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U. S. Interventions in Venezuela, Peru, and Paraguay Where is the Truth?

by W.T. WHITNEY Jr.

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To refute official explanations for U.S. interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean is easy sometimes. Critics recently highlighted falsehoods and contradictions given off from President Obama’s executive order of March 9 that imposed sanctions against Venezuela, and the job was done.

That document mentioned “erosion of human rights guarantees” in Venezuela, attacks on press freedom, police violence in response to anti-government protests, and arbitrary arrests. Alternative voices told the truth: private media flourishes there, U.S.-financed counterrevolutionary groups recruited anti-government agitators of last year who accounted for most of the deadly violence cited by Obama. Critics highlighted abuse of Black people’s rights in the United States and the scandals of U.S. torture, poverty, and prisons. The Guantanamo prison was mentioned repeatedly.

There are other interventions, however, with other rationalizations. These too are poorly explained, but in a different way. They seem to shift depending on circumstances, and look like they are contrived for propaganda purposes. These official justifications marked by scatter apply particularly to military incursions in the region.

The U.S. military, for example, is implementing a scheme of collaboration with Peru. The Peruvian Congress passed enabling legislation in January and February. Some 3500 U. S. Marines will be in Peru for short or long periods during the coming year. Their purpose, according to an official Peruvian military source, is instructional. The first contingent of 58 U.S. troops arrived on February 1 and will stay for a year working in five districts. Two weeks later, 67 more marines arrived for a six-week stay. On September 1, 3200 soldiers will disembark from the amphibious assault vessel “America.” That ship visited Peru in September 2014.

On September 1-6, the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS George Washington calls at Puerto Callao in Peru. The U. S. Fourth Fleet, reactivated in 2008 to support missions of the U. S. Southern Command, has operational control of both vessels.

The official Peruvian and U.S. story is that the troops will be helping out with Peru’s war on drug-trafficking. Two years ago Peru did regain its former status as the world’s top producer of coca. But it’s clear also the troops are there to strengthen Peru’s hand in anti- insurgency warfare. There are references to war on terrorism. The Maoist Shining Path Guerrillas have shown signs of reviving.

Peruvian academician and drug policy expert Roberto Soberon insists the United States intends to “retake the initiative in South America and implement a more visible military presence in the Andes and Western Pacific always taking into account open and covert actions developing in Venezuela and other countries that distance themselves from Washington.” The United States has “capabilities for intervening automatically in scenarios of socio-political convulsion.” He worries about U.S. targeting of “social organizations that are protesting, [especially] against the presence of mining and/or petroleum companies.”

Another local writer characterizes the arriving U.S. troops as “a true army of occupation.” And the intervention is midway between “Evo’s multicultural Bolivia and the region more to the North where the actions of Rafael Correa’s government don’t exactly depend on Washington’s approval.”

The drug-war rationale for U.S. intervention famously has applied to Colombia. That’s a worrisome precedent what with drug – war interventions like Plan Colombia having led to direct U.S. participation in “dirty-war” atrocities associated with counterinsurgency. One rationale merged into another.

Teams of U.S. military personnel purporting to deliver humanitarian aid represent slippage of yet another sort. Over many years the Southern Command has had U.S. soldiers settling down throughout the region to offer medical, dental, technical and/or engineering assistance. In 2012 military teams in Peru provided medical services in 11 locations for over six weeks. Since the 1980s this kind of military outreach has been called “New Horizons.” In 2008 the Southern Command adjusted terminology to “Beyond the Horizon.” Aid-dispensing soldiers have traveled to Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Belize, Haiti, Chile, and elsewhere.

The Southern Command opened its Center for Emergency Operations in Santa Rosa, San Pedro department, in northern Paraguay on February 22, 2014. The U. S. ambassador attended the

inaugural ceremony. The facility cost \$1.7 million, and U.S. military personnel would be there to provide “help to the Paraguayan people in the event of emergencies and natural disasters.” The Southern Command notes the area’s history of “seasonal floods, droughts and wildfires that have driven thousands of families from their homes and threatened the livelihood of its inhabitants.” Medical and dental care would be available.

At the time, Southern Command humanitarian aid specialist Steve Carro indicated “the U.S. military forces had in mind a network of 100 [such] centers (...) in 25 Latin American and Caribbean counties.”

U.S. military planners, however, had not taken on a new worldview of beneficence. Two days before the opening, Paraguay’s defense minister met with U. S. Defense Attaché Bárbara Fick and Rear Admiral George Balance. They discussed increased military cooperation, and Admiral Balance requested that Paraguayan soldiers attend U.S. military schools on scholarships. Drug war cooperation was mentioned.

All along, according to a November 2013 news report, the Paraguayan government had been projecting its own \$2 million military base in Northern Paraguay. Its purpose, said the same defense minister, was “to bring back peace to the people.” The project was in response to the increasing presence in the area of Marxist Leninist guerrillas known as the Army of the Paraguayan People. A local newspaper revealed that, “The initiative for fitting out a military base (...) came from the United States.” The Paraguayan soldiers presumably would be working in tandem with U.S. counterparts nearby, that is, if the latter could break away from their good works.

Pablo Ruiz of the School of the Americas Watch says U.S. interest in Northern Paraguay stems from the strategic importance of the underlying Guarani aquifer (largest in the world), copious natural resources, the vantage point provided for spying on nearby Brazil and Argentina, and growing peasant resistance in the area to a land monopolization for soy production.

Ultimately the larger story is of adjustable, slippery motives. The phenomenon seems to cover up the truth as to why the U.S. government meddles. A process of mystification ends up in lies and contradictions, little different in essence from explanations as to why sanctions were imposed against Venezuela.

Obfuscation is the order of the day. Southern Command head Major General John Kelly responded to a reporter’s question about whether or not events in Caracas on February 12, 2015 represented a coup attempt, as Venezuelan leaders allege.

“A coup? You know, I don’t know anyone that would want to take that mess over, but it might be that we see, whether it’s at the end of his term or whatever, I wouldn’t say — I wouldn’t (say) necessarily a coup, but there might be with — the same ruling party ... some arrangements to change leadership.”