

Peru's crisis-ridden president launches police-state buildup

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The government of Peru's unelected President Dina Boluarte has unveiled a multi-million-dollar "strategic plan" for the buildup and rearming of the country's armed forces, along with its militarized National Police (PNP), in anticipation of major social unrest, strikes and anti-government demonstrations in the coming year.

Military spending is set to increase by roughly 12.97 billion soles (\$3.422 billion). This will include the purchase of advanced fighter jets for the Air Force, along with two military transport aircraft for 222.6 million soles (\$60 million). The Navy is to receive some \$1.3 billion in new equipment, including an ocean patrol boat and two logistical transport units. The Army is to get new rocket launchers and other equipment.

The government's plan for the PNP includes acquiring 56 armored 4x4 vehicles, 43 anti-riot units fitted with water cannon for breaking up demonstrations, 1,007 handguns, and other equipment, totaling over \$57.6 million.

The lavish new spending on Peru's repressive forces is being rolled out amid a series of escalating crises and scandals that have destroyed the last shred of the government's credibility among the Peruvian population. Boluarte's popularity rating has sunk to just 3 percent, the lowest of any head of state on the planet.

Among the latest developments are a police raid on the home of Boluarte's official spokesman and close political ally, Fredy Hernán Hinojosa Angulo, in connection with a kick-back and bribery scandal surrounding the *Qali Warma* (Vigorous Child in Quechua) program providing school meals for poor children. After the poisoning of children in a district near the southern city of Puno, it was discovered that

the meals included molded chicken, horsemeat and dog food. At the time when Hinojosa headed the program, Boluarte was the minister overseeing his work. Simultaneously, a prostitution ring operating inside the Peruvian Congress, a sex-for-votes operation, has also been uncovered.

The regime of Boluarte, who was installed as president in a US-backed parliamentary coup that toppled President Pedro Castillo two years ago, epitomizes the corruption, self-dealing and hatred of the masses that characterizes the Latin American bourgeoisie.

Its attitude toward the Peruvian working class was made explicit this month when a reporter asked Education Minister Morgan Quero about the failure of the government to speak on Human Rights Day about the 50 Peruvians killed by security forces in the protests against the ouster of Castillo. "Human rights are for people, not rats," was the minister's terse reply.

The announcement of massive new spending on the military and security forces comes amid the continuing collapse of Peru's health and education systems and as over half the population confronts food insecurity.

There are no looming conflicts with any of the five countries bordering Peru. The buildup of the armed forces is directed against the enemy within, the working class and oppressed rural masses. At the same time, its purpose is to curry favor with the generals, who will no doubt profit handsomely from kick-backs on military contracts.

It is also part of a global shift towards dictatorial measures to manage social unrest related to the threat of war, attacks on democratic rights, unemployment, poverty, and hunger.

While Peru has no regional foes requiring a strong army to defend itself, the country does find itself

increasingly drawn into the economic power struggle between China and the United States for dominion over the South American continent. The US has reacted angrily to China achieving a sizable lead in exports and foreign direct investment in a country rich in copper and rare metals. It has expressed concerns that the new Chancay mega seaport, built by a Chinese company, may be used to harbor Chinese battle ships. Chancay is expected to become the South American hub for sea exports to Asia; particularly valuable is the export of lithium from Bolivia – essential to the production of EVs.

The current global landscape, marked by the genocide in Gaza and the war in Ukraine, Trump's election to the presidency and his vocal admiration for right-wing Latin American figures like Javier Milei in Argentina and Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, prompts a closer look at developments in Peru.

Peruvian media highlight Argentine President Milei's budget cuts, claiming they have curbed inflation and revived the economy, with GDP growth reported in the third quarter of 2024. However, this growth coincided with 55 percent of Argentines being driven into poverty.

Meanwhile, Salvadoran President Bukele's authoritarian measures are framed positively for their effectiveness against organized crime, even as they have destroyed democratic freedoms.

The protests that rocked Peru in the latter months of 2024, focusing on organized crime and rising violence, reveal deeper issues. The government has tried to palm off its police-state buildup as a response to the demand raised by the protests for an end to the insecurity caused by organized crime and its shakedown operations. The existence of the gangs, however, is bound up with rampant social inequality. They are politically connected, create profits for a wealthy elite and are able to recruit from a mass of impoverished youth who find no place to either work or study.

Peru's Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) and the Central Reserve Bank (BCR) project economic growth to fall below the 5 percent goal needed for job creation. Without job creation, poverty and extreme poverty will continue to rise. Protests, strikes and social upheavals will inevitably grow. This is what the government is preparing for with its massive arms spending.

The Peruvian working class must prepare as well. The decisive question is that of revolutionary leadership. This year's protests were dominated by petty-bourgeois forces precisely because of a lack of such a leadership. The betrayals carried out by the Stalinist-led union apparatus, the diversion of social struggles into bourgeois politics by the "old" United Left, and the bitter experiences with guerrilla movements have all contributed to a political disorientation that must be overcome.

Crucial lessons must be drawn. No faction of the Peruvian ruling class, from the right-wing *fujimoristas* to populist demagogues like Castillo, is capable of resolving any of the basic economic and social issues confronting the working class and rural poor in Peru and across the South American continent. The Peruvian developments have served to confirm Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, which explained that, in the epoch of imperialism, the fight for social and democratic rights for workers and the oppressed masses in the former colonial countries can only be accomplished by the working class in a fight for political power.

Today, this means uniting the struggles of the working class and rural poor in Peru across national borders with those of workers throughout Latin America, in the US and internationally. This requires the building of independent working-class organizations of struggle, armed with a socialist perspective, and pitted in irreconcilable opposition against all the parties of the national bourgeoisie, the trade union bureaucracies and their pseudo-left apologists. Above all, this means the founding of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Peru and across Latin America.



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