

In case of a provocation: Hugo Chavez says Venezuela ready for war with Colombia

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Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has said the country's armed forces are ready for a war with Colombia should Bogota provoke it.

"In case of a provocation on the part of Colombia's armed forces or infringements on Venezuela's sovereignty, I will give an order to strike with Su aircraft and tanks. I will not let anyone disrespect Venezuela and its sovereignty," Chavez said Sunday on his weekly TV show, "Hello, President."

Chavez said this in response to Colombian Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos's recent statements, which said that Colombia's military will keep killing rebels from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) on the territory of other states.

Bilateral relations sharply aggravated after Colombia's military bombarded a camp of Colombian rebels in Ecuador in March 2008, killing FARC leader Raul Reyes as well as another 16 rebels.

In response, Chavez ordered the deployment of several thousand soldiers and tanks toward the border with Colombia. Chavez characterized Colombia's actions as violating Ecuador's sovereignty, and called Colombian President Alvaro Uribe "a criminal."

This week, Colombia's National Radio said citing a high-ranking intelligence source that nine people from the FARC General Staff hide in Venezuela and another two in Ecuador. The top management of the staff includes 31 people.

FARC is a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group established in 1960s. It is considered a terrorist organization by the Colombian government, the U.S. and the EU. The group's revenues are believed to be partly obtained from drug trafficking and kidnapping.

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