

Central America US War Drive

The Reagan Administration plans air strikes against Salvadorean freedom fighters who are thwarting US ambitions for strategic control.

In the May 7th edition, *Barricada International* commented: «The war against Nicaragua continues its course and the Contadora group has not been able to obtain a position in support of peace from Washington. So to speak of 'elections' in El Salvador is to speak of war, and of the dangers that the war may widen now with an 'elected' mask.»

This prediction has been amply substantiated: Clearly, the Reagan Administration sponsored the election of the relatively moderate Duarte as El Salvador's president in order to further its own regional military plans. Under the guise of checking the death squads, provisions are being made for yet more massive and systematic terror against the people of Central America. The proposals of Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) for dialogue with Duarte were swept aside. In mid-June, El Salvador's army, backed by the US and Honduras, launched a new offensive against the FMLN in the north of the country as an extension of the joint military maneuvers Grenadier I. Their counterinsurgency bogged down however; half the troops had to be diverted southwards as the FMLN attacked government forces close to the capital and took control of two strategic highways.

The Reagan Administration's latest remedy for the Salvadorean army's chronic failure is ordering the Pentagon to develop plans for US bombers to strike the FMLN as part of a new range of military and covert operations. Also the State and Defense Departments were instructed to devise ways of aiding Duarte's army if the US Congress fails to allocate the requested \$117 million. These measures are supposedly necessitated by US intelligence that there will be a new FMLN offensive this summer. Given the revolutionaries' steady advance, this would be natural. Yet there is more to the story than that. Reagan doesn't want his reelection campaign marred by FMLN victories.

The US administration is using the spectre of a communist victory in El Salvador to garner domestic support for strategic military presence in Central America. Concurrently, the June dispatch of the John F. Kennedy aircraft carrier off Nicaragua's coast, to remain until November, symbolizes the big stick Reagan is waving over the heads of the people of Central America. In short, imperialist blackmail similar to that used against the Soviet Union on the nuclear question is being enacted vis-a-vis Central America.

Permanent US military presence

Plans for using US bombers to stop the people's war in El Salvador are closely linked in aim and logistics to the efforts to undermine revolutionary Nicaragua. For both, the launching pad is Honduras where US military presence has become a permanent reality under the shadow of perpetual military maneuvers. The latest of these, Grenadier I, started in April with US Army engineers upgrading airstrips with 3,500 foot runways in Jamastrán, close to Nicaragua, and Cucuyagua, close to El Salvador.

These are part of a chain of military airports/bases created or planned, which can handle the big transport and fighter planes used by the US armed forces. The first phase of Grenadier I involved 2,800 US and Honduran troops in May. The second, staged on the borders with Guatemala and El Salvador in June, involved over 5,000, including for the first time Salvadorean troops. In the third phase, 750 paratroopers simulated seizure of an «enemy occupied airfield». After the US invasion of Grenada, this can only be interpreted as preparations for invading Nicaragua, or even Cuba.

The emphasis on constructing infrastructure makes these maneuvers synonymous with US bases. Today 1,700 troops are at Palmerola, where there has been US presence since the Big Pine maneuvers of February 1983. There are 1,000 US personnel at the regional military training center of Puerto Castillo, site of the bulk of counterinsurgency training for the Salvadorean army and other reactionary forces. There are also reports that the US army is constructing a base for 2,500 troops and an arsenal including highly toxic chemical weapons. Not surprisingly, the

