

U.S. threatens to invade South America

by Carlos Wesley

The Bush administration is threatening to carry out a military invasion of Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru, ostensibly “to cripple, in one swift blow, the cocaine cartels in South America,” says the July 16 *Newsweek*. The plans are being worked up by the U.S. Southern Command under Gen. Maxwell (“Mad Max”) Thurman, and call for a “simultaneous attack to impact on the cartel’s entire support structure.” *Newsweek* says that “the model is Thurman’s invasion of Panama last December—an all-out assault to ‘take down’ the forces of Gen. Manuel Noriega.” Supposedly, this time, the troops will not be American, but from the affected countries. But, says *Newsweek*, “if need be, Thurman is prepared to go in with U.S. commandos.”

The leak to *Newsweek* confirms earlier reports to EIR News Service. On May 19, we reported that a helicopter that crashed in the Panamanian jungle province of Darien was participating in secret maneuvers preparatory to an invasion. The story noted that the maneuvers were being “carried out by the U.S. Special Operations Command, based in Fort MacDill, Florida.” Earlier, in our May 4 issue, we stated: “The Bush administration is so pleased with the results of its Panama adventure that it now wants to extend its benefits to all of Ibero-America. Lt. Gen. Carl Stiner, who ran the Panama invasion, has been tapped as chief of the Pentagon’s Special Operations division, which oversees all Special Forces of the Army, Air Force, and Navy. This command is in charge of implementing the Thornburgh Doctrine of sanctioned coups, murders, and arrests.”

‘Keep Rambo in U.S.’

Referring to the *Newsweek*’s report, Colombia’s Foreign Minister Julio Londõno Paredes said, “Where this type of Rambo action is needed, is in the big cities of the United States.” The Colombian anti-drug newspaper *El Espectador* also rejected the interventionist plan. “This is not the first threat against us. In recent months the government of the United States itself tried to violate our territorial waters using the same perfidious pretext,” it commented in a July 10 editorial. “We cannot allow our territory to be utilized in any way by foreign troops, on the pretext of fighting drug trafficking.” *El Espectador* added that do so “in the context of our indelible memory of what happened in Panama . . . would be an indescribable act of humiliation.”

The U.S. administration issued the expected denials.

“President Bush’s Andean drug policy is to break the flow of cocaine into the U.S. through joint work with the Andean governments,” read a statement issued in Spanish by the U.S. embassy in Colombia. “This strategy has never contemplated nor does it include direct involvement by the U.S. Armed Forces.” But the Ibero-Americans remember that in March, U.S. agents kidnaped Mexican citizen Dr. Humberto Alvarez Machain in Guadalajara, Mexico, and illegally brought him for trial in the U.S.

Even less reassuring was Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, who said in a television interview on July 9 that the nations in the region had nothing to worry about, because “no U.S. forces participate in any activities down there unless I am personally signed off on their presence in those countries.”

The administration is demanding that the charter of the Organization of American States (OAS) be amended to make military interventions legal. In fact, far from helping to fight drugs, a U.S. military intervention in Colombia would be a boon to the drug traffickers, who have been suffering severe blows at the hands of Colombia’s police and armed forces in the past few months.

In early July, Colombian President Virgilio Barco wrote a letter to President Bush noting that while he had promised great things in terms of support for Colombia’s war on drugs at the Cartagena summit a few months ago, to date the U.S. has done little to help.

Capturing tamales

“Mad Max” Thurman “is being touted as one of the best generals around,” says *Newsweek*. If so, the U.S. Armed Forces are in trouble. Their performance in Panama was, to put it charitably, incompetent.

Going up against the ill-equipped Panamanian Defense Forces with an advantage of 6 to 1, and having at their disposal the largest and best-equipped force since the war in Vietnam, U.S. commanders were calling for reinforcements two days into the attack. The super-sophisticated F-117A Stealth fighter bombers, which boast pinpoint accuracy, missed their targets. In fact, had it not been for Bush’s “new kind of war” against the civilian population, which turned a “surgical strike” to capture Noriega into the murder of thousands of non-combatants, the battle would have lasted longer than it did. The going will be tougher in Colombia, eight times larger than Vietnam. Throw in the Peruvian and Bolivian jungles, and U.S. troops will be facing the task of pacifying a territory 30 times the size of Vietnam.

As the Pentagon changes its orientation “from nuclear megatons to cocaine kilos,” Thurman, says *Newsweek*, has set a goal: “He wants 500 tons seized within a year.” Again here, his track record leaves something to be desired. The last time Thurman announced a big cocaine haul, during the invasion of Panama, the “cocaine” turned out to be corn meal tamales.