

General McCaffrey's secret talks: US discussed plans for Colombian intervention

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Following Barry McCaffrey's recent visit to South America, media revelations in Peru and Argentina indicate the US general advanced American plans to coordinate a military intervention to pacify Colombia under the guise of an anti-drug crusade.

From August 23, McCaffrey, head of the US National Drug Policy Control Office, visited Brazil, Bolivia, Peru and Argentina. On August 30, Frecuencia Latina, a Peruvian television station with close links to the Peruvian military intelligence service SIN, reported that McCaffrey privately urged leaders of the four countries to participate in a multinational military intervention against the largest Colombian guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

This is contrary to McCaffrey's public denials of any plans for direct US intervention in Colombia, echoed strongly by top US State Department officials.

Frecuencia Latina outlined the following scenario for the intervention: Colombian President Andres Pastrana would try to reach an agreement with FARC. If this failed by January 2000, he would declare a state of internal war in Colombia and call on regional intervention from Peru, Ecuador and Brazil. This force would join with five Colombian battalions currently being trained by US advisors. US warships off Colombia's coasts would support the intervention with missile attacks and air strikes.

The report noted that McCaffrey held private talks with Peruvian presidential advisor Vladimiro Montesinos, the head of SIN and a powerful figure in Alberto Fujimori's regime. Montesinos has frequently been linked to human rights violations in Peru and some reports have tied him to narcotics trafficking.

The television station did not report Peruvian president's attitude toward the US intervention plan. It did add, however, that Peru had already deployed 5,000

troops to the Colombian border, as well as four warships with Peruvian Special Forces and Marine units. This report was in part confirmed by a Lima newspaper report the same week that 2,000 Peruvian soldiers had been deployed to the remote Colombian border.

McCaffrey's tour also prompted revelations in the Argentine media about plans for closer military ties between the two countries. Argentine President Carlos Menem had already declared in July that he would send troops: "If Colombia requests it, Argentina, because of solidarity, will be there." Given that elections take place in Argentina on October 24, McCaffrey met with Peronist presidential candidate Eduardo Duhalde and Alliance candidate Fernando de la Rua, as well as Menem.

At a Buenos Aires press conference attended by government ministers, the heads of three security forces, SIDE secret service chief Hugo Anzorreguy and local drug czar Eduardo Amadeo, McCaffrey was interrupted by Interior Minister Carlos Corach. Corach announced that FARC guerrillas had their own representative in Argentina named Javier Calderon, who had met in Neuquen province with certain union leaders and continued to do so.

The annual report of the United States DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) released in February stated that Argentina was becoming a preferred route of transit for drugs from Bolivia, Peru and Colombia. McCaffrey endorsed this, saying, "Clearly there is drug smuggling heading out of Buenos Aires to the US and probably Europe too, all of it hidden among quantities of legal commerce."

In August the *El Clarin* newspaper carried reports detailing US involvement in Argentina that could open the way to the installation of ground bases in the

country. The report said that few functionaries wanted to talk about it, and they reacted nervously as Miguel Angel Toma, secretary of security, answered: "I discredit any claim which says there is a [North American] plan to establish an operative base." But he confirmed the existence of a combined US-Argentine operation under way in Salta that could constitute the beginning of such a project.

For over a year, members of the Gendarmeria Nacional police and the DEA have carried out an operation called "Operativo Area Frontera Norte," occupying a rented house in Calle Santiago del Estero in the provincial capital, Salta. About 30 Argentine policemen work there independently of their chain of command, under US supervision.

At his meeting with Argentine President Menem, McCaffrey talked about the deployment of a US "army delegation." An intelligence source said that McCaffrey prefers that term to "military base" because Argentine law forbids the presence of foreign troops on national territory.

A source close to the governor of Salta, Juan Carlos Romero, admitted that he knew about the operation but his opinion was never requested nor was he officially informed. "The government of this province does not know about the movements of that group," the source declared. Members of the group went to the US to be trained and have carried out special operations in Bolivia. DEA agents, just arrived from the US, visit Salta every week to complete the group's training. The autonomy of the group has generated tensions among the local authorities.

El Clarin said McCaffrey's warm reception in Argentina was bound up with the government's desire to be accepted into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which has thus far dealt Menem an embarrassing rejection. Facilitating these installations would not only demonstrate the seriousness with which the Argentine government approaches membership in the Western military alliance, but also its willingness to take concrete actions during the few remaining months of Menem's government.

An army source explained that there is another reason: "Brazil's refusal to accept an expansion of the US presence, under a strategic-military pretext or to reinforce the war against drugs." Brazil not only has refused to cooperate with an armed multinational

intervention in Colombia, but it sees in the expansion of military facilities in Colombia a threat that US intelligence would be directed toward the control of the whole Amazon region.

On September 5, *El Clarin* reported that the Argentine government had offered Washington the use of an army training ground in the Misiones jungle for a training operation by the US Army Green Berets. The US Army Southern Command is interested in finding new training grounds to replace the loss of its base in Panama.

The plan is to allow the Green Berets to train commandos in the Argentine army school in Misiones in exchange for the payment of the school's costs. Argentine soldiers already train together with the Green Berets every two or three years, but after this accord they would train more often.



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