

The U.S. Army insisted on building the road in a river valley, despite Ecuadoran objections.

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classifying this work as "training," the Reagan administration has found a convenient way to circumvent congressional approval for their deployment.

The use of National Guard troops to implement a questionable foreign policy has alarmed many state governors. Last year seven of them publicly stated that if asked to send their troops to Central America they would refuse. The federal government's response to this show of resistance was the Montgomery Amendment, which revoked the power of state governors to deny a request from the federal government to deploy National Guard troops overseas. Attached to a routine budget bill, this amendment received only a 10-minute discussion on the House floor before being passed by a 261-159 vote in August 1986 and was later signed into law. Gov. Rudy Perpich of Minnesota challenged this restriction in court, claiming that it represented a federal encroachment of states' rights. He lost the first round in local court and his appeal to the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals is to be heard in February.

The presence of U.S. troops in Ecuador extends U.S. counterinsurgency policy beyond the Central American conflict by implementing it on the South American continent. Apart from the "training" the National Guard and the Army is receiving in Ecuador, the military is getting on-site, foreign logistical experience in operations conducted in secrecy. The U.S. troops enter and leave the country in their own planes without ever passing through local inspection or customs procedures. Not even the Ecuadoran military that guards the U.S. camp has access to it.

Opening the door: The Pentagon is keeping a sharp eye on the country's two neighbors, Colombia and Peru. Not only are both highly unstable politically, but they also have solidly entrenched guerrilla movements and are centers of international drug production and trade. If the movement in either of these countries begins to succeed, the Pentagon will have easy access to Ecuador. It will know how to enter directly and rapidly, which generals it can rely upon for support and what terrain is waiting for them. Ecuador is being groomed as a possible site for the making of "Honduras II" and National Guard troops are once again being used as frontmen.

Puerto Rican National Guard troops, with their Latin heritage and Spanish-speaking abilities, are ideally suited to prepare the way for a long-term U.S. military presence by reducing its "foreignness." It is not surprising then that Puerto Rican troops have been used heavily in this stint in Ecuador nor that the Army officially denies that they are even there.

Regardless of where they come from, the troops have created a climate of mistrust, anger and fear among the local population. One Archidona shopkeeper states emphatically that the U.S. troops were taking out samples of plutonium, uranium and iridium, citing a document found in the trash of the Army camp as his evidence. The townspeople are also upset about the negative impact the troops have had on



By Paul Little

ARCHIDONA, ECUADOR

THE PRESENCE OF U.S. ARMY AND NATIONAL Guard troops in Ecuador last year is a non-secret that no one seems to know about. Their arrival last May in the country's mineral-rich Amazonian jungle territory is one example of the U.S. military's quiet expansion of its Latin American operations that has major implications for future U.S. involvement in the region.

Seven thousand National Guard troops rotated in and out of Ecuador last year in groups of 600 to 800 per two-week duty. These troops came from Puerto Rico and the Southeastern U.S. and included some of the same units that participated in the Blazing Trails and Kindle Liberty war games held in Panama in 1985. Blazing Trails is also the name of the Ecuadoran operation and is the first major use of National Guard troops on the South American continent. In addition, the troops were supervised by at least 78 U.S. Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force regulars, making it one of the largest U.S. military contingents operating in South America.

The troops were ostensibly in Ecuador to build a road connecting with the rest of the country several jungle towns that had been cut off from basic supplies and services by the devastating earthquake that rocked Ecuador last March 4. The offer to send U.S. troops and machinery to build this road in a six-month operation was made by Vice President George Bush during his whirlwind four-and-a-half-hour visit to Quito, the nation's capital, shortly after the quake. Ecuadoran President Leon Febres Cordero, a millionaire businessman and one of President Reagan's staunchest supporters in

Latin America, willingly accepted the offer.

Problems arose, however, in the negotiations between the Ecuadoran government and the U.S. Army about the route of the road. The local Ministry of Public Works selected a 25-kilometer stretch of jungle as the best site for the new road. The Army balked at this proposal, claiming that the terrain was too rocky. Instead it insisted on building a 65-kilometer road along a river valley that the Ministry of Public Works claimed was on soft terrain. The solution to this impasse was to build two roads parallel to each other that start and finish at virtually the same place: one built by Ecuadorans and the other by the U.S. Army.

The Americans arrive: Last May 15 hundreds of Army regulars and National Guardsmen arrived at the quiet jungle town of Archidona to set up camp. They shipped in hundreds of heavy machines, earth-movers and bulldozers that were inappropriate for the soft jungle soil and that regularly sank in the mud. The torrential jungle rains that came afterward merely added to the problem.

When the pre-allotted six months expired on November 15—after more than 800,000 man-hours of labor—the U.S. troops had completed only six of the projected 65 kilometers of road. But the Ecuadoran crew building the parallel road completed the 25-kilometer stretch on September 30, reuniting the isolated jungle towns with the rest of the country and thereby rendering unnecessary the Army's six-kilometer road that leads to a dead end in the jungle.

The troops left last month, though U.S. Ambassador to Ecuador Fernando Rondon has announced that the troops are willing to come back to finish the project. At their current rate of work, it would take at least

five years to build the road. Soldiers at the army encampment in Archidona indicated that the troops could be back early this year to continue the job depending upon who wins the Ecuadoran presidential elections at the end of the month.

This pattern of inefficiency repeats the experience of yet another Blazing Trails project in Honduras. The U.S. National Guard began building a short road in central Honduras three years ago and, though thousands of troops early this year moved in and out of the project, it is still not finished and they plan to continue construction through 1988. These are part of the 63,000 National Guard troops that have been sent to Central America since 1975.

The use of National Guard troops for what are apparently "humanitarian" projects is an integral part of the "low-intensity conflict" strategy being implemented by the Pentagon in Latin America. The civic action units, public relations officers and medical teams that have accompanied the Guard troops building this road are part of an effort to "win the hearts and minds" of the local population.

Changing role: Peggy Moore, coordinator of the National Guard Clearinghouse in St. Louis, explains, "The role of the National Guard has changed dramatically in recent years. Today National Guard units have ceased to be mere state militias and are being fully integrated into the larger military infrastructure. The real business of the guard troops in Central America is counterinsurgency and the U.S. militarization of the region."

The importance of this development is highlighted by the fact that 46 percent of the U.S. Army's total combat strength is made up of Guard troops. Furthermore, by

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their town.

They have attracted prostitutes from all parts of the country who make fast and good money. According to the local grapevine, these women receive up to \$30 per customer—or nearly half the \$65 basic monthly income of an Ecuadorian factory worker. The townspeople are also concerned about the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases, especially AIDS.

Last October the big rumor around town concerned an alleged battle between Ecuadorian police and Colombian guerrillas in a nearby jungle area. No one seemed to have any hard facts, but hearsay alone caused panic in the U.S. camp command. Soldiers were prohibited from going into town for three days. Fear of the guerrillas led to a farcical situation: the Ecuadorian army surrounded the camp to protect the U.S. Army from what turned out to be two armed bandits.

Local opposition: A key difference between Ecuador's Blazing Trails project and its Honduran counterpart is that the Ecuadorans have protested the U.S. military presence from its inception. The opposition-controlled Ecuadorian Congress debated the issue of the U.S. troops in the country and concluded that they represented a "direct violation of the sovereignty of Ecuador." In a majority vote lawmakers expelled the troops from the country, but this proved to be yet another ineffectual gesture against an authoritarian and all-powerful executive. The president simply ignored the congress-

sional expulsion and the troops stayed.

A Committee for National Sovereignty has been formed by more than 20 youth, Christian and women's organizations to oppose the U.S. Army's occupation of part of their territory. The group launched a petition drive calling for the immediate removal of the troops from Ecuador and spearheaded a large *comparsa* (masquerade march) in protest to their presence. In addition, anti-American graffiti has multiplied many times over and, in one form or another, carries that age-old Latin American message: Yankee Go Home.

In the name of development: The intensity of this resistance is the result of a long history of U.S. imperialism in Ecuador that has focused upon the country's extensive Amazonian jungle territory. Though it is a sparsely populated area, it has great geographical importance, is rich in strategic minerals and offers enormous profit-making possibilities. The majority of Ecuador's oil, which accounts for more than 65 percent of its export income, is in the region. The nation's free-market-oriented president, Febres Cordero, has sharply limited the role of CEPE, the national oil consortium, in new oil exploration. The jungle has been divided up and auctioned off to foreign oil companies, most of them American, which are aggressively making oil explorations and will be the owners of whatever oil they find.

African palm tree plantations offer foreign investors yet another get-rich-quick

scheme. By clear-cutting the jungle and planting African palm, they can make exorbitant profits in the short term by selling palm oil on the international market. In the long term, however, the trees' oily content contaminates the soil and the rivers, thereby destroying fish, animals and vegetation and leaving the fragile jungle ecosystem in shambles.

This blind exploitation of the Amazon basin, done in the name of "development," has had an even more devastating impact on the areas' Indian tribes. Ecuador's jungle tribes, as with those in most parts of the Amazon basin, still live a life closely tied to the land. A small band of Indians lives by hunting, fishing, gathering and seasonal planting over a wide area of jungle that for centuries has been their homeland. The Ecuadorian government does not recognize these historical claims to the land and classifies any uncultivated jungle land as "vacant," which gives them the "right" to sell it to oil companies, foreign investors or mestizo settlers. This pushes the Indian tribes farther into the jungle in search of subsistence.

"Obstacles" to progress: As part of their development strategy, the government has sought to "civilize" these Indian tribes so that they can be "integrated into the national life." This effort is spearheaded by the numerous evangelical sects that have been introduced into the country and especially into its jungle areas. More than 400 religious sects are currently operating in

Ecuador and their presence has become an issue of national concern.

The evangelicals' work with Amazonian tribes, apart from Christianizing them, also seeks to "Westernize" them. The introduction of manufactured goods and modern clothes attempts to integrate them into the nation's consumer market while the propagation of individualist ideologies tries to change their communal ways, which are seen as an obstacle to progress.

These sects have deeply divided Indian communities and have been widely denounced by Amazonian Indian organizations. One of the oldest and largest of these sects, the Summer Institute of Linguistics based in California, was expelled from the country in 1981 for "working against the national interest." They have recently been allowed to re-enter the country with the blessing of President Febres Cordero.

Expanding "democracy": The deployment of U.S. troops to Ecuador's Amazon jungle is an alarming new expansion of the Pentagon's militarization of Latin America. Yet at the same time it continues a broader policy geared toward increasing U.S. corporate penetration in this vital area of the world. Providing earthquake relief has proved an excellent pretext for this policy, and all Ecuador has to show for it is a six-kilometer road to nowhere. □

Paul Little is a free-lance journalist and development specialist. He has lived in Ecuador the past four years.

Unwelcome guests: the U.S. Army camp in Archidona.



Paul Little