

Peru military-police scandal throws government into crisis

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The uncovering of the extra-legal provision of police protection to an individual—Oscar López Meneses—previously convicted of corruption, has rocked the Peruvian government of President Ollanta Humala as well as Peru's military and police forces. Various figures have been forced out of their posts, including some close to the president, and a congressional commission has been formed to investigate the matter, with the aim of citing Humala himself.

The exposure, carried out by the right-wing journalist Cecilia Valenzuela, was first published by the Peruvian daily *El Comercio* on November 13. It reported that a police guard had been deployed around the clock at the house of López Meneses and his father in the upper class Surco district of Lima. Some of these patrols were drawn from special operations units.

The trajectory and record of López Meneses personifies the putrefaction of Peruvian democracy under the dictatorial and corrupt government of former President Alberto Fujimori and his “intelligence advisor” Vladimiro Montesinos, which ruled Peru from 1990 to 2000. A former member of APRA and a dentist with a forged license, López Meneses rose in the 1990s to become a protégé of Montesinos, who was then the head of the Peruvian Intelligence Service, and was a partner in his web of corruption and spying.

According to Montesinos’ secretary, one of López Meneses’ jobs was to convince opposition politicians to join the ranks of the ruling party and support President Fujimori. For undertaking this task, according to the testimony of the secretary, he received up to \$150,000 that Montesinos stole from the state treasury. From this position, López Meneses created a network of contacts in every possible sector: the political parties, the chiefs of the police and armed forces, and

big business.

With the fall of the Fujimori government in 2000, López Meneses, like his boss Montesinos, fled the country. When the police raided his home that year, they found eavesdropping devices and weapons of war. This was the same house where police protection has been provided from June of this year, *El Comercio* reported. Deported from the US in 2003, López Meneses spent nine years in prison for embezzlement and illegal weapons possession. However, according to various reports, once free, López Meneses resumed his connections with the high command of the Peruvian army.

In the days following the *El Comercio* exposure, the questions on everyone’s lips was: “Why was so much police protection given to the home of Lopez Meneses?” and “Was there anything in the house that required a massive police protection?”

The journalist Rosa María Palacios, in her opinion column in the liberal daily *La República*, suggested two hypotheses: “The first and most serious would deal with a power structure parallel to the government (...), organized for the purpose of trafficking in information obtained illegally with instruments of the state (wiretaps), to push for promotion or advantageous positions in the distribution of power and make money from these illicit activities ... And in the second hypothesis, what is posed is that the police protection is a gift from the senior members of the police and the armed forces to López Meneses—who claims to have ‘an intimate friendship with the president’—for helping them with his wide connections and alleged influence in government.

Whatever the truth, the scandal has already taken its toll on the government. Three days after its exposure, amid the purge of police chiefs and internal accusations

over who ordered the police guard, Interior Minister Wilfredo Pedraza resigned, apparently under pressure from the president. Adrián Villafuerte, the president's security adviser—and according to some, "Humala's Montesinos"—in his first media appearance called RPP radio to deny links to López Meneses, although *El Comercio* reported a meeting between the two at a restaurant. Soon after, the government secretariat announced that Villafuerte had also resigned.

The Lima daily *La Republica* reported that the opposition "not content with the resignation of Pedraza also requested the removal of the advisor." (It is worth recalling that, by some accounts, it was Villafuerte who advised Humala to unleash greater repression against the protests against the Conga mining project in Cajamarca in 2011.)

While *El Comercio* and the rest of its newspapers and media—which comprise 70 percent of the print media in the country as well as the most watched the news channels—have emphasized connections between López Meneses and the Humala government, they have deliberately omitted the fact that Lopez Meneses and his illegal activities are a product of the authoritarian regime of Fujimori, who is imprisoned today on the outskirts of Lima for violations of human rights. This is because the Peruvian right and big business are preparing for the next elections. Polls indicate that the favorite so far is none other than Keiko Fujimori, daughter of the former dictator and leader of Popular Forces, the rightist party which upholds his policies. She is seen as the best option for Peruvian capitalism.

Palacios, concluding the aforementioned column, writes: "Who is reaping the benefits of the present crisis? Fujimoristas and Apristas who aggressively deny their obvious historical ties to López. Who loses? The president..."

Both Fujimori and APRA have reasons to want to provoke a governmental crisis of which they would be the main beneficiaries. A few months ago, Humala refused to pardon Fujimori when he claimed—it turned out, falsely—to be suffering from terminal cancer. He also refused to give him house arrest. The former dictator is being prosecuted again for another crime committed by his government: the misuse of the military budget to fund popular tabloids used to grotesquely attack opposition figures.

As for APRA, for months its main figure, former

President Alan García, has been investigated for "alleged irregularities" by his last government, including a case in which García, according to the testimony of various ex-convicts, had been the head of an organization that took in money from drug traffickers for reducing their sentence. García and his entourage have called this probe "political persecution" by the Humala government.

None of these parties is a mass movement, nor do any of them have any broad support in the working class. APRA, which was once a social democratic party that mobilized millions of Peruvians on the basis of reformist illusions ("Only APRA can save Peru") and was outlawed by various dictatorships, is now largely seen as a political mafia, which has as its nucleus a club of powerful professional lobbyists—including García.

Popular Force, however, is based on the populist legacy of Fujimori's government of the 1990s, which provided soup kitchens and other minimal assistance to the poorest layers of the society, while simultaneously coordinating mass repression, wholesale privatizations and the destruction of labor rights in the Peruvian working class.

In the last election in 2011, Fujimori's daughter made it into the second round before being defeated by Humala. Now, with whatever illusions generated by Humala's populist and nationalist rhetoric largely dissipated, these right-wing forces are able to engineer the resignation of his ministers and push his government even further to the right.



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