

# Beware Risks to a Democratic Future

By J. MICHAEL WALLER

Despite the new incendiary anti-U.S. leaders in South America, much of the Bush administration is fiddling as the future of hemispheric security begins to smolder.



**Leftist firebrand:**  
In Brazil, da Silva has made a career out of portraying the United States as the enemy.

**M**uch of South America is spiraling into a political and economic morass that invites not only further demographic dislocation but an unprecedented haven for terrorism and political extremism. Yet in the Bush administration, only the Department of Defense (DoD) seems to be presenting a plan to salvage a democratic future for the region, even as the State Department and the National Security Council (NSC) offer only what one observer calls "bureaucratic bromides." U.S. inattention to its neighbors is reaping a bitter harvest:

- Colombia, under a new, pro-U.S. president committed to smashing his country's two Marxist-Leninist narcoterrorist groups and eradicating cocaine and heroin production there, nonetheless is surrounded by Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela — each of which has elected charismatic, anti-U.S. demagogues as rulers.

- Brazil's new president, inaugurated Jan. 1, is a hard-core professional radical who built his career by portraying the United States as the enemy. Luis Inacio "Lula" da Silva took power with a documented history of supporting the hemisphere's revolutionary and terrorist groups. He also stated his support for resuming Brazil's mothballed nuclear-weapons program and using the country's high-tech industry to revive the economy and its diplomatic prestige by building and proliferating advanced nuclear weapons.

- Ecuador elected a leftist, one-time coup leader, Col. Lucio Gutierrez, in November, raising doubts about the stability of its relationship with the United States. Ecuador is a significant oil producer and has been a key ally with the United States and Colombia against narcoterrorism. This may now be at risk.

- Venezuela, a major oil supplier to the United States, risks being torn apart by President Hugo Chavez, a coup-plotter turned dictator who views himself as a leader in a radical entente. He sympathizes with Cuba's Fidel Castro and Iraq's Saddam Hussein, and stands accused of aiding Colombian narcoguerrillas and Islamist terrorists (see "Chavez Plans for Terrorist Regime," Jan. 7-20).

- Islamist terrorists continue to build a presence on the continent, especially in the tri-border region of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil.

The response of the NSC, the State Department and even the GOP-led Congress: ho-hum.

The Bush administration gave not the slightest hint of concern when Brazil's da Silva paid a preinauguration visit to Washington. The Western Hemisphere



MARIANA BAZO/REUTERS

### Power to the presidents:

*Ecuador's Gutierrez, above, and Venezuela's Chavez, right, are one-time coup plotters who now lead their countries..*

affairs director at the NSC, John Maisto, is derided by conservatives as a foreign-service careerist with a history of kowtowing to communists and other tyrants. As deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Managua, Nicaragua, administration sources tell *INSIGHT*, he apologized to the Sandinistas for President Ronald Reagan's successful policies that ousted them. As former U.S. ambassador to Venezuela, Maisto assured all who would listen that the newly elected Chavez wasn't the threat his critics made him out to be. Early in 2002, administration sources say, Maisto blocked a DoD initiative to promote democracy and security in the hemisphere, preventing a painstakingly developed strategic plan from reaching the president.

Nearly a full year has gone by with the United States adrift and the South American situation worsening. The NSC has issued controversial statements, apparently with little consultation with the State Department or Pentagon. In one case it crafted a White House statement on Venezuela that called for early elections when there is no legal process for early elections in that country and not even the opposition was calling for them.

The DoD, however, has been engaged actively and with a clear strategic vision for the hemisphere, administration officials say. Pentagon officials leading the war on terrorism have voiced concern at the unraveling of the hemispheric

security relationship built around the half-century-old Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, or Rio Treaty, which the Mexican government of President Vicente Fox has been working openly to destroy.

Why sabotage it? In its 55-year existence, the Rio Treaty was invoked only once: after Sept. 11, 2001, when its signatories unanimously agreed to join the United States in the war on terrorism.

In November, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld unveiled an initiative to "foster security and draw Western Hemisphere nations closer together." Visiting Santiago, Chile, for the De-

peacekeeping and stability operations."

Rumsfeld made the 5,000-mile trip before attending a NATO meeting in Prague, indicating the importance he places on hemispheric security: "Needless to say, I would not be going all this distance if I did not think this was extremely important," he said. Next May, the Organization of American States, one of the world's oldest international organizations, will meet to consider post-Cold War security arrangements.

The Pentagon-led hemispheric-security proposals — unlike ideas floating around the State Department and among both Republicans and Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee — focus on strengthening and advancing democracy and freedom, not flirting with the status quo. A senior administration official tells *INSIGHT*, "The idea is to link the democratic progress and nature of the hemisphere with security."

Rumsfeld told his Latin American counterparts in Santiago, "There are some who thought with the end of the

Cold War, NATO might fade into irrelevance. Instead, more countries are seeking to join — and decades of security cooperation paid off when new threats emerged. The same is true of the Inter-American system. Today, the need for our nations to work together has not diminished, it has grown — as has the need for the institutions that facilitate hemispheric cooperation."

A former national-intelligence officer for Latin America warns of a new, hemispheric "Axis of Evil." Constantine Menges, once the CIA's top Latin America analyst, served on Reagan's NSC and now is at the Hudson Institute. Menges has been the spark behind much of the new strategic thinking on the hemispheric crisis, and on Brazil and Venezuela in particular.

Chavez, da Silva and Gutierrez are taking pains to reassure the U.S. that there is no cause for concern and have been making overtures to the American banking and business communities, suggesting there is no cause for alarm.

"That could happen, and many in the U.S. State Department seem to be making this hopeful assumption," Menges says. "But the more likely future is one in which the Lula da Silva government combines a strong interest in promoting Brazilian exports and maintaining good relations with U.S. business, foreign investors and international financial



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defense Ministerial of the Americas meeting, Rumsfeld urged Latin American countries to consider ways to expand national capabilities into regional ones, particularly strengthening operational and planning capabilities, command and control, and information sharing, plus a strong maritime-cooperation agreement to help fight the organized criminal-terrorist nexus. Rumsfeld also said, "We should explore the possibility of integrating these various specialized capabilities into larger regional capabilities so that we can participate as a region in

organizations with a parallel series of actions, both visible and hidden, that are intended to help pro-Castro, anti-U.S. radicals take power in other neighboring countries such as Colombia — racked for decades by communist guerrilla attacks.”

In a December paper, part of which was published in *INSIGHT*'s sister daily, the *Washington Times*, Menges noted: “As Chavez has done since 1999, these radicals would pursue a parallel strategy of normal business and financial relations with the United States while they would also help other pro-Castro radicals take power and be allied with hostile state sponsors of terror such as Cuba, Iran, Iraq and Libya on many issues. They are also likely to establish close political-strategic, economic and perhaps military relations with Communist China, as Cuba and Chavez have done.”

The two-faced nature of the policies trouble intelligence veterans such as Menges. An important indicator of the radical dimensions of the future plans of da Silva is that, since 1990, he has convened an annual meeting called the “Forum of Sao Paulo.” It has included all the communist and radical political parties and armed communist terrorist organizations of Latin America, plus terrorist groups from Europe (Irish Republican Army, ETA) and the Middle East (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command), as well as participants from Iraq, Libya, Cuba and other state sponsors of terrorism. These meetings are direct successors to the Tricontinental Congress established by Castro in 1966 to help terrorist organizations from Latin America, Europe and the Middle East better coordinate their attacks on the United States and its allies, Menges says.

“In December 2001, Lula da Silva's group met in Havana, Cuba, and this December it met in Guatemala, again joined by delegates from Cuba, Iraq, Libya and North Korea,” Menges says. “As an indicator of its political views, this year's working paper for the Dec. 2-4 meeting included the following statements: ‘NATO troops perpetrated genocide in Kosovo, U.S. and British forces massacred the population of Afghanistan, [prisoners held by the United States in Guantanamo, Cuba] are submitted to punishment and tortures with full U.S. support, [and] the government of Israel continues to carry out a systematic policy of murdering Palestinians.’”

The White House and State Depart-



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FILE

**President's men:** Rumsfeld, above, and Reich, left, know the importance of stability in South America.

are structurally similar to the shock troops of the Sandinista party in Nicaragua.

President George W. Bush had appointed a seasoned crisis hand, former U.S. ambassador to Venezuela Otto Juan Reich, for the State Department's top Latin America post, but the Democrat-controlled Senate blocked the appointment. In an unusual move Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps and Narcotics Affairs, refused even to allow Reich a confirmation hearing.

Dodd's action forced Bush to name Reich only in an interim capacity with a term limit of one year. Reich had to step down in November, and the White House has not indicated whether it will rename him or appoint someone else. But Bush likes Reich's track record since the Reagan days. White House spokesman Ari Fleischer recently rose to his defense: “The president thinks that Otto Reich is serving his country ably and well. He is a fine public servant who has helped bring democracy and freedom to Latin America and Central America, and [the president] is very proud of him.”

ment did nothing to help Venezuela's democratic opposition to Chavez in the early stages of his crackdowns and, a senior administration official says, actively discouraged them from supporting military figures seeking to oust him and restore constitutional rule. Only later, when Chavez allegedly began setting up illegal, Cuban-style vigilante groups outside constitutional structures and loyal to him personally, did the United States start voicing official concern.

Those vigilante groups, called “Bolivarian Circles” after Venezuela's colonial-era liberator Simón Bolívar, raised the ante for the possibility of large-scale violence in the country. The late Chilean president Salvador Allende, openly a Marxist, created similar forces whose presence was key to the military coup against him in 1973. The vigilantes also

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