

## Andean Report by Andrea Olivieri

### Twisting arms at San Antonio

*President Bush will use the drug summit to push ahead with his proposed multinational invasion force.*

On the eve of George Bush's high-profile anti-drug summit in San Antonio, Texas with the heads of five Ibero-American countries, the U.S. President has already announced that no new financial assistance will be forthcoming for the war on drugs in the Andes, and that besieged countries like Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia should instead talk to the countries of Europe and Asia if they want economic aid.

The "new" U.S. strategy on drugs will instead center around the formation of a multinational military strike force, precisely the centerpiece of Defense Secretary Richard Cheney's just-concluded tour of the region. The concept of such a strike force, which would be forged at a U.S. Southern Command regional training center relocated to Brazil and empowered to cross national borders, met with nervous resistance from most of the governments Cheney met with. But Bush is not about to give up on his new "Military Initiative for the Americas."

Thus, San Antonio will provide an arena for pushing ahead Bush's anti-drug "invasion force" scenario. But few expect anything concrete to come out of the summit itself, except maybe some electoral mileage for Bush's candidacy. One South American diplomat was cited by the *New York Times* saying, "I think the main objective for Mr. Bush here is going to be domestic."

However, Bush's drug war appears to be batting zero on the home front. In the period leading up to the summit, his administration has been

hit with a series of congressional and private evaluations which all conclude that his anti-drug strategy is a complete and total failure. Both production and consumption of drugs is soaring, and the Bush approach of militarizing the war abroad and ignoring it at home has enraged many.

The government nonetheless insists that its three-year "war on drugs" has garnered successes. Melvyn Levitsky, U.S. assistant secretary of state for international narcotics matters, testified on Capitol Hill Feb. 20 that cocaine use among students and occasional users was down, but neglected to address the country's soaring crack addiction rates, especially in the inner cities. He claimed coca cultivation in the Andean region was down, even while cocaine production from that region is officially reported to be near a record 1,000 metric tons! He claimed that drug seizures were significantly up in countries like Mexico and Colombia, but in view of the dramatic overall rise in cocaine production, those seizures are a drop in the bucket.

Finally, there is the bad joke of Levitsky's claim that the surrender of Medellín Cartel kingpins under the Gaviria government's plea-bargain arrangement is a "success story." Repeated charges that Medellín Cartel chieftain Pablo Escobar is running his trafficking operations from his army-protected bunker have been all but admitted by the Colombian government. Latest revelations include claims that Escobar is reviving his assassination bureau, to "pay back a few debts" to people like former Justice Minister

Enrique Parejo, one of Colombia's few surviving anti-drug voices.

More significantly, President Gaviria has authored an amnesty for the cartels' drug money—the unspoken part of his U.S.-approved plea-bargain offer—which has brought in a flood of narco-dollars and delivered control of the country's banks and stock markets to the narcos. Columnist Juan Diego Jaramillo charged Feb. 8 that the Gaviria government's economic policy is deliberately designed to create a "narco-economy."

Wrote Jaramillo, "It all began a year ago, when the government resolved to beg Colombians to bring their dollars home from abroad. They were amnestied with a 3% tax and invited to speculate with super-high interest rates that the government itself guaranteed. Then extradition was prohibited, and we were ready to turn ourselves into a fiscal and moral paradise of drug trafficking, which is precisely what has happened."

The Bush administration is now claiming that it intends to provide the evidence to keep Pablo Escobar behind bars. A deal between U.S. Assistant Attorney General Robert Mueller and Colombian Justice Minister Fernando Carrillo was reportedly just struck, whereby the U.S. will hand over evidence and witnesses to back up a new 50-count indictment against Escobar. And yet everyone in Colombia—and in Washington—knows that Escobar, along with his Cali Cartel colleagues, is essentially untouchable as long as cartel money is keeping the Colombian "economic miracle" afloat. The delivery of U.S. evidence against Escobar to the thoroughly corrupted Colombian justice system is thus just another element of the plea-bargain deal, whereby Escobar is protected from any future Colombian or U.S. prosecution under the double-jeopardy protections.