

Ex-Peruvian president Fujimori jailed after first trial

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Former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori was sentenced to six years in prison Tuesday, at the conclusion of the first in a series of trials in which he faces charges of corruption, abuse of power and responsibility for death squad massacres as well as other human rights atrocities committed during his decade of rule that began in 1990.

The entire process is expected to last until next July and, when it is over, Fujimori, 69, could be sentenced to 30 years in prison. The trials mark the first time that a former Peruvian president has been prosecuted for crimes carried out under his rule.

The first trial involved one of the lesser crimes of which he is accused, which was committed in 2000, as his presidency was wracked by a series of corruption scandals that followed the rigged election that handed him a third term in office that year.

In this proceeding, conducted in closed session before a single judge, Fujimori was charged with ordering a military aide to masquerade as a prosecutor and carry out an illegal raid on the apartment belonging to the wife of the president's key henchman, Vladimiro Montesinos.

Montesinos, who had fled the country just days before the raid, was Fujimori's chief advisor as well as the de facto chief of Peru's secret police apparatus. He had amassed a library of thousands of secretly filmed videotapes—popularly known as *vladivideos*—implicating Peruvian officials, politicians and businessmen in corruption scandals.

Police involved in the raid seized more than 70 suitcases and boxes filled with tapes and documents. They were taken to a military section of the Lima airport where Fujimori and his brother-in-law, then Peru's ambassador to Tokyo, went through them. Just days later, Fujimori himself fled Peru for Japan,

presumably taking the videotapes with him.

In Japan, the birthplace of his parents and where he holds dual citizenship, Fujimori gained support from the Japanese political right. In 2005, he flew to Chile, with the aim of going to Peru and running in the 2006 presidential election. He was detained by Chilean authorities, however, who extradited him last September to face the charges now being heard.

In a tactical bid to get the sentence reduced to a level that automatically triggers suspension of jail time, Fujimori “confessed” to abusing power in engineering the raid, while claiming that its purpose was to arrest Montesinos. The judge ruled the ex-president's admission as meaningless.

After the sentence was announced, supporters of Fujimori denounced and threatened prosecutors, warning that they would suffer consequences after 2011, when the next presidential election is scheduled. “And it could be much sooner, we’ll see,” Martha Moyano, a member of congress loyal to Fujimori, warned, according to the Peruvian daily *La Republica*.

Fujimori's own contrite attitude during the sentencing was in stark contrast to his outburst at the opening of another trial on Monday; this one involving the death squad massacres of La Cantuta and Barrios Altos.

After asking to briefly address the court before entering a plea, the ex-president delivered a tirade in his defense. Screaming and waving his arms, he declared: “I received Peru in 1990 in a state of collapse, with hyperinflation, international isolation, and widespread terrorism.” Claiming that his “reforms” and “respect for human rights” had yielded progress for Peru, Fujimori shouted, “I totally reject the charges. I am innocent.”

The so-called reforms included shutting down the

Peruvian congress, purging the judiciary and the imposition of martial law over three-quarters of the country. It also involved the wholesale privatization of Peru's state-owned enterprises and the sell-off of the most profitable assets to international capital.

As the main trial resumed on Wednesday, Fujimori claimed that he knew nothing of the operations of the Colina Group, the military death squad involved in the two massacres for which he is being tried.

The first took place on November 2, 1991, in an old and impoverished working class neighborhood of Lima known as Barrios Altos. A squad of eight men armed with automatic weapons and their faces covered by ski masks burst into a yard where local residents were holding a party. Forcing them to the ground, they raked them with machinegun fire and then one of the gunmen fired a bullet into each of the victims' heads. The 15 killed included men, women and one eight-year-old child, who was the last to die as he ran out, frightened, in search of his father, who already lay dead.

The second massacre took place on July 18, 1992, at La Cantuta University, a teachers college on the outskirts of Lima. The death squad burst into a residence hall, forcing students out of their rooms and ordering them to lie on the ground. The gunmen picked out nine students and one professor and took them to a desolate area of the city, where they were tortured and then executed. Their bodies were hastily buried in unmarked graves. Members of the military and the intelligence services later leaked details of the operation, including the location of the graves, which led to the recovery of the remains.

Fujimori's claims that he had nothing to do with these crimes are expected to be refuted by the military officer who directed the operations of the death squad, retired Captain Santiago Martín Rivas, who has stated publicly that the ex-president was fully aware of its activities, supporting them as a key component of the "dirty war" meant to wipe out popular support for the Maoist guerrilla movement, Sendero Luminoso.

Montesinos, with whom Fujimori claimed on Wednesday only to have had "hierarchical, functional" connections, is also expected to testify at the trial, as are former military commanders.

In this trial, Fujimori is also charged with ordering the kidnapping and torture of a businessman and a journalist. Subsequent trials will deal with corruption

charges, including a \$15 million payoff to Montesinos, the bribing of congressmen, the use of state funds to secure the support of a television station for his reelection and illegal wiretapping.

On the eve of the trial, human rights groups and other organizations organized a demonstration in Lima in remembrance of the 70,000 victims of the "dirty war" that raged in Peru from 1980 to 2000 and to demand justice in the Fujimori trial.

The Peruvian Association for Human Rights issued a statement declaring, "The trial of Fujimori constitutes a historic opportunity to judge an ex-head of state for grave violations of human rights, crimes of corruption and attacks on democratic institutions committed during his government."

Participating in the demonstration was Raida Condor, the mother of one of the slain La Cantuta students. "I have been a shadow of this murderer Fujimori," she told the Peruvian television station, Canal N. She said that she hoped Fujimori would feel her stare in the courtroom and said she would ask him, "Why did you kill my son? What was his crime?"

Fujimori's regime enjoyed close relations with Washington, which supported his policies. Montesinos was an asset of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The current Peruvian president, Alan Garcia, has sought to forge similar ties with Washington, while pursuing essentially the same free-market policies as Fujimori. Garcia could justifiably be tried for similar offenses, having presided during a previous term as president in the 1980s over Peru's dirty war and a series of massacres and death squad murders as well as wholesale corruption.

Garcia will be hosted by George W. Bush on Friday at the White House for the signing of a new US-Peruvian free trade agreement recently passed by the US Congress.



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