

PARAGUAY: A TERRORIST'S UTOPIA

The coming months should bring an increased focus on Paraguay. In reaction to the growing U.S. presence in Colombia and other South American nations, drug traffickers as well as various militant movements are gradually fanning out, establishing what is an alarming presence, according to U.S. officials. Unstable institutions, rampant corruption and a struggling economy make Paraguay an attractive venue for would-be terrorists and drug smugglers to establish their operations.

U.S. agencies have been monitoring clandestine activity in Paraguay for a number of years. However, only recently have they begun to increase their physical presence. According to reports, the DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) has more than doubled the size of its office in Asuncion. In the wake of the terrorist strikes in the U.S. Paraguay's recent history of severing as a staging ground for militant Islamic groups such as Hezbollah and the Islamic Jihad will certainly draw closer scrutiny.

Terrorist Cells

The U.S. as well as the Southern Cone countries have long known about the involvement of radical Islamic terrorist organizations in the tri-border region, where Paraguay borders Argentina and Brazil. Now, as the result of increased U.S. pressure, Paraguayan authorities, and to a lesser extent, the governments of Brazil and Argentina, are beginning to take a more active role in monitoring these groups. In response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, Brazil and Argentina bowed to FBI requests to tighten its borders with their neighbors. Paraguay, worried over its reputation as a country harboring terrorists, has announced that it would temporarily would severely restrict issuing visas and increase security along its borders, particularly focusing on the eastern portion of the country, an area with a large Arab community. On September 21, foreign affairs ministers from the OAS nations met to discuss terrorism-related hemispheric security concerns. Portions of the talks dealt with the Southern Cone countries' long-standing belief that Paraguay has shown little concern in addressing the terrorist elements operating within its borders. For instance, Argentina has maintained that Hezbollah terrorists used Ciudad del Este, Paraguay's principle city in the tri-border area, as headquarters for their attacks on the Israeli Embassy in 1992 and a Buenos Aires' Argentine-Israeli Community Center in 1994. A trial involving 20 low-level defendants accused of assisting the attackers recently began, with some hoping that more knowledge will be revealed concerning who supervised the terrorists. Argentine pressure is mounting, with Enrique Mathov, its new Internet Security Secretary, calling the "triple border" area a "hot zone." Indeed, it is possible that the U.S. will step up pressure on the tri-border countries to clean up this area and eliminate "rouge elements."

U.S. Involvement

President Bush's call to sustain the war "until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated" indicates that U.S. authorities will certainly increase this country's monitoring of developments in the area. Triple-frontier countries have indicated that they intend to fully cooperate in helping the U.S. eliminate any terrorist threat in the region. Although Brazil and Argentina have increased their border security, Paraguay has perhaps taken the strongest position in support of the U.S. anti-terrorism efforts by asking the OAS to firmly support any U.S.-led retaliation.

Nevertheless, rhetoric and a strong anti-terrorism stance by these nations are not

deemed sufficient by U.S. authorities to quell their fears about the potential terrorist threat in the region. Paraguay's foreign minister, Jose Antonio Moreno, stated that 40 FBI agents have arrived in Paraguay and were headed to Ciudad del Este, "transit point for shadowy groups." Many experts foresaw this increased U.S. presence as inevitable; however, a deployment of this magnitude was certainly accelerated by the recent terrorist attack. The inevitability of U.S. involvement in the area was reflected in statements made by the State Department and former director of the FBI, Louis J. Freeh. The FBI's concern is rooted in a trip that Freeh took to South America in 1998 to assess security concerns. At the time, Freeh called for a multinational crackdown on crime, something he saw as an important step to establishing a hemispheric police alliance. He called the tri-border region "a free zone for significant criminal activity, including people who are organized to commit acts of terrorism." Last April, the State Department warned that the governments of Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina are not capable of preventing Islamic terrorist originating from Paraguay's hub of militancy, Ciudad del Este.

A primary Washington concern has been the lack of control of the region's numerous airstrips and waterways. Using these modes of transportation, terrorist groups can communicate and move operatives and supplies with near anonymity. To reassert proper governmental control, the U.S. is offering its Special Forces to train and advise the Paraguayan military and national police on a variety of anti-terrorism and anti-drug tactics. U.S. Special Forces already have made their presence felt in Paraguay earlier this year by participating with the country's military on a "training exercise" focused on combating drug traffickers. Many thought that the "training exercise" closely resembled a counter-insurgency operation. This could signal a change in U.S. military policy in Paraguay, as further training could focus on counter-intelligence operations and counter-terrorism tactics. If the war on terrorism lasts for years, as the Bush administration has stated it will, the U.S. could soon find itself involved in a series of protracted and complicated campaigns in that nation.

HONORING RON WALTERS

HON. LYNN C. WOOLSEY

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 28, 2001

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in order to honor a man in the City of Petaluma, where I proudly reside, who embodies the spirit and best qualities of that town. He is a man who attracts people through his gift of music and humor, and has used his special voice to make Petaluma a better place to live. Petalumans would know that I'm talking about Ron Walters.

Ron Walters' was born in Ute, Iowa on Thanksgiving Day in 1932 and from the beginning people have been thankful for his giving nature. Growing up in the depression, Ron migrated to California in 1936 with his parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles in car hauling a homemade house trailer filled with all their worldly possessions. After graduating from high school in Healdsburg he attended several colleges where he excelled in sports, music and drama. Ron graduated from Gonzaga University in Washington state where he starred

in varsity basketball and also set records as the sole representative of the University's unofficial track team.

After graduation, Ron returned to California where he held several jobs and met and married Judy Paige and soon was the father of three lovely daughters, Leigh, Juli and Erin. Then in October 1963 Ron, who was looking for a way to apply his love of music, walked into the KTOB radio station in Petaluma and asked for a job, which he thought he didn't get. But the next day, the station owner called to ask, "How come you're not a work?" Ron started work the same day.

At KTOB, Ron quickly became the "Voice of Petaluma," with a regular morning program. He quickly put his humor and homespun sensibilities to use. He used his microphone to raise money for efforts including Pop Warner Football, the Petaluma Boys Club (which was in dire financial straits), medical costs for an injured high school football player and many, many other worthy causes. He was a staunch supporter of Petaluma beautification projects and played an important role in Petaluma's historic preservation efforts which has preserved much of the city's Victorian architectural heritage, including his own home.

Ron not only played music on the radio, he also taught music at Sonoma State University and was a performer. He starred in local productions of Broadway musicals including acting and singing the role of the Professor Harold Hill in the "Music Man" three times, a very appropriate role for an Iowa boy who lived in a town nicknamed "River City." Ron also performed vocal jazz with the Harmonizers and Harmonettes and sang with various local bands including those of Ernie Walker, Peter Welker, Walt Oster and Bill Sax. Ron was a featured performer at Carnegie Hall last year with the jazz group, Take Note, and will sing there again next year.

Ron Walters' voice hasn't disappeared into the airwaves. The lessons he taught about civic involvement, philanthropy, and support for youth and the arts strongly reverberates in Petaluma and will do so for a long time to come.

Ron Walters always signed off his radio programs saying, "This is Ron Walters saying thanks a heap and don't forget what I told you yesterday."

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to Ron on behalf of all the people his life has touched, "Thanks a heap, and no, we won't forget."

TRIBUTE TO THE STUDENTS OF SOUTH FORK SCHOOL SYSTEM

HON. JOHN SHIMKUS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 28, 2001

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the students of South Fork School System in Kincaid, Illinois, and their important and heartwarming efforts to help those affected by terrorism.

On October 11, 2001, President Bush made a request of the children of America. He challenged each of them to earn and send in one dollar. This money, sent by the kindness of the children of the United States, will be used to reach out to the unfortunate children in far off Afghanistan.