

Tensions grow between Venezuela and Colombia

Rix Bragg Tue, 18/08/2009 - 14:00

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The increase in US troops is behind the increasing strain in Latin America, argues Rix Bragg

After his election Barack Obama stated that he wanted to improve relations with Latin America, including with various countries like Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia that had been highly critical of the US agenda under the Bush administration. But actions speak louder than words.

The deceitful role of the US in the Honduran coup, which it denounced but where it is now trying to broker a ?comprise? which would oblige President Zelaya to abandon his plans for radical constitutional reform, and the latest plan to double to ten the number of bases in Colombia open to US troops, send a different signal; that Obama wants to reassert US hegemony over its ?backyard? ? Central and South America.

The Christian Science Monitor reported last week that the US-Colombia deal would also allow the US to run surveillance from three different air bases in the central Andes for both counternarcotics and counterinsurgency operations. The US claims that their increased military presence in the region is purely to aid in the prevention of drugs trafficking as part of their continuing war on drugs and to prevent ?terrorism?.

The decision to increase the number of troops in Colombia itself came after Ecuador refused to renew the US lease on their Manta Base; the US now plans to use Colombia as a hub of operations in the region, which is why they need more access to these military bases. The deal with Colombia comes hot on the heels of an announcement by Ecuador, another country with a left-wing populist president, that they would be terminating the lease on one of their military bases which allowed US military forces to operate from there

It is scarcely surprising that the response of Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez has been a sharp one. He called the US-Colombia military base plan a "threat" to Venezuela, saying, "the [US] policy of aggression against Latin America is the same... It's as if no change had occurred from Bush to Obama. It's all the same."

On his weekly TV programme, *Alo Presidenté*, he stated, ?The threat against us is growing,? Chávez, said Sunday. ?I call on the people and the armed forces, let?s go, ready for combat!?

Colombia ? the main base of the US in South America and a regime which fosters the systematic use of death squad actions aimed at leaders of the trade unions and peasants organizations - has raised the temperature by claiming that three Swedish-made anti-tank weapons found at a camp of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), last year had been supplied by Venezuela?s military. The Colombian government is systematically smearing Chávez as aiding terrorism, i.e. of supporting the Colombian rebels. This comes on top of repeated claims from Colombia that the FARC have military bases in Ecuador.

Colombian president Alvaro Uribe has been jetting around South American capitals earlier in August in an attempt to drum up support for an increased US military presence in his country.. Colombia has received \$5 millions in military aid in recent years to fight the 'war on drugs', an excuse for the Colombian government to further militarise Colombian society and consolidate the power of their regime.

It is clear that the new agreement between Washington and Bogotá is part of a general strategy of the US to build up its military presence in the region as a means to put pressure on Venezuela, along with other Latin American countries, to open themselves up to greater economic penetration by the US. Colombia's pro-US government is acting as an agent of the US to incite conflict in the region at which point the US would be well placed to intervene and gain access to valuable resources. After initially expressing doubts about increased US presence in Colombia Brazil's President Lula's has fallen into line with Obama and Uribe.

An example of the increased tensions is the accusation by Chávez that the Colombian army sent an army patrol into Venezuelan territory; with the result that Chávez has ended the Colombian fuel subsidy. These accusations were made on the eve of a summit of regional powers, the US troop increase were to be at the top of the agenda for the various Latin American leaders to discuss.

On top of all of these remains the fact that Venezuela is suffering considerably from the falling oil prices with the result that Chávez is increasingly unable to fund his programme of reforms, and even having to introduce a [new budget](#) ^[1] which actually increases attacks on his base of support amongst the poor. With the threat of a loss of popular support an increase in anti-imperialist rhetoric looks to be a useful tool to unite the people of Venezuela and to some extent the region, behind him.

Colombia is imperialism's watchdog in South America. It is a regime which regularly and systematically uses terror against its own people. The Uribe government's plans must be opposed by all progressive forces, and support mobilised for Colombian workers in their struggle against the US backed death squads, operating clandestinely with US agencies (like the Drug Enforcement Agency). The war on drugs, which is used to target and attack the FARC, is also an excuse to attack the peasants who are fighting to resist the seizure of their land by Colombian landlords and multinationals. It is also used as an excuse to put the screws militarily on Venezuela and Ecuador.

The Obama administration is shedding its democratic mask and building up the US military presence in the continent which many US strategists bemoan was 'lost' to socialism and populism under the previous administration. The antiwar and anti-imperialist forces in the USA and around the world must demand the withdrawal of all US forces, the ending of all aid to Uribe's terrorist regime and be ready to support Venezuela or Ecuador if they come under attack from US imperialism and its puppets.

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