

# Peru takes the lead in the war on drugs

by Dr. Ricardo F. Martin

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Peru has not yet won the war against narcotics traffic, as shown by the fact that an army of 150 narco-terrorists was able to assault a police anti-drug unit on Dec. 29, 1986. But the Peruvian case offers an example of how to run a military war on drugs, how to maximize scarce resources, and, especially, what can be accomplished when there is a political will to win. Peru led the way to joint anti-drug actions with Colombia, and is now prodding Ecuador and Brazil to cease providing safe-houses for the traffickers who find it difficult to operate in Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia.

President Alan García began *Operation Condor*, his war on the drug traffickers, only days after his inauguration on July 28, 1985. The first *Operation Condor* wiped out the Caballococha nest of cocaine-refining laboratories near the Amazon point where Peru meets Colombia and Brazil. One carefully planned and effectively executed *Condor* operation has succeeded another. *Operation Condor V* was launched on Dec. 1, 1986, as a surprise attack. It ended in mid-December 1986, with the combined forces of the Air Force and the Civil Guard having swept the coca leaf-growing zones of the central Huallaga valley. They destroyed five clandestine laboratories, including 44 coca leaf maceration pits and one clandestine airport. They captured a ton of recently produced basic cocaine paste.

## Regional cooperation

Deputy Interior Minister Agustin Mantilla the next day announced that, starting in 1987, joint operations with neighboring countries to eradicate narcotics traffic in the border zones would be systematized. "We have begun a historic process of struggle with Colombia and with Ecuador, a country which does not have any experience, but is now in training," he said. "We hope during the coming year to be able to unite with Brazil and Colombia and to undertake joint operations; the agreements have already been signed."

Brazil constitutes a special problem, since its vast Amazon territory has become a haven for drug traffickers, who clearly have powerful political protection. García and Mantilla understand that so long as Brazil keeps its "hands-off" policy, no amount of effort and sacrifice by Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia could succeed.

On Dec. 6, the Peruvian interior ministry official in charge of narcotics control, René Flores Agreda, announced that the Brazilian authorities had agreed to provide Peru with boats and other logistical support for patrolling the numerous Amazon tributaries which flow from Peru into Brazil.

Flores also announced that the Civil Guard, which had been entirely dependent upon whatever aircraft could be spared by the Air Force at a given moment, now had its own fleet of 16 small planes which could be used to transport troops and for patrols. The planes had been confiscated from drug traffickers. Little can be done without aircraft in a jungle which is not only covered by thick vegetation, but is filled with cliffs and pits. During the past year, Mantilla has, by hook or by crook, gained some of the transport capability required to turn sporadic forays into the jungle into permanent patrol and control operations.

## Sovereignty replaces law of the jungle

García and Mantilla are imposing law and order on the Peruvian jungle. The corruption and complicity of the previous governments of Francisco Morales Bermúdez and Fernando Belaunde had abandoned those regions to the narcotics traffickers. Now, *Operation Condor* has hit the jungle baronies of "entrepreneurs" such as Richard Gamboa and Catalino Escalante, who have built armies of hired killers to protect themselves and their installations.

On Dec. 29, one hundred and fifty men armed with automatic weapons and explosives surrounded the camp of a 31-member police patrol near Uchiza, in the Huallaga Valley. After a two-hour battle, the narco-terrorists were seen carrying away three bodies. One policeman died; two were injured. The single helicopter available to the police ferried in reinforcements, who fanned through the jungle and captured seven suspects.

The savage Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) terrorists run parallel and combined operations with the narco-traffickers' mercenary armies. Not far from Uchiza, Peruvian detectives on Oct. 31, 1986 found a narco-terrorist base and captured 10 Shining Path terrorists, including the terrorist gang's jungle region chief David Rosemberg. They also found loads of propaganda, machine guns, vehicles, and a notebook with data on Shining Path's activities and those of its intended victims.

The next phase of President García's war on drugs must be to strip away the financial backing of the drug trade. Rumors are already circulating in Lima that precisely such investigations into the financial arena are now being considered.