

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Human rights and fighting drugs

Colombia's "human rights" lobbyists demand a halt to the military's increasingly successful war on drugs.

During the first week of May, the Colombian Army raided and shut down a dozen giant cocaine laboratories in Magdalena Medio, the country's guerrilla-infested central region. According to government reports, four of those labs alone were capable of yielding more than 3 tons of cocaine a day! A raid on the "La Venturosa" estate turned up four separate cocaine laboratories and vast quantities of chemicals for cocaine processing. More shocking, the drug complex also boasted a 2,500-meter runway, capable of accommodating jumbo jets!

These highly successful raids, an escalation from the March-April dragnets in the drug center of Medellín itself, have begun to sow panic among the bosses of the so-called Medellín Cartel, who are losing multimillion-dollar investments with each bust. Rumor has it that the Ochoa clan is beginning to sell off many of its properties before the military hits them.

More significant than the raids themselves is the fact that the Armed Forces have apparently decided not to allow their efforts to founder in the morass of political corruption that has long characterized Colombia's political and judicial circles. Military exposés of political collaboration with the drug kingpins successfully purged the Barco government of its pro-drug attorney general last March. Now, IV Brigade Commander Gen. Jaime Ruiz Barrera—head of the "Operation Crucible" anti-drug sweeps in Medellín—has called on the new attorney general to investigate judges who have repeatedly released hired mafia assassins from jail.

The military's latest successes have not come without a fight, but have been dogged by the leftist and "human rights" lobbyists, claiming that the war on drugs is the military's "cover" for pursuing a "dirty war" against Colombia's so-called political opposition. While this line has long been the trademark of the "Project Democracy" secret government crowd in Washington, it is now being selectively aimed at those military forces which have been most insistent on defending sovereignty.

The slander campaign against Colombia's military was launched in earnest with Amnesty International's April 19 report charging the Colombian Armed Forces with perpetrating a deliberate policy of "political murder." Cries for boycotting Colombian exports like coffee and bananas immediately began to surface internationally from AI circles. So too have the cries for drug legalization.

Then unconfirmed charges began to circulate inside Colombia that military personnel were involved in a gruesome Easter massacre of 36 peasants in Córdoba department. A press drumbeat for investigation of the Armed Forces was headed up by the pro-drug newspaper *El Tiempo*. Editor's son Roberto Posada García wrote on May 8, "It is necessary that the Armed Forces . . . investigate and punish those sordid deeds, which not only compromise the prestige of the institution, but give full credibility in both domestic and foreign opinion circles to such otherwise one-sided reports as those of Amnesty International."

Army Commander Gen. Oscar Botero Restrepo has nonetheless insisted that the war on drugs will continue, and has denounced efforts to stall the military campaign with charges of "human rights" violations. Similarly, XIII Brigade Commander Gen. Luis Alberto Rodríguez, promised that the military would not halt its anti-drug operations, "despite the threats."

Defense Minister Rafael Samudio Molina went further, charging that "foreign forces" were trying to compromise the military, "without concern for the success of justice, nor for the victims, nor for those who mourn." On May 9, the results of an official investigation into the Córdoba massacre were released, identifying lunatic drug trafficker Fidel Castaño, known as "Rambo," as the author of the mass executions. Nine of his assassins have already been arrested.

The real interests behind the military destabilization campaign were revealed in a May 10 *El Espectador* column by Jorge Child, who not only claimed that the rumors of military involvement in the Córdoba massacres prove that "something is rotten" in the Armed Forces, but who went on to insist that the continued military war against drugs is at best useless, and at worst a mafia-allied conspiracy to drive up cocaine prices!

Child wrote, "More important than dismantling some coca labs in 'Operation Crucible' would now be for the Army to get busy dismantling the crucibles of the dirty war. . . . It could be as the Nobel Prize winner [and drug legalization advocate] Milton Friedman said, that with an eventual reduction in [cocaine] supply, and if demand does not shrink, one will only achieve an increase in the price of cocaine without reducing the income of the traffickers."