

Andean Report by Andrea Olivieri

Drugs and the new world order

Bush's "war on drugs" has taken on a new dimension, following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on kidnaping foreigners.

The Colombian daily *La Prensa* protested on June 23 that there were 118 U.S. military advisers and at least 50 agents of the Justice Department's Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) on Colombian soil, under cover of assisting the "war on drugs" that pro-legalization President César Gaviria is supposed to be conducting. *La Prensa* denounced agreements between the Colombian Air Force and the U.S. Southern Command, which apparently permit U.S. intrusion of Colombian airspace by frequently undetectable AWACS radar planes, and charged that the U.S. was conducting electronic sweeps of Colombian radar facilities. The newspaper also expressed concern that the U.S. was readying "bounty hunters" to invade Colombia and kidnap alleged drug cartel members.

In view of the June 15 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court permitting violation of the sovereignty of nations through the kidnaping of foreign nationals, countries in Ibero-America have begun to take a second—and third—look at apparently innocuous "anti-drug" or humanitarian deployments by U.S. military and police forces into their territory.

According to *La Nación* of Argentina, for example, U.S. Army troops, National Guard reservists, DEA agents, and U.S. Air Force personnel from U.S. Southern Command headquarters in Panama have combined with an Argentine Air Force mission in a deployment to the northern Argentine province of Salta, arousing widespread suspicion. Both the U.S. em-

bassy in Buenos Aires and spokesmen for the National Guard claim that the U.S. forces are providing humanitarian aid: dental care for locals and the de-parasitizing of their animals. However, *La Nación* insists that the deployment is actually an anti-drug operation, and that it is in violation of the Argentine Constitution, which prohibits military involvement in the war on drugs. The newspaper notes that the mission has tons of food, communications equipment, and vehicles appropriate for mountainous terrain.

Under pressure from the press and from opposition forces in the Congress, Argentine Defense Minister Antonio Ermán González blustered that no anti-drug operations were involved, and that the Argentine Air Force was merely conducting an exercise in radar control over airspace. When the Aeronautics Police issued a bulletin admitting that the operation was "related to the air traffic of drugs," Minister Ermán insisted that the bulletin contained an editorial mistake.

On June 20, Bolivian Bishop Luis Casey charged that armed U.S. troops had boarded a boat belonging to his vicarate and interrogated its occupants. The troops withdrew when they discovered a priest on board. Bishop Casey asked how the U.S. might react were a similar occurrence to take place on its territory. "It is not possible that a nation like ours can permit the entrance of armed people into our territory to accost Bolivian citizens," he said. He added that a contingent of 100 U.S. soldiers would be arriving shortly in the Bolivian department of

Pando, joining another 150 already there. Although they are allegedly involved in "civic action," said the bishop, "there is no doubt that this is a penetration of armed foreigners."

Bishop Casey's charges occurred at the same time that a number of Bolivian leaders were warning that the U.S. Supreme Court ruling could lead to DEA-inspired kidnapings of Bolivians sought on drug-trafficking charges by U.S. authorities. The Bolivian government warned that unless the ruling were clarified, DEA activities inside Bolivia could be suspended.

The court decision has created such turmoil that six Ibero-American Presidents on June 24 asked the legal committee of the Organization of American States to issue an opinion "on the international legality" of the U.S. Supreme Court's outrage. The call for OAS action was signed by the Presidents of Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Paraguay. Mexican Foreign Secretary Fernando Solana gave a press conference June 30 at which he demanded that the U.S. provide "juridical guarantees, not just verbal ones," that no more kidnapings will occur.

And yet, while the Bush administration apparently hopes to "wait out the storm" of protests, there are new revelations of U.S. kidnapings of Ibero-American nationals. A diplomatic stir was caused when word leaked out that U.S. FBI agents working with the Venezuelan political police had kidnaped two Colombians on Venezuelan soil, and brought them to the U.S. to stand trial on drug charges. Both the Venezuelan and Colombian foreign ministries have issued formal protests, but the U.S. has refused to comment. And on July 3, it was revealed that a Chilean had been kidnaped several months before in the Dominican Republic, and is now sitting in a Denver, Colorado jail.