

AMC

## United States: flying kites

### and grounding Kfirs

**Some of the broad outlines of President Carter's policy towards Latin America are beginning to emerge, but there is still plenty of work to be done on the details.**

With President Carter verbally committed to a fairly general policy of sweetness and light in a continent where both are in short supply, there is plenty of room for speculation as to what the new administration is actually going to do. One version, which surfaced in Montevideo last week, quoted from a report allegedly written by a 'distinguished Central American personality, who knows the southern cone well and has the backing of the new United States President'. In general terms, the report advocated support for a return to parliamentary democracy and might well have been written by, say, Gonzalo Facio, the perennial Costa Rican foreign minister. It fits generally into the philosophy of the Linowitz report, but goes further in suggesting some specific interventions, including the removal of Generals Pinochet and Banzer, and support for Generals Geisel and Videla. Elsewhere in Latin America, the writer looked for the signing of a new treaty with Panama, and the normalisation of relations between Cuba and the United States.

Apparently Latin American governments are expecting a programme along these lines, and military rulers are falling over each other to display tokens of devotion to human rights and democracy. It is not easy to see, however, that any very fundamental changes are possible in the immediate future. Certainly, a treaty with Panama heads the agenda (see last week's issue), but Carter's top advisers on Latin America do not know very much about the continent yet, and have not had time to make up their minds what can be done about the southern cone, even though they would agree with the general proposition that it is a mess.

When the *Financial Times* (London) speculated this week that the State Department had decided to veto the sale by Israel of Kfir jet fighters to Ecuador on the grounds that the administration wanted 'to defuse what is becoming an increasingly tense situation among the republics of the Pacific coast', the writer was probably giving credit where none was due. The fact is that the administration is likely to de-emphasise military aid and to discourage military sales to Latin America in general, at least initially.

The pressure from Congress on the White House is not so much for specific solutions to

situations in particular countries, as for an end to the actual policy of constant interference. With this in mind, Carter's ambassador to the United Nations is likely to press for early signing and ratification of the conventions on human rights, which the United States has previously boycotted. Congressman Donald Fraser suggested recently that all military aid should be suspended, at least for a period.

The administration is unlikely to be harassed by early hearings on countries like Argentina, but on the other hand revisions of the Ford budget will be studied carefully for signs of the new spirit supposedly abroad. Congressmen and senators are also watching for signs of interference in the El Salvador elections, which take place on 20 February (LA X, 43). Congressman Edward Koch read into the congressional record a report he received from El Salvador: 'Interestingly, we were told that the United States military attache for a long time held off from indicating his preference since he saw neither candidate for President (Humberto Romero and Ernesto Claramount) as suitable. . . . His own idea was an institutional solution, i.e. coup. However, around early December of 1976 he began to back Romero openly'. Koch went on to say that 'this allegation, if true, represents the worst form of meddling'. As an earnest of support for parliamentary democracy, the Christian Democrat Napoleón Duarte, who won the Salvadorean presidential elections (but lost the count) in 1972, and has since had to live in exile in Venezuela, has been invited to Washington where he will attend a lunch hosted by Senator Edward Kennedy and other congressional leaders.

Apart from Panama, the principal Carter initiative with regard to Latin America has been a vigorous attempt to modify the nuclear agreement between West Germany and Brazil. Much to the Brazilians' disgust, it became clear last week following Vice-President Walter Mondale's visit to Western Europe and Japan that this matter would be dealt with trilaterally, with little reference to Brazil. Brazil is unlikely to enjoy the 'most favoured nation' treatment it had from Presidents Johnson and Nixon, and the so-called 'consultative agreement' (LA X, 9) is being quietly forgotten.

It is certainly significant that the people in charge of making policy towards Latin America in the State Department and the National Security Council are specialists in United States foreign policy rather than Latin Americanists. This means that the details of the new policy for the region have not yet been worked out. Until budgetary details have been released (mid-March) and a few new ambassadors named, the scene remains set for kites to be launched from Latin America, testing the new atmosphere in Washington.

## News in brief

**Argentina:** The power workers' protest over the new labour legislation (LA, X, 4 & 5) is continuing with employees refusing to work the new extended hours. The government has threatened to dock fines from their wages. The leaders of other state sector unions are awaiting a reply to their request for an interview with the labour minister.

**Argentina:** *La Opinión's* edition of 29 January was seized by security forces before it could be distributed, and the paper was forbidden to publish on 30 January. Earlier in the month it had reprinted an article by a Jesuit priest on the violations of human rights in Argentina, but the reasons for the latest action are not clear. The editor, Jacobo Timmerman, has been invited to testify to a congressional committee in Washington.

**Argentina and Peru:** The Argentine ambassador in Lima has denied reports in the Buenos Aires press of plans for a military axis between the two countries following a visit by General Roberto Viola, commander-in-chief of the Argentine armed forces. President Videla is to visit Peru in March or April, and has been officially invited to Venezuela.

**Bolivia:** The interior ministry has announced that 10 miners who were imprisoned or exiled following the miners' strike of June 1976 have been granted an amnesty, including two who had been deported to Chile.

**Chile and Peru:** Military delegations have been exchanging courtesy visits in the frontier cities of Tacna and Arica, to give the lie to rumours of approaching war between the two countries. In Arica, the Chilean military intendent of the Tarapacá region, General Hernán Fuenzalida Vigar, and the Peruvian commander of the Tacna garrison, General Enrique Vegas, said the two armies were agreed that arms suppliers were responsible for stirring up antagonisms between Chile and Peru. A group of cadets from the Chilean military academy visited Lima at the end of January.

**Costa Rica:** President Daniel Oduber has come out in favour of a new constitution, replacing the 1949 one, which he said was out of date and

incapable of dealing with the growth of the state apparatus and the political requirements of public administration.

**Dominican Republic:** Radhamés Trujillo, the son of the ex-dictator, has announced his intention of running for the presidency in 1978, and confirmed that his Movimiento Nacional Progresista would take part in the elections of the same year.

**Guatemala:** General Romeo Lucas García has been replaced as defence minister by army chief of staff General Otto Spiegel, who has been succeeded by General David Cancinos Barrios. Deputy defence minister General Juventino Gómez has been replaced by Colonel Guillermo Echeverría Vielman.

### In our other reports

The economic outlook for the current year in Brazil is the main article in this week's LATIN AMERICA ECONOMIC REPORT. Also featured are the Peruvian government's modifications to the Comunidad Industrial legislation, Colombia's farm aid programme, Caricom's latest crisis, Argentina's oil plans, and the third Brazilian oil exploration risk contract. This week's LATIN AMERICA COMMODITIES REPORT leads off with the reaction to the United States bill to dispose of some of its strategic tin stockpile, and also features Brazil's cocoa ambitions, Colombian coffee smuggling, Central American coffee rust, Brazilian plans for palm oil expansion and Peruvian wool exports.

**Guyana and Brazil:** According to a report in the leading Venezuelan daily *El Nacional*, eight Guyanese soldiers were killed two weeks ago in border clashes between Guyanese and Brazilian forces in the Roraima area.

**Uruguay:** Despite President Aparicio Méndez's insistence shortly after taking office that there were no political prisoners in Uruguay, the supreme court last week denied petitions for the freeing of 5,000 political and trade union prisoners.

LATIN AMERICA POLITICAL REPORT is published weekly (50 issues a year) by Latin American Newsletters Ltd, 90-93 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6BL, England; telephone (01-251 0012; telex 261117. News services: INTER PRESS SERVICE, Efe, l'Information Latine, Prensa Latina, own correspondents. Latin American Newsletters Ltd publishes three newsletters, the Political Report, the Economic Report and the Commodities Report. Subscription rates for 1977: ANY ONE report, £55 in the British Isles, us\$100 abroad; ANY TWO, £100 in the British Isles, us\$180 abroad; ALL THREE, £140 in the British Isles, us\$250 abroad. Reduced rates for individuals on request. Payment should accompany all orders. Overseas subscriptions sent by airmail. New York representative: William Holub, 432 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016, USA; telephone (212-889 6626. Typeset by Wordsworth Typesetting Ltd, 1 Benjamin Street, London EC1. Printed by Friary Clark Ltd, 8/13 New Inn Street, London EC2. COPYRIGHT 1977; reproduction in whole or in part prohibited, including photocopying. Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office.