

## Andean Report by Andrea Olivieri

### Colombia in uproar over U.S. flights

*The escape of Medellín Cartel chieftain Escobar gave Bush another pretext to test his Thornburgh Doctrine.*

A cluster of U.S. spy planes, equipped with the latest in radar detection, infrared scopes, and telecommunications intercept devices, were sent into Colombian airspace a week after drug lord Pablo Escobar (learning of his imminent transfer to a real prison) walked out of his Army-protected refuge July 22 and settled into more clandestine quarters. Medellín residents were awakened at 3 a.m. to the drone of U.S. P-3s and C-130s circling overhead, with many panicking at the prospect of a Panama-style invasion by U.S. troops.

Their fear of invasion was an appropriate response to Washington's latest foreign policy actions stemming from the so-called Thornburgh Doctrine (first tested in Panama in 1989) which defines the United States as the world's gendarme, and "international criminals" as whomever Washington chooses to define as such. Under George Bush's new world order, national borders no longer exist and the concept of national sovereignty is dismissed as an anachronism.

Although the involvement of U.S. surveillance aircraft in the hunt for the fugitive Escobar was explained by Colombian President César Gaviria as "collaboration in photometry and technical intelligence," Colombians weren't buying it. The president of Gaviria's Council of State, Alvaro Lacompte, denounced the overflights as "in violation of the national Constitution," which specifies that any foreign troops or military incursion on Colombian soil must have prior approval by both the Congress and council.

The Congress demanded an explanation from Gaviria of why it was bypassed in the decision to invite U.S. military involvement. Opposition Sen. Fabio Valencia charged that the U.S. military presence on Colombian territory is "a supremely serious thing. We Colombians cannot go on being spectators at the surrender of our national sovereignty."

Escobar's lawyer drew the obvious conclusion: "We know the [U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration] has *carte blanche* to kidnap anyone in the world. They took the doctor from Mexico, Noriega from Panama. They can take anyone. It would be a big coup for George Bush, who is losing in the polls, to be able to say to the American people, 'Here is Public Enemy No. 1'"—referring to Escobar.

Apart from being a violation of the Colombian Constitution, U.S. military involvement in the hunt for Escobar was a deliberate affront to the Colombian Armed Forces, which have unfairly taken the flak for Gaviria's disastrous appeasement policy gone sour and has been pilloried in the U.S. press for its alleged incompetence and corruption.

The outcry against the U.S. spy planes was nonetheless sufficient to force a retreat. On Aug. 4, Colombian Foreign Minister Noemí Sanín announced that "the operation is finished," and that the U.S. planes would be withdrawn.

It is unclear whether the Bush administration will be satisfied with this latest imperial "probe" into Ibero-America, or whether it will attempt to

snatch Escobar, an action that could end Gaviria's already precarious hold on the presidency.

What is clear is that reports on the conditions of Escobar's "imprisonment" are awakening Colombians to the treasonous nature of the plea-bargain arrangement Gaviria provided one of the world's most murderous and dangerous criminals. Following an Aug. 2 visit to "the Cathedral," as Escobar dubbed his jail, Attorney General Gustavo de Greiff issued a statement to the press expressing his "nausea" over the luxuries he found there:

"It wasn't a prison. It was more like a vacation ranch, as easy to get out of as to get in. . . . It is absolutely incredible that there existed rooms, so-called cells of the prisoners, equipped with every possible comfort; nearby cottages with the same luxuries, and three houses apparently outside the perimeter of the jail, but which the prisoners could go to any time they wanted."

Pornographic videotapes of orgies held at the prison were discovered, along with huge numbers of photos of naked women. Cellular telephones, fax machines, computers, sophisticated audio-visual equipment, and an entire corporate boardroom serviced Escobar's multibillion-dollar drug-trafficking business. Luxuriously appointed and custom-designed apartments, with fireplaces, bars, waterbeds, and a fully-equipped gymnasium were complemented by soccer fields and swimming lakes with artificial waterfalls. Tuxedoed guards served Escobar his food and drinks. A quantity of women's underwear was discovered, although De Greiff didn't say whether it belonged to the prisoners or to their guests.

De Greiff concluded, "It is inexplicable that no one discovered this situation before the escape, and if they did, why they didn't speak up."