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## MILITARY

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### US Southern Command

United States law allows up to 500 US military personnel and 300 civilian contract personnel to be deployed in Colombia at any given time. According to US officials, as of late 2002 there were on average about 120 American pilots and other private contractors in Colombia's anti-narcotics program at any one time. They provide counterinsurgency instruction, maintain listening outposts, or monitor air traffic from any of five US-built rural radar stations, among various other tasks. American personnel serve as liaison officers at the Colombian Joint Intelligence Center in the southern base of Tres Esquinas, which the US helped set up.

Military personnel also are deployed in Peru at three U.S.-built radar stations, in addition to hundreds of troops helping to refurbish an air base in Manta, Ecuador, and to construct several military bases in Bolivia. The United States also runs military surveillance flights from the Caribbean islands of Aruba and Curacao. No information is available about the number of CIA and other intelligence personnel operating in the region.

Ecuador seems to have moved into the fore-front of integrated US military planning and operations. New facilities have been established at the port city of Manta, Special Force units from the US Southern Command operate alongside some 5,000 Ecuadorian troops of the 19th Napo and 21st Condor Jungle Infantry Brigades on the borders of Colombia, while other specialist US forces operate radar stations tracking the drug-cartel's aircraft and man secret listening posts on behalf of the NSA to monitor communications.

The US military mission occupies a small building on the sprawling Fuerte Tiuna military base, Venezuela's Pentagon. In August 2001, the Venezuelan armed forces announced that the mission would be shut down. The government said it needed the office space, but observers here took it as a clear sign that Chavez wanted to distance his generals from their American allies.

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