

Secret Wars, Secret Bases, and the Pentagon's "New Spice Route"

Obama's Scramble for Africa

by Nick Turse

They call it the New Spice Route, an homage to the medieval trade network that connected Europe, Africa, and Asia, even if today's "spice road" has nothing to do with cinnamon, cloves, or silks. Instead, it's a superpower's superhighway, on which trucks and ships shuttle fuel, food, and military equipment through a growing maritime and ground transportation infrastructure to a network of supply depots, tiny camps, and airfields meant to service a fast-growing US military presence in Africa.

Few in the US know about this superhighway, or about the dozens of training missions and joint military exercises being carried out in nations that most Americans couldn't locate on a map. Even fewer have any idea that military officials are invoking the names of Marco Polo and the Queen of Sheba as they build a bigger military footprint in Africa. It's all happening in the shadows of what in a previous imperial age was known as "the Dark Continent."

In East African ports, huge metal shipping containers arrive with the everyday necessities for a military on the make. They're then loaded onto trucks that set off down rutted roads toward dusty bases and distant outposts.

On the highway from Djibouti to Ethiopia, for example, one can see the bare outlines of this shadow war at the truck stops where local drivers take a break from their long-haul routes. The same is true in other African countries. The nodes of the network

out pinpoint missions. Barnes did admit that in "several locations in Africa, AFRICOM has a small and temporary presence of personnel. In all cases, these military personnel are guests within host-nation facilities, and work alongside or coordinate with host-nation personnel."

Shadow wars

In 2003, when CJTF-HOA was first set up there, it was indeed true that the only major US outpost in Africa was Camp Lemonnier. In the ensuing years, in quiet and largely unnoticed ways, the Pentagon and the CIA have been spreading their forces across the continent. Today—official designations aside—the US maintains a surprising number of bases in Africa. And "strengthening" African armies turns out to be a truly elastic rubric for what's going on.

Under President Obama, in fact, operations in Africa have accelerated far beyond the more limited interventions of the Bush years: last year's war in Libya; a regional drone campaign with missions run out of airports and bases in Djibouti, Ethiopia, and the Indian Ocean archipelago nation of Seychelles; a flotilla of 30 ships in that ocean supporting regional operations; a multi-pronged military and CIA cam-

...Department of Defense personnel are assigned to US embassies across Africa....

tell part of the story: Manda Bay, Garissa, and Mombasa in Kenya; Kampala and Entebbe in Uganda; Bangui and Djema in the Central African Republic; Nzara in South Sudan; Dire Dawa in Ethiopia; and the Pentagon's showpiece African base, Camp Lemonnier, in Djibouti on the coast of the Gulf of Aden, among others.

According to Pat Barnes, a spokesman for US Africa Command (AFRICOM), Camp Lemonnier serves as the only official US base on the continent. "There are more than 2,000 US personnel stationed there," he told TomDispatch recently by email. "The primary AFRICOM organization at Camp Lemonnier is Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA). CJTF-HOA's efforts are focused in East Africa and they work with partner nations to assist them in strengthening their defense capabilities."

Barnes also noted that Department of Defense personnel are assigned to US embassies across Africa, including 21 individual offices of security cooperation responsible for facilitating military-to-military activities with "partner nations." He characterized the forces involved as small teams carrying

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paign against militants in Somalia, including intelligence operations, training for Somali agents, a secret prison, helicopter attacks, and US commando raids; a massive influx of cash for counterterrorism operations across East Africa; a possible old-fashioned air war, carried out on the sly in the region using manned aircraft; tens of millions of dollars in arms

for allied mercenaries and African troops; and a special ops expeditionary force (bolstered by State Department experts) dispatched to help capture or kill Lord's Resistance Army leader Joseph Kony and his senior commanders. And this only begins to scratch the surface of Washington's fast-expanding plans and activities in the region.

To support these mushrooming missions, near-constant training operations, and alliance-building

...US special operations forces are engaged in missions against the Lord's Resistance Army....

joint exercises, outposts of all sorts are sprouting continent-wide, connected by a sprawling shadow logistics network. Most American bases in Africa are still small and austere, but growing ever larger and more permanent in appearance. For example, photographs from last year of Ethiopia's Camp Gilbert, examined by TomDispatch, show a base filled with air-conditioned tents, metal shipping containers, and 55-gallon drums and other gear strapped to pallets, but also recreation facilities with TVs and videogames, and a well-appointed gym filled with stationary bikes, free weights, and other equipment.

Continental drift

After 9/11, the US military moved into three major regions in significant ways: South Asia (primarily Afghanistan), the Middle East (primarily Iraq), and the Horn of Africa. Today, the US is drawing down in Afghanistan and has largely left Iraq. Africa, however, remains a growth opportunity

for the Pentagon.

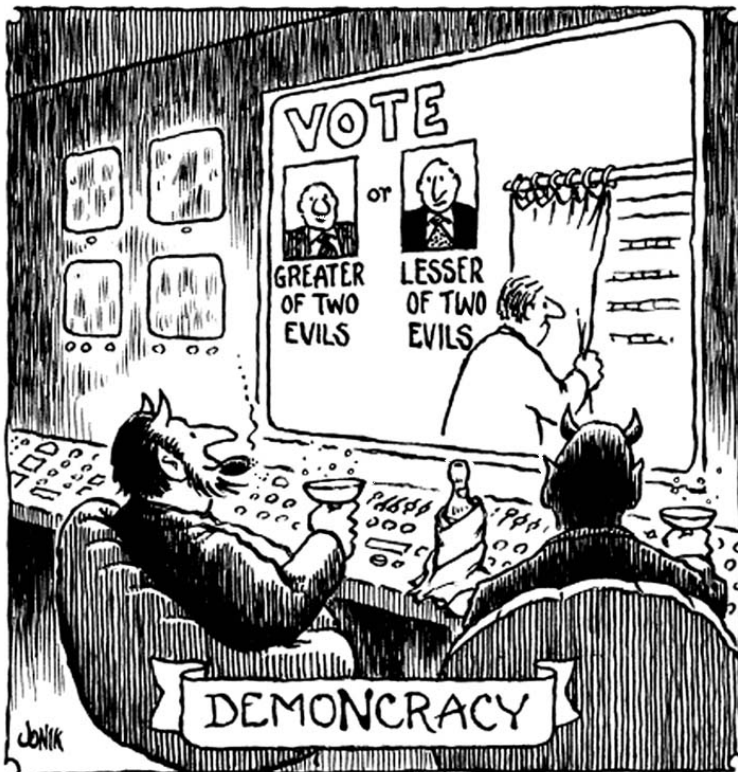
The US is now involved, directly and by proxy, in military and surveillance operations against an expanding list of regional enemies. They include al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in North Africa; the Islamist movement Boko Haram in Nigeria; possible al-Qaeda-linked militants in post-Qaddafi Libya; Joseph Kony's murderous Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the Central African Republic, Congo, and South Sudan; Mali's Islamist Rebels of the Ansar Dine; al-Shabaab in Somalia; and guerrillas from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula across the Gulf of Aden in Yemen.

A recent investigation by the *Washington Post* revealed that contractor-operated surveillance aircraft based out of Entebbe, Uganda, are scouring the territory used by Kony's LRA at the Pentagon's behest, and that 100–200 US commandos share a base with the Kenyan military at Manda Bay. Additionally, US drones are being flown out of Arba Minch airport in Ethiopia and from the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean, while drones and F-15 fighter-bombers have been operating out of Camp Lemonnier as part of the shadow wars being waged by the US military and the CIA in Yemen and Somalia. Surveillance planes used for spy missions over Mali, Mauritania, and the Sahara desert are also flying missions from Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, and plans are reportedly in the works for a similar base in the newborn nation of South Sudan.

US special operations forces are stationed at a string of even more shadowy forward operating posts on the continent, including one in Djema in the Central African Republic and others in Nzara in South Sudan and Dungu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The US also has had troops deployed in Mali, despite having officially suspended military relations with that country following a coup.

According to research by TomDispatch, the US Navy also has a forward operating location, manned mostly by Seabees, Civil Affairs personnel, and force-protection troops, known as Camp Gilbert in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. US military documents indicate that there may be other even lower-profile US facilities in the country. In addition to Camp Lemonnier, the US military also maintains another hole-and-corner outpost in Djibouti—a Navy port facility that lacks even a name. AFRICOM did not respond to requests for further information on these posts before this article went to press.

Additionally, US special operations forces are engaged in missions against the Lord's Resistance Army from a rugged camp in Obo in the Central African Republic, but little is said about that base either. "US military personnel working with regional militaries in the hunt for Joseph Kony are guests of the African security forces comprising the regional counter-LRA effort," Barnes told me. "Specifically in Obo, the troops live in a small camp and work with partner nation troops at a



Ugandan facility that operates at the invitation of the government of the Central African Republic.”

And that’s still just part of the story. US troops are also working at bases inside Uganda. Earlier this year, elite Force Recon Marines from the Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force 12 (SPMAGTF-12) trained soldiers from the Uganda People’s Defense Force, which not only runs missions in the Central African Republic, but also acts as a proxy force for the US in Somalia in the battle against the Islamist militants known as al-Shabaab. They now supply the majority of the troops to the African Union Mission protecting the US-supported government in the Somali capital, Mogadishu.

In the spring, Marines from SPMAGTF-12 also trained soldiers from the Burundi National Defense Force (BNDF), the second-largest contingent in Somalia. In April and May, members of Task Force Raptor, 3rd Squadron, 124th Cavalry Regiment of the Texas National Guard took part in a training mission with the BNDF in Mudubugu, Burundi.

In February, SPMAGTF-12 sent trainers to Djibouti to work with an elite local army unit, while other Marines traveled to Liberia to focus on teach-



be able to fulfill the demand by using conventional forces,” Colonel Andrew Dennis told a reporter about the deployment.

Air Africa

The *Washington Post* revealed that, since at least 2009, the “practice of hiring private companies to spy on huge expanses of African territory ... has been a cornerstone of the US military’s secret activities on the continent.” Dubbed Tusker Sand, the project consists of contractors flying from Entebbe airport in Uganda and a handful of other airfields. They pilot turbo-prop planes that look innocuous but are packed with sophisticated surveillance gear.

America’s mercenary spies in Africa are, however, just part of the story.

While the Pentagon canceled an analogous drone surveillance program dubbed Tusker Wing, it has spent millions of dollars to upgrade the civilian airport at Arba Minch, Ethiopia, to enable drone missions to be flown from it. Infrastructure to support such operations has been relatively cheap and easy to construct, but a much more daunting problem looms—one intimately connected to the New Spice Route.

...diplomatic clearances and airfield restrictions on US military aircraft cost the Pentagon time and money....

ing riot-control techniques to Liberia’s military as part of what is otherwise a State Department-directed effort to rebuild that force.

In addition, the US is conducting counterterrorism training and equipping militaries in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Niger, and Tunisia. AFRICOM also has 14 major joint-training exercises planned for 2012, including operations in Morocco, Cameroon, Gabon, Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho, Senegal, and Nigeria.

The size of US forces conducting these joint exercises and training missions fluctuates, but Barnes told me that, “on an average basis, there are approximately 5,000 US Military and DoD personnel working across the continent” at any one time. Next year, even more American troops are likely to be on hand as units from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, known as the “Dagger Brigade,” are scheduled to deploy to the region. The roughly 3,000 soldiers in the brigade will be involved in, among other activities, training missions while acquiring regional expertise. “Special Forces have a particular capability in this area, but not the capacity to fulfill the demand, and we think we will

...the “practice of hiring private companies to spy on African territory has been a cornerstone of US secret activities....”

“Marco Polo wasn’t just an explorer,” Army planner Chris Zahner explained at a conference in Djibouti last year. “[H]e was also a logistician developing logistics nodes along the Silk Road. Now let’s do something similar where the Queen of Sheba traveled.” Paeans to bygone luminaries aside, the reasons for pouring resources into sea and ground

supply networks have less to do with history than with Africa's airport infrastructure.

Of the 3,300 airfields on the continent identified in a National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency review, the Air Force has surveyed only 303 of them and just 158 of those surveys are current. Of those airfields that have been checked out, half won't support the weight of the C-130 cargo planes that the US military leans heavily on to transport troops and materiel. These limitations were driven home during Natural Fire 2010, one of that year's joint training exercises hosted by AFRICOM. When C-130s were unable to use an airfield in Gulu, Uganda, an extra \$3 million was spent instead to send in Chinook helicopters.

In addition, diplomatic clearances and airfield restrictions on US military aircraft cost the Pentagon time and money, while often raising local suspicion and ire. In a recent article in the military trade publication *Army Sustainment*, Air Force Major Joseph

One military intervention ... led to three major instances of blowback in a neighboring country in just a year.

Gaddis touts an emerging solution: outsourcing. The concept was tested during 2011, during another AFRICOM training operation, Atlas Drop 2011.

"Instead of using military airlift to move equipment to and from the exercise, planners used commercial freight vendors," writes Gaddis. "This provided exercise participants with door-to-door delivery service and eliminated the need for extra personnel to channel the equipment through freight and customs areas." Using mercenary cargo carriers to skirt diplomatic clearance issues and move cargo to airports that can't support US C-130s is, however, just one avenue the Pentagon is pursuing to support its expanding operations in Africa.

Another is construction.

The great build-up

Military contracting documents reveal plans for an investment of up to \$180 million or more in construction at Camp Lemonnier alone. Chief among the projects will be the laying of 54,500 square meters of taxiways "to support medium-load aircraft" and the construction of a 185,000 square meter Combat Aircraft Loading Area. In addition, plans are in the works to erect modular maintenance structures, hangars, and ammunition storage facilities, all needed for an expanding set of secret wars in Africa.

Other contracting documents suggest that, in the years to come, the Pentagon will be investing up to \$50 million in new projects at that base, Kenya's Camp Simba, and additional unspecified locations in Africa. Still other solicitation materials suggest future military construction in Egypt, where the Pentagon already maintains a medical research facility, and still more work in Djibouti.

No less telling are contracting documents indicating a coming influx of "emergency troop housing" at Camp Lemonnier, including almost 300 additional Containerized Living Units (CLUs, stackable, air-conditioned living quarters) as well as latrines and laundry facilities.

Military documents also indicate that a nearly \$450,000 exercise facility was installed at the US base in Entebbe, Uganda, in 2011. All of this indicates that, for the Pentagon, its African build-up has only begun.

The scramble for Africa

In a speech in Arlington, Virginia, AFRICOM Commander General Carter Ham explained the reasoning behind US operations on the continent: "The absolute imperative for the United States military [is] to protect America, Americans, and American interests; in our case, in my case, [to] protect us from threats that may emerge from the African continent." As an example, Ham named the Somali-based al-Shabaab as a prime threat. "Why do we care about that?" he asked rhetorically. "Well, al-Qaeda is a global enterprise... we think they very clearly do present, as an al-Qaeda affiliate... a threat to America and Americans."

Fighting them over there so we don't need to fight them here has been a core tenet of American foreign policy for decades, especially since 9/11. But trying to apply military solutions to complex political and social problems has regularly led to unforeseen consequences. For example, last year's US-supported war in Libya resulted in masses of well-armed Tuareg mercenaries, who had been fighting for Libyan autocrat Muammar Qaddafi, heading back to Mali where they helped destabilize that country. So far, the result has been a military coup by an American-trained officer; a takeover of some areas by Tuareg fighters of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, who had previously raided Libyan arms depots; and other parts of the country being seized by the irregulars of Ansar Dine, the latest al-Qaeda "affiliate" on the American radar. One military intervention, in other words, led to three major instances of blowback in a neighboring country in just a year.

With the Obama administration clearly engaged in a twenty-first century scramble for Africa, the possibility of successive waves of overlapping blowback grows exponentially. Mali may only be the beginning, and there's no telling how any of it will end. In the meantime, keep your eye on Africa. The US military is going to make news there for years to come.

Nick Turse is the managing editor of TomDispatch.com and a fellow at the Nation Institute. An award-winning journalist, his work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Nation*. He is the author/editor of several books, including the just published *The Changing Face of Empire: Special Ops, Drones, Spies, Proxy Fighters, Secret Bases, and Cyber Warfare* (Haymarket Books). This article originally appeared on TomDispatch.com.

Latin America Moves Left and Forward

by Carmelo Ruiz-Marrero

The Foro de Sao Paulo (FSP), a forum that brings together most of the Latin American left, had its 18th meeting in the Venezuelan city of Caracas on July 4–6, 2012. In attendance were representatives of practically all of the Foro's member organizations, including El Salvador's FMLN, Nicaragua's Sandinistas, Guatemala's URNG (all three of them former guerrilla groups), the Cuban Communist Party, Ecuador's Alianza PAIS, Uruguay's Frente Amplio, Bolivia's Movement Toward Socialism and the Puerto Rico Socialist Front, as well as leftist and socialist political parties from countries like Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Barbados and Argentina.

The host country's left pulled out all stops in helping to organize the event. Countless youth volunteers of the ruling party—president Hugo Chavez's PSUV—looked after every detail of logistics and protocol, and the local Communist Party, the PCV, was also out in force. There was also a substantial number of observers and dignitaries from other parts of the world, including Russia, China, Vietnam, Saharawi, Lebanon, Palestine, France, Spain and Greece. VIPs included Nobel laureate Rigoberta Menchú from Guatemala, and writers Ignacio Ramonet and Atilio Boron, who sat in places of honor near President Chavez at the closing activity.

Brazil's delegation, which included the ruling Workers' Party (PT) and the Communist Party (PcdoB, now celebrating its 90 years), had a commanding presence in Caracas. The PT was indeed the main driving force behind the FSP's founding, and the meeting's proceedings were presided over by the extremely capable Brazilian political strategist Valter Pomar, who is not only the Foro's executive secretary but also a member of the PT's top leadership.

Currently one of the world's leading economies, Brazil has a gross domestic product dozens of times the size of any of its neighbors'. The country's political and economic shadow looms over all South America. The PT has won the last three presidential elections—in the first two of these the winning candidate was former factory worker and labor organizer Luiz Inacio "Lula" Da Silva, and the current president is the former guerrilla and political pris-

Socialism is becoming an increasingly mainstream proposition except in the USA...

oner Dilma Rousseff. It must be regarded as the most important political institution of the Latin American left and one of the single most important political parties in the hemisphere. Lula fully intended to come to Caracas but could not do so due to health problems. He did, however, send a video greeting in which he expressed support for President Chavez's reelection bid.

The FSP is definitely not to be confused with the World Social Forum, which also began in Brazil. Whereas the Social Fora are non-partisan, the Foro de Sao Paulo is openly, brazenly and proudly partisan and leftist. The terms of debate and discussion at the FSP are far to the left of what most American progressives would be willing to consider. In it there is open talk of class struggle, anti-imperialism, wealth redistribution and, yes, the dreaded "s" word, socialism. Socialism is indeed becoming an increasingly mainstream proposition all over the world—except in the USA, where the word is still used as an insult.

I must have been the only delegate in Caracas that noticed the total absence of Americans, which

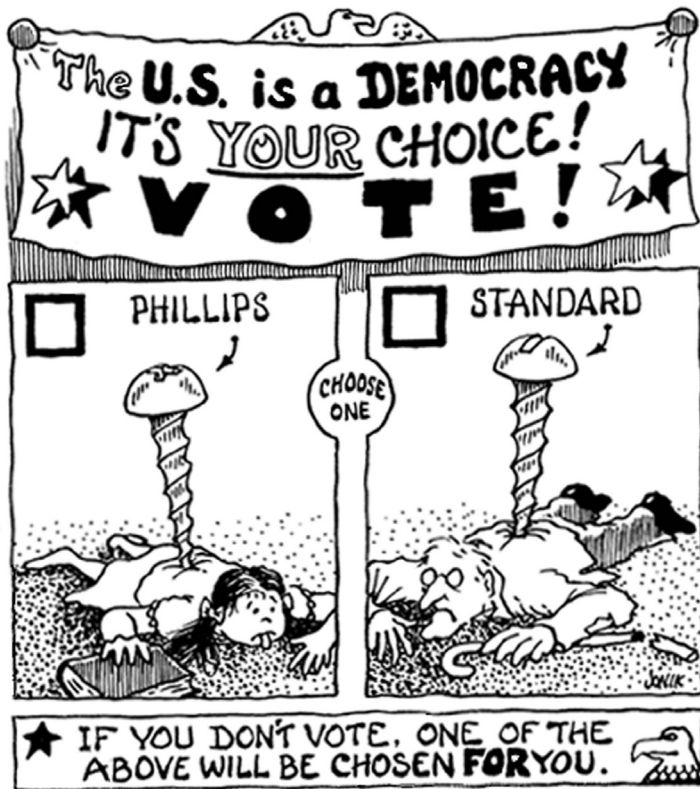
...the total absence of Americans says plenty about the provincialism of most American leftists and progressives.

says plenty about the provincialism of most American leftists and progressives. But on the other hand, it was also evident that the Americans were not missed at all; nobody bemoaned their absence. Latin America is increasingly looking south. Only the right wing and ruling classes are looking north for answers and help in these changing times.

A little history

The FSP was founded in 1990, when the left was in its worst moment. The collapse of the Eastern European socialist bloc, the Soviet Union's implosion, Tiananmen Square, the Sandinista electoral defeat. But the outlook was not all bad. After all, the dictatorships in South America and the genocidal wars in Central America were coming to an end, Haiti had its first freely elected president, Mandela was free and so was Namibia, apartheid ended, the Iran-Iraq war stopped, and cold war conflict zones like Afghanistan and Angola were cooling off.

However, the new post-cold war "democracy" was a hollow political formality. The doctrine of neoliberalism reigned supreme—all talk of social justice, labor organizing and addressing economic inequality, or even merely suggesting that another world was possible, was thrown out the window.



Leftists were jumping ship all over the place, repenting of their past and repackaging themselves into something more user-friendly.

Brazil's PT, back then an opposition party, formed the Foro as a rallying point for all the stalwarts who refused to let the dream die, who insisted on believing in socialism and on choosing the difficult road, the one that leads to the rational society where there are no oppressors or oppressed.

How have times changed since then! The FMLN, which in the 1980s was an outlaw band of guerrillas that the US was bent on stamping out, won the last presidential election in El Salvador, the Sandinistas are back in power in Nicaragua, in Uruguay the leftist Frente Amplio has won its second presidential election in a row and its current president,

The PT's political line is felt all over the world thanks to Brazil's activist foreign policy...

José Mujica, is a former Tupamaro guerrilla, the Cuban revolution survives, the people of Ecuador and Bolivia overthrew neoliberal governments and rewrote their countries' constitutions, and Venezuela's president Chavez, reviled by the corporate media, gets reelected again and again.

Brazil is now practically a different country. The PT has rescued the country from neoliberal stagnation and turned it into the world's sixth economy. The national oil company Petrobras is the world's second largest, larger than Microsoft and Wal-Mart. Brazil's government development bank, BNDES, is by far the largest public sector develop-

ment funder in the world—yes, larger than the World Bank. Sao Paulo's stock exchange is the world's second largest. The PT's political line is felt all over the world thanks to Brazil's activist foreign policy, which is forging solid trade and diplomatic links not only with Latin American neighbors but also with countries in Africa, the Middle East, the Asia Pacific region, China and India. Brazil is one of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) countries, which together are expected to outgrow the G7 economies by 2032.

And then there are the regional initiatives. The governments of Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela teamed up with civil society activists in trashing then-US president George Bush's proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas and replaced it with the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA). And in the last couple of years, under the initiative of Hugo Chávez, the region's countries are grouping together as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which explicitly excludes the US and Canada. When was the last time that the US progressive media even mentioned this last development?

Caracas 2012

The Caracas FSP meeting took place in a context of upbeat optimism in the face of these substantial advances. But there is also concern and precaution because of the actions of an implacable enemy that refuses to give up. Only two weeks earlier Paraguay's president Fernando Lugo was overthrown by the country's right-wing and oligarch-dominated legislature. The coups d'état in recent years in Honduras, Venezuela and Ecuador—only the first of these successful—were fresh in the memory of all those present. The meeting's final document, the Caracas Declaration, stated that, "The Honduras coup and the overthrow of Fernando Lugo indicate that the right is willing to use violent means or the manipulation of institutional means to overthrow governments that do not serve its interests."

All over Caracas, on every street corner, there was overwhelming evidence that the presidential campaign had started. It is a totally polarized country. Its public life has no room for the dilettante or the undecided. The tension in the streets was palpable. The Paraguay coup and the even more recent massive electoral fraud in Mexico, courtesy of the right-wing PAN party, are making the mix more volatile. Opinion polls agreed that Chavez had a solid advantage over his rival, the reactionary Capriles-Radonsky.

The meeting's participants were emphatic in condemning the starring role of right-wing news media in the subversion against progressive governments and against the region's leftward trend (If you think Bill O'Reilly and Glenn Beck are bad, you should see what's on Latin America's right-wing television.) Quoting the Caracas Declaration again, "The right wing has unleashed a broad media cam-

paign operated internationally through powerful communications consortia... Major corporations develop destabilization plans and behave as factors of power, capable of placing themselves above the public powers that emanate from universal suffrage. Large media enterprises defy democracy and its institutions on a daily basis. This is perhaps one of the biggest challenges that leftist governments face: democratizing communications.”

The Caracas Declaration also included expressions of solidarity with the Haitian and Paraguayan people in their struggles against oppression, with the Colombia peace process, and with presidents Correa of Ecuador and Morales of Bolivia. The document also declares support for Palestinian self-determination, for the release of Puerto Rican political prisoner Oscar Lopez, who has been incarcerated in the US for 31 years, opposition to military intervention in Syria and Iran, and has statements on other issues such as the environment and discrimination against women.

With regards to decolonization, it calls for the return of the Falkland islands to Argentina, the self-determination and independence of Puerto Rico, the decolonization of the French and Dutch Guyanas, and support for the brave struggle of Northwest Africa’s Saharawi. Valter Pomar presented Ecuador’s chancellor Ricardo Patino, who was in Caracas heading his country’s delegation, with an FSP declaration calling on his country to give asylum to Wikileaks’ Julian Assange.

A long way to go

But let’s not fool ourselves. There is still plenty of work to do in Latin America. The process of change is riddled with contradictions, as any process of social change would be.

The region still has a long road to go towards socialism. And the failure of the FSP and leftist governments to address environmental issues in any meaningful way is nothing short of alarming. As much as Bolivian president Evo Morales and the new Ecuadorian constitution may talk about the environment,

mother earth (*pacha mama*) and right livelihood (*sumak kawsay*), the fact is that Latin America’s leftist revolution runs on oil and natural gas. Fossil fuels are an indispensable source of foreign exchange for Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia, and dependence on their export is increasing.

The agribusiness model of farm production, incompatible with ecology or food sovereignty, is running amok in South America—and among the pesti-

Latin America’s leftist revolution runs on oil and natural gas.

cide-drenched monocultures, Monsanto’s genetically engineered Roundup Ready soy is

king. The construction of mega hydro dams in the Amazon jungle (like the controversial Belo Monte project) and of super highways linking Brazil to the continent’s Pacific coast continue apace. Contrary to popular perception, bringing greens and reds together is not an easy task. One can argue that it has never been successfully done yet (the insights of social ecologist Murray Bookchin could really come in handy now).

It would be a huge disservice to uncritically worship and glorify the leftward surge and progressive governments of the new Latin America and sweep their failings and inconsistencies under the rug. But it would be equally unhelpful and unfair to dismiss them out of hand for “not being leftist enough” or for being environmentally destructive.

It’s a fine line to walk. Ultimately, it is better to embrace these movements and work within them to try to steer them into the right path than to oppose them and bark at them from the sidelines. The latter course of action would play right into imperialism’s strategy.

The agribusiness model of farm production, incompatible with ecology or food sovereignty, is running amok...

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Sustainable Colonialism® in the Boreal Forest

by Russ McSpadden

What do you get when the world's largest environmental organization and the world's largest "sustainable" logging company shake hands? Answer: a half dozen press releases that'll increase donations to the eco-bureaucracy, a green-washed face lift for a rapacious industry and a good old fashioned guilt-free feeling white America is willing to pay extra money for.

Oh yeah, that and the continuation of deforestation and the kind of genocidal colonial land use policies North America is founded on.

Resolute Forestry Products, on the heels of a big fat congrats last month by the World Wildlife Fund for its role as the world's largest manager of Forest Stewardship Council® certified forests, has begun illegally logging on unceded indigenous land in the Boreal forest. Despite very clear stipulations spelled out in the UN Resolution on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and a ruling by the supreme court of Canada that first nations must be notified of any intent to log

...an indigenous occupation... has the potential to stave off the clearcuts...

on their land, Quebec's liberal party government, under the leadership of provincial premier Jean Charest, sidestepped any negotiations with the original and sovereign inhabitants of the land and permitted the operation.

There is an on-the-ground indigenous resistance effort—an indigenous occupation of colonially occupied land—that has the potential to stave off the clearcuts and bolster the cultural life of a First Nation. They need supplies and funding for legal support and camp logistics. They need coffee and food staples. But maybe you had better just close your eyes and give that money to a large environmental organization. I doubt the Barriere Lake Algonquins will send you a bumper sticker for your Prius or an eco-friendly tote bag in return. No, they have far more at stake than the value of their eco-brand.

Tomorrow, they might arrest community members. We don't have any other choice. My grandchildren will ask me, "why didn't you try to protect the sacred site," and my words will be worthless because it's not there, that's what we are facing, what we will lose for our grandchildren, but at least we are going to show that we stood our ground and the spirit was there with us.

That's Michel Thusky, an elder of the Barriere Lake Algonquins in southern Quebec and a survivor of the culturally devastating Canadian Indian residential school system. Known to themselves as the Mitchikanibikok Inik, they are yet another tribe of Algonquins in the region, along with the Attikamek, the Wemotaci and the Manawan, who have resisted illegal logging practices on their land, through camps and blockades, in the past few months.

The First Nation community is about three and a half hours north of Ottawa, the capital of Canada, along highway 117, in the middle of the La Vérendrye Wildlife Reserve—a part of the Boreal forest. Resolute Forest Products began logging, but has since been stopped by a series of round-the-clock camps occupied by elders, youth and children. I spoke with Mr. Thusky two days after members of the camp were read their rights by Sûreté du Québec officers, and were warned of impending arrests if they did not allow logging to proceed.

Russ McSpadden: Can you tell me about the situation that exists between the Algonquins of Barriere Lake, the provincial government of Quebec and Resolute Forest Products?

Michel Thusky: On July 4, 2012, we issued a letter to provincial premier Jean Charest, the liberal government, regarding our disappointment regarding the way his ministry is managing forestry issues in our traditional territories. They failed to consult us, the community affected by their operations. It's a total breach of the highest court ruling, the supreme court of Canada ruling that they must consult First Nation communities.

We asked them to cease their operations.

Another letter went out to the forestry director within the region asking for a copy of the cut plans for two years. We are concerned they will cut our sacred area and destroy our identity; our relationship with the land would be destroyed as well as the animals' habitat, all significant to our survival needs. They have



mapped out their plans but have failed to consult us.

At the same time the provincial government has sent in a police force, about 30 officers, a riot squad really, two paddy wagons, to arrest the elderly and the youth.

We were never informed that they were cutting. When we found out the elderly were crying and the children were crying and witnessing the elderly crying. It's really emotional.

We dare the provincial government, Premier Charest, to take his flag, the Quebec flag, and burn it in front of his children, to burn it in front of his grandchildren.

RM: Because that's what you feel he is asking you to do?

MT: That is what he is doing to us by destroying our sacred sites. That is our identity. All the traditional knowledge has been passed on by generations, long before Quebec's existence in this territory. We have retained it despite the interruption by the outside society. We have managed to preserve our language, spiritual and moral values, social and community structure and the sharing of our resources.

We have informed the premier himself that they have done cuts where families had to be accommodated by us because of what those cuts have done.

What is happening is against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the highest supreme court of Canada.

RM: Have you had any contact with Resolute Forest Products, the company doing the logging?

MT: The only contact we've had with them is last month when they charged one of our youth leaders, Norman Matchewan, with financial damage—millions of dollars. They launched a lawsuit against him, accusing him of blocking the road. A foreman of the company was caught lying before the provincial court and they lost that court case last month. This is the same company, Resolute Forest Products,



our language. That is what gives us the strength to sustain ourselves, our connection with the land. The government is trying to disconnect us from our use of the area. We have preserved our Algonquin place names, names of the lakes, animals, the language is strong. The area they are going to be cutting is... In English, the foreign language, it is called Poigan Bay.

That is the birthplace for many of our elders. It is the place they are going to be destroying.

RM: Have they begun cutting?

MT: They cut last Tuesday and we interrupted them. We asked them to stop until we have a meaningful consultation. We extended our respect but they failed. On July 9 they sent a riot squad and many police officers, what they call Sûreté du Québec, security of Quebec.

They put conditions on us. They put a blockade on us, in the Algonquin birth place. If we go past a certain line, they say they will arrest us.

RM: Tell me about the camp?

MT: There are several camps hoping to put pressure on the government and to get public support, to listen to our concern.

RM: How many people are present?

MT: There is a rotation. The logging site is about an hour and 15 minute drive from our community. And about 50 people are on site, with about 20 rotating, permanently there since July 4. They are all from the commu-

nity.

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To directly support the Barriere Lake Algonquins, visit www.barrierelakesolidarity.org/ for updated news.

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that is coming into our territory now. And the worst thing about it is they have gotten the Forest Stewardship Council Certification for their products. That is a total shame.

Come see it for yourself; this very strong community and forest is under attack.

We rely on the land for our subsistence. We harvest our animals with respect to the populations; we harvest fish and our trees; we use our medicinal plants. We have a spiritual, emotional, physical connection to our land, what we call *kikeegan*. That's in