

Rumors Of Coups And War: U.S., NATO Target Latin America

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There is no way of overestimating the challenge that the emergence of ALBA and the overall reawakening of Latin America pose to the role that the U.S. arrogates to itself as lord of the entire Western Hemisphere. The almost two-century-old Monroe Doctrine exemplifies Washington's claim to exclusive influence over all of North, Central and South America and the Caribbean Basin and its self-claimed right to subordinate them to its own interests. Never before the election victories of anti-neoliberal forces throughout Latin America over the past eleven years has the prospect of a truly democratic, multipolar New World existed as it does now.

It is in response to those developments that the U.S. and its former colonialist allies in NATO are attempting to reassert their influence in the Americas south of the U.S. border.

November 28 will mark five months since the coup led by U.S.-trained commanders deposed the president of Honduras, the next day will see a mock election in the same nation designed to legitimize the junta of Roberto Micheletti, and the day following that will be a month since Washington signed an agreement with the Alvaro Uribe government in Colombia for the use of seven military bases in the country.

While intensifying a full-scale war in South Asia, continuing occupation missions in Iraq and the Balkans, maintaining warships off the coasts of Somalia and Lebanon, and deploying troops and conducting war games in most parts of the world, the United States and its NATO allies have not neglected Latin America.

Central and South America and the Caribbean are receiving a degree of attention from the U.S. and its partners not witnessed since the Cold War and in some ways are the targets of even more intense scrutiny and intervention.

Nearly five months since the June 28 coup d'état against Honduran President Manuel Zelaya led by General Romeo Vasquez Velasquez, a graduate of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, formerly the School of the Americas, Washington has not used its substantial – decisive – leverage with the illegal government and its military supporters to reverse the armed takeover of power. Instead it has conspired with the junta to drag out deliberately futile negotiations and has thrown its weight behind the November 29 election which, occurring without the previous reinstalling of President Zelaya, will be a travesty of law and international protocols and is in fact intended to lend false credibility to the current regime.

On November 15 Manuel Zelaya wrote a letter to American President Barack Obama decrying Washington's machinations and stating that accepting the terms of the U.S.-

sanctioned (to say no more) arrangement with Micheletti regarding the upcoming election would amount to “covering up the coup d’etat, which we know has a direct impact due to the military repression on the human rights of the inhabitants of our country.”

The letter also said “The same day that the accord’s Verification Commission was set up in Tegucigalpa the statements by officials from the State Department surprised (everyone) where they modify their position and interpret the accord unilaterally with the following statement: ‘the elections should be recognized by the United States with or without the reinstatement’” of President Zelaya. [1]

The accord in question was one brokered by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias and signed on October 29 which would have led to a unity government with Manuel Zelaya returned to the presidency preparatory to a new election.

Micheletti and his supporters in the country’s business community and “muscle” in the military unilaterally abrogated the terms of the agreement by thwarting Zelaya’s reinstatement and appointing all members of the national cabinet. With the active connivance of Washington, as Zelaya’s letter to Obama contends.

If a government friendly to the United States was overthrown in the manner that the Honduran one was on June 28 it would not take the White House and the State Department five months to respond, and even then only to abet the crime. Censure, sanctions and covert operations would have been resorted to immediately.

In nations where candidates not entirely to the West’s liking win elections or unapproved presidents win reelection, the whole panoply of “regime change” interventions are put into effect with some variation of a “color revolution” ultimately negating and reversing the result. That such efforts have not been extended in Honduras is ample proof that the U.S. is satisfied with matters as they stand and would prefer the likes of Micheletti and General Vasquez to preside over a country where the Pentagon has a military facility at the Soto Cano Air Base and there stations its Joint Task Force Bravo replete with Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters.

On November 16 a photograph appeared on a Pentagon website, Defense Link, of the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, and his Colombian opposite number, General Freddy Padilla de Leon, shaking hands outside the Pentagon three days earlier. [2]

No story on or details of their meeting are available, not even on Defense Department sites. Only the photograph and brief notices on Facebook and Twitter.

Padilla’s resume is both illustrative and typical. He earlier matriculated in “terrorism studies” at George Washington University and received a fellowship for the Foreign Service Program at Georgetown University, as well as taking a course on advanced military studies at Fort Belvoir, Virginia and and training in strategic intelligence at the Defense Intelligence Analysis Center in Washington, D.C.

The transcripts of his discussions with Mullen would prove intriguing, focusing as they no doubt did on the buildup at the seven military bases in Colombia recently turned over to the Pentagon and on the uses thereof.

Since the agreement on their acquisition by the United States was signed on October 30

confirmation of the bases' dual purpose – escalating the counterinsurgency war inside the country and containing and confronting two of its neighbors, Venezuela and Ecuador – has been witnessed.

Bogota reported that nine of its soldiers were killed and four wounded in a major clash with FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) fighters in the southwestern department of Cauca on November 10.

Five days later Colombia seized four Venezuelan border guards on a river off Colombia's Vichada Department. A few days earlier two Venezuelan National Guard troops were killed in the state of Tachira on the Colombian border, leading Caracas to deploy 15,000 troops to the area on November 5.

The preceding week Venezuela arrested eight Colombian nationals and two locals suspected of paramilitary activity on the two countries' border. Government official Ricardo Sanguino "denounced increasing paramilitary activity as a strategy to conceal soaring US access to Colombian military bases" and said "they are trying to destabilize the government of Venezuela...." [3]

Recently Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez renewed repeated concerns over the new American bases on the territory of his western neighbor, saying "that according to recently produced documents, the military bases would be used for espionage purposes, allowing US troops there to launch a military offensive against Venezuela." [4]

On November 8 Bolivian President Evo Morales said that "the use of Colombian military bases by U.S. troops meant a provocation to the Latin American peoples, mainly to the members of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA)."

He specified that "With the excuse of fighting against drug trafficking and terrorism, thousands of U.S. soldiers will be deployed in Colombia." [5]

ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, consists of Bolivia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Honduras (until the coup), Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Antigua and Barbuda, the last three nations joining this June.

Washington using Colombia as the nucleus of a new Latin American military bloc to counteract ALBA has been explored in a previous article in this series. [6] Other prospective candidates include post-coup Honduras, Panama, Peru and Chile, with pressure placed on Brazil, Guyana and Suriname to either supply bases or in other ways augment American and European military presence in Latin America and the Caribbean. [7]

The seven new U.S. military bases in Colombia allow the Pentagon far more scope than is required merely for alleged drug interdiction surveillance and even for the counterinsurgency war against the FARC. The agreement on the bases, bearing the sleep-inducing title of Supplemental Agreement for Cooperation and Technical Assistance in Defense and Security Between the Governments of The United States of America and the Republic of Colombia, lists where U.S. military personnel and equipment will be deployed:

German Olano Moreno Air Base, Palanquero; Alberto Pawells Rodriguez Air Base, Malambo; Tolemaida Military Fort, Nilo; Larandia Military Fort, Florencia; Capitan Luis Fernando Gomez Nino Air Base, Apiay; ARC Bolivar Naval Base in Cartagena; and ARC Malaga Naval Base in Bahia Malaga. [8]

The document also states that “the Parties agree to deepen their cooperation in areas such as interoperability, joint procedures, logistics and equipment, training and instruction, intelligence exchanges, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, combined exercises, and other mutually agreed activities” and Washington’s Colombian client concedes, in addition to the seven bases named above, “access to and use of other facilities and locations as may be agreed by the Parties.”

Furthermore, “The authorities of Colombia shall, without rental or similar costs to the United States, allow access to and use of the agreed facilities and locations, and easements and rights of way, owned by Colombia that are necessary to support activities carried out within the framework of this Agreement, including agreed construction. The United States shall cover all necessary operations and maintenance expenses associated with its use of agreed facilities and locations.”

U.S. military, intelligence and drug enforcement personnel – and American private contractors – “and their dependents” are granted “the privileges, exemptions, and immunities accorded to the administrative and technical staff of a diplomatic mission under the Vienna Convention....Colombia shall guarantee that its authorities verify, as promptly as possible, the immunity status of United States personnel and their dependents who are suspected of criminal activity in Colombia and hand them over as promptly as possible to the appropriate United States diplomatic or military authorities.”

One of the military bases obtained by the United States – the Larandia Military Fort in Florencia – is within easy striking distance of Ecuador (as the Alberto Pawells Rodriguez Air Base in Malambo is of Venezuela).

Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa and Defense Minister Javier Ponce visited Russia late last month and on October 29 the two nations signed a declaration on strategic partnership. Correa and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev discussed energy and military cooperation. Ahead of the visit Ecuador’s president stated, “We need to restore the might of our army” in reference to the U.S. buildup in Colombia, its neighbor to the north. “Ecuador has been alarmed by the decision of Colombia, with which it severed diplomatic relations in March 2008, to allow U.S. troops to use its bases.” [9] The severing of relations occurred after Colombia’s army launched an attack inside Ecuador.

Ecuador and Russia signed a contract for the delivery of Mi-171E Hip transport helicopters to the Ecuadoran Ground Forces and a Russian newspaper said “Russia could supply six Su-30MK2 Flanker multirole fighters, several helicopters, and air defense systems to Ecuador, which would increase the value of their military cooperation to over \$200 million.” [10]

Like other members of ALBA – Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua – Ecuador is purchasing Russian military equipment as a counterbalance to traditional U.S. domination of its defense procurements, with the potential for sabotage and blackmail it entails, and as protection against potential attacks from Washington and its proxies, most notably Colombia.

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Never before the election victories of anti-neoliberal forces throughout Latin America over the past eleven years has the prospect of a truly democratic, multipolar New World existed as it does now.

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The Pentagon recommissioned the Navy's Fourth Fleet, disbanded in 1950 after World War II, last year and fully activated it this one. Its area of responsibility is the Caribbean Sea and Central and South America.

In early November a new commander for U.S. Army South was appointed, Major General Simeon Trombitas. The Army Times of November 10 provided background information on him:

"Trombitas, a 1978 West Point graduate, began his career in the 2nd Armored Division and served three tours with 7th Special Forces Group. He served in U.S. Southern Command and Special Operations Command in Panama and commanded the U.S. Military Group in Colombia. His general officer assignments include commanding general of Special Operations Command, Korea, and he served on the Iraq National Counter-Terrorism Force Transition Team." [11]

The United States is not alone in threatening a newly and truly independent Latin America and Colombia and Honduras are not the only parts of Washington's plans. On November 5 Paraguay's President Fernando Lugo replaced the nation's top military commanders - Army General Oscar Velazquez, Navy Rear Admiral Claudelino Recalde and Air Force General Hugo Aranda - against a backdrop of what Agence France-Presse reported as a fear of "an ouster similar to the one that befell Honduran President Manuel Zelaya...." [12]

That the Honduran putsch is intended to be the first in a series of similar plots in Latin America and is neither an aberration nor the last of its kind was also indicated last week when Nicaragua expelled a Dutch European Union parliamentarian. Radio Netherlands characterized the motivation for the action as follow: "Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega says Dutch MEP Hans van Baalen was in Nicaragua to see how the army felt about attempting a coup d'état, but found no officers willing to go along with the idea."

Van Baalen then moved to Honduras to "mediate in the political conflict between ousted President Manuel Zelaya and his de facto successor Roberto Micheletti." [13]

Mexican journalist Luis Gutierrez, speaking at a conference against NATO's global expansion in Berlin last month and in particular of the bloc's Article 5 military mutual assistance clause, observed that "Mexico's 3,000 kilometer border with the United States is also a border with NATO." [14] Troops from 50 nations on five continents and in the Persian Gulf, the Caucasus and the South Pacific are serving or pledged to serve under NATO command in Afghanistan at the moment because of Article 5.

The Netherlands, for example, is not only assisting its American NATO ally in Nicaragua and Honduras, but allows its island possessions in the Caribbean - the Netherlands Antilles - to be employed for surveillance of and future military actions against Venezuela.

In Curacao, a Dutch possession only 70 kilometers from the Venezuelan coast, the leader of an opposition party, Pueblo Soberano (Sovereign People), demanded that the U.S. military

base on the island be closed down.

Helmin Wiels said that “he wants to prevent Curacao from being dragged into what he predicts will be a future war between the US and Venezuela.

“The US has a number of military bases in Colombia, and Mr Wiels claims the country is intent on a confrontation with Venezuela’s leftwing President Hugo Chavez.” [15]

In May of 2008 a U.S. warplane flying from Curacao violated Venezuelan airspace, conducting surveillance of the Venezuelan military base on Orchila Island. President Chavez said of the intrusion: “They’re spying, they’re even testing our reaction capacity.” [16]

Moreover, Venezuela accused the U.S. of coordinating the action with Colombia, whose soldiers had crossed the Venezuelan border the day before.

In 2005 Chavez appeared on the American television news program Nightline and warned that the U.S. and its NATO allies were rehearsing invasion plans for his nation, codenamed Balboa, which involved aircraft carriers and warplanes, and said that American troops had been deployed to Curacao as part of the preparations.

He further admonished: “We are coming up with a counter-Balboa plan. That is to say if the government of the United States attempts to commit the foolhardy enterprise of attacking us, it would be embarked on a 100-year war. We are prepared.” [17]

A former Dutch possession in the Caribbean, Suriname, one country (Guyana) removed from Venezuela, offered the Pentagon bases to test military vehicles for jungle warfare in 2007.

In Guyana, Venezuela’s eastern neighbor, the nation’s former colonial master Britain canceled a security agreement after the Guyanese government questioned its partner’s real intentions.

The nation’s Office of the President released a statement which in part said: “This decision by the UK Government is believed to be linked to the administration’s refusal to permit training of British Special Forces in Guyana using live firing in a hinterland community on the western border with Brazil and Venezuela.” [18]

The Head of the Presidential Secretariat, Dr. Roger Luncheon, stated, “It could be that the UK Government did not fully appreciate how dearly held was our position on the non-violation of the sovereignty of Guyana. Their insistence in installing in their design in April...management features that seriously compromise Guyana’s ownership and when our new design re-established ownership that was more consistent with our notions of sovereignty, the plug was pulled....” [19]

With U.S. bases in Colombia to the west and in the Netherlands Antilles to the north, British military presence in the east would tighten the encirclement of Venezuela. A collective siege conducted by NATO allies the U.S., the Netherlands and Britain.

This June the chief of the Pentagon command that covers Central America, South America and the Caribbean – Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) – Admiral James Stavridis, was transferred to Brussels to become top military commander of United States European Command (EUCOM) and NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).

The transition was seamless, as one of the first initiatives on his new watch was to recruit U.S.-trained Colombian counterinsurgency troops for the war in Afghanistan. When they arrive they will be the first forces from Latin America, and the Western Hemisphere in general except for NATO members the U.S. and Canada, to serve under the Alliance's command in the escalating South Asian war. [20]

Elsewhere in the Caribbean, Panamanian opposition sources report that Washington is in the process of securing four air and naval bases in their country. A news story from late September revealed that a preliminary agreement on the bases "was reached between Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during recent talks in New York." [21]

On November 9 Senator Bill Nelson of Florida spoke out against drilling for oil off his state's coast, saying "many of the activities at Florida military bases, including testing missile and drone systems and training pilots, depend on the vast open stretches of ocean, much of it restricted airspace."

He mentioned that the Gulf of Mexico is "the largest testing and training area for the U.S. military in the world." [22]

A Cuban analysis of three years ago described the overall American military blueprint for Latin America and the Caribbean:

"The United States has a system of bases that has managed to establish two areas of control:

"1. The circle formed by the Caribbean islands, the Gulf of Mexico and Central America, which covers the largest oil deposits in Latin America, and is formed by the bases of Guantanamo, Reina Beatriz, Hato Rey, Lampira, Roosevelt, Palmerola, Soto Cano, Comalapa and other lesser military posts.

"2. The circle that surrounds the Amazon basin, downward from Panama, where the canal, the region's wealth and the location of an entry to South America have been essential, and which is formed by the bases of Manta [closed by Ecuador this July], Larandia, Tres Esquinas, Cano Limon, Marandua, Riohacha, Iquitos, Pucallpa, Yurimaguas and Chiclayo, which in their turn are linked to those of the region further north...." [23]

The U.S. strategy to control the Amazon Basin and the Andean region depends on Colombia on the northwest of the South American continent and on obtaining bases and military allies further south. Peru is one such likely location and so is another which is at loggerheads with it, Chile.

Under former defense minister and current president Michelle Bachelet the nation has amassed a formidable arsenal of advanced weapons from NATO states: Hundreds of German, French and American tanks; F-16s from the Netherlands and the United States; Dutch and British destroyers; French Scorpion submarines. [24]

This unprecedented - and unjustified - arms buildup has alarmed Chile's neighbors: Argentina, Bolivia and Peru.

A commentary from four years ago pointed out that "Foreign analysts have said that Chile is seeking hegemonic military power in Latin America vis-a-vis Peru, Argentina and Bolivia in

order to defend Chilean economic interests in those countries and, in case of armed conflict, to expand its territory in the way it has done in the past.” [25]

On November 6 Bachelet appointed General Juan Miguel Fuente-Alba Poblete as new commander in chief of the Chilean army, which “aroused objections from human rights organizations, since he has been accused of being involved in a series of massive [violations] during the military regime of 1973-1990.” [26]

Six days later the Reuters news agency reported that the U.S. is to provide Chile with \$655 million dollars worth of new arms: “The Pentagon on Thursday [November 5] advised the U.S. Congress of the possible sale of stinger missiles worth about \$455 million, AIM medium-range missiles worth \$145 million and Sentinel radar systems worth \$65 million.” [27]

Several days later a report titled “U.S. Authorizes Sale of German Missiles to Chile” detailed:

“Seven months after Chile’s Defense Minister expressed interest in purchasing a fleet of used (U.S. made) F-16 Fighter Jets from Holland, the U.S. government helped seal the deal by supporting Chile’s bid to buy missiles for the jets.”

It added: “Also last week, the Pentagon endorsed two other possible defensive arms sales for Chile’s army. The first purchase would include six new Sentinel radar systems and six SINCGARS radio systems, at a cost of US\$65 million. The second deal could include 36 Avenger planes and 390 ground-to-air missiles at a cost of US\$455 million.” [28]

....

The accelerating pace and wide-ranging scope with which the U.S. and its allies are militarizing the world is unparalleled. Even during the depth of the Cold War most nations avoided being pulled into military blocs, arms buildups and wars. No longer. And Latin America is no exception.

Notes

1) CNN, November 15, 2009

2) Photograph

http://www.defenselink.mil/dodcmssshare/homepagephoto/2009-11/hires_091116-N-0696M-004d.jpg

3) Prensa Latina, November 2, 2009

4) Press TV, November 16, 2009

5) Xinhua News Agency, November 10, 2009

6) Colombia: U.S. Escalates War Plans In Latin America

Stop NATO, July 22, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/09/01/colombia-u-s-escalates-war-plans-in-latin-america>

7) Twenty Years After End Of The Cold War: Pentagon’s Buildup In Latin America

Stop NATO, November 4, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/11/04/stop-nato>

8)

<http://justf.org/content/supplemental-agreement-cooperation-and-technical-assistance-defense-and-security-between-gov>

9) Vedomosti, October 27, 2009

10) Ibid

- 11) Army Times, November 10, 2009
- 12) Agence France-Presse, November 6, 2009
- 13) Radio Netherlands, November 15, 2009
- 14) World Future Online, October 24, 2009
- 15) Radio Netherlands, November 16, 2009
- 16) Bloomberg News, May 21, 2008
- 17) Associated Press, September 16, 2005
- 18) Stabroek News, October 28, 2009
- 19) Ibid
- 20) Afghan War: NATO Builds History's First Global Army
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<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/09/01/afghan-war-nato-builds-historys-first-global-army>

South Asia, Latin America: Pentagon's 21st Century Counterinsurgency Wars
Stop NATO, July 29, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/09/01/south-asia-latin-america-pentagons-21st-century-counterinsurgency-wars>

- 21) Russian Information Agency Novosti, September 27, 2009
- 22) Tampa Tribune, November 10, 2009
- 23) Granma International, April 18, 2006
- 24) NATO Of The South: Chile, South Africa, Australia, Antarctica
Stop NATO, May 30, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/08/31/nato-of-the-south-chile-south-africa-australia-antarctica>

- 25) OhmyNews International, December 31, 2005
- 26) Xinhua News Agency, November 7, 2009
- 27) Reuters, November 12, 2009
- 28) Santiago Times, November 16, 2009

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