

Latin America rejects Bush doctrine

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Reeling from the blow that it received in the aftermath of the Colombian military's illegal incursion on March 1 into Ecuador — which resulted in the brutal massacre of a number of civilians and members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), including its chief negotiator Raul Reyes — US imperialism has once again raised the ante in its struggle to undermine the growing process of Latin American integration.

Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution, led by President Hugo Chavez whose government is spearheading the push to unite Latin American nations to counter US domination, is being specifically targeted.

"The region is facing an increasingly stark choice: to quietly accept the vision of the terrorists and the demagogues, or to actively support democratic leaders", US President George Bush stated on March 12. Bush said his government was studying whether or not Venezuela should be added to its list of countries that "sponsor terrorism".

In Washington's Orwellian world view — where war is peace and elected leaders are dictators — his comments were aimed at Venezuela's democratically-elected government that is offering its services to assist with a negotiated peaceful solution to Colombia's more than four decade-long civil war.

Venezuela's representative in the Organization of American States (OAS), Jorge Valero, hit back that same day, calling the US government "the terrorist government par excellence".

Valero argued it was "an absolutely stupid thing to say from the government of Mr Bush ... that practices state terrorism, that has invaded Iraq and Afghanistan without respect for international law, that commits genocidal practices in various parts of the world, that has invaded Latin American and Caribbean countries ..."

Having viewed Latin America as its own backyard for decades, Washington is becoming increasingly concerned about developments south of its border. Its biggest headache is Venezuela, whose government has been making important headway in bring together governments of Latin America, as well as undermining capitalism inside Venezuela.

Washington has waged a constant public campaign (similar to its campaign against Iraq before the invasion) attempting to link Venezuela with narcotrafficking, terrorism, promoting an arms race, money laundering and threats to regional security.

US-Venezuelan lawyer Eva Golinger argued on the Venezuelan TV show La Hojilla that this campaign is aimed at containing Chavez's influence and undermining Latin American integration — a process aided by the election of a number of governments that, to varying degrees, have proven willing to exercise independence from Washington and pursue closer

regional collaboration.

For Dario Azzellini, author of several books about US military intervention into the region, Colombia's illegal cross-border attack (publicly supported by the US government, which funds and arms the Colombian military) was the first step in carrying out more serious military infractions across its border in order to provoke a response from Venezuela and lay the blame for the subsequent conflict at their feet.

"Their aim is to create massive destabilisation in a region where Colombia would play a similar role to that of Israel in the Middle East", Azzellini told Green Left Weekly.

"The Colombian government said that they had the coordinates of Reyes whereabouts for month, during which we can suppose that he moved between Colombian, Venezuelan and Ecuadorian territory as part of the current negotiations by the FARC in releasing prisoners. So the question is why did they choose to carry it out in Ecuador?"

"It was a test, they wanted to do it in Ecuadorian territory and not in Venezuela to see what the international reaction would be."

Luis Bilbao, director of Latin American magazine America XXI, told GLW US imperialism had two aims in mind with Colombia's attack (which was clearly coordinated with the US) — put a halt to the hopes for humanitarian accord with the FARC, who only days before had released four prisoners unilaterally, and sabotage the growing South American convergence.

Finding a political solution to Colombia's current conflict is a danger to Washington, which has used it as justification to build up their military presence in Colombia. This is why the issue of peace in Colombia is so closely intertwined with the process of Latin American integration.

Colombia's attack came just days before global protests in favour of a peaceful solution to Colombia's civil war and against state and paramilitary violence, which targets political activists, with more trade unionists killed in Colombia every year than any other country. On March 6, hundreds of thousands marched across Colombia, defying threats of reprisals from paramilitaries.

Associated Press reported on March 14 that six organisers of the march had been murdered, and two dozen more received death threats from the Black Eagles death squad.

Moreover, Bilbao pointed out that in the immediate aftermath of this event, it seemed unthinkable that the meeting of the South American Community of Nations (Unasur, formed in April 2002 with the aim of creating a European Union-style body across South America) that had been scheduled to take place in Colombia at the end of the month could have gone ahead.

Such a turn of events would suit Washington, as the development of Unasur threatens the ability of the US to exert its control over the region on behalf of US corporate interests.

Bilbao argued that the action was nonetheless a big mistake on the part of Colombia. Bilbao argued that "they didn't attack Venezuela", as Venezuelan foreign minister Nicolas Maduro had stated Venezuela expected, "because of the firm stance that Venezuela has taken and instead attacked Ecuador expecting a timid response ... setting a precedent for further

repeat actions in Ecuador and to extend this to Venezuela”.

However the firm stance by both Ecuador and Venezuela — both of whose governments broke diplomatic ties and moved troops to their Colombian borders — put Colombia on the back foot.

In fact, rather than reverse the trend towards integration, the response to Colombia’s attack could mark an important regional realignment — assisting the process of regional integration.

The most significant event was the summit of the Group of Rio held on March 6 and 7. Televised live across the whole continent, representatives of all Latin American governments debated the issue without the presence of the US government.

After a fiery debate, the meeting came to a unanimous decision to reject the actions of the Colombian government and any further violation of the sovereignty of another country. Crucially, the vote was a rejection of the doctrine of “preventive war” that the US has pushed since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Ecuador and Colombia are pushing for the March 17 meeting of the OAS (of which the US is a member) to ratify the Group of Rio’s motion. Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa has stated bluntly that if the OAS meeting did not condemn the aggression, that it should be thrown “in the dustbin of history”.

Arguing that it would be “difficult for the US government to oppose such a resolution”, Valero asserted that “I don’t believe the United States has sufficient strength to crush the will of the Rio Group countries”.

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