

# Did U.S. Mercenaries Bomb the FARC Encampment in Ecuador?

By [Tom Burghardt](#)

Global Research, March 23, 2008

[Antifascist Calling...](#) 23 March 2008

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

## [Antifascist Calling...](#)

As diplomatic and military fallout from the March 1 Colombian raid into Ecuador escalate regional tensions, allegations from Ecuadorean sources link the unprovoked attack to the U.S. Manta airbase and charge the American mercenary firm DynCorp with piloting the planes that killed FARC commander Raúl Reyes and 24 others.

According to investigative journalist [Kintto Lucas](#),

A high-level Ecuadorean military officer, who preferred to remain anonymous, told IPS that “a large proportion of senior officers” in Ecuador share “the conviction that the United States was an accomplice in the attack” launched Mar. 1 by the Colombian military on a FARC...camp in Ecuador, near the Colombian border.

“Since Plan Colombia was launched in 2000, a strategic alliance between the United States and Colombia has taken shape, first to combat the insurgents and later to involve neighbouring countries in that war,” said the officer. “What is happening today is a consequence of that.” (“Ecuador: Manta Air Base Tied to Colombian Raid on FARC Camp,” Inter Press Service, March 21, 2008)

Ecuadorean Defense Minister Wellington Sandoval said an investigation into whether the Manta airbase was used in the attack should be carried out by Ecuador’s armed forces. According to the leasing agreement, the Manta base can only be used for counternarcotics operations.

While U.S. Ambassador Linda Jewell assured Ecuadorean Foreign Minister María Isabel Salvador that the planes at Manta “were not involved in any way,” the military source told the IPS reporter that “the technology used, first to locate the target, in other words the camp, and later to attack it, was from the United States.”

Sandoval had earlier said that “equipment that the Latin American armed forces do not have” was used in the Mar. 1 bombing, according to Lucas.

Commenting on the tactical modalities employed in the raid, Sandoval said,

“They dropped around five ‘smart bombs’,” the kind used by the United States

in the First Gulf War (1991), “with impressive precision and a margin of error of just one metre, at night, from planes travelling at high speeds,” said the minister.

The military source said that “an attack with smart bombs requires pilots who have experience in such operations, which means U.S. pilots. That’s why I think they did the job and later told the Colombians ‘now go in and find the bodies’, which is when Colombian helicopters and troops showed up” at the site of the raid.

The U.S. role in the raid could have been even greater. The officer claimed that the bombing raid was actually led by “U.S. pilots, possibly from DynCorp.” While demonstrable evidence for these explosive charges has yet to surface, the statements by the Ecuadorean officer seem plausible, particularly when one considers the role played by American military- and mercenary personnel in coordinating Plan Colombia.

Claiming that the aircraft “took off from the Tres Esquinas air base in the southern Colombian department of Caquetá,” the officer went on to describe how “the planes used to fumigate coca crops or to attack the guerrillas are piloted by serving members of the U.S. military or (former) military men at the service of companies like DynCorp.”

More than \$5.5 billion dollars has been poured into the region by the United States since 2000, allegedly for “counternarcotics operations.” A key strategic goal of America’s “war on drugs” is to take the “battle” to the source—coca growing, processing and exporting Andean nations, and DynCorp has been a major beneficiary of U.S. largess in the area.

Meanwhile, Ecuador’s President Rafael Correa warned on Saturday that diplomatic tension with Colombia will rise “if an Ecuadorean was among the dead,” in the March 1 raid [Reuters](#) has reported. “It would be extremely grave if it is proven that a Ecuadorean died. We will not let this murder go unpunished.”

Citing Uribe’s “dodgy dossier,” the [Associated Press](#) claims “that the FARC gave money to Correa’s 2006 presidential campaign.” Without skipping a beat, or apparently examining the files, denounced as forgeries by investigative journalist [Greg Palast](#) who actually did, the AP reporter avers, again citing Uribe that “Correa’s ally, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, planned to give the rebels US\$300 million.”

As a key “private partner” of Plan Colombia, DynCorp’s aerial spraying of herbicides over portions of the Colombian countryside has caused wide-spread ecological damage with no discernible diminution of the flow of narcotics into Europe and the United States.

Indeed, according to a February 2008 [report](#) published by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), “intensive aerial herbicide spraying of coca crops in Colombia has backfired badly, contributing to the spread of coca cultivation and cocaine production to new areas of the country and threatening human health and the environment.” The WOLA report, citing UN figures, goes on to describe how cocaine production in Colombia has risen from 617 metric tons in 2001 to 640 metric tons in 2005, a wretched failure considering the inestimable cost in human lives and habitat destruction.

Since 2002, congressional authorization for the program has permitted “counternarcotics” funds to be siphoned-off into scorched-earth counterinsurgency operations by the

Colombian Army and their paramilitary allies. Some 300 U.S. Special Forces “advisors” serve as “mentors” to elite Army units in what has become another front in the U.S.-led “war on terror.”

Analyst [Doug Stokes](#) describes how Plan Colombia has morphed into an all-out war against Colombia’s left-wing opposition:

*In the case of Colombia, civil society organizations, especially those that seek to challenge prevailing socio-economic conditions, are construed by the U.S. government as potentially subversive to the social and political order, and in the context of counter-insurgency, legitimate targets for “paramilitary, sabotage and/or terrorist” attack. [T]he 1991 post-Cold War U.S. reorganization of Colombian military and paramilitary networks and the massive levels of post-Cold War U.S. funding of the Colombian military serves to underline the continued relevance of counterinsurgency for destroying movements that may threaten a stability geared towards U.S. interests. (“The U.S. War of Terror in Colombia, Colombia Journal, December 2, 2002)*

The controversial mercenary outfit, like its better-known cousin, Blackwater, has a dodgy history and has been fingered by investigators in human rights and other abuses in countries where it operates.

According to a CorpWatch [profile](#),

DynCorp began in 1946 as a project of a small group of returning World War II pilots seeking to use their military contacts to make a living in the air cargo business. Named California Eastern Airways the original company was soon airlifting supplies to Asia used in the Korean War. By 2002 Dyncorp, headquartered in Reston, Virginia, was the nation’s 13th largest military contractor with \$2.3 billion in revenue until it merged with Computer Sciences Corporation, an El Segundo, California-based technology services company, in an acquisition worth nearly \$1 billion.

The company is not short on controversy. Under the Plan Colombia contract, the company has 88 aircraft and 307 employees-139 of them American-flying missions to eradicate coca fields in Colombia. Soldier of Fortune magazine once ran a cover story on DynCorp, proclaiming it “Colombia’s Coke-Bustin’ Broncos.” (“CSC/DynCorp,” Company Profiles, CorpWatch, no date)

While attempting to fly below the public radar, DynCorp’s questionable Plan Colombia operations surfaced when a group of Ecuadorean peasants filed a class action lawsuit against the outfit in 2001. The suit alleges that herbicides spread by DynCorp aircraft in Colombia drifted across the border, killing their crops and causing widespread livestock and human illnesses; in several cases, aerial fumigation led to the death of several children.

Washington responded by attempting to have the suit squashed. According to CorpWatch, “Assistant Secretary of State Rand Beers intervened in the case right away telling the judge the lawsuit posed ‘a grave risk to US national security and foreign policy objectives.’”

In a 2001 article profiling DynCorp’s Latin American operations, investigative reporter Jeremy Bigwood [wrote](#),

DynCorp's day to day operations are overseen by a secretive clique of officials in the State Department's Narcotic Affairs Section (NAS) and the State Department's Air Wing, a group that includes unreformed cold warriors and leftovers from the Central American wars of the 1980's. Working hand-in-hand with U.S. military officials, Narcotic Affairs is supposed to be part of the drug war only, running the fumigation operations against drug crops. But there are indications that it is also involved in the counter-insurgency. In areas that are targeted for fumigation by Narcotic Affairs, Colombian right-wing paramilitaries arrive, sometimes by military helicopter, according to a human rights worker living in the Putumayo who asked for anonymity. Members of these paramilitaries "clear the ground" so that the planes spraying herbicides, often piloted by Americans, are not shot at by angry farmers or insurgents. ("DynCorp in Colombia: Outsourcing the Drug War," CorpWatch, May 23, 2001)

Whether or not DynCorp pilots bombed Ecuador on behalf of America's ally, the paramilitary-linked regime of Colombian president Álvaro Uribe, it is clear the United States will not willingly relinquish the Manta airbase when its lease expires in November 2009.

In 2001, a retired Ecuadorean army colonel, Fausto Cobo, told IPS that "Manta, for the purposes of Plan Colombia is a U.S. aircraft carrier, on land."

As one of four "forward operating locations (FOLs), along with Curaçao, Aruba and El Salvador, Manta is a critical strategic base for U.S. "counternarcotics" and "counterinsurgency" operations in Latin America-and as a possible launching pad for an attack on Venezuela.

While the furor surrounding Colombia's allegations against Ecuador and Venezuela may have fallen off the media's radar, [congressional efforts](#) to have Venezuela declared "a state sponsor of terrorism," have not.

In Latin America, the "public-private partnership" in repression with well-paid mercenary outfits like DynCorp taking the lead, it is a near certainty that incidents like the March 1 raid will continue as Washington seeks to shore-up the periphery of its shrinking imperialist empire.

*Tom Burghardt is a researcher and activist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to publishing in Covert Action Quarterly, Love & Rage and Antifa Forum, he is the editor of Police State America: U.S. Military "Civil Disturbance" Planning, distributed by AK Press.*

The original source of this article is [Antifascist Calling...](#)  
Copyright © [Tom Burghardt](#), [Antifascist Calling...](#), 2008

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Tom Burghardt](#)  
<http://antifascist-calling.blogspot.com/>

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)