

Participate

- Contact Us
- Feedback Form
- About Us
- Web Links
- Enter your email address to get regular PA-readers updates

Enter your email

OK

Current issue
January

- January 2006 – Happy New Year
- Terrorism: Who Benefits and Why
- Wal-Mart: Always Low Wages
- Terminating Arnold: A Cat's Eye View of California Politics
- Secret Invasion: US Troops Steal into Paraguay
- Portrait (part 1)
- Portrait (part 2)

Browse

- Archive by Date
- by Author
- Site map

Hot deals

1-year individual subscription



1-year subscription
(11 issues)
\$ 18.00

1-year subscription



/Archives - Dates and Topics /2006 /January

Secret Invasion: US Troops Steal into Paraguay

By *W.T. Whitney Jr*

Related stories: Globalization

12-29-05, 12:00 pm



(illustration by Victor Velez)

The Bush administration has sent troops into Paraguay. They are there ostensibly for humanitarian and counterterrorism purposes. The action coincides with growing left unity in South America, military buildup in the region and burgeoning independent trade relationships.

In a speech on July 26 in Havana, Fidel Castro took note of the incursion and called upon North American activists to oppose it. In that vein, an inquiry is in order as to why the US government has inserted Paraguay into its strategic plan for South America. In addition, we should look at factors that favor Bush administration schemes for the region and others that work against US plans.

In December 2004, the Bush administration canceled \$330 million in economic and military aid to 10 South American countries. They were being penalized for turning down a US request for granting its soldiers immunity from prosecution for crimes they commit within the countries' borders.

On May 5, however, the government of Paraguay took the bait. It signed an agreement authorizing an 18-month stay, automatically extended, for US soldiers and civilian employees. The previous limit had been set at six months. On May 26, in a secret session, Paraguay's Congress passed legislation protecting US soldiers from prosecution for criminal activity, both within Paraguay and by the International Criminal Court.

Reportedly, 400 or 500 US troops – estimates vary – arrived in Paraguay on July 1, with planes, weapons, equipment and ammunition. They are billeted at a base near Mariscal Estigarribia, a small city located 200 kilometers from the Bolivian border in the arid, sparsely populated Chaco area of Paraguay. That facility, built by US contractors in the waning years of the Stroessner dictatorship (1954-1989), offers a runway long enough to accommodate large military transport planes and bombers. It provides barrack space for 16,000 troops.

Print

Send to friend

Take Action



Take a Stand
(10/01/2003 18:49)



Support Political Affairs today



(click image)



(click image)

Special Internet Sale:

1-year sub for new subscribers – \$18 (11 issues) 18% off cover price.

\$ 18.00

Adopt your library



Purchase a gift subscription for your library.

\$ 15.00

Gift for a prisoner



Give a prisoner *Political Affairs* today.

\$ 15.00

Poll

Did Bush and friends lie about Iraq to mislead us into war?

- Yes, and we need to know the truth
- No, they weren't smart enough to listen to intelligence
- It doesn't matter; troops should be pulled out anyway

Vote

- Results
- Polls

Journalist and human rights activist Alfredo Boccia Paz, stated in Asuncion that immunity from prosecution for US soldiers, extension of their stay, and joint military exercises all provide the groundwork for the eventual installation of a US base in Paraguay. He quoted Argentine Nobel Peace laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel: "Once the United States arrives, it takes it a long time to leave. And that really frightens me."

The US embassy in Paraguay declared that the United States has "absolutely no intention of establishing a military base anywhere in Paraguay" and "has no intention to station soldiers for a lengthy period in Paraguay." The government of Paraguay seconded that notion. Brazil, however, responded. In late July, its army undertook military maneuvers along that country's border with Paraguay. Paratroopers staged a mock occupation of the Furnas electrical substation, located on the Brazilian border with Paraguay.

Paraguay's vice president, Luis Castiglioni, met with Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and former Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs Roger Noriega last July in Washington. Observers suggested that this welcoming committee was unusually high-powered for a visiting vice president of a small South American nation. According to Rumsfeld, experts would soon be going to Paraguay to develop a "planning seminar on systems for national security." The secretary visited Paraguay in August. The FBI announced that it would be opening an office in Paraguay in 2006.

The official US version of the Paraguay initiative is that for the next 18 months, in addition to joint military exercises, 13 US military teams would be working on humanitarian aide projects, provide counterterrorism and police training and ameliorate the effects of poverty. It turns out that US military personnel have been providing medical care for poor peasants in a northern province since 2002. Boccia Paz commented: "These missions are always disguised as humanitarian aid.... What Paraguay does not and cannot control is the total number of agents that enter the country."

There is of course no shortage of US bases in Latin America. They are located in Guantánamo, Cuba; Fort Buchanan and Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico; Soto Cano, Honduras; and Comalapa, El Salvador. New US air bases are situated in Reina Beatriz, Aruba; Hato Rey, Curacao; and Manta in Ecuador. The latter was officially described as a weather station on a dusty road, until it came out that a full-fledged air base had materialized on the site at a cost of \$80 million. Washington also operates a network of 17 land-based radar stations (three in Peru, four in Colombia, plus 10 mobile radar stations in secret locations.) All of these installations come are under the control of the US Southern Command, based in Miami.

The US rationale for converting Paraguay into a military satellite is worth exploring. For one thing, Washington is responding in catch-up fashion to mounting popular resistance in the region to US bullying. In neighboring Bolivia, for example, two US-friendly presidents have been chased from office in the past two years. And mass opposition to the US-backed candidate in last December's national election was no exception to the trend.

There's more. Paraguay's neighbor, Uruguay, put a social democrat into the presidency in 2004, and last February President Kirchner of Argentina violated world financial orthodoxy when his government negotiated a 60 percent cut in Argentina's \$82 billion debt obligations. Both Argentina and Brazil have quietly rejected the FTAA. Paraguay has joined them in the South American Common Market (Mercosur), which shelters its members from US and International Monetary Fund dictates. For Paraguay to defect would serve US ends.

Washington took major exception to declarations emanating from a gathering March 29, 2005 of Brazilian, Colombian, Venezuelan and Spanish heads of state at Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela. They had discussed the use of raw materials and regional trade patterns to combat poverty and secure peace in South America. A few weeks later Washington was miffed when its candidate for the secretary generalship of the Organization of American



(click image)



click to purchase post cards with this image



Support Political Affairs today

States was rejected. And right under the US nose, Latin American nations are coming together to form Telesur and Petrosur, continent-wide television and energy corporations, and developing banking services that serve people's needs.

Natural resources may also figure into the US motivations for expanding its military presence in South America. One branch of the main opening for a huge Bolivian natural gas field apparently crosses the international border and is accessible in Paraguay at the Independencia I site, not far from Mariscal Estigarribia. If US troops occupied the base there, they would be in striking distance of the Bolivian provinces of Santa Cruz and Tarija, where US natural gas corporations are active. Bolivia will soon be voting on autonomy for the provinces. A "yes" vote is expected to result in privatization. In the event of civil unrest following that outcome, the corporations could call for military protection.

The military base overlies the Guarani aquifer, one of the world's largest underground fresh water reserves. Already water wars have riled Bolivian politics. Oligarchic interests in both the United States and South America have great longings to advance the process of turning water into a commodity.

The Bush administration has an additional interest in Paraguay through its war on terrorism. The so-called triple border, where Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay meet along both sides of the Parana River, is the storied locus for smuggling, money laundering, commerce in child prostitutes, counterfeit operations, and fixing of illegal border crossings. Some 20,000 Middle Eastern, Muslim expatriates, most of them Lebanese in origin, live in Ciudad del Este on the Paraguayan side of the river and Foz do Iguacu in Brazil. The cities supposedly are centers for Islamic extremism and sources of funding for terrorist groups. Al Qaeda, Hamas and Hezbollah operatives reportedly have passed through the area, and training camps, sleeper cells, and passport factories are said to be located there. After September 11, 40 FBI agents joined Paraguayan colleagues to investigate some of these networks. Dozens of suspects were arrested. US military authorities advertise their operatives moving into Paraguay as experts in counterterrorism.

US meddling in South America has great potential to add to existing tensions in the region as it adds its might to ongoing South American military expansion. According to Uruguayan Raúl Zibechi, an expert on the continent's military landscape, South America is experiencing unprecedented military growth. Nations there have reacted to the excesses of US Plan Colombia and to new military modalities, particularly the privatization of military forces on display in Columbia. They are also attempting to emulate Brazil's new posture of strategic military autonomy. And, as is their habit, ruling circles in many countries, following Washington's lead, respond to social unrest through military expansion.

In December 2004, Venezuela agreed to buy 110,000 Kalashnikov rifles, 33 helicopters and 50 fighter-bombers from Russia. Spain supplied Venezuela with naval aeronautical material, 10 transport planes, and four coast-guard cutters. Venezuela will be buying 50 training and combat jets from Brazil. Venezuela earlier this year

Other Action:

Take more e-Action here. (updated 10-22-05)

Current Campaigns:

- [Call for friendship with Venezuela](#)

● [Read more](#)

POWERED BY
eZ publish

ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE...

Support this progressive web-site by subscribing to the print edition of POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Joined the chorus of voices that say:

NO TO WAR!
BRING THE TROOPS HOME NOW!
IMPEACH GEORGE BUSH!
RESIST THE ULTRA RIGHT AGENDA!

NOVEMBER 2005

pa

SHAME!

4 YEARS UNDER THE PATRIOT ACT

If you are searching for truth and honesty you've come to the right place.

SUBSCRIBE NOW CLICK HERE

activated a two million-member reserve component of its national military force.

Yet according to the journal *Military Power Review* Venezuela comes in at sixth place among South American nations in terms of military strength. Brazil is far in the lead; Peru places second; Argentina, third; followed by Chile and Colombia.

Increased military power, operating in tandem with nationalist stirrings, may inhibit US military meddling. Brazil, for example, with its own strategic defense plan and brisk economic growth, is an unlikely US acolyte. The nation is the 10th largest industrial power in the world and has become the world's fifth largest arms exporter. Brazilian industry builds warships, several types of fighter jets, and is constructing a nuclear submarine. And to facilitate its expanded trade with China, Brazil is paying 70 percent of the \$1 billion cost of a 1,500 mile long highway that extends from Peruvian ports to Santos on Brazil's Atlantic coast.

Brazil recently sent military planners to Vietnam to learn about guerrilla war. The head of Brazil's Amazon military command, General Claudio Barbosa, has predicted that Brazil may in the future face wars similar to the war that convulsed Vietnam and the one transpiring in Iraq now. The priority would be guerrilla warfare, "an option the army will not hesitate to adopt facing a confrontation with another country or group of countries with greater economic and military power." What nation could the general be thinking of?

Brazil opposes Plan Colombia. The nationalist orientation of its industrial leaders persuaded them to put off joining FTAA. Brazil has no US bases on its soil, nor does Brazil engage in joint military exercises with the United States. Military cooperation between Brazil and Argentina apparently is flourishing, and in February, Brazil signed strategic accords with Venezuela. The Brazilian example of independent pursuit of national interests has emboldened other South American nations.

The single-minded pursuit of national interests, however, may work against popular struggle and Latin American unity. Analysts agree that Brazil and Argentina's preoccupation with internal interests has created a power vacuum that encouraged Washington to court Paraguay successfully. Relations between the two nations have long been plagued by trade clashes.

Ideally, Brazil might have utilized its economic power to further Latin American unity and ward off predatory US behavior. Instead it operates according to free market rules and, unlike Venezuela, looks for salvation through from the US-led world market economy, distancing itself from Latin America's agenda. Worse, jostling for market advantage creates divisions that lay the region open to tactics of divide and rule.

The Herculean labors of unified democratic struggle elsewhere in Latin America point to strategies through which Bush scheming and US military probing in the region might be resisted. The example of the FARC-EP, in its survival and apparent growth, has meaning for revolutionaries far beyond Colombia's borders. The organization now maintains a presence in nearly 100 percent of the municipalities in Colombia, and, according to *Monthly Review*, "with the exception of Cuba, [the FARC-EP] has become the largest and most powerful revolutionary force – politically and militarily – within the Western Hemisphere."

Chávez forces in Venezuela, under the aegis of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), have fused the twin causes of Latin American unity and social justice. Mass protests in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, even Chile keep empire minders in Washington on edge. The point here is that growing solidarity on the part of US activists with struggles throughout Latin America may act as a brake on US meddling in Paraguay.

Opposition likely will materialize within Paraguay itself. In recent years peasants there have mounted protests against privatization, economic restrictions imposed by the International Monetary Fund, unfair land holding

patterns, and antiterrorism legislation.

There is no lack of awareness. Orlando Castillo of the human rights group Servicio Páz y Justicia recalls that, "US soldiers taught torture and other forms of human rights violations in courses at the School of the Americas." He warns that "the United States has strong aspirations to convert Paraguay into a second Panama for its troops and is not far removed from reaching its objective of controlling the Southern Cone."

While attending the 2nd Jubilee South World Assembly in Havana, Sixto Pereira of the Paraguayan Initiative for People's Integration told Cuban-based Prensa Latina:

We demand the abolition of regulations that harbor and give impunity to Pentagon troops. It is a demand in favor of Paraguay and Latin American integration.

Pereira indicated that mobilization against the presence of US troops is gaining momentum in Paraguay.

[» PA Home](#)

[» PA Online Edition](#)

[» January Print Edition](#)

[» PA Subscribe](#)

Comment List

Topic:	Author:	Time:
The Rev. Sun Myung Moon also known as the Messiah	III Duce	12/31/2005 13:25

Is it by coincidence that the Rev. Moon owns approximately 1.5 Million acres in the Chaco province. Is it also coincidence that the government of Paraguay has moved to appropriate his land in the name of agrarian reform? Is it also coincidence that Moons "paper" the Washington Times is still a hotbed of anti-communist demagogues?

Maybe the move by this administration is less about the leftist solidarity in South America and more about helping out a true friend and sycophant.

My question is this?

Why does the Messiah need the help of the US Army.
Can't he just twitch his nose or blink his eyes and make everything better?

Reply

New comment