

The US have lost control: Latin America has ‘created its own neighbourhood’

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The drums of war are once again beginning to sound, as US imperialism steps up its propaganda attack on Venezuela’s Bolivarian revolution.

The new offensive has centred on the supposed documents found on the laptops retrieved from the site of the illegal military assault by Colombia that massacred over 20 people at a Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) campsite inside Ecuador in early March. This is despite clear evidence of Colombian government interference with the laptops before handing them over, which many accept would rule such evidence as illegitimate.

On May 16, the Venezuelan government denounced as a “provocation” the incursion of 60 Colombian soldiers into Venezuelan territory, intercepted 800 metres over the border. This occurred at the same time as the US Navy has decided to reactivate, after 58 years, its Fourth Fleet to patrol Latin American waters.

Aggression

The Interpol report released on May 15 verified that the material allegedly found on the “magical” laptops that somehow survived the intense bombing of the FARC camp backs up Colombian and US claims of links between the guerrillas and the Venezuelan government.

The day before, speaking to a group of uniformed soldiers, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez warned that “Colombia is launching a threat of war at us”. He described Colombia’s proposal to establish a US military base on its Venezuelan border as an act of “aggression”.

Chavez used the opportunity to insist that “the Colombian government will surely announce tomorrow that the documents retrieved from [FARC negotiator killed in the attack] Raul Reyes’ computer are authentic and, therefore, Chavez supports terrorism”, he stated.

Following the Interpol announcement, Chavez stated that the Venezuelan government would revise diplomatic, economic and political relations with Colombia.

Tension between the two countries boiled over following Colombia’s illegal incursion onto Ecuadorian soil. Ecuador and Venezuela both broke relations and set troops to their respective Colombian borders.

In the immediate aftermath, several meetings of the Organization of American States and the Group of Rio, comprised of most of the countries of Latin America, declared their rejection of Colombia’s actions, which were backed only by the US.

While a clear blow to Washington's war plans in the region, recent events show that imperialism's offensive has not ended.

Lost control

Eva Golinger, a US-Venezuelan lawyer who has dedicated herself to exposing US intervention in Venezuela and is the author *Chavez vs Bush*, explained to *Green Left Weekly* that behind these events was the fact that the US "have lost control in this region, and this is something that is incredible threatening for the US empire".

"They are seeking out a way to divide and create conflict in the region", said Golinger "in order to impede integration in the region".

"The backyard of the US has gone; it's created its own neighbourhood, and the US isn't part of it", commented Golinger.

The events in Ecuador occurred only weeks before the second meeting of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), one of the numerous initiatives of the Venezuelan government aimed towards increasing Latin American integration.

For Golinger, this latest phase of the campaign against Chavez — which intensified several years ago with statements such as those of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice of the need to create an international "united front" against Venezuela — can be linked to the steps being promoted by Chavez for a humanitarian accord between the FARC and the Colombian government.

Last September, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe invited Chavez to act as a mediator in the humanitarian accords and then in November "unilaterally cut off his role with no important reason to terminate", Golinger explained.

Golinger argued that the US-backed Colombian regime did not want Chavez to continue in his role, as it saw that he was actually making progress towards the release of FARC-held prisoners — "which was going to look good for Chavez, good for [Venezuela's revolutionary] process, and bad for the US, bad for the Colombian government".

According to Golinger, the policy of Colombian government was never to promote a serious negotiation to release hostages and "give the FARC some kind of political platform in the country". She argued it was always a manoeuvre aimed at working towards the goal of "eliminating the FARC".

Demonstrating his position on the internal conflict, Uribe announced the extradition of 14 warlords involved with right-wing Colombian paramilitaries that were facing charges in Colombia to the US. There, they will not face the charges of murder against them in Colombia, but merely drug trafficking.

"What was extradited was the truth", Teresita Gaviria, a leader of the Mothers of La Candelaria that represents the families of more than 530 victims of the paramilitaries, told the *Christian Science Monitor* on May 15.

Aiming to put a halt to the humanitarian exchange process, which was a direct threat to the continuation of Plan Colombia — the US's project of the militarisation of the region under the

guise of fighting “narco-terrorists” — the Colombian government carried out its attack on Ecuadorian soil that killed Reyes, the main contact point not only for the Venezuelan but also the French government in its attempts to secure the release of hostages, specifically French-Colombian prisoner Ingrid Betancourt.

Struggle for peace

While communication with the FARC was severed with the murder of its chief negotiator, Chavez announced on May 14, in a telephone call to French President Nicolas Sarkozy, that he promised to “continue to do everything possible” to continue to proceed towards finding a political solution to the conflict.

On his May 11 Alo Presidente weekly show, Chavez warned that Colombia might be trying to generate a conflict with Venezuela in order to take the focus off the ongoing “para-politics” scandal inside Colombia.

Venezuelanalysis.com reported the following day, “Since 2006, many government officials and close allies of President Uribe have been indicted for suspicions of colluding with armed paramilitary forces. As many as 33 lawmakers, and most recently President Uribe’s cousin Mario Uribe Escobar, are currently in jail awaiting trial.”

Golinger pointed out that there is not only the issue of Uribe’s problems but also the fact that current US president George W Bush is in his last year of power. “As we get into the final days of Bush we are going to see more desperate moves from Washington to let Bush go out with a bang ... he would like to have some type of success, given Iraq has been such a failure, and Latin America has always been a kind of easy scapegoat of the US government.”

Asked if the November US presidential elections could signal a change in Venezuela-US relations, Golinger replied: “I don’t see much chance of change for the moment. I think that until Venezuela is able to somehow get its view across and get accurate information to US public opinion on a massive level, on a mainstream level, there’s not going to be much change.

“I think all of the candidates have made statements referring to President Chavez as a tyrant or dictator”, Golinger commented. “All of them would back the continued funding of the opposition, and all of them would reject the socialist model.”

Golinger argued: “It’s not a question of whether it is an ultra right-wing Republican or a moderate Democrat. They are all still promoting a capitalist consumerist model, and that’s in direct conflict to the Venezuelan model of socialism and democracy.”

The biggest challenge faced in building solidarity with Venezuela against US attacks in this context is the “huge media wall” that blocks accurate information about what is happening in Venezuela.

Moreover, added Golinger, even much of the US left has been confused by the campaign of the Venezuelan opposition and the Bush administration and Democrats alike, who have an agenda against Venezuela.

“That is why we see most of the respectable publications on the left, like Nation magazine, publishing articles that are incredibly critical and manipulative of what is happening in

Venezuela, and that type of information over the years has been published in that magazine and others.

“Its hard to find allies on the US left that are willing to extend themselves in a public way to express solidarity and support for Venezuela and that’s troubling because how can we expect [Venezuela] to have a relationship with the Democratic Party when we don’t even have such a relationship with what’s left of the left — the progressive more radical sectors in the US.”

“In this sense a lot more work has to be done” to win over these sectors, Golinger said.

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