
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Seeking Truth, Response to John Hamilton, “The Fall of Fujimori: A Diplomat’s Perspective,” Volume 30.2, Summer, 2006

Having lived in Peru throughout the demise of the Fujimori government and subsequent transition, while working for an international aid organization, I very much appreciated “The Fall of Fujimori: A Diplomat’s Perspective” (Vol 30:2) by John Hamilton, former-U.S. Ambassador to Peru. In his account, Hamilton sets out to explain “why we [the U.S.] stuck with Fujimori so long.” The article provides a fascinating insider perspective and moments of candor regarding the last months of the authoritarian government of Alberto Fujimori and the shadowy man behind the throne, National Intelligence Service head Vladimir Montesinos. But Hamilton fails to achieve his stated purpose of overcoming the “puzzlement of the democratic opposition” as to the U.S.’s justification for backing Fujimori.

Hamilton glosses over the most important moment that requires explanation: that of the U.S.’s quick recognition of the validity of the clearly fraudulent election of Fujimori to an illegal third term. Hamilton’s starting point comes *after* the extremely problematic elections that the U.S. had barely hesitated to recognize. What I saw among pro-democracy organizations and other civil society groups in Peru at the time was confusion and disappointment at the U.S. conclusion that it preferred to work for change within the corrupt, authoritarian, and discredited Fujimori regime. Hamilton gives little more than a nod to this on his way to explaining the details of the post-election period. If he intended to explain why the U.S. stuck with Fujimori, this is the elephant in the room.

In recognizing the elections, the U.S. turned its back on the democratic opposition and Peruvian civil society organizations working at significant risk to recover democracy. None of these groups merit an appearance in Hamilton’s cast of characters, not even key institutions like the Institute for Legal Defense, the National Coordinating Body of Human Rights Organizations, or the Peruvian State Ombudsman’s office, all

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effective organizations and central funding partners of USAID in its democracy building strategy after Fujimori's "self-coup" in 1992.

Hamilton misses a similar point when addressing the relationship of the U.S. with Vladimir Montesinos. He states clearly that Montesinos was not a CIA agent, as was widely rumored. But he refrains from acknowledging, as other U.S. officials did in early 2001, that over the previous decade the CIA had made payments of more than \$10 million in cash to Montesinos for counternarcotics efforts. The CIA had neither received nor asked for receipts for these funds. Funding a corrupt and anti-democratic figure such as Montesinos, who was entirely unaccountable to national institutions or the voting public, in a way that facilitated corruption and the lack of transparency, raises questions about whether an otherwise coherent official U.S. policy toward building democracy had been undercut all along. ■