

Dogs of War Gathering in the Andes — and in Washington

By [Tom Burghardt](#)

Global Research, March 15, 2008

Antifascist Calling... 15 March 2008

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

With dizzying speed—and rank hypocrisy—the United States is escalating its war of words with Venezuela.

On Friday, a group of Republican lawmakers proposed a resolution that calls on the Bush regime to declare Venezuela “a state sponsor of terrorism.”

Hyped by Florida representatives Connie Mack and [Ileana Ros-Lehtinen](#), a staunch apologist for Cuban neofascist thugs Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles, the congressional text, according to the [Miami Herald](#) cites,

...international agreements committing nations to fight terrorism that Venezuela is allegedly violating by backing the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, which has waged a guerrilla war against the government there for more than four decades. It also lists FARC abuses, including kidnappings and drug trafficking.

Were Bush to list Venezuela as a “terrorist sponsor,” crippling economic sanctions could be imposed as a prelude to a military intervention to topple the Bolivarian socialist Republic.

Without skipping a beat, *Herald* reporters declared without a shred of proof, referencing Uribe’s “dodgy dossier,” that

U.S. officials have long complained of close ties between Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and the FARC, which is considered a terrorist group by the U.S. and Colombian governments and the European Union.

*But the capture of four computers belonging to the FARC by Colombian police suggest the ties were deeper than previously believed and could involve payments of cash. (Pablo Bachelet, “Bill: Deem Venezuela a Terror Sponsor,” *Miami Herald*, Friday, March 14, 2008)*

(For the full text of the proposed congressional resolution, see: “Mack, Ros-Lehtinen Introduce Resolution Calling for Venezuela to Be Named a State Sponsor of Terrorism,” [Press Release](#), March 13, 2008.)

Meanwhile, the [Associated Press](#) reports that U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Thursday “that all U.N. nations, including Venezuela, have an obligation to go after terrorists and keep them from operating within their borders.”

Ramping up the “Mighty Wurlitzer” for a confrontation with the socialist government, Rice said in response to a question about Venezuela’s alleged links to the FARC, “We will watch

the situation and the United States will act accordingly.”

Responding to escalating threats from Washington, president Hugo Chávez said in a televised speech reported by the [Associated Press](#),

“Let them make that list and shove it in their pocket. We shouldn’t forget for an instant that we’re in a battle against North American imperialism and that they have classified us as enemies—at least in this continent they have us as enemy No. 1.

“The imperial plan is to overthrow this government and knock down the Bolivarian Revolution. They’re afraid of the impact of this revolution in the rest of the countries ... of Latin America. That permanent aggression is because of that.” (Jorge Rueda, “Chavez Dares U.S. on Terror List Proposal,” *Associated Press*, Friday, March 14, 2008)

Rice’s belligerent remarks followed equally harsh rhetoric from international war criminal and state terrorist, U.S. president George W. Bush. According to “the Decider-in-Chief,” Latin America, “...is facing an increasingly stark choice: to quietly accept the vision of the terrorists and the demagogues or to actively support democratic leaders like President Uribe.”

This is particularly rich, considering the unfolding “parapolitical” scandal rocking Colombia’s elite as their ties to right-wing paramilitary death squads and narcotrafficking syndicates expose new layers of complicity and corruption festering at the heart of the Colombian deep state.

The Center for International Policy, citing the Colombian newsmagazine *Semana*, has posted excerpts of an interview with “David Hernández López, a former Colombian army lieutenant who became a close associate of paramilitary leaders between 2000 and 2007.”

According to CIP’s [report](#), the cozy relationships amongst the Colombian Army, paramilitary narcotraffickers and the oligarchy threaten Uribe’s credibility as “our guy.”

Retired Gen. Rito Alejo del Río. General del Río headed the Colombian Army’s 17th Brigade in the Urabá region of Antioquia department in 1995-1997, a time when paramilitary groups were taking over the region through a campaign of near-daily massacres. (Also a time, incidentally, when Álvaro Uribe was Antioquia’s governor.) Though Gen. del Río stands widely accused of aiding and abetting the bloody paramilitary takeover of Urabá, charges against him were controversially dropped in mid-2001.

Sen. Ciro Ramírez. Outside Colombia, Sen. Ramírez is best known — if known at all — as the first Colombian politician to call for changing Colombia’s constitution yet again to allow Álvaro Uribe to run for a third term. He did so at a press conference held August 2, 2006, shortly before President Álvaro Uribe’s second inauguration. According to David Hernández, Ciro Ramírez — now under investigation for the “para-politics” scandal — eagerly aided the AUC’s nascent “Capital Bloc” starting in 2000 and 2001. (The Center for International Policy, “Another Paramilitary Witness Comes Forward,” March 12, 2008)

So much for “democratic leaders like President Uribe”!

Semana’s revelations are consistent with a decades’-long collaboration by the Colombian far-right, international narcotics syndicates and the United States: quintessential “partners”

of America's own deep state. But what of the U.S. role in fomenting and exacerbating the crisis? Latin American analyst James J. Brittain argues that the "targeted-killings" of FARC commanders Raúl Reyes (March 1) and Iván Ríos (March 7) were intimately linked to U.S. counterinsurgency operations with the Colombian Army and far-right paramilitary forces, [Brittain](#) writes,

Reports have detailed that US Special Forces and Marines have been illegally engaging in counter-insurgency campaigns within the country of Colombia for years. Even though the legal number of US troops cannot exceed 800 state forces (and 600 private forces), thousands have been operating in campaigns against the FARC-EP. For example, Peter Gorman published that as far back as 2002 roughly 1,100 US counter-insurgency troops were on "orders to eliminate all high officers of the FARC". This does not even highlight what possible actions private US-based contracted counter-insurgency forces may be carrying out.

Brittain believes this is a component of extensive U.S.-Colombian psychological operations (PSYOPS) against the FARC and other leftist opponents—armed actors or legal political parties. The methodology employed is drawn directly from the U.S. counterinsurgency playbook and includes:

1) Systemically exposing sectors of Colombia's general public to photographs of the bullet ridden and mutilated corpse of Reyes on an hourly basis or the 'cooler' containing Ríos' severed limbs is a tool utilized to intimidate the subconscious and sociopolitical direct action, deter sympathizers of the insurgency, political activists, and state opponents within Colombia from criticizing the state's political dominance and promotion of far-right economic policies.

*2) Telling the world that Comandante Ríos' was murdered by his own comrades is a tactic employed to decrease external solidarity from sectors of the international community, who may now falsely believe the argument that the largest and most powerful Marxist-Leninist revolutionary social movement in Latin America is losing ground, power, and influence in the Colombian countryside. At the same time, such accusations are internally disseminated in the hopes of destabilizing the FARC-EP itself. Propagating that the rank-and-file have abandoned the leadership and that the movement is collapsing is a strategy to destabilize the insurgency's many Squads, Companies, Columns, and Fronts. ("Was the United States Involved in Recent Attacks Targeting the FARC-EP?" *Venezuela Analysis*, March 12, 2008)*

Brittain's analysis seems plausible, although the proverbial "smoking gun" has yet to make its appearance. Considering the \$5.5 billion in Plan Colombia dollars showered on the region for "counternarcotics" operations, it would seem that Washington's unrepentant cold warriors would encourage full-blown counterinsurgency tactics replete with "hunter-killer" teams of U.S. Special Forces and PSYOPS advisers working in tandem with "mission friendly" narcotrafficking paramilitaries leading the charge in defense of the Uribe regime.

As a cash cow for American defense contractors and "private military contractors" (armed mercenaries), Plan Colombia is another in a long line of shady U.S.-sponsored "public-private partnerships" in repression. According to [John Lindsay-Poland](#),

DynCorp International has signed contracts with the State Department for about \$150 million annually since 2000 for its operations in Colombia. It also also handles most of the operations at the Manta base. The company's corporate offices, like those of many of the

growing band of mercenary outfits, are located in suburban Virginia, outside Washington. (The company's headquarters are in Falls Church, which is adjacent to the Congressional district of Representative Frank Wolf, the ranking Republican on the House of Representatives Foreign Operations subcommittee that marks up the hundreds of millions of dollars in funds that Congress approves for DynCorp.) The company in turn has consistently given thousands of dollars to Wolf's campaign. Such a blatant conflict of interest is another demonstration of Plan Colombia's corrupt underlying dynamics, which should be cause for a fundamental re-casting of the policy. ("Yankees Head Home," Foreign Policy in Focus, March 6, 2008)

Conflict of interest or business as usual, you make the call. But back in 2001, investigative journalist [Jeremy Bigwood](#) exposed an even darker side of the all-purpose mercenary outfit:

DynCorp's shroud of secrecy has the potential for giving cover to a wide range of activities outside stated US policy objectives. DynCorp is contracted to help eliminate drug production in Colombia. But a DEA document, recently obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, stated that on May 12, 2000 the Colombian National Police intercepted a FedEx parcel at the airport. It was sent from the Bogota DynCorp site and destined for DynCorp's office on Patrick Air Force Base in Florida. The name of the sender has been blacked out. The 250 Gram liquid "tested positive for heroin," according to the DEA. "My understanding is that was a faulty test result," DynCorp spokesperson Wineriter told CorpWatch. ("DynCorp in Colombia: Outsourcing the Drug War," CorpWatch, May 23, 2001)

Fast-forward to 2008, billions of dollars later, and the results of U.S. counternarcotics operations are anything but promising. According to the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), U.S. aerial fumigation of Colombia's coca and poppy fields have, as in Afghanistan, been a dismal failure.

In a [new report](#), WOLA analysts describe how "Intensive aerial herbicide spraying of coca crops in Colombia has backfired badly, contributing to the spread of coca cultivation and cocaine production to new areas of the country and threatening human health and the environment." They found that during a seven-year period, "the area under coca cultivation in Colombia rose from 122,500 hectares to 157,200 hectares, according to U.S. government figures" and that "Cocaine production in Colombia rose from 617 metric tons in 2001 to 640 metric tons in 2005, according to UN figures, despite an increase in fumigation every year during that period." ("Chemical Reactions', Washington Office on Latin America, February 29, 2008)

But as I detailed in an earlier [report](#), citing investigations by [Bill Conroy](#) and [Daniel Hopsicker](#), such "failures" may very well be part and parcel of a protected intelligence operation intended to link massive coca cultivation and "drug trafficking" by FARC rebels to Venezuela.

As Plan Colombia falters, oil prices soar and the U.S. economy "heads south," Latin America is rejecting the "Washington consensus" of IMF-World Bank-dictated neoliberal "reforms." Predicated on NED-guided "managed democracy" and vicious resource extraction schemes guaranteed by U.S.-friendly "strong states," the Bush regime is preparing the ground for full-blown political destabilization and possible military intervention across the Andes to annihilate any potential "threat" of a socialist alternative.

Dangerous times for the capitalist masters call forth desperate measures. Washington is seeking a regional adversary to blame for its own bankrupt policies and Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian socialist government are being made to fit the frame.

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