

Western hemisphere nations form common front against drug mafia

by Dolia Estévez Pettingell

For the first time since illegal drugs became “the single greatest menace to civilization” and to the security of the Western Hemisphere, top-level government and military representatives from the most important Ibero-American nations and the United States met to discuss combined efforts to wipe out the drug trade.

The atmosphere was one of optimism. It was the firm conviction of all present that “the war on drugs can and will be won.” Sen. Paula Hawkins (R-Fla.), chairman of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse who sponsored the Jan. 31-Feb. 1 conference in Washington, D.C., stated that all that is needed from the nations of the Hemisphere is “political will.”

“Our children are victimized, and our national security and safety are threatened by the presence of illicit narcotics. . . . Illegal drugs threaten our educational systems, paralyze our national productivity, destroy our military preparedness, and rob our families of sons, daughters, mothers, and fathers,” Senator Hawkins told the participants during her opening remarks.

The governments of Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina, and Ecuador sent ministerial level representatives. All other Ibero-American nations were represented by Washington-based diplomats. The entire U.S. anti-drug high command in law-enforcement, military, and government agencies attended.

The U.S. media, however, did not find it “newsworthy.” The creation of a multi-national anti-drug command to eradicate drugs was not reported by either the *Washington Post* or the Moon-linked *Washington Times*. But then, both are on record for drug “decriminalization.” The *Washington Times* recently editorialized in favor of legalizing cocaine.

The *Post* and *Times* of Washington are representative of the dominant faction in the U.S. news media, which favors legalizing drugs to permit debtor nations to become officially drug-producing nations, exporting their crops as a means of earning foreign exchange to pay their debts to those interests for which such newsmedia speak. This faction also has current control of U.S. economic policy toward debtor (drug-exporting) nations, which, as State Department representatives’ behavior at the conference underscored, represents a factor of pure sabotage of the administration’s war on drugs.

“American mothers and fathers are fed up” with illegal narcotics trafficking and drug abuse, stated Hawkins. After offering the Ibero-American governments “whatever resources necessary” to fight what she called “no longer a battle, but a war,” she called on them to “join hands” with the United States like “sister nations” to “eradicate this evil.”

“We were founded by the same ancient civilizations,” she recalled. “We all began as colonies of other empires, and we all had to fight for our precious freedom. We must not relinquish this freedom to drug trafficking. We must work together to rid our nations, and our peoples, of this mutual affliction.”

The Reagan administration “remains dedicated to achieving, once and for all, the eradication of drug abuse.” She particularly referred to the First Lady’s personal role in the anti-drug fight, and took the opportunity to make public Mrs. Reagan’s plans for a “summit” of First Ladies from the Western Hemisphere in the middle of this year to coordinate efforts against drug abuse.

‘War can and will be won’

The first day of the conference heard progress reports from the U.S. representatives, among them: Carlton Turner, special assistant to the President for drug abuse policy; Lt. Gen. Dean Tice, director of the Defense Department Task Force on Drug Abuse, Adm. James Gracey, commander of the U.S. Coast Guard; William Webster, director of the FBI; Francis Mullen, director of the Drug Enforcement Administration; and William van Raab, commissioner of the U.S. Customs Service.

The presence of such high officials, plus a 10-minute appearance by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, left no doubt that the administration means business. Both Weinberger and General Tice referred to the legal impediments that the U.S. armed forces face in “participating directly in the seizure, apprehension, or arrest of civilians. . . . It is very difficult for the armed forces to be used for law-enforcement related matters,” the secretary of defense said, but “the actual duties and mission of the military itself . . . enable us to assist in this war on narcotics and we are participating to the full extent the law permits it.”

Tice delivered an impressive report on “indirect” military

participation in anti-drug efforts. Moves are under way to change some of the regulations that prohibit more direct military participation, Weinberger added.

Dr. Turner called for a "united front" among nations, adding that for President Reagan, the fight against drugs represents one of the "highest priorities of his administration." One man gave his life in this war, Turner went on: Colombian Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. We have to continue providing the leadership he represented before his murder. As Colombian President Belisario Betancur once said, Turner concluded, "Drug abuse is a cancer in the soul of men. If we don't extirpate it, men will die."

U.S. Customs Commissioner van Raab pointed out that the American people are beginning to take a harsher attitude toward drug consumption thanks to the Reagan administration's strong stand on the issue. "We almost gave up the fight in the early 1970s" when a number of states started to "decriminalize" drug abuse. "We thought it was an evil we had to live with." But, he continued, thanks to the Reagans, we can say without doubt that "the war can and will be won."

Colombia in the lead

On the second day of the conference, which was not open to the public, the participants discussed the different strategies of the Ibero-American nations to combat not only drug traffic, but its partner, terrorism. Reports were presented by the Colombian vice-minister of justice, Dr. Nazley Lozano, the vice-minister of justice of Venezuela, Dr. Sonia Sgambatti (see p. 58), and the Peruvian ambassador to Washington.

Colombian President Betancur's determination to destroy the drug mafia in his country was acknowledged and strongly backed. Senator Hawkins asked for one minute of silence in memory of Colombia's Lara Bonilla, killed in April of last year by mafia families now threatening Betancur and Colombian and U.S. law-enforcement officials.

As the conference was taking place, intelligence sources reported that a Colombian mafia hit-team had entered the country to kill anti-drug officials. Security for the Colombian representative, Mrs. Lozano, was strengthened for the duration.

Mrs. Lozano gave a dramatic report on the fight in her country against Dope, Inc. She provided U.S. officials with new statistics on the number of marijuana and coca plants and cocaine laboratories destroyed from 1982 to 1984, and the number of drug cargos captured on land and at sea. She also reported on new laws regulating importation of chemicals used to produce cocaine.

The Venezuelan representative, Dr. Sgambatti, referred to her government's plans to propose continental legislation to prevent this "transnational" mafia from continuing to use its economic power to "corrupt, blackmail, and silence" those who oppose their evil.

The alliance between terrorists and drug traffickers was addressed by Senator Hawkins, who showed pictures of Nicaraguan officials with Colombian mafia chief Pablo Escobar.

Mrs. Lozano added that the easiest way for terrorists to get cash to buy arms is to protect the mafia's drug industry. A "guerrilla" group was recently caught operating a cocaine laboratory in Colombia.

Peru's Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), a savage medievalist terrorist group whose criminal operations are financially supported by the drug mafia, is known to have assassinated a number of anti-drug officials in Peru. Senator Hawkins referred to several Peruvian law-enforcement officials who had been collaborating with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and who were recently found decapitated. Their skin had been peeled off while they were still alive.

Real causes not addressed

The Ibero-American nations complained about the economic crisis in their countries which has prevented them from obtaining the means to fight a well-equipped narco-terrorist structure. In some cases, as in Bolivia, the mafia is financially more powerful than the government itself, representing a state within the state.

Jon Thomas, assistant secretary of state for international narcotics matters, replied in private conversations with Ibero-American representatives: "One cannot blame high interest rates and the debt problem for not fighting drugs. It is just an excuse which we will not accept." He also launched veiled threats against Colombian President Betancur for factionalizing, and thus weakening, armed-groups in his country by offering "amnesty" to those who give up their arms.

On the contrary: Paul Volcker's international regime of usury and the policies of the International Monetary Fund are at the heart of the drug problem. Unless the Reagan administration is prepared to break with the International Monetary Fund, whose policies have not only caused the shift in relative economic and political power to organized crime elements, but encouraged drug production and export to earn foreign-exchange to meet debt-service payments, the war on drugs is doomed.

This was not addressed at all during the otherwise excellent conference. IMF and World Bank officials have stated that they do not care if Bolivia, Peru, and any other nation in the South pays the debt with drug-earned money, as long as they pay it. At current prices, peasants in Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru find it more attractive to grow coca or marijuana than potatoes. In Peru alone, over 1 million people work in the drug industry, in Bolivia over 300,000.

If the war on drugs is to be won, the administration and Congress must adopt economic policies consistent with the fight against drugs at the law-enforcement level, and let the "Jamaican model," "free enterprise" advocates like the State Department, David Rockefeller, and Henry Kissinger, go hang. By dumping the IMF, reorganizing debts, and granting credit at low interest rates, the administration would allow Ibero-American nations to develop economically, employing their labor force in jobs worthy of human beings.