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Peruvian Political Crisis: Summary Of Developments, April 21 - May 11

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April 21: In a speech broadcast nationwide on radio and TV, President Alberto Fujimori announced a timetable for a "return to democracy." The calendar includes a July 5 plebiscite to "verify support" for the government's programs; publication of a reform package by Aug. 31; elections for municipal and regional government officials and a plebiscite to ratify constitutional amendments scheduled for Nov. 8; and, members of the national congress elected on Feb. 28, 1993, would take office on April 5 next year. Vice President Maximo San Roman was sworn in as Peru's "constitutional president" by members of the congress dissolved by Fujimori on April 5. All political parties represented in the congress, excepting Fujimori's Cambio 90, had declared support for San Roman. Police reported that Jorge Duran a top leader of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) guerrillas in charge of rebel press and propaganda activities had been arrested. Over the past several days, at least 30 Sendero activists were arrested during house-to-house searches in Lima. April 22: Members of the dissolved congress and supporters of "constitutional president" San Roman rejected Fujimori's 12-month calendar as a ploy aimed at gaining time to consolidate power. US State Department spokespersons said that the Bush administration was disappointed with Fujimori's timetable for the return to democratic government. An estimated 10,000 to 15,000 Fujimori supporters participated in a demonstration in downtown Lima. The president told the crowd that he would not turn back in his campaign to reform the constitution and public administration. April 23: A special Organization of American States (OAS) mission sent to Lima concluded a three-day visit. The mission was headed by OAS Secretary General Joao Baena Soares and Uruguayan Foreign Minister Hector Gros Espiell. Members of the mission met with news service owners and editors, military officers, and representatives of the Fujimori administration, opposition political parties, professional associations, the Catholic church, business associations, and trade unions. The mission, described as "exploratory" and aimed at "information gathering" is to be followed by another OAS mission dedicated to carrying out negotiations. On several different occasions, police dispersed anti-government protesters with tear gas and water cannon outside a Lima hotel, where OAS mission members were lodged, and the site of most meetings. A delegation from the OAS-affiliated Inter-American Human Rights Commission (CIDH) arrived in Lima for a three-day visit aimed at investigating reports of abuses. During an interview with television reporters, former president Alan Garcia described Fujimori's timetable as a "farce." He also said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was ultimately responsible for the political crisis. Garcia has remained in hiding since April 5. Police presented to reporters 15 of 23 Sendero Luminoso members detained in recent weeks. According to police sources, the 15 were core staff of the rebel group's clandestine newspaper, El Diario. In a raid of El Diario offices, police confiscated paper, computers, typewriters and other equipment. Government news service Andina reported the establishment of a National Dialogue Coordination Office (Oficina de Coordinacion para el Dialogo Nacional). The office has a US$1 million budget to use in organizing a "national dialogue." In Caracas, CIDH president Marco Tulio Bruni Celli denounced "grave violations of human rights" in Peru. The Fujimori government denied Bruni Celli permission to enter the country with the CIDH delegation. Diplomatic sources
in Washington confirmed the resignations of Roberto McLean, Peruvian Ambassador to the US, and Luis Marchand, Peru's ambassador to the OAS. April 24: Economy Minister Carlos Bolana withdrew his resignation. Oscar de la Puente replaced Augusto Blacker as foreign minister. Next, Jorge Camet was appointed industry minister, replacing Victor Joy Way. Fujimori issued a decree establishing four- to six- year prison terms for individuals who "usurp government functions." The sanctions are to be applied to dismissed public officials who refuse to relinquish their posts, and individuals who take on official responsibilities or give orders without legal authority to do so. Maximo San Roman may face such sanctions. San Roman has promised to appoint a full shadow cabinet, and publish a parallel official gazette in his capacity as "constitutional president." The official gazette El Peruano published a list of 138 judges dismissed by Fujimori. The judges were accused of corruption, nepotism and/or political bias. April 26: The government decreed a 60-day extension of a state of emergency encompassing 15 departments located in five provinces. At present, about 30% of the nation's territory and half the population are under state of emergency restrictions. President Fujimori appointed Maria Herminia Drago as attorney general. Drago was the state's chief prosecuting attorney in the corruption case carried out against former president Alan Garcia in 1991. She replaces Pedro Mendez Jurado, who resigned April 8. April 27: Opposition party spokespersons told reporters they supported a proposal for electing a constituent assembly which would be in charge of returning Peru to constitutional rule. The proposal is reportedly backed by the leader of the OAS mission, Uruguayan Foreign Minister Hector Gros Espiell. April 28: San Roman proposed that constituent assembly elections take place July 5. Next, Fujimori, San Roman and all other members of the government elected in 1990 would be obligated to step down when the assembly begins deliberations on July 28. According to San Roman's proposal, the constituent assembly would appoint an interim president to serve until general elections in January next year. The Supreme Court filled 12 vacancies, and elected magistrate Luis Serpa Segura to serve as court president. April 30: Fujimori announced proposed changes to the penal code permitting judges to issue life imprisonment sentences against persons convicted of terrorism. In a message to President Fujimori, the Inter- American Press Society (Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa- SIP) expressed dissatisfaction with recently imposed restrictions on press freedoms. The Interior Ministry issued a resolution calling for legal proceedings against former president Alan Garcia in connection with illegal weapons found in his home. May 1: Government officials suspended a national dialogue round scheduled to begin the same day. No reason was given for the suspension. Next, officials announced the establishment of a ministerial-level commission, led by Foreign Minister Oscar de la Puent, responsible for overseeing the "national dialogue." May 2: After a meeting with Fujimori in Lima, US assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs Bernard Aronson told reporters that Washington considered the July plebiscite "insufficient." The US government's suspension of economic and military aid, he said, will continue until Peru achieves satisfactory progress in the return to constitutional rule. Aronson added that the US was prepared to support any resolutions adopted by the OAS. May 3: San Roman criticized the government for denying a permit to organizers of a pro-democracy demonstration scheduled for May 5. According to San Roman, despite repeated attempts, he was unable to secure the necessary permit from Lima municipal government authorities. An OAS mission arrived in Lima for a new round of talks. Mission members included Secretary General Baena Soares, Gros Espiell, Paraguayan Foreign Minister Alexis Frutos, Honduran Foreign Minister Maria Carías Zapata, Argentine deputy foreign minister Fernando Petrella, and Canadian deputy foreign minister Stanley Gooch. In a public statement, Fujimori said he was opposed to the constituent assembly proposal, arguing that such a move would "lead only to a resumption of the old customs of sterile parliamentary discussions among the
traditional political elite." The president added that he would consider modifying his timetable for new elections. May 4: In a joint statement, 13 political parties and organizations expressed support for the OAS proposal to elect a constituent assembly. The statement said Fujimori’s resignation is a prerequisite for such elections. San Roman announced suspension of the May 5 demonstration due to the "dictatorship’s refusal to grant authorization." In Vienna (Austria), Hugo Cabieses, international relations secretary for the Partido Unido Mariateguista (PUM), told reporters that Gen. Jose Valdivia, a key Fujimori backer in the armed forces, is connected to drug trafficking activities. Cabieses said Valdivia threatened to kill the attorney general if any official investigations of drug trafficking links were carried out. May 5: The OAS delegation concluded an attempt at negotiations. Gros Espiell said that in view of disappointing results, a follow-up mission scheduled for May 10 was cancelled. Fujimori reportedly refused to discuss the possibility of organizing elections for a constituent assembly. In a nationally broadcast speech, Fujimori announced that prison terms for persons found guilty of participating in "terrorist activities" leading to deaths or destruction of public property would be increased to 30 years. He added that the government is also considering of reintroducing the death penalty for terrorist group leaders. The prison term for rebels convicted of multiple offenses was extended from 25 years to life. Fujimori also promised protection for citizens who collaborate with authorities in identifying rebels and rebel activities. Next, judges presiding over cases involving terrorism will henceforth remain anonymous. May 7: The Spanish government announced suspension of bilateral aid programs to Peru, with the exception of humanitarian assistance. The government’s chief criminal prosecutor, Nelida Colan Maguino, told reporters that she supports Fujimori’s proposal to apply the death penalty to convicted rebel leaders. If the death penalty is reintroduced, she added, it should also be used in cases of rape, murder, drug trafficking, kidnapping, and "all habitual criminals who are beyond rehabilitation." Political analysts cited in the local media warned that imposition of life imprisonment or the death penalty would have little effect on the Sendero Luminoso, and in fact might play into the rebels' strategy of polarizing Peruvian society. Members of the dissolved congress told reporters that during the recent OAS mission visit, they had proposed the resignation of Fujimori and all members of the congress simultaneous to setting up an interim government headed by former UN secretary general Javier Perez de Cuellar. Fujimori rejected the proposal. May 8: President Fujimori appointed university professor Alberto Varillas Monetenegro to head the Education Ministry. Varillas' predecessor resigned on April 5. May 11: In Lima, a CIDH delegation met with cabinet members, including the interior and defense ministers. The mission, led by Venezuelan Marco Tulio Bruni Celli, also met with opposition party representatives. (Sources: Notimex, 04/21/92, 04/22/92; Deutsche Press Agentur, 04/21/92, 04/24/92; Inter Press Service, 04/23/92, 05/07/92; Spanish news service EFE, 04/21/92, 04/24-28/92, 05/01/92, 05/02/92, 05/04-08/92, 05/11/92; Agence France-Presse, 04/21/92, 04/22/92, 04/24/92, 04/27/92, 04/28/92, 04/30/92, 05/01/92, 05/04-07/92, 05/11/92)