



Peru: Democracy & Dictatorship

By Coletta A. Youngers, Washington Office on Latin America

When President Alberto Fujimori assumed an unconstitutional third term in July 2000 following fraudulent elections, some Peruvian analysts predicted that growing popular unrest would thwart him from staying in the presidential palace for his full five-year term. Nobody, however, thought that Fujimori would decide to step aside only a few months after the contested elections. In mid-September, Fujimori announced that he would be holding new elections (in which he would not participate) and that he would dismantle the feared National Intelligence Service (SIN). Fujimori's startling announcement provoked joyous celebrations, as Peruvians across the country took to the streets, honking horns and chanting anti-Fujimori slogans.

In the background, however, an ominous power play has intensified involving the president, his national security adviser, Vladimiro Montesinos, and the armed forces. A cloud of uncertainty hangs over Peru, as calls for the detention of Montesinos go unheeded and he appears to continue to orchestrate events from behind the scenes at SIN headquarters. Some Peruvian analysts are referring to a "white coup," in which hard-line sectors have gained the upper hand.

Peru is now clearly on a different path—popular sentiment has turned sharply against the Fujimori government, making it ever more difficult for the president to continue in office. Popular protests continue. Yet the path toward democratization is mined with obstacles, unless firm action is taken quickly against Montesinos and other top military leaders.

What sparked Fujimori's announcement was the release of a video that shows Montesinos bribing an opposition member of Congress, Alberto Kouri, to switch loyalties and join ranks with the Fujimori coalition in return for a \$15,000 monthly stipend and payments to cover campaign costs. In addition to Kouri, at least 17 others recently voted into Congress were bribed or threatened into switching allegiances, thereby allowing the Fujimori government to obtain a majority—in direct

defiance of voters' wishes and largely delegitimizing the present Congress.

The source of the leaked video remains a cause for speculation. However, what lies at the heart of Fujimori's apparent demise is an even more sinister action. Information has slowly emerged indicating that high-level military and intelligence officials, including Montesinos himself, have likely been involved in trafficking guns to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), possibly in exchange for drugs. According to press reports, thousands of Russian manufactured automatic weapons were legally purchased from Jordan by the Peruvian military and then secretly delivered to the FARC.

These recent events illustrate the extent to which governance in Peru has deteriorated into an authoritarian regime where bribery, intimidation, and repression are utilized to maintain political control. Under Fujimori's ten-year rule, the roles of the Peruvian armed forces and SIN, which currently functions as Peru's political police, have expanded exponentially. Both the judiciary and Congress are subservient to the executive branch, eliminating any effective checks and balances.

The 2000 electoral process was tainted from the start. Having already served two terms in office, Fujimori should have been prohibited from running for a third term by the 1993 constitution, which allows for one consecutive reelection. Yet the manipulation of the press, excessive use of state resources for Fujimori's campaign, control of official electoral agencies, and SIN's intimidation and harassment of opposition candidates ensured a playing field steeply tilted in Fujimori's favor. In the May 28 runoff vote, Fujimori was uncontested. Both the opposition candidate, Alejandro Toledo, and international monitors pulled out due to the lack of guarantees for a free and fair process. The head of the Organization of American States (OAS) observer mission left days before the final vote, after the Peruvian government refused to agree to a postponement of the elections in order, at minimum, to ensure that the OAS team could verify the final vote count.

Having gone to such extremes to ensure reelection, Fujimori may not give up power as easily as implied in his call for new elections. Fujimori has already indicated that he plans to stay in office until next July and will oversee the upcoming electoral process. And he has hinted that he may just run again in 2006.

Key Points

- Since taking office in 1990, President Fujimori has concentrated power in his own hands, greatly strengthened the role of the armed forces and SIN, and thwarted political opposition through bribery and intimidation.
- The recent Peruvian elections failed to meet even the most minimal international standards for a free and fair process, and Fujimori embarked upon an unconstitutional third term, which left the country deeply polarized.
- Fujimori's decision to call for new elections and dismantle SIN is an important step toward putting Peru back on the path to democratization; however, the situation remains very tense and the position of the military and intelligence services uncertain.

Problems with Current U.S. Policy

Although the call for new elections appears to have caused unease in Washington, the Clinton administration has publicly supported both Fujimori's announcement of an ongoing dialogue with the OAS. There are reports that as a result of the arms scandal and the videotape disclosure, U.S. officials put significant pressure on Fujimori to dismiss Montesinos. Some speculate that the arms scandal could also be deeply damaging for the Clinton administration, and Washington may in fact have pressed for Montesinos' departure to divert attention from the growing scandal. If Peruvian journalists were able to uncover the arms deals, U.S. intelligence agencies surely had some indication of what was going on, yet they continued to provide support to SIN and the Peruvian armed forces. A key question that remains unanswered is: what did the CIA and other U.S. officials know, and when did they know it?

Washington's interactions with Peru over the last decade provide a vivid example of the contradictions and confusion that often surround U.S. policy. The myriad U.S. interests in Peru often work at cross-purposes, creating inconsistencies in U.S. policy toward that country. The Clinton administration's response to recent developments is no exception.

Washington led the international condemnation following the 1992 *autogolpe*, or presidential coup. Although attention to Peru largely waned following the 1995 elections, U.S. officials have spoken out at some key moments when democratic setbacks took place, and they have played a positive role in supporting civil society organizations, particularly within the human rights community. The U.S. government also played a critical role in negotiating an end to the Peru-Ecuador border conflict.

Yet these actions are directly undermined by the desire to maintain continuity in both the antidrug and economic arenas. Most disturbingly, the U.S. government has provided direct support to SIN—the very agency responsible for setbacks to democracy and for grave human rights abuses—for counternarcotics purposes. Ironically, Fujimori's shadowy adviser and *de facto* head of SIN, Vladimiro Montesinos, has long been rumored to have maintained ties to the drug trade after serving as a lawyer for various notorious drug traffickers in the 1980s.

Montesinos has also long been rumored to be on the CIA payroll. U.S. officials have maintained a stony silence in response to accusations that Montesinos takes protection money from drug traffickers, refusing even to call for investigations. Hence, it should come as no surprise that though U.S. officials have consistently spoken out against electoral irregularities in Peru, they have not once referred to the roles of SIN and Montesinos in undermining Peru's electoral process. Only when confronted with overwhelming evidence of corruption have they apparently taken stronger action.

To its credit, the Clinton administration put significant pressure on the Fujimori government to allow for a second round of voting when it appeared that the Peruvian

government was posed to proclaim a first-round victory last April. Following the May 28 runoff vote, the United States urged strong OAS action, although critics point out that U.S. officials lacked a clear strategy and frequently antagonized other governments. At the June OAS General Assembly meeting, a resolution was adopted expressing grave concern regarding the elections and mandating an OAS mission to Peru to push for democratic reforms. The OAS mission put forward a comprehensive list of recommendations and has set up a permanent office in Lima to monitor the reform process. It is facilitating a "dialogue" between the Fujimori government, the political opposition, and civil society representatives to enhance democratic reform.

Nonetheless, the unwillingness of OAS member states to call for new elections in Peru sent a dangerous signal to Fujimori that the OAS is not serious about its commitment to ensure clean elections. Likewise, the unwillingness of the U.S. and other governments to follow up the OAS meeting with strong bilateral action demonstrates that the OAS process has no teeth to it.

Although Clinton administration officials continue to speak out in support of the OAS process and of democratic reform, they have not suspended any aid or trade program to Peru. Even small military-to-military training programs have gone untouched. Officials claim that their unhappiness with the present situation in Peru is evident in what they are NOT doing—such as not sending a diplomatic mission from Washington to attend the inauguration.

The U.S. Congress, however, is taking a tougher stance toward Peru. An unusual alliance of liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans has ensured easy adoption of resolutions and amendments condemning Peru's authoritarian government. Several Senate offices are reportedly investigating Montesinos and the arms scandal. Yet when Congress eliminated \$42 million slated for Peru in the recent emergency aid package for Colombia, the U.S. Ambassador to Peru quickly announced that he was seeking to restore the aid. The administration is now allocating \$32 million in a line-item for helicopter support to the Peruvian police and is taking additional money from a regional account. As one official notes, "Congress did not prohibit aid to Peru." But the administration is certainly violating the congressional intent aimed at ensuring that Peru will at least not get additional resources over and above its normal allocation.

Key Problems

- Competing U.S. policy priorities in Peru have led to inconsistencies and incoherence, as is evident in the U.S. response to this year's fraudulent elections.
 - Through its counternarcotics program, Washington is supporting the Peruvian intelligence establishment, the very force responsible for Fujimori's illegitimate third term and a central player in the present power struggle.
 - To date, the Clinton administration has undertaken no significant bilateral action toward Peru, such as suspending aid or trade benefits. It has yet to call publicly for Montesinos to be investigated and prosecuted.
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Toward a New Foreign Policy

Peru's President Fujimori represents a dangerous model of authoritarian populism that may become increasingly prevalent across Latin America. Fed up with existing parties and politicians, rampant corruption, and inefficiency in government, Latin Americans are increasingly turning to populist independents who promise strong leadership in order to bring order to society and discipline to government. The subdued regional and U.S.

working toward constructing a proposed government of national unity.

First and foremost, the U.S. government should focus its efforts on ensuring that President Fujimori follows through with his promises to dismantle SIN and to move immediately toward new presidential and congressional elections under close international supervision. U.S. relations with Peru regarding aid, trade, and other programs should be evaluated through that lens. U.S. assistance to Peru's security forces, including the notorious SIN, should be discontinued immediately. Military-to-military training programs should cease; no Peruvian soldiers should be brought to the School of the Americas or any other U.S.-based training facilities. Joint military-to-military operations should be canceled.

The Clinton administration should publicly call for the detention of Montesinos, for independent investigations into allegations of corruption and human rights violations lodged against him, and for subsequent prosecutions. His U.S. visa should be revoked, and Washington should publicly repudiate the role of SIN in Peru today. There should be full disclosure of information gathered by U.S. officials regarding both the allegations against Montesinos and the recent arms scandal. Then the U.S. Congress should hold hearings on the scandal.

All reforms—such as the dismantling of SIN—should be carried out within the context of the OAS-sponsored dialogue. Moreover, the OAS should have responsibility for preparing and monitoring presidential and congressional elections. If prompt movement in this direction does not occur, the U.S. government should cut off all nonhumanitarian aid to Peru, suspend some trade benefits, and vote “no” on loans by the international financial institutions.

Likewise, if substantial progress is not made, the OAS should suspend Peru from its ranks until Peru returns to a democratic path. A clear message must be sent both to President Fujimori and across the hemisphere that in the 21st century, fraudulent elections and authoritarian rule are simply not acceptable.

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Key Recommendations

- Washington's top priority in Peru should be to ensure that new presidential and congressional elections are held as quickly as possible and that SIN is effectively dismantled.
- The Clinton administration should immediately cease all assistance and training for Peruvian security and intelligence agencies, should publicly call for Montesinos to be held accountable for corruption and human rights violations.
- If the transition process does not move forward, the U.S. government should cut off all nonhumanitarian aid to Peru, suspend some trade benefits, and vote “no” on loans by international financial institutions.

response to Peru's fraudulent elections sends a dangerous message to the hemisphere's growing number of strongman wannabes. As a result of recent developments, however, the international community has been provided with a new opportunity to take strong action to ensure that Peru returns to a democratic path.

Such international pressure has had an impact in the past. Though rarely achieving a total turnaround in Peruvian government policy, outside pressure has forced important changes. It led both to the reestablishment of the Peruvian Congress in 1993, following the autogolpe, and to the drafting of a new constitution, although both of these changes were ultimately crafted to Fujimori's advantage. Domestic and inter-

national pressure has obligated Peru to retry before a civilian court American Lori Berenson and to create an ad hoc commission to review the cases of Peruvians in jail on terrorism charges. Ultimately, the success of Fujimori's neoliberal economic policies is dependent on staying within the good graces of the international community. Thus far he has managed to walk that fine line, but such poise may be increasingly difficult if the political situation deteriorates. International investors expressed relief at the announcement of new elections; failure to move forward effectively could further erode investor confidence and threaten Fujimori's economic program.

Moreover, Peru's civil society groups are mobilized to see the reform process through and are seeking stronger international pressure. Although the political opposition is internally weak, it remains united against Fujimori and is growing in strength. It now appears to have popular sentiment on its side and is

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Peruvian News Organization

<http://www.imediaperu.com/>

International News on Peru

<http://www.lima-news.com/>

Peru Election 2000 Public Education Website

<http://qsilver.queensu.ca/peru/>

Peru Home Page (provides links to major media)

<http://ekeko.rcp.net.pe/>

Transparencia (civil society election monitoring organization)

<http://www.transparencia.org.pe/>

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