birth in detention were distributed among their parents' murderers. In over 300 camps and detention centres, victims were tortured to death and then dumped in mass graves or flown out to be dropped into the Atlantic from military transport planes. Their property and goods were divided up among their torturers and murderers – over US\$70m worth.

Plan Condor – some history

US determination to destroy opposition to its domination in Latin America stemmed from its defeat in Vietnam. The 1972 team in Paris helping Kissinger negotiate with the Vietnamese included current US ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, and Vernon Walters, later a key adviser to Ronald Reagan, then Army Attache at the U.S. Embassy in Paris. In those days George Bush Sr. was ambassador to the UN.

By 1975 Bush Sr. was head of the CIA and working together with Kissinger and Vernon Walters to develop Plan Condor – a coordinated operation against opposition movements throughout Latin America. [4] Plan Condor involved using illegal covert means such as the assassination team coordinated between the Chilean DIN security service and Miami Cuban terrorists like Orlando Bosch, Guillermo Novo and Luis Posada Carriles. [5] It also meant supporting brutal government policies of mass repression in countries throughout South America. Plan Condor was an ambitious and successful attempt to coordinate that repression.

Plan Condor moves to the Isthmus

By 1980, the priorities for President Reagan's Latin American team were to defeat the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, stop the revolutionary movements in Guatemala and El Salvador and to wipe out the popular movement in Honduras. By the end of 1981 many now familiar people were in place. Elliot Abrams (now Senior Director for Near East and North African Affairs on the National Security Council) was Assistant Secretary of State for, incredibly, human rights and humanitarian affairs. John Negroponte was ambassador to Honduras and John Maisto ambassador to Nicaragua. John Poindexter, Colin Powell, Richard Armitage, Otto Reich, Roger Noriega, all worked on Latin America under Reagan. All were brought back into the White House by George W. Bush after the Republican packed Supreme Court effectively validated the Florida voting fraud in the 2000 US presidential elections. [6]

Early in 1980, Argentinian army and naval officers arrived in Guatemala to provide counterinsurgency training for the Lucas Garcia regime. Together with advisers from Chile and Israel they assisted the Guatemalan death squads, originally created by the CIA in the 1960s. An estimated 200,000 people were killed by the Guatemalan military during the long popular resistance to that country's US supported dictatorships. In August 1981, the deputy director of the CIA, Vernon Walters, arranged a meeting in Guatemala City with the aim of consolidating an anti-Sandinista terrorist force with training from Argentina. [7]

Between 1981 and 1983, members of Argentina's Battalion 601, the unit responsible for much of the terror in Argentina itself, worked with Israeli trainers out of Guatemala. In El Salvador they helped train murderers like Roberto D'Aubuisson (who organised the killing of Archbishop Oscar Romero). In Honduras they helped organise both the notorious death squad Battalion 3-16 and the mass murderers of the Nicaraguan Contra. From 1983 onwards, the Israelis trained Carlos Castaño and other current leaders of the Colombian AUC paramilitary death squads. [8]

John Negroponte – fascist proconsul

It may seem strange now that Elliot Abrams and John Negroponte would have facilitated Argentinian fascists (who refined their torment of Jewish victims back in Buenos Aires by torturing them beneath portraits of Adolf Hitler). But Abrams and Negroponte did just that. Argentinian officers trained members of the Honduran army in techniques of mass repression while John Negroponte was ambassador in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa from 1981 to 1985. There he worked closely with Honduran armed forces chief Gustavo Alvarez Martinez to impose a "national security" state on the Argentine model – that is, a police state based on extra-judicial murder.

As US ambassador in Honduras, John Negroponte displayed cynical contempt for US Congress and legitimacy, shamelessly violating the 1983 Boland Amendment restricting aid to the Contra. On Negroponte's recommendation, the Reagan government gave Alvarez Martinez the Legion of Merit in 1983 for "encouraging democracy." Alvarez Martinez was responsible for disappearing over 140 trades unionists, students and other leaders of the Honduran popular movement between 1981 and 1984. In 1989, in a test case, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights convicted Honduras of forcibly disappearing four people between 1981 and 1983. During that period, under Negroponte's proconsulship, Argentinian and Israeli terrorists helped the Honduran military refine their techniques of repression.

Saudi and drugs paymasters

That training did not come free. Who paid for it? Mostly the US taxpayer via military aid to Argentina and Israel. But when legal funds were hard to come by, illegal sources served, including drugs proceeds and money siphoned through the fraudulent Bank of Commerce and Credit International, courtesy of links between George Bush Sr., the Saudi royal family and the Bin Laden family. [9] BCCI folded after revelations that it laundered money from the Colombian Medellin drugs cartel, later to figure in the Iran Contra affair.

At this time, both Colombia and Taiwan also gave training. But the principal countries involved were Argentina and Israel. To help things along, Israel set up a plant in Guatemala to manufacture Galil rifles. Under an agreement reached in October 1981, 200 Guatemalan army officers took anti-insurgency courses in Buenos Aires including use of "interrogation techniques". Among their "instructors" was Ricardo Cavallo.

The Cavallo Scandal

On June 11th this year the Mexican authorities confirmed an extradition order against Ricardo Cavallo by the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon for crimes against humanity during the terror in Argentina. [10] Cavallo is accused of 337 political kidnappings, 227 forced disappearances and the theft of children of political prisoners. Cavallo's story stems from Plan Condor and threads back to the current Bush administration.

Cavallo and his colleagues, Jorge Radice, Jorge Acosta and others were torturers in the Argentine armed forces. They forced their victims to sign authorities permitting them to dispose of their property, bank accounts and belongings. Cavallo also worked closely with the Bolivian

army under Luis Garcia Meza in the early 1980s when Bolivia was virtually run by drugs traffickers.

With their illicit capital, Cavallo and his friends set up the security and data control businesses Martiel and Talsud in Argentina. They made deals with Seal Lock, an Argentine company representing US based Advantage Security systems. Martiel represented Casa de la Moneda of Brazil, CONSAD of Argentina, Ciccone Calcográfica [11] and the French smart card firm Gemplus. [12] Talsud and Martiel were virtually interchangeable, both worked on the deal to emit the New Zaire currency for CIA favourite President Mobutu in Zaire in 1993.

In 1995, Bridas subsidiary TTI and Seal Lock helped Talsud secure lucrative deals in Argentina's Mendoza province. In 1996, Talsud got the contract to issue driving licenses in Argentina's Rioja province. Among Seal Lock's clients were the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Argentine Central Bank, The National Registry of Bolivia, Shell Paraguay and Israel's ZIM maritime line. Cavallo and his brother Oscar also set up a business in El Salvador called Sertracen, closely linked to the Salvadoran military. Sertracen issues driver and gun licenses in El Salvador.

In August 1998, Cavallo entered Mexico as a tourist, miraculously managing to process his residency within a month. Within a year his Talsud company was bidding for the Mexican driver licensing authority (RENAVE), together with Gemplus and the Mexican company CIFRA. On September 7th 1999, they won the contract guaranteeing an estimated annual turnover of US\$400 million

The Cavallo/RENAVE scandal broke in Mexico earlier this year amid mounting evidence of irregularities. Commerce Vice-Minister Raul Tercero, who authorised the RENAVE deal, was found in a wood near Mexico City with his throat cut. He left behind several letters defending himself against accusations of corruption.

Cavallo's business associates have an unfortunate tendency to die violently. In October 1998, during a bribery scandal involving IBM, Marcel Cattaneo, brother of the owner of Cavallo client CONSAD was found hanging from a lamp post. That apparent suicide followed similar suspicious deaths. In June 1998 a friend of President Carlos Menem, leading businessman Alfredo Yabran, associated with De La Rue subsidiary Ciccone Calcografica, was found dead. In August of the same year Jorge Estrada, Cavallo's former chief at the ESMA torture centre and a shareholder in Martiel was found dead, another apparent suicide.

Plan Condor veteran in Mexico

Like Cavallo, someone else arrived in Mexico in 1998, but not as a tourist, US ambassador Jeffrey Davidow. [13] Davidow was a political adviser at the US embassy in Chile from 1971 to 1974. In Santiago, he was an embassy insider when the CIA and the DIN Chilean security agency were organising the assassination gang that later murdered leading Chilean opposition figures, Carlos Prats in Buenos Aires and Orlando Letelier in Washington. In Mexico Davidow continued honing the skills he learned in Chile, covering up human rights abuses in Chiapas and cultivating dubious relationships with drug dealing

businessmen – all to be expected of a Plan Condor veteran.

The Cavallo scandal sharpened concern in Mexico and the rest of Latin America relating to reports that US data mining company Choicepoint has been purchasing confidential information from companies like Talsud and Martiel on whole populations of Central and South American countries. People fear violations of the legitimate privacy of Latin American people travelling to or living in the United States. Choicepoint is the company whose DBT subsidiary spoiled the electoral roll in Florida enabling George Bush to win that 2000 presidential election. [14]

Data abuse – the Choicepoint link

It is hard to get precise details on who is selling Choicepoint this confidential information. [15] But some idea of the use to be made of all that data can be inferred from the role envisaged by John Poindexter for his Total Information Awareness program (TIA) in the developing John Ashcroft police state. While Poindexter, convicted of lying to Congress during the Iran Contra hearings, may be off the public scene after the DARPA "terrorism futures" fiasco, TIA soldiers on under different guises, like the MATRIX program in various US states, notably Florida.

Richard Armitage, one of the Iran-Contra plotters, was a board member of Database Technologies (DBT)/ChoicePoint Inc before taking office under George Bush Jr. Now he is Colin Powell's deputy Secretary of State. Choicepoint is a partner of data mining company SAIC whose web site proclaims it has "developed a strategic alliance with ChoicePoint Incorporated to provide our clients with quick and effortless information retrieval from public records data. ChoicePoint Incorporated maintains thousands of gigabytes of public records data." [16] SAIC's clients include The U.S. Army National Guard and Reserve, United States Marine Corps and BP Amoco. Before becoming Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld was on BP Amoco's advisory board.

BP-Amoco? Sounds like Bridas-Pan American Energy....

Back at the conversation between Shimon Peres and Carlos Bulgheroni, their terrorist reminiscences over, maybe the conversation turned to oil and gas. Funny how times change and erstwhile friends fall out.

In the early 1990s Bridas obtained oil exploration concessions in Turkmenistan. By 1997 they were negotiating with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to build a pipeline there. Bridas found itself in competition vying for Taliban favor with Unocal, a US oil company heavily criticised for its operation in army controlled Myanmar (Burma).

Richard Armitage [17] worked for Unocal along with another Iran-Contra figure, Robert Oakley. The Taliban favoured a deal with Bridas. Bridas and Unocal ended up fighting it out in the US courts. Bridas lost. At the same time, through 1997 and 1998, US policy on Afghanistan turned sour. [18] Between November 2000 and August 2001, Argentina had its financial guts ripped out by US banks and the international finance markets. [19] In October 2001 the US invaded Afghanistan.

This is a fine illustration of the Bush Doctrine: no country will be permitted to pose a threat to the perceived interests of the United States, not even a friendly former terrorist client state like Argentina. Bidas could see how things were going and went with the flow. In 1997 it teamed up with BP-Amoco. Reborn as Panamerican Energy, Bidas is working with BP-Amoco to exploit gas and oil reserves throughout Latin America, but mainly in Argentina and, controversially, Bolivia. BP-Amoco gets the benefit of Bidas assets in Central Asia.

Plan Condor – alive and well

The progression from Chile, Argentina and Uruguay through Central America to present day Venezuela and Colombia is clear. The same actors appear time after time. Elliot Abrams, John Negroponte, Colin Powell, Richard Armitage, John Maisto Roger Noriega and Otto Reich all move between comfortable jobs in US government and the corporate plutocracy that dictates US government policy.

Every one of them participated one way or another in the Iran Contra conspiracy to mislead Congress. Abrams was indicted and found guilty by the Congressional investigating commission but pardoned by George Bush Sr. Richard Armitage escaped prosecution because the investigating commission lacked resources. They were exhausted nailing former Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger, also pardoned by Bush Sr. Now Powell, Armitage, Maisto, Noriega and Reich are plotting the overthrow of democratically elected Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and attempting to deepen US military engagement in Colombia. In Guatemala, an old associate, mass murderer Rios Montt is threatening violent overthrow of the country's hard-won democratic governance.

None of this has anything to do with any "war on communism" or "war on drugs" or "war on terror". The United States and the European Union are in Latin America for the same reasons as the Spanish, Portuguese, British, French and Dutch colonialists before them – natural resources and cheap labour, compounded these days by neo-colonial extraction of forcibly contrived "debt". The methods are privatisation, dismantling of domestic agricultural economies, and open markets imposed by the IMF and World Bank through local clients to favour multinational corporations like BP-Amoco, Monsanto, Cargill and other all too familiar names.

For people in the United States the lessons of Latin America should be very clear. French philosopher Simone Weil once wrote that people in Europe were shocked by the Nazis because the Nazis applied to Europe the methods European powers practiced in their colonies. Now it's the turn of the United States. The banal, evil individuals currently running the White House are steadily putting into practice at home what they have done for three decades while facilitating terror in Latin America.

NOTES

1. Bidas is an energy production and exploration company. It operates in Latin America and Central Asia. It has a joint exploration &

production venture with BP Amoco called Pan American Energy. The company owns 40% of Pan American Energy (60% owned by BP Amoco). Pan American Energy LLC is a company registered in Delaware, USA. (From BP-Amoco and related web sites.)

2. For Hill quote see : www.icaonline.org/72616,46136.html among many others

3. "Guatemala: Laboratorio estadounidense del terror", February 2002. Gustavo Meoño Brenner, Nuevo Diario, Guatemala. This article cites:

- Ariel C. Armony "La Argentina, los Estados Unidos y la Cruzada Anti-Comunista en América Central, 1977-1984" Editorial Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1999.
- Stella Calloni "Operación Cóndor, pacto criminal" Ediciones La Jornada, Ciudad de México, 2001.
- "Las intimidaciones del proyecto político de los militares en Guatemala". Jennifer Schirmer, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Guatemala, 1999.

4. The same team helped set up in 1975 the Committee on the Present Danger, in which Paul Wolfowitz was a leading figure.

5. Hernando Calvo Ospina, "Pinochet, la CIA y los terroristas cubanos", 23 de agosto del 2003, www.rebellion.org.

6. Colin Powell is Secretary of State. Richard Armitage is Deputy Secretary of State. John Maisto is US representative to the Organization of American States. Roger Noriega is Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. Otto Reich is US Special Envoy for Western Hemisphere Initiatives.

7. Testimony of Edgar Chamorro, former Contra organizer to the International Court of Justice in the Hague, September 5th 1985.

8. Jeremy Bigwood, Narco News, "Israel y los paramilitares colombianos" from www.rebellion.org August 15th 2003

9. The Reagan administration also used BCCI to channel funds to the Afghan mujaheddin in the days when Bin Laden was a US hero. Two former CIA directors, Richard Helms and William Casey were involved in BCCI before it folded following revelations that it laundered money for the Medellin drugs cartel. William Casey died before the Iran Contra hearings took place. Among various sources:

- "US arms group heads for Lisbon" The News, Portugal's English language Weekly, 4 April 2003. www.globalresearch.ca
- "À qui profite le crime? Les liens financiers occultes des Bush et des Ben Laden" Réseau Voltaire 11 septembre 2001

10. Sources for information on Cavallo:

- Article by Olga Viglicca, Hector Pavon and Guido Braslavsky. Clarín-Zona. Argentina September 10th 2000
- "Renave: los porqué de un fracaso" Jorge Fernández Menéndez. Semanario Milenio. Mexico, September 14th 2000

- "El largo brazo de la mafia argentina", José Steinsleger La Jornada. Mexico September 24th 2000
- "Se expanden las empresas del ex marino Ricardo Cavallo licencia." Mario Fiore. Los Andes. Mendoza. Argentina August 17th 2001.
- "Tiene Cavallo Información Estrategica" Jorge Carrasco A. La Reforma. Date unclear.

11. A subsidiary of De la Rue producing passports for the Mexican government. De La Rue now own the US Sequoia computerised voting systems company, part owned by Carlyle group partner, US investment firm Madison Dearborn who took over Jefferson Smurfit's share of Sequoia

12. Fort Worth based Texas Pacific Group recently made a huge private equity investment between \$300 and \$500 million into Gemplus to expand Gemplus presence in the international wireless communications, e-commerce and Internet security markets.

13. "Borderline behavior", Al Giordano. The Boston Phoenix. December 16-23, 1999

14. Greg Palast, November 2nd 2002, "The re-election of Jim Crow: How Jeb Bush's team is trying to steal Florida again" and his book "The Best Democracy Money Can Buy"

15. "Imperio de control", Dieter Drüssel. www.rebellion.org, September 1st 2003. Drussel mentions Costa Rican owned Silnica in Nicaragua. In El Salvador and Guatemala public concern has centred on Sertracen and InforNet.

16. SAIC web site

17. Iran-Contra Special Counsel's report, "Independent Counsel declined to prosecute Armitage because the OIC's limited resources were focused on the case against Weinberger and because the evidence against Armitage, while substantial, did not reach the threshold of proof beyond a reasonable doubt."

18. Various web sites

- "Afghanistan, Turkmenistan Oil and Gas, and the Projected Pipeline",
- ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~pdscott/q7.html
- Timeline,
- www.worldpress.org/specials/pp/pipeline_timeline.htm
- www.thedubyareport.com/oilwar.html
- "Enron played key role in events presaging war", Martin Yant. Columbus Free Press. April 10, 2002

19. "Argentina Didn't Fall on Its Own – Wall Street Pushed Debt Till the Last", Paul Blustein. The Washington Post. August 3rd 2003

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