

Andean Report by José Restrepo

Bush threatens Colombia blockade

With Panama's blood fresh on his hands, Bush is now trying his big-stick tactics on another Ibero-American ally.

The Bush administration is making plans to block all trade coming from Colombia, with the excuse of fighting the drug traffic—the same excuse he used to justify a genocidal war against Panama. A Pentagon official announced Dec. 27 that the operation is intended to “make every kind of drug shipment from Colombia, be it by air or by sea, impossible.” Despite promises not to “shoot people out of the air,” such a blockade would clearly intimidate even the most honest Colombian exporter.

The military operation, according to the same official, would include an aircraft carrier battle group and Air Force squadron, and would cover Colombia's Caribbean and, possibly, Pacific coasts. The battle group could include as many as 90 aircraft, including fighters, bombers, and reconnaissance planes, and several ships and submarines.

In a communiqué issued Dec. 28, the Colombian government responded to the blockade announcement, saying that “the United States government has not consulted with Colombian authorities about this particular subject. The national government has not received any proposals or requests on the subject of operations against drug trafficking in international waters.”

The Colombian government made it quite clear that the U.S. plan was unilateral. “The policy of the national government in regard to multilateral or bilateral actions against the drug trade is premised on the principle of agreement as the basis of international

cooperation,” the statement read. But the Bush administration had apparently decided to act without respect for such bothersome principles.

“We have discussed absolutely nothing with the United States government and have not agreed to share our own air and physical space with other countries,” said Yesid Castaño, head of the National Aeronautics Agency in Colombia. Castaño added that Colombia was planning to increase its own radar network, precisely to achieve sovereign control over air traffic flows, in fulfillment of its international responsibilities.

Some analysts have suggested that the threat of a U.S. blockade is in retaliation for Foreign Minister Julio Londoño's denunciation of the Panama invasion as “unacceptable,” and his demand that American troops be immediately withdrawn.

Immediately after Londoño's statement, the U.S. embassy in Bogotá pressed the Colombian government to retract the foreign minister's condemnation. When Londoño refused, an intimidated President Virgilio Barco sent him on “vacation” and issued a revised statement expressing “deep concern” for the invasion of a country on Colombia's own border.

More than one Colombian journalist has drawn the conclusion from the U.S. blockade threat, that Washington is rattling sabers again. Wrote one columnist, “If the U.S. can invade Panama [in the name of fighting drugs], why not Peru or Colombia?” Another wrote that such a blockade by the “forces of war of another country”

is the equivalent of “placing our sovereignty in quarantine.”

While the Bush administration claims it would impose the Colombian blockade in the name of fighting drugs, it is clear that on this subject, the U.S. has little to teach Colombians, who have been martyred by the hundreds in a bloody war with the drug cartels. President Bush's own badly stained record includes agreements with the cocaine-trafficking Medellín Cartel to finance and arm the Nicaraguan Contras, and other sordid details likely to come out in the trial of Panama's Gen. Manuel Noriega.

Lyndon LaRouche, the Bush regime's most prominent political prisoner, commented on the planned U.S. blockade of Colombia that the action has nothing to do with fighting a war on drugs. Rather, he said, it has everything to do with the “Andropov Doctrine” for a superpower condominium. According to that doctrine, the United States will take “a free hand in the Western Hemisphere, on condition of an adequate reduction of forces, including, possibly, the withdrawal of the Sixth Fleet from the Mediterranean, to reduce the threat to the Soviet heartland.” LaRouche added that “if the Panama operation is part of this, as it appears to be, then look for something following the staging of a naval force off Colombia, as leaning toward action against Cuba or Nicaragua.”

Bush will do everything he can to impose his blockade against Colombia, and the current plan is to ram through such a scenario at the upcoming drug summit meeting in Cartagena, where Bush is scheduled to discuss “joint” anti-drug actions with the drug-producer nations of the Andean region. If Bush's performance in Panama is any indication, a rejection of his blockade plan by the Colombian government is not likely to stand in the way of his “Teddy Roosevelt” image.