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Latin America

Disciplining the back yard

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Almost 2 million people are on the brink of famine in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. The effects of the succession of "natural disasters", the collapse of agricultural prices and the decomposition of the economies of the region also extends to Costa Rica and the entire coastal zone of the Gulf of Panama. International "humanitarian aid" is at a scandalous level: a dollar per person.

However, this is not news any more. Since September 11, it has been displaced by the "war against terrorism". The attack on the empire has reshuffled the cards. In the middle of an unprecedented socio-economic crisis and a broad and prolonged popular resistance (see IV 333) the Latin American elites, not finding anything better with which to confront the crisis of governability, have aligned themselves behind Bush's crusade.

They are committed to implementing an immense operation of military monitoring, police control, attacks on democratic liberties, and criminalisation of all social protest. In fact, they are enlisting in the army of the United States as it tries to impose the FTAA in a framework of political instability and social explosiveness.

For some time, Washington has been preparing a bellicose hemispheric project commanded by the Pentagon, to transform the Latin American armies into internal security patrols with strategies and structures of control laid down by US generals. Under the renewed doctrine of Low Intensity Conflict, the dissemination of "free market democracy" on a continental scale has become a 'security matter'

The criminal terrorist attacks of September 11 and the collective hysteria they have caused came as a godsend to the United States and the governments who carry out its orders without question. On Friday September 28, the ministers of the Interior of Mercosur created a Permanent Working Group to evaluate "joint and coordinated operations against terrorism" and to study initiatives "for inclusion in the Regional Security Plan" involving coordination of intelligence services.

At a meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) an emergency convocation of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism was suggested. The idea of creating a network of espionage in the framework of that body created in 1999 at the initiative of the Menen government - is indeed one of the initiatives most fervently supported by the most reactionary sectors. A few days previously, president Fernando Henrique Cardoso had authorized the opening of an office of the CIA in Brazil.

The army were not slow to follow with Argentine and Brazilian military meeting in the region of Foz de Iguaz , centre of the "triple border" that these countries share with Paraguay, an area where thousands of people of Arab origin live. The head of Brazil's Southern Military Command, General Max Hoertel, said that after the attacks against the Twin Towers and the Pentagon by suicide bombers "there is no doubt that we must adopt preventative measures not only against nature but also disasters caused by terrorists". (Clar n, Buenos Aires 7-10-01).

From the formulation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 Latin America and the Caribbean was a traditional area of US domination. As of that date, the United States considered the entire region as a zone of national security and imperial expansion. Military interventions followed one after the other through the years and the creation of the Pan-American Union (1890) was nothing more than the legalization of the process of political and economic integration under the hegemony of the "big brother".

In February of 1945, the member countries of the Pan American Union under the so-called Act of Chapultepec (Mexico) adopted the principle of "joint defence of the American states against external aggression". Soon, in September 1947, the 22 countries met in Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro, at the initiative of Arthur V. Vanderberg, one of the ideologists of anti-Communism and the protocol of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR) was signed. The Treaty a typical mechanism of the Cold War - considers that any aggression against one of its members will be considered as an attack against all. After remaining dormant for decades, the TIAR has been revived.

At the initiative of Brazil, and in the framework of the OAS meetings held in Lima and Washington, the member states agreed to participate in the hunting down of anyone suspected of terrorism.

In fact, the invocation of the TIAR has, mainly, a sense of political legitimization that is located in the resolution of a "democratic charter" adopted by the O.A.S. In concrete military terms, it adds absolutely nothing. The United States has already taken all the measures it thinks necessary.

It has established a network of fixed or movable military bases and radar systems in the name of the fight against drug trafficking, incorporating military pressure with "economic aid". In the framework of Plan Colombia, it has rearranged its installations in the region: Aruba-Curacao in the Dutch Antilles; Manta in Ecuador; Comalapa in El Salvador; San Cono in Honduras: the occupation of the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico. As James Petras puts it "the ease with which the US military could construct this network of bases is mainly due to the support and long term training of dependent military officials, carried out by the USSouthCom in Latin America" (KoeyÃº Latinoamericana, Venezuela, July 2001)

Democrats and Republicans have agreed in Congress to grant to Bush the Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), known as the "fast track". This mechanism will allow the government to establish free trade agreements without it being possible for them to be modified later by the legislative power. Thus the way has been cleared for the FTAA (see [article](#) in IV 334).

The US deputies and senators, seem to have listened to the secretary of Commerce, Robert Zoellik, who had insisted that after September 11 the priority of the United States was "free trade" for "impelling the values that define us against our adversary". (Washington Post, 20-9-01)

The resolution comes at a time of maximum weakening of MERCOSUR when both political leaders and civil servants of the governments who make up the regional agreement agree with the proposal of the Unión Industrial Argentina: "to suspend regional integration until new notice". (Página/12, Buenos Aires 27-10-01).

What is certain is that the new international conjuncture has been a setback to the development of what some analysts called the "Brasilia-Caracas axis" (which enjoyed the enthusiastic support of Cuba) as alternative to the negotiation of the FTAA. Now, any attempt to block the imperial trade ambitions will be more difficult. The pressure of a social resistance and a continental anti-FTAA movement which had massively announced itself in the Social Forum at Porto Alegre, in Buenos Aires and Quebec has been weakened. The continuation of that resistance and movement is all that can ensure that Latin America does not end up as an Indian reservation of the United States.