

## Bush and Uribe v. Chavez and Correa

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Call it another salvo in Bush v. Chavez with Ecuador's Raphael Correa as a secondary target and Colombia's Alvaro Uribe as a proxy aggressor. The Ecuadorean incursion was no ordinary cross-border raid. It was a made in Washington affair that escalates a nine year attempt to remove the Venezuelan leader and return oligarchs in the country to power. It also threatens two regional leaders who know what they're up against in Uribe and Washington, "friendly" handshakes in the Dominican Republic notwithstanding. The situation is far from settled, and here's how events unfolded so far:

— on March 1, the Colombian military illegally entered Ecuadorean air space and invaded on the ground; the target was a FARC-EP rebel camp; US intelligence was key by identifying the precise location to bomb through satellite telephone tracking; Colombian Radio Cadena Nacional (RCN) reported it heard a FARC-EP leader - Chavez conversation three days before the raid; Colombian Noticias Uno TV said "foreign spy planes" photographed FARC-EP's precise location for the country's military to use in the raid;

— it's also known that US Special Forces train Colombian counterinsurgents, accompany them on missions, and likely participated (covertly) in the March 1 operation;

— Colombian (and likely US) forces attacked and slaughtered over 20 people in total, including 16 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) members while they slept;

— among the dead was FARC-EP's second-in-command, Raul Reyes; he was FARC-EP's public voice, its key peace negotiator since the 1990s, and the lead figure in the Chavez-arranged hostage releases; that and his prominence made him a target so his death may disrupt the process and current efforts toward resolving a 40 year conflict equitably; Washington wants it halted, so does Uribe, and that's where things now stand;

— Hugo Chavez and other Latin American leaders were united in condemning the hostile act; the 35-member Organization of American States, however, was tepid in its formal March 5 response; Correa called it welcome but inadequate and insists on a formal condemnation; Chavez was even more forceful saying: "We demand condemnation of the Colombian government for this aberrant act," he called it a "war crime (and blamed the crisis on the US) empire and its lackeys;"

— ahead of the March 7 Dominican Republic XX Rio Group Summit of Latin American leaders, foreign ministers from Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil and Peru issued a statement demanding respect for their national sovereignty; Chavez called the meeting "positive" and advocated "cooling tensions;" he supported Ecuador and said: "We don't want war;"

— Chavez, Correa and Uribe exchanged cool handshakes and pro forma conciliatory

statements at the Summit; for what it's worth, Uribe issued a "formal apology" to the Ecuadorean government and its people; call it disingenuous diplomacy; it settles nothing in spite of how the media played it;

— one example is correspondent Simon Romero of The New York Times; he's always disingenuous and never neutral; he reported "handshakes and warm embraces....ended the dispute" as though nothing ever happened and it's again business as usual; in fact, nothing is settled; the incident still simmers, it's just a matter of time before the next one erupts, and Chavez, Correa and other regional leaders know it; so does Washington that plans them;

— earlier, Chavez also called Colombia the "Israel of Latin America" saying both countries claimed "a supposed right to defense," to bomb and invade neighbors on orders from Washington;

— Uribe confirmed it by saying he "refused to rule out future military incursions into Ecuador or Venezuela," so expect more provocations ahead with full Washington backing;

— at the same time, huge crowds of Colombians at home and abroad marched for peace and against terrorist acts; they denounced violence on both sides and want it ended, but a new disturbing report came out:

— the Colombia weekly *Semana* wrote that ex-Israeli military men are fighting guerrilla organizations (meaning the FARC-EP and ELN), and Defense Minister Juan Santos confirmed that "A group of former Israeli military officials (including three senior generals, a lower ranking officer and three translators) is counseling the military's top brass on intelligence issues;" in addition, FARC-EP claims that Israeli commandos were engaged against them along with US and British forces.

The hostile words followed with Ecuadorean officials citing irrefutable evidence that Uribe's attack was premeditated and his worst ever aggression against their country. Correa expressed "outrage" and sees no negotiated settlement because "there is nothing to negotiate." In Brazil for a meeting with Lula da Silva, he said Ecuador is prepared to go "up to the ultimate consequences (over this even though) nobody wants war. But we won't fool ourselves. The war was started by Colombia. We were bombed."

Correa and Chavez both deployed troops to their borders, and each country went further. Ecuador severed diplomatic ties with its neighbor, and Correa called Uribe Washington's "unconditional puppet" for his blatant act of aggression. Chavez also expelled Colombia's ambassador, and called the strike "a cowardly murder, all of it coldly calculated" and planned in Washington. He also warned Colombia against similar Venezuelan incursions that he would interpret as a "cause for war."

Uribe, in turn, defiantly shot back that Colombia will charge Chavez in the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague for materially aiding the FARC-EP by "sponsor(ing) and funding genocidal" groups. Colombia's Radio Caracol then reported Uribe intends to "revise" or "examine" his charges with no further details given. And on the same day Vice-President Francisco Santos Calderon provocatively indicated that relations with Correa "may be recovered," but it will be "very difficult" to reach a diplomatic solution with Chavez. He and Uribe have long been antagonists and have been at odds for months over Chavez's hostage mediating success that embarrassed the Colombian president and Washington in the

process.

Colombian officials heightened tensions further through misstatements. First, they claimed bombings occurred on their own territory. Then they changed the story saying: "Colombia has not violated any sovereignty, (we) only acted in accordance with the principle of legitimate defense," and responded to fire from inside Ecuador.

Both statements were untrue and Chavez reacted. He accused Uribe of lying and called him a "criminal" saying: "Not only is he a liar, a mafia boss, a paramilitary who leads a narco-government (that's) a lackey of the United States (but he also) leads a band of criminals from his palace."

The war of words continues with Washington's OAS ambassador, Robert Manzanares, accusing FARC-EP of "undertak(ing) repeated incursions and infringements of national sovereignty (against Colombia's) neighbors." Defense Secretary Robert Gates "applauded" Uribe's action, and when asked if US intelligence supported it said: "Well, I would just say that we are very supportive."

George Bush joined in, and jumped to his ally's defense. Well he should as Washington provides Colombia with over \$600 million a year and all for one purpose - to support repression and the interests of capital at the expense of beneficial social change. On March 4, Bush phoned Uribe with assurances "America fully supports Colombia's democracy (and) firmly opposes any acts of aggression that could destabilize the region." He also called sending Venezuelan troops to the border "provocative maneuvers."

In addition, he used the crisis to push Congress to approve a trade deal that's been stalled over issues of Uribe's paramilitary links and the country's human rights record. Bush did what he always does. He cited national security and said ratification is a way to counter leaders like Chavez who destabilize the region. "If we fail to approve this agreement, we will let down our close ally, we will damage our credibility (and) will embolden the demagogues in our hemisphere."

Consider comments as well from US presidential candidates. On March 3, Barack Obama said: "The Colombian people have suffered for more than four decades at the hands of a brutal terrorist insurgency, and the Colombian government has every right to defend itself against the...FARC."

Hillary Clinton was even more hostile stating: "Hugo Chavez's order yesterday to send ten battalions to the Colombian border is unwarranted and dangerous. (Colombia) has every right to defend itself against drug trafficking terrorist organizations that have kidnapped innocent civilians, including American citizens. By praising and supporting the (FARC-EP), Chavez is openly siding with terrorists that threaten Colombian democracy and the peace and security in the region. (Chavez) must call a halt to this provocative action. As president, I will....press Chavez to change course."

Then there's John McCain who even scares some in the Pentagon and is virulently hostile to Chavez. He calls him a "wacko" and "two-bit-dictator" and advocates his ouster "in the name of democracy and freedom throughout the hemisphere." As president, he'd be the most likely to provoke a confrontation because he's ideologically committed to militarism "to confront a range of security challenges....in a dangerous world."

One writer calls him an “authoritarian maverick” and a man to fear as president. Another describes his “McCainiac mentality,” his notion of occupying Iraq for 100 years or as long as it takes, and his belief that militarism, nationalism and honor are their own rewards. Still another expects a McCain administration to confront Venezuela and Cuba by allying with regional rightist forces for regime change in both countries. Add Ecuador as well and a determination to declare “mission accomplished” before his tenure ends if he’s elected.

Disturbing evidence of his belligerence is in his October 2001 commentary titled: “No Substitute for Victory – War is hell. Let’s get on with it.” In it, he calls war “miserable business (but let’s) get on with the business of killing our enemies as quickly....and as ruthlessly as we must....(post-9/11) we have only one primary occupation, and that is to vanquish international terrorism. Not reduce it. Not change its operations. Not temporarily subdue it. But vanquish it...We did not cause this war (but) we must destroy the people who (did).” Is this a man to trust as president who considers anyone unresponsive to US interests a “terrorist” and state enemy to be destroyed?

Democrats are no better, so expect the worst under a new president next year. The “war on terror” will continue, and Uribe will get full funding and support for internal repression and Washington-ordered regional aggression.

By that standard, Hugo Chavez and Raul Castro have every right to invade Florida to capture two resident terrorists for bona fide crimes against their countries – Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch. Posada is a former CIA operative who terror-bombed and killed 73 people in 1976 on Cubana flight 455 that Bosch likely masterminded. Yet South Florida’s Cuban-American community and the Bush administration protect them as an expression of their judicial double standard.

### **Heated Rhetoric and Provocative Charges**

Further heightening tensions, Colombia’s vice-president, Francisco Santos Calderon, made an outlandish claim. With no verifiable evidence, even some in the intelligence community are dubious – that invading forces found provocative material on three recovered laptops that supposedly show:

- Venezuela provided \$300 million in aid to the FARC-EP;
- Chavez and Correa have links to the rebel group;
- Chavez is trying to undermine, isolate and discredit Uribe and wants to cleanse FARC-EP of its (undeserved) pariah status; and most outrageous of all that
- FARC-EP acquired 50 kilograms (110 pounds) of uranium for a radioactive dirty bomb it wishes to sell for profit.

Former State Department arms smuggling expert, James Lewis, discounts the story. He said: “In a lot of cases involving uranium deals, somebody’s usually getting snookered (and the 50 kilos) quantity sounds really suspicious” because US intelligence would likely spot anyone securing an amount that large.

Chavez as well denounced the claim and called the documents lies and fabrications. He also closed Venezuela’s 1300 mile long Colombian border, and at an extraordinary Organization

of American States (OAS) session, his representative, Jorge Valero, said: "The Colombian government has lied blatantly. All (its) accusations....against Venezuela and Ecuador are false, totally false." Retired Venezuelan general, Alberto Muller Rojas, went further. He denounced Colombia's "evidence" as an "exercise in falsification (and stated that) the only foreign government that finances the conflict in Colombia is the United States," it's done it with billions for years, and in the same way it destabilizes regions throughout the world.

### **Corporate Media Responses**

A March 5 Washington Post editorial supported Colombia's aggression, but that's typical for its one-sided type journalism. The commentary said: "Colombia's armed forces struck a bold blow against the....FARC, a group specializing in drug trafficking, abductions and massacres of civilians that (the US has) designated a terrorist organization....it showed how Colombia's democratic government may be finally gaining the upper hand over (these) murderous gangs.

Now (Hugo Chavez) has been revealed as an explicit supporter and possible financier of the FARC. (He) made a show of ordering Venezuelan troops to the border (and) goaded his client (Correa) into mimicking his reaction. (They) both may have something to hide (about) financial links with the terrorists (and) backing an armed (terrorist) movement against the democratically elected government of their neighbor. No wonder (Uribe acted); he knows (Chavez and Correa) provid(e) a haven for the terrorists."

The New York Times' Simon Romero's comments were more measured in an article titled: "Colombia is Flashpoint in Chavez Fued with US," but his message was much as it always is - one-sidedly supporting Washington and its allies and hostile to Hugo Chavez. In this instance, it's his ties to the FARC-EP and supplying it with millions of dollars in aid. In an editorial, The Times went further. It accused Chavez of "meddling and manipulation (and trying to) revive his own flagging political fortunes" by getting involved. It added "Mr. Chavez should just keep quiet. The more he meddles, the easier it is to believe that the charges against him are true."

Then there's the Wall Street Journal that's even further hard right since Rupert Murdoch bought it. It's March 4 editorial was titled "Chavez's War Drums" with a sub-headline stating "A laptop spills some of his secrets." The commentary noted "Colombia's....major antiterror victory" and "Chavez....threatening war....But the real news (was in) a laptop belonging to (Paul Reyes) that reveals some of Mr. Chavez's secrets."

Columbia's "military (entered Ecuador) for legitimate reasons of self-defense....the Venezuelan bully....ordered 10 battalions and tanks to the Colombian border, and warned of war if the Colombian army staged a similar raid inside Venezuela....The war bluster is phony because Mr. Chavez is already waging his own guerrilla campaign against Colombia (by) support(ing) the FARC." The recovered "computer contains evidence supporting the claim that the FARC is working with Mr. Chavez (and) showed that Venezuela may have paid \$300 million (for the) FARC's recent release of six civilian hostages."

Documents also "show(ed) that the FARC was seeking to buy 50 kilos of uranium (and sold) 700 kilograms of cocaine valued at \$1.5 million." The "military found a thank you note from Mr. Chavez to FARC for some \$150,000 that the rebels had sent him when he was in prison for his attempted (1992) coup d'etat."

This type agitprop never lets up, so expect continued anti-Chavez rhetoric ahead as the dominant media plays up every chance they get to demonize him and support Bush's hostile regime change agenda.

### **Some Background on the Diplomatic Crisis**

Venezuelan-American lawyer and activist Eva Golinger writes on how Washington relentlessly targets Chavez. In November 2006, she explained what's just as true today - that the Bush administration goes at him by "three different fronts of attack."

- the financial front by funding opposition groups "to obtain control in all different parts of the country," including the electoral process;

- the diplomatic front by accusing Chavez of destabilizing the region; also by "diplomatic terrorism," including sanctions "for made-up things" like non-existent drugs trafficking or not cooperating against it or the "war on terrorism;" and

- the military front with a large US presence in the region, major support for Uribe, and "use of Colombian paramilitaries (and) intervention of US Special Forces; the paramilitaries are the 'actors'....they're....sent....to try to assassinate Chavez (but) command-and-control is directed and controlled by the US Special Forces;" the paramilitaries and Colombian army "do the dirty work" while the US is "building up a secret (military) base near" Venezuela's border; in addition, "there were attempts to push the FARC into Venezuela to provide an excuse for Colombian troops to enter the country (and) make (the) border a combat zone." At the time Golinger wrote, she said there were more than 3000 paramilitaries in the Caracas area alone. That number or more are still likely there and elsewhere in the country, and in Ecuador as well.

### **Colombian-Directed Hostility Toward Chavez**

Since his 2002 election, Uribe has been hostile to Chavez, and Colombian paramilitaries continue committing border-area terrorist attacks and within Venezuela as well. Uribe is Washington's key Latin American ally, he's liberally funded for his role, and his background makes him ideal - his hard right ideology, a wealthy land-owning family background, and a tainted past history:

- he's been linked to the country's paramilitary death squads and drug cartels;

- for over 20 years in various government positions, he supported state terrorism, including kidnappings and assassinations - of trade unionists, opposition group peasants, social and human rights activists, journalists, and others on the left who oppose the country's corporatist interests; and

- he frequently violates Venezuelan sovereignty with full backing and funding of the Bush administration calling the shots.

In his earlier writing, long-time Latin American expert, James Petras, referred to "the Uribe Doctrine (that) lays the basis for unilateral military intervention anywhere in the hemisphere (and echoes) Washington's global pronouncements." They remain unchanged and claim the right to:

- "violate any country's sovereignty (through) force and violence;



- recruit and subvert military and security officials to serve (Colombian and Washington's) interests;
- allocate funds to bounty hunters or 'third parties' to engage in illegal violent acts within a targeted country;
- (assert) the supremacy of Colombian laws, decrees and policies over and against the sovereign laws of the intervened countries;" and
- target Venezuela and militarily act wherever else Washington directs it in the hemisphere.

Chavez correctly calls Colombia "Latin America's Israel." And Washington funds it well for that purpose and to aid the Bush administration's top regional priority - toppling Chavez with Uribe's incursion the latest episode that signals further escalation. Petras says Uribe acts openly, and he's supported "at the highest level of the US government." Bogota ambassador, William Brownfield, is also supportive. He formerly served in the same capacity in Caracas where he frequently clashed with Chavez while there.

Petras also explains what Uribe's doctrine is up to, and it's clear where it originates. First and foremost it's to support Bush administration regional policies, specifically target Chavez, and get billions in funding to do it. In addition, it's to:

- "destroy Cuban-Venezuelan trade ties (to) undermine (Cuba's) government;" efforts to do it may now intensify against the new Raul Castro government;
- assure Venezuela remains "an exclusive oil exporter to the US" and sabotage Chavez's efforts to lessen his reliance on America by serving new markets like China; and
- prop up a key regional ally to assure rightist forces rule as a reliable Washington proxy and consider its record:
  - Colombia is an internally repressive narco-state;
  - it practices state terrorism;
  - its foreign minister, Maria Consuelo Araujo, resigned last year after her brother, a senator, was jailed for colluding with paramilitary death squads; Colombia's Supreme Court also urged federal prosecutors to investigate her father - a former governor, federal lawmaker and agriculture minister on kidnapping charges;
  - its democracy is a sham; in last year's regional elections, 30 mostly left of center candidates were murdered; news reporting is censored; journalists are arrested and killed; civil liberties are debased; and the rule of law is tenuous at best under a president who roguishly suspends it; he also packed the country's Supreme Court and bribed and bullied enough legislators to amend the constitution to allow him to run for a second term - the first time in over 50 years an incumbent president did it;
  - its government is riddled with scandal; over one-third of his party members are allied with paramilitary death squads; eight pro-Uribe congressmen were arrested last year for their paramilitary ties, and dozens of national and regional politicians are under investigation and fled the country; in addition, Colombia's attorney general arrested Uribe's campaign

manager and secret police chief, Jorge Noguera, for having supplied paramilitaries with trade unionist names to murder; another former secret police official is serving an 18 year sentence for purging police records of paramilitaries and drugs traffickers;

— around two-thirds of Colombians are impoverished;

— many thousands of its people are restless and leaving;

— many cross into Venezuela with several hundred thousand now there;

— wealth concentration is extreme and worsening; and

— in the wake of his blatant aggression, Council on Hemispheric Affairs' Director, Larry Birns, calls Uribe "Latin America's most disgraced president." He says he's "scorned throughout (the region) for being Bush's favored hemispheric figure (but his) legacy (of aggression) will be a heavy cross for (him) to bear." He calls his presidency "catastrophic," and his Ecuadorean incursion effectively dooms it and his influence "on the hemisphere....Metaphorically speaking, (Paul) Reyes....scalped Uribe and....hung (his) tattered presidential sash upon a pike and walked the macabre sight through (Latin American) streets." Uribe will pay an "excessively high" price for "gunning down Reyes."

Contrast that assessment to conditions in Venezuela under Chavez. They're mirror opposite so expect lots more trouble ahead. Tattered or not, Uribe remains a loyal Washington proxy and will continue in that role while in office. It's why Plan Colombia isn't about eradicating drugs. Its about weakening Chavez and toppling the FARC-EP and National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel groups that control sizable portions of the country. Washington calls them Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), but many countries disagree. Hugo Chavez calls them a revolutionary army that shares Venezuela's vision for a Bolivarian Latin America. Workers' Party of Mexico deputy Ricardo Cantu Garza agrees. He says they're a legitimate belligerent force confronting a corrupt and unequal political system.

And here's how prominent US attorney, Paul Wolf, describes the FARC-EP: They're a "belligerent army of national liberation....they conduct their conduct of hostilities by organized troops kept under military discipline and complying (with) the laws and customs of war....international law (doesn't prohibit) revolution, and if (it) succeeds....international law (allows) the outcome, even though it was achieved by force."

Progressive scholars and human rights activists agree, which brings us to what still drives both sides of the struggle. Washington and Colombia won't give an inch, but rebels won't yield until they do. For his part, Chavez wants peace, but was grim in his outlook when an American journalist asked if a confrontation with the US is inevitable: it is, "because while we want freedom, they want to keep us in chains....We want a fatherland; they want a colony....we want peace," but Colombia and the US want war and perpetual conflict. "Venezuela will never again be a US colony," and he saluted Fidel Castro as he said it and called him a "great teacher."

Castro responded and called the Ecuador raid a "monstrous crime. Deadly bombs were dropped....They were Yankee bombs, guided by Yankee satellites. Absolutely no one has the right to kill in cold blood....Correa has in his hands the few survivors and the rest of the bodies." Colombian troops kept two prominent ones as trophies and to collect millions in Washington-offered bounty. Correa, for his part, "can (now) cry out like Emile Zola:



J'accuse."

So can the FARC-EP. Petras calls them the "longest standing, largest peasant-based guerrilla movement in the world (that was) founded in 1964 by two dozen peasant activists (to defend) autonomous rural communities from" Colombian military and paramilitary violence. It's now a "highly organized 20,000 member guerrilla army with several hundred thousand local militia and supporters...."

Pre-9/11, most EU and Latin American countries recognized the organization "as a legitimate resistance movement," and for several years Colombia's Pastrana government negotiated peace with its leaders. Since 2000 under Clinton and continuing under Bush, however, conflict replaced compromise with a clear committed aim - support for narco-state terrorism to "destroy the guerrilla army and its suspected social base among peasants, urban trade unions and professionals (especially teachers, lawyers, human rights activists and intellectuals)."

Ever since, a bloody extermination campaign has been waged, and it spills into Venezuela to topple its government and return the country to friendly oligarch rule. The scheme involves pouring billions into Colombia on the pretext of eradicating drugs. In fact, it's to build Uribe's military and fund a "31,000 strong death squad (paramilitary) force" that ravages the country, kills thousands of peasants and people on the left, and engages in US-style abductions and torture. With American taxpayer dollars, their post-2000 record is appalling:

- over 2.5 million peasants and urban slum dwellers displaced;
- more than 5000 trade unionists murdered from 1986 to 2006, by far the most anywhere in the world;
- "30,000 peasants, rural teachers, and peasant and indigenous leaders have been killed with impunity;" and
- "land seizures by paramilitary leaders, cattle barons and military officers (that's) concentrating land ownership to an unprecedented level."

With this going on, the liberation struggle continues, and expect no amount of billions to crush it. Colombia's conflict is civil. It's not, as Washington calls it, a "war on terror," but it's clearly state-directed terror against the Colombian people that also targets Venezuela. It's the latest salvo in Bush v. Chavez that won't likely end when a new US president takes office. So the struggle for justice continues with no early end of it in sight and no chance whatever that those in it have any intention of quitting.

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