



## **Pentagon Plans Latin America-Wide Intervention Ability for New Military Base in Colombia**

*May 18, 2009, Oakland, CA:* The United States is planning to establish a new military facility in Colombia that will give the U.S. increased capacity for military intervention throughout most of Latin America. Given the tense relations of Washington with Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, as well as the Colombian military's atrocious human rights record, the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) believes the plan should be subjected to vigorous debate.

"This base would feed a failed drug policy, support an abusive army, and reinforce a tragic history of U.S. military intervention in the region," said John Lindsay-Poland, Latin America Program Co-director for FOR. "It's wrong and wasteful, and Congress should scrap it."

The new facility in Palanquero, Colombia would not be limited to counter-narcotics operations, nor even to operations in the Andean region, according to an Air Mobility Command (AMC) [planning document](#). The U.S. Southern Command aims to establish a base with "air mobility reach on the South American continent" in addition to a capacity for counter-narcotics operations, through the year 2025.

With help from the Transportation Command and AMC, the Southern Command identified Palanquero, from which "nearly half of the continent can be covered by a C-17 without refueling." If fuel is available at its destination, "a C-17 could cover the entire continent, with the exception of the Cape Horn region," the AMC planners wrote.

President Obama's [Pentagon budget](#), submitted May 7, includes \$46 million for development of the Palanquero base, and says the Defense Department seeks "an array of access arrangements for contingency operations, logistics, and training in Central/South America." A U.S. Embassy spokesperson in Bogota told FOR that negotiations were not yet concluded for the base.

The Southern Command is also pursuing access to a site in French Guiana that would permit military aircraft [to reach sites in Africa](#), via the Ascension Islands, according to AMC. SouthCom apparently sought use of facilities in Recife, Brazil for the same purpose, but "the political relationship with Brazil is not conducive to the necessary agreements," AMC wrote.

The lease for the U.S. "Forward Operating Location" in Manta, Ecuador expires in November 2009, and Ecuador notified Washington last year that it would not renew the lease. The facility in Manta was authorized to conduct only counter-drug operations, but drug traffic in the Pacific, where aircraft from Manta patrolled, has [increased in recent years](#), according to military spokesmen. U.S. forces in Manta also carried out operations to arrest undocumented Ecuadorans on boats in Ecuadoran waters. But public documentation of U.S. operations conducted from Manta does not indicate use of C-17 cargo aircraft, so their use in Palanquero apparently would represent an expanded U.S. military capacity in the region.

The “mission creep” in the proposal for continent-wide operations from Colombia is also evident in President Obama’s [foreign aid request](#) for Colombia. While the budget request for \$508 million tacitly recognizes the failure of Plan Colombia drug policy by cutting funds for fumigation of coca crops, the White House is asking for an increase in counterinsurgency equipment and training to the Colombian Army.

Colombian and U.S. human rights and political leaders have [objected to continued funding](#) of the Colombian army, especially after [revelations](#) that the army reportedly murdered more than 1,000 civilians and alleged they were guerrillas killed in combat, in order to increase their body count. The Palanquero base itself, which houses a Colombian Air Force unit, was banned from receiving U.S. aid for five years because of its role in a 1998 [attack that killed 17 civilians](#), including six children, from the effects of U.S.-made cluster bombs. The United States resumed aid to the unit last year.

Colombian [Defense Ministry sources said](#) that Colombia was attempting to obtain increases in U.S. military aid as part of the base negotiations. Palanquero offers the U.S. military [a sophisticated infrastructure](#) – a 10,000-foot runway, hangars that hold more than 100 aircraft, housing for more than 2,000 men, restaurants, casinos, supermarkets, and a radar system installed by the United States itself in the 1990s.

U.S. law caps the number of uniformed U.S. soldiers operating in Colombia at 800, and the number of contractors at 600. Until last year, a significant number of them were intelligence personnel assigned to the effort to rescue three U.S. military contractors kidnapped by the leftist FARC guerrillas. With the rescue last year of the three contractors, many U.S. intelligence staff left Colombia, leaving space for soldiers to run operations in the prospective new U.S. base or bases.

“That the Colombian government asks for a U.S. base now would be a serious error,” says former defense minister and presidential candidate [Rafael Pardo](#).

FOR believes replacing one military base that was set up for the failed drug war with another base to intervene in South America and to support the abusive Colombian army would be a serious error for the United States as well.

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