

Oil-rich Neuquén, Argentina - Site of a New U.S. Military Base

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Obsessive media focus on President Trump's personal indecencies undoubtedly contributes to important news stories not seeing the light of day. In that regard, it's no wonder the U.S. public is generally unaware of U.S. military interventions in parts of the world, particularly in Latin America. That way, U.S. imperial excess gets a pass.

Political ramifications would be more likely if stories like two recent good examples from Argentina were known about. One of them is a warm-up to the other, which is the main show here.

On July 12, a Hercules C-130 U.S. military transport plane landed at a military base near Buenos Aires with at least eight U.S. Special Forces troops on board, along with "arms, explosives, and head gear." They will be preparing 40 police officers from Argentina's "Special Group for Federal Operations" to take charge of security for a two-day meeting of the G-20 group of wealthy nations set for Buenos Aires beginning on November 30. Argentina and Brazil are the only Latin American members of the G-20 group.

The [U.S. government will pay most of the \\$1.5 million cost](#) of the training project. The U.S. soldiers belong to the "Special Operations Command" of the [U.S. Southern Command](#). They'll be in the country until August 3.

[Argentina's Law 25.880](#) requires that the government seek congressional approval for the entry of foreign troops. That did not happen with these U.S. soldiers. A government spokesperson emphasized that they will ["be strengthening relations and ties of friendship between both countries."](#)

As acolytes of the market economy and expropriators of natural resources, the two nations enjoy an affinity, which is oxygen for a U.S. project underway now in Neuquén. That southwestern city of 340,000 people is the largest in Argentina's Patagonia region.

A coalition known variously as the "Multi-Sectorial [Group] for Territorial Sovereignty," or the ["Multi-Sectorial for No to Yankee Bases"](#) held a meeting in Neuquén on June 27. The organization is made up of 60 labor, political, and social organizations. [Spokesperson Marcela Escobar informed the local press](#) the meeting was about "the imminent installation of a U.S. base in Neuquén [which was being] presented deceitfully as something humanitarian."

The new base, said Escobar, is “at the side of the Northern Highway, next to the international airport and the Petroleum Route, the road to Vaca Muerta (Dead Cow).”

Vaca Muerta, it must be explained, is an expanse of 11,583 square miles extending across several provinces in the Pampas. Underground deposits there of shale oil and shale gas are huge. [The U.S. Energy Information Administration explains](#):

“Argentina has world-class shale gas and shale oil potential—possibly the most prospective outside of North America—primarily within the Neuquén Basin. (emphasis added) ... Significant exploration programs and early-stage commercial production are underway in the Neuquén Basin by Apache, EOG, ExxonMobil, TOTAL, YPF, and smaller companies.”

[According to Buenos Aires’s Clarín newspaper](#),

“Global investment in the unique [Vaca Muerta] deposits will exceed \$100 billion in equipment and structures over the next 10 years. U.S. companies will be providing most of that money.”

It’s by no means accidental, therefore, that a U.S. base is being constructed in such a place, and in an area too, one adds, with large aquifers of fresh water.

The base will cost \$2 million. U.S. embassy spokespersons say American troops will be helping out with natural disasters. Provincial officials, however, identify the installation as a [“military base.”](#) The Southern Command was to have established a base in Neuquén in 2012, but held off in the face of protests against a base proposed for Chaco province.

Argentina’s government is transferring troops to the Neuquén area where, [according to a military spokesperson](#), they “will...be able to move immediately in case of eventual conflict in the region, especially in the petroleum zone.”

Marcela Escobar’s June 27 meeting and her group’s subsequent press conference concerned their demonstration opposing the Neuquén base that took place on July 9, which is Argentina’s Independence Day. [According to a report](#),

“labor union representatives, opposition political parties, and social organizations gathered at a monument to liberation hero San Martín and then traveled on the Northern Highway to the location of the new civil defense center that the U.S. Southern Command has donated.”

A document was circulated saying that,

“Today there’s nothing to celebrate.... We are met in the place where the national and provincial governments are about to install a U.S. military base.”

Speakers rejected the supposed “humanitarian” objectives of the base, because

“these can change and the base is ready to be fully activated in the event of uprisings by workers and people who may want to reclaim for themselves the production of [natural] gas and petroleum.”

Maria Ortega of the [House of Friendship with Cuba reminded](#) fellow demonstrators that the United States “invades countries to overthrow their governments, and destabilizes governments that are for the people.” Indigenous leader Jorge Nahuel declared,

“We know the United States has interests through its corporations and petroleum multinationals they need to protect.... [But] they know too that people are mobilized and they need to contain that reaction...and killings don't matter to them.”

Other U.S. bases are on the way in Argentina. [One in Misiones](#), in the North near the “Triple Border” with Brazil and Paraguay, is programmed to combat narco-trafficking and terrorism. Another will be [in Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego](#). Scientific purposes are spoken of. There's a proposal for yet [another in Jujuy province](#), in the country's extreme northwest where massive deposits of lithium are located.

Very likely the role of U.S. bases, at least in Latin America, is to make real the U.S. concept of mobilizing national alliances to serve U.S. purposes. That strategy was evident at [a gathering of regional military forces](#) in November 2017 at Tabatinga, Brazil, near the convergence of three nations' borders. Speculation at the time had it that the training exercises were directed toward possible military action against Venezuela.

Possible scenarios for Neuquén include these: a political movement cropping up in neighboring Chile led by a latter-day Salvador Allende, indigenous rebellions nearby or across borders, and oil-worker unionists taking on old ideas of national independence and regional solidarity.

The potential exists for violent confrontations. Eventually, perhaps, the reasons why local activists, bystanders, and minders of corporate interests might die in such circumstances will be unacceptable in the United States. The U.S. citizenry, hardly anti-imperialist, might lose heart at the deaths of loved ones in the Argentine Pampas. Someday they may even reject their civilization's addiction, no matter the toll, to fossil fuels as drivers of production.

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