

## Andean Report by Gretchen Small

### Who will join Colombia in battle?

*The drug mafia is redeploying into the territory of Colombia's neighbors, Venezuela, Peru, and Brazil.*

One month after the Colombian government began its full-scale offensive against the narcotics empire, military and police operations on the part of Colombia's neighbors by and large still remain limited to efforts to close their borders to traffickers intent on relocating their drug operations.

Recognition is growing, however, that nothing short of an integrated, continent-wide, military offensive will defeat a drug empire which, unlike the nations of the area, fully integrated its operations long ago.

Colombia's Andean neighbors are well aware they are most at risk at the moment. Venezuelan Defense Minister Gen. Filmo López Uzcátegui announced on Aug. 30 the reinforcement of military operations along the Venezuelan-Colombian border, in order "to prevent drug-trafficking and subversive elements being pursued and surrounded by the Colombian Army, from coming into our country."

Military forces along the border where placed on alert, and both the Venezuelan First Task Force and a 300-man battalion specializing in anti-guerrilla operations, were shifted to the border region.

Peru's authorities had already announced a border alert. On Sept. 10, they went one step further, as Peruvian anti-drug police, backed up by U.S. anti-drug personnel stationed in Peru, staged helicopter raids which shut down three jungle laboratories, opening what they characterized as a "frontal assault" against trafficking centers in the Upper Huallaga Valley, the heart of cocaine operations in Peru.

Ecuador's government initially put out the line that while they acknowl-

edged that traffickers might enter their territory, they would not settle there, because the country is "too small." Such complacency was soon proven unfounded. The president of the Ecuadoran Federation of Agricultural Producers reported on Sept. 5 that Colombian "investors" were buying up lands in at least two Ecuadoran provinces.

The former head of the central bank, Carlos Julio Emanuel, also protested that imports of chemicals used in cocaine processing had risen by more than \$100 million in the first half of 1989. On Sept. 13, Acting Minister of Government Luis Félix announced that the government would open an investigation.

Little more than expressions of desperation have been heard from Bolivian officials thus far. With Bolivia's economy devastated by looting by the international banks, the narcotics mafia's resources have long out-matched those of the government. Bolivia has historically been one of the two largest producers of coca leaves in the world, and traffickers had already begun building up operations there long before Colombia launched its war.

The Andean countries are not the only ones targeted. U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration sources expect traffickers to shift resources out of Colombia and into trafficking routes which run from Argentina, Brazil, and Chile into Europe, the *Washington Post* reported Sept. 5.

The Brazilian Army and Federal Police quickly initiated coordinated border operations with the Colombian Army after Aug. 18. Traffickers have

established a massive logistical, transport, and processing infrastructure in Brazil's vast Amazon region, which South American officials expect they will attempt to upgrade to serve as their new headquarters, if Colombia's war continues for any length of time.

"Nothing will be gained if the band of drug traffickers is attacked only in Colombia, and they succeed in taking refuge in Brazil. We must attack them on all fronts," Romeo Tuma, head of the Brazilian Federal Police, promised on Aug. 30. Tuma told reporters that he suspected that top Colombian traffickers retreating from the Colombian battle, had already crossed into Brazil in small planes, and were preparing to flee to Europe and the United States.

"The question is far from being one of just Brazil and Colombia. On the contrary, one should ask with great indignation why such a grave problem was never treated on the continental level," *Jornal do Brasil* stated in an Aug. 30 editorial. "This is a continent where rhetoric comes easy; few themes have been more aired and motivated than the famous continental integration. But, there is an excellent chance now to demonstrate that that idea is not merely material for speeches. A neighbor is threatened—and not by a political or ideological movement, but by the most manifest criminality. Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina have direct interests in this problem," *Jornal* warned.

That recognition is growing. On Aug. 28, Argentina became the first country to offer concrete military assistance to Colombia, when President Carlos Menem announced that his government is willing to send up to six Pucarás to Colombia, small Argentine planes which amply proved its military efficacy during the 1982 Malvinas War.