Pentagon sending troops to train Peruvian coup regime's killers

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The US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), the Pentagon's overseer for Latin America and the Caribbean, will be sending hundreds of Marines and special forces troops to Peru beginning as early as this week, to train military and Peruvian National Police special forces units. These same forces have carried out massacres and extra-judicial executions to suppress the mass protests against the coup regime of Dina Boluarte.

Peru's Congress, dominated by the ultra-right Fuerza Popular party and its allies, approved the US deployment by a two-to-one margin earlier this month. Congress has joined with the Boluarte regime and the judiciary in consolidating an authoritarian state to suppress Peru's restive working class and oppressed masses.

The repression of the mass upheavals that began last December in response to the ouster and arrest of President Pedro Castillo has resulted in an official death toll of nearly 70, many of the victims killed by live fire from the police and the military. Many hundreds more have been grievously wounded.

The dispatch of US troops to Peru, while largely blacked out by both the Peruvian and US media, constitutes an unmistakable demonstration of support on the part of the Biden administration and the Pentagon for this bloody repression. It is also a bid to exploit the crisis gripping the country to further American imperialist dominance in the region, using military means.

Peru's top prosecutor has summoned Boluarte to testify next week in an inquiry opened at the start of this year into her alleged role in the deaths of protesters killed in clashes with security forces after Castillo's ouster. She, along with top government ministers, are supposedly being investigated over alleged crimes of "genocide, aggravated homicide and serious injury."

A report issued last week by Amnesty International, however, strongly suggests that this probe is a sham. It states that Peru's Attorney General's office has yet to question a single member of the Peruvian security forces involved in the mass killings, while a "lack of resources, experts and prosecutors allocated to these cases, plus a series of institutional measures taken by the Attorney General ... have undermined investigation and the collection of key evidence."

The Amnesty report states that the use of live ammunition against unarmed protesters across four separate regions of Peru suggested the "responsibility of the most senior commanders, at least, of the Peruvian Nationalist Party and the Peruvian Army" in a "deliberate and coordinated state response" to drown the social protests in blood. It further charged that Boluarte and her ministers worked to "stigmatize" those being killed. They made "baseless statements that branded protesters as terrorists and praised the actions of the Peruvian security forces."

In reviewing the casualties in the conflict zones of Andahuaylas, Chincheros, Ayacucho and Juliaca, Amnesty identified a number of those killed as 15- and 16-year-old youth. Hilaria Aime Gutiérrez, mother of Christopher Ramos, killed by the military in Ayacucho, told the human rights group, "How can a 15-year-old child be a terrorist? How can a child who saved money every day to get ahead be a terrorist? (...) You cannot treat an adolescent like this, he was my little one, my beloved child."

Amnesty International warned that, as a result of recent laws and amendments passed by the right-wing Congress, Peru's security forces enjoy a level of impunity that allows those "responsible for serious violations of human rights to escape justice."

This impunity has only been widened with a recent ruling by Peru's supreme court that there effectively exists no right to protest under Peru's constitution, which was imposed by the dictatorial regime of Alberto Fujimori in 1993. The ruling was handed down in rejecting an appeal of four people convicted for participation in blocking trucks at the Las Bambas mining project, a common form of protest by peasant communities against the ravaging of their lands by the transnational mining corporations.

The high court found that any protest that "could" infringe upon anyone's rights or upon the workings of Peru's capitalist economic system—even if peaceful—constitutes criminal activity.

The Amnesty report follows another issued last month by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), of which Peru is a member. It likewise found the Peruvian police and army guilty of "excessive, indiscriminate and lethal use of force" in suppressing protests across the south of the country in December and January, following the ouster of Castillo. It also

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condemned the Boluarte regime for “the stigmatization” of peasants and indigenous peoples with the false accusations that they were “terrorists”, thereby justifying the massacres.

A similar conclusion was reached by Nyaletsossi Voule, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on the rights to peaceful assembly and association in a statement at the end of a recent 10-day official visit to Peru: “Excessive and disproportionate use of force led to the killing and injury of protestors and bystanders during the protests that began in December 2022.” He further insisted that “those responsible for human rights violations during the protests are effectively held to account.” Nothing of the kind, of course, has taken place.

This, then, is the pariah regime and its security forces to which the US military and the Biden administration is preparing to provide “support and assistance.” US troops are to be deployed to some of the same regions where streets were awash with blood and where new strikes and protests are being organized and prepared. They are being sent to help prop up a regime that is overwhelmingly hated by the Peruvian masses. The highest approval rating Boluarte has received in recent polls is 16 percent, while that of Congress is even lower.

Even as troops are being prepared for deployment to Peru, US SOUTHCOM on May 23 announced the appointment of a Peruvian general, Brig. Gen. Marco Marín, as the deputy commanding general-interoperability for US Army South, ensuring the closest collaboration between the Pentagon and Peru’s repressive security forces.

There is no question of mistaken identity involved here. The Boluarte regime was brought to power with the direct connivance of Washington. The US ambassador to Peru, Lisa Kenna, a CIA veteran and former top aide to Trump’s secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, on the very eve of the parliamentary coup that brought down Castillo, organized a meeting with Peruvian Defense Minister Gustavo Bobbias to ensure that the military would cast its deciding vote in favor of overthrowing the Peruvian president.

US SOUTHCOM’s Peruvian expedition exposes the rank hypocrisy of Washington’s incessant invocation of “human rights” as a cover for the pursuit of its imperialist interests, from Ukraine, to the Pacific and Latin America itself.

In Peru, these interests are obvious. The country is the world’s second-largest producer of copper, expected to mine 2.8 million tons this year. Exploration has begun in the southern region of Puno near the border with Bolivia for lithium deposits. Both metals are of strategic importance in the race for developing electric vehicles and “clean” energy. Peru is also an important producer of gold, zinc, silver and natural gas.

China has eclipsed the US as Peru’s main trading partner, while it has extensive investments in mining as well as in the development of infrastructure, including the only Chinese-run port in Latin America. Beijing and Lima have a free-trade agreement, and Peru has become part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative. According to China’s embassy in Peru, trade between the two countries topped $37 billion in 2021, more than double the amount between Peru and the US. For Latin America as a whole, trade with China has soared from $12 billion in 2000 to $495 billion in 2022.

The support for the coup regime and the deployment of troops in Peru is part of Washington’s strategy in the hemisphere. It is based upon a reliance on militarism and support of the region’s counterrevolutionary oligarchies to offset the dramatic erosion of US economic hegemony—all the while mouthing phrases about “human rights” and “democracy”.

In Peru, where six presidents have been ousted in five years and virtually every major political figure is implicated in corruption scandals, Washington is seeking to build up the military as an instrument for dominating the state and carrying out counterrevolutionary repression, while serving as a US-aligned counterbalance to China’s economic influence.

US imperialism’s determination to turn Latin America into a battlefield in the drive toward a third world war poses immense dangers to the masses of working people in the region. The US is reviving its well-worn methods of militarism, coups and dictatorship in its attempt to reassert hegemony in a region it long viewed contemptuously as its “own backyard”.

Bitter experience has proven that these threats cannot be countered by reliance on supposedly “left” bourgeois politicians and parties. From Castillo in Peru, to the PT in Brazil, the Boric government in Chile and elsewhere in the region, the so-called “pink tide” governments have only paved the way to the rise of the most right-wing forces and intensified attacks upon the working class.

The greatest danger facing the Latin American working class is the absence of a revolutionary leadership based on an internationalist and socialist program. This must be answered through the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

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