

## Dateline Mexico by Carlos Valdez

### Outrage against Thornburgh Doctrine

*As the U.S. flaunts its disdain for sovereignty, Mexico's pro-U.S. President is more and more boxed in.*

On March 1, the Mexican political world woke up to the news that the United States Supreme Court had just decided to grant broad powers to U.S. anti-drug forces, to permit their search-and-seal operations abroad. The decision was made in relation to the 1986 arrest of drug trafficker René Verdugo Urquidez, conducted by Mexican agents who then handed him over to U.S. agents on the border. In 1988, a raid of his Mexican properties was conducted in search of evidence that would link him to the international drug trade.

The guilt of Verdugo Urquidez, an accomplice of Rafael Caro Quintero, who is serving time in Mexico for the assassination of DEA agent Enrique Camarena, was never at issue for the U.S. Supreme Court. Rather, that body concerned itself with the decision of a Circuit Court, which eliminated from his trial all evidence obtained by the U.S. agents who searched his Mexicali home in 1988. A California federal judge further ruled that the evidence seized was inadmissible in court because the Washington agents had not obtained a U.S. search warrant. According to the Washington correspondent of a Mexican daily, the Supreme Court decision could have an immediate impact on the U.S. trial of Panama's Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega.

Although President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's government has thus far managed to avoid issuing any statements against the new Thornburgh Doctrine of the Bush Justice Department, the response of broad sectors of the Mexican political arena has been prompt. The same day that news of the court ruling was released in Wash-

ington, a group of Mexican congressmen visiting the American capital, headed by PRI deputy from San Luis Potosí Gonzalo Martínez Corbala and by Sen. Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, called the Supreme Court decision "a legal aberration." Martínez Domínguez, in particular, warned that the principle behind the ruling was "a legal absurdity" which condoned "acts that violate the sovereignty" of other nations.

The official daily of the Mexican government, *El Nacional*, devoted its front-page headline March 7 to the warning: "No U.S. Policeman Will Have Impunity in Our Country." The paper announced that, through its embassy in Washington, "Mexico requested precise information on the ruling of the United States Supreme Court." The Mexican Foreign Ministry, said the newspaper, "warned that in case situations of this sort should occur, the Mexican government will proceed in strict conformity with its juridical order. It said that that type of action would violate principles of respect for territorial sovereignty."

For two days in a row, *El Nacional* ran editorials sharply critical of the Supreme Court finding. On March 6, the newspaper editorially described the ruling as "misunderstood pragmatism," and urged the Bush administration to calm down, saying that "legitimate repression of terrorism employed by international criminals cannot be unleashed based on the commission of other crimes and with disregard for the sovereignty of other states."

And on March 7, *El Nacional* warned that with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling, "what is at stake is noth-

ing less than respect for the sovereignty of nations. The problem is not new, and the long, historic list of violations of the sovereignty of states which lack military and economic power—to force respect for U.S. law or at least using that excuse—most likely begins with the last century's incursions into Mexican territory to pursue warrior tribes on the common border, on down to the invasion of Panama; the whole thing was a large-scale war operation whose official objective was the arrest of former General Noriega, accused of drug trafficking. It is obvious that, in many cases, the transgressions against states which lack the resources to halt the armed presence of 'agents' from Washington, corresponded to hegemonic interests."

Finally, *El Nacional* warns that "the fact that the Bush administration has put this, shall we say, tendency into effect must cause Mexican concern. The geographic proximity and the very particular focus that has been given in the United States to the repression of the drug trade, are factors which combine to make this kind of 'green light' to U.S. agents awaken nervousness in our country. Unfortunately, there have already been experiences that demonstrate, rather eloquently, how certain power circles in Washington are determined to achieve spectacular results at the cost of the sovereignty of other nations."

The policies of the Salinas government may be facing a dead end. In order to impose his famous deal with Mexico's creditor banks, within the framework of the U.S. Brady Plan, President Carlo Salinas de Gortari has always heavily relied on the personal intervention of George Bush. The hostile environment provoked by the Thornburgh Doctrine may well make such personal relations unfeasible.