

Dateline Mexico by Mark Sonnenblick

Bush launches military actions

Mexicans fear recent hostile actions are a prelude to overt military operations, disguised as "anti-drug."

On Jan. 31, Mexico was shaken by two ominous applications of the Bush administration's new "Thornburgh Doctrine," the outrageous idea that the U.S. government has the right to do whatever it wants, wherever it wants, to catch anyone the Department of Justice believes may have transgressed U.S. laws. In both cases, the "war on drugs" was the pretext.

In one incident, a Cuban-owned freighter carrying chrome concentrates from Cuba to Mexico refused demands from a U.S. Coast Guard cutter in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico that it submit to a search. The Pentagon ordered the cutter to fire on the freighter. It "escaped" over Mexico's 12-mile limit after being hit 70 times in the rudder, machine room, and the bridge by 12mm cannon and machine-gun fire. The Cuban government called it an "act of piracy." The Mexican government, seeking to avert a major confrontation with the United States, denied initial reports that the barrage had continued into Mexican waters. Mexico refused U.S. demands to be allowed to search the ship inside Mexican waters. Its own search found nothing but chrome.

The second tremor was in Los Angeles, where the Justice Department obtained indictments of two former Mexican police chiefs for allegedly taking part in the 1985 kidnapping and murder, in Mexico, of Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique Camarena. The indictment named Manuel Ibarra Herrera, former director of the Federal Judicial police, and former Interpol director in Mexico, Miguel Aldana Ibarra. They were

indicted along with Juan Ramón Mata Ballesteros and 17 other Mexicans. Mata is now serving a life sentence in the United States.

What is at issue is not whether Mexican ex-police officials were clean or corrupt, but whether national sovereignty means anything to the United States anymore. A sovereign state ought to be helped by other sovereign states to enforce its laws over crimes committed in its territory. While the Justice Department has refused to provide Mexican prosecutors with the evidence it has of crimes committed in Mexico by narcotics suspects under arrest there, it is avid to indict Mexican officials in the United States.

Mexicans fear these hostile acts are a prelude to overt military operations against them. During the Jan. 7-9 screening of NBC's docudrama on the Camarena Case, NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw asked whether "after Panama, everything will be set to intervene in Mexico."

Mexico's official news agency, Notimex, reproduced Jan. 22 an article from the *San Antonio Light*, which reported: "The United States is silently concentrating military forces all along the Mexican border. . . . First, the National Guard was called out to search vehicles crossing the international bridges between Mexico and the United States for drugs. Then the Marines were sent to the Rio Grande to train the Border Patrol. And now, the U.S. Army has set up a command in El Paso to help anti-drug agents from Brownsville to San Diego." *The Light* concludes, "This unprecedented militarization is the most extensive

seen until now on the Mexican-U.S. border to support the war on drugs."

The revised anti-drug plan George Bush sent to Congress Jan. 25 named the Mexican border as one of the five prime targets of interdiction efforts. He said the United States would press Mexico to permit hot pursuit to intercept "planes crossing Mexican space or which land in Mexico." He pledged he would "do whatever it takes" to interdict drug shipments across the border or across the Gulf.

Historically, Mexico, which has lost half its territory to an expansionist United States, has had to worry about U.S. disregard for sovereignty. In March 1916, an incident in which several U.S. sailors were insulted in the port of Tampico, the same one to which the Cuban freighter was headed, led President Woodrow Wilson to order a U.S. Marine occupation of Mexico's main ports, customs houses, and rich oilfields. This "champion of democracy's" invasion of "the Halls of Montezuma" lasted until the Mexican President was overthrown. In 1916-17, the U.S. Army tramped over northern Mexico in hot pursuit of Pancho Villa and to impose conditions on the next President.

One Mexican diplomat warned in Britain's *Guardian*, "If we don't put up 'Hunting Prohibited' signs, our land will be devastated once again. We must put up our signs fast, and if necessary, use prudence and firm will to make them obeyed."

The government daily *El Nacional* in a long editorial Feb. 1 warned "yesterday's incident, in international waters . . . comes on top of a series of actions which have created tension in the Caribbean." The daily concludes, "No government is against taking energetic measures against drug trafficking. But there are ways and means dictated by international coexistence which must be respected."