Bush provokes protests—and police—in Chile

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US President George W. Bush's participation in the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Santiago, Chile provoked the largest popular demonstrations that the country has seen since the end of the US-backed dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet 14 years ago.

Some 50,000 people took to the streets, chanting, "We refuse to be an American colony." The protests were met by severe police repression, gassed from helicopters, hit by water cannon and subjected to baton charges by the Chilean Carabineros.

While the Carabineros were brutalizing protesters, other members of this militarized police force were clashing with Bush's security detail.

The US president sought to focus the APEC meeting on questions of terrorism and security, but the obsessive character of his own security precautions became the dominant theme of the summit.

Conflicts between the US Secret Service and the Carabinero presidential guard began even before Bush's arrival, when an American advance team conducted an inspection of the La Moneda presidential palace in Santiago, poking into 19th century brass cannons outside the building to see if they posed a threat to the US president.

On Saturday, at a dinner for the 21 heads of state attending the summit, tensions erupted into a shoving and shouting match between the Secret Service and the Chilean security detail. Apparently, the two sides reached an agreement that the US security detail would go through a separate entrance, but several of the bodyguards forced their way through behind Bush. The Chilean security detail responded by blocking others from going in, including Bush's "lead agent."

Bush, discovering that his main bodyguard had been stopped at the door, reached over the Chilean security agents and dragged the agent into the function. Videotape of the US president's intervention into the melee was replayed repeatedly on Chilean television. Popular reaction in Chile was one of disgust at the arrogance of the US president and his security agents, and the incident overshadowed any of the issues discussed at the summit.

On Sunday, US security demands prompted Chile's President Ricardo Lagos to cancel a state dinner that was to be attended by some 250 guests at La Moneda. US officials had insisted that all in attendance pass through a US-manned metal detector. Lagos rejected the US demand.

A senior Chilean diplomat told the daily *El Mercurio*, "President Lagos considered it unacceptable that the highest-ranking officials in the country and distinguished men of business would be submitted to a search that can be humiliating." Instead, the Chilean president held a "working dinner" for 20 people.

Finally, when Bush joined the 20 other heads of state for a group photograph marking the end of the summit, a Secret Service agent tried unsuccessfully to push through Chilean presidential guards to join him. "This is my president," the agent shouted. "This is my country," responded the Carabinero.

Ironically, La Moneda, the focus of the excessive US concerns over the US president's security, was the site where Chile's President Salvador Allende died in the US-backed military coup of September 11 1973.

Bush wrapped up his brief Latin American sojourn with a stop in the Colombian tourist center of Cartagena, for what amounted to a photo-op with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Velez. His four-hour visit to the war-torn country was accompanied by the mobilization of some 15,000 Colombian troops and police, together with large contingents of Secret Service agents and the deployment of warships and submarines off the coast and helicopters and fighter planes in the skies.

"We have reinforced security, taking into account

that in the countries he has visited there have been protests," explained Vice Admiral Fernando Roman, chief of operations of the Colombian Navy. "It is necessary to take additional measures to avoid this visit from being tarnished."