

THE PENTAGON'S "COUNTERINSURGENCY WAR" ON LATIN AMERICA : Colombia, America 's "Military Launchpad"

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The Pentagon announced on April 23 that Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has begun a trip to South America, arriving in Colombia as part of a three-nation tour that will also take him to Brazil and Chile.

It is his first visit to the continent as Pentagon chief, though he has visited often in other capacities, including as director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Panetta's meetings with top government and military officials in the three nations will follow those of America's top military officer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey, to Colombia and Brazil late last month.

Panetta's mission also occurs two weeks after U.S. and Brazilian presidents Barack Obama and Dilma Rousseff met in the White House on April 9 and agreed on the establishment of the U.S.-Brazil Defense Cooperation Dialogue, announcing that Defense Secretary Panetta and Brazil's Defence Minister Celso Amorim will hold the first meeting in that format on April 24.

While on a scandal-plagued trip to Colombia on April 15 to attend the Summit of the Americas, Obama and his Colombian counterpart Juan Manuel Santos signed a new U.S.-Colombia Action Plan on Regional Security.

Colombia is the largest recipient of U.S. military aid in Latin America, though its population is less than a quarter of Brazil's, and the third largest in the world after Israel and Egypt.

After the passage by Congress of the Clinton administration's Plan Colombia in 2000, the military in Bogota has received approximately \$7 billion in U.S. assistance, up from \$50 million in 1998 when it was already the biggest beneficiary of American military aid in Latin America.

On October 30, 2009 the Obama administration and that of then-Colombian President Alvaro Uribe agreed on the U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement, which opened up three Colombian air bases, two naval bases, two army installations "and other Colombian military facilities if mutually agreed" to the Pentagon.

One of the 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.

Colombia launched a deadly attack against rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) inside neighboring Ecuador in 2008, which the Ecuadorian government accused U.S. special forces personnel inside its country of having assisted. The following year the Colombian armed forces conducted an incursion inside Venezuela, seizing four border guards.

Panetta is in Colombia to coordinate a final offensive against FARC fighters, who have been battling the country's narco-autocracy and its political minions in Bogota since 1964.

According to Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs and Pentagon Press Secretary George Little, the defense secretary is to meet with Colombian Defense Minister Juan Carlos Pinzon Bueno and General Alejandro Navas, General Commander of the Military Forces of Colombia.

On April 23 Panetta praised his military ally, stating, "Colombia, to its credit, has done a tremendous job in going after the FARC." He failed to mention with, in addition to \$7 billion dollars of Washington aid, U.S. helicopter gunships, planes, trainers and special forces troops.

Pentagon spokesman Little added, "Clearly we still have plenty to talk about in continuing to support the Colombians in their efforts against [the FARC]..."

When chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dempsey was in Colombia on March 27-28, the Defense Department website reported that he visited Joint Task Force Vulcano, "a new interagency force aimed at defeating the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia...The strategy calls for Colombia to cut the FARC forces in half in two years."

In Dempsey's words, "They selected 2014 as a key moment for them, They want to accelerate their effects against the FARC." With the Pentagon's active connivance and assistance, which why is Dempsey was and Panetta is in the country.

Dempsey was explicit about the American role in the "final solution" of the Colombian civil war: "We're getting ready to send some brigade commanders who have been in Iraq and Afghanistan down here to partner with their Joint Task Force commanders in a leader developmental function. The challenges they face are not unlike the challenges we've faced in Iraq and Afghanistan."

The Pentagon's website reported the following on March 27, worth quoting in detail.

Dempsey "joined virtually the entire Colombian defense leadership to visit Joint Task Force Vulcano," just outside the town of Tibu, only three kilometers from the Venezuela border.

"The Colombian government established the task force in December. It is the latest effort to defeat the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia..."

"Dempsey arrived at the base in a Colombian Air Force Mi-17 helicopter along with Colombian Defense Minister Juan Carlos Pinzon Bueno and Gen. Alejandro Navas, commander of the Colombian Armed Forces.

"Following his comments, Dempsey discussed strategy with the minister and the chief of defense and also Army chief Maj. Gen. Sergio Mantilla Sanmiguel, Navy chief Vice Adm.

Roberto Garcia Marquez and Air Force chief Maj. Gen. Tito Saul Pinilla-Pinilla.

"Before Joint Task Force Vulcano stood up, there were a small number of troops in the region. Now there are more than 10,000, [spokesman for the task force, Colombian army Captain Jose Mojica] said. The forces are composed of three mobile brigades and a geographic brigade. A fourth brigade is getting ready to deploy to the area.

"This is all part of an ambitious Colombian strategy to cut the FARC by half in two years. U.S. Embassy officials said there are about 8,000 FARC members now. Colombian officials spoke of the plan as the end game for the rebellion against the government after 48 years of intermittent war."

Immediately before Dempsey's visit to Colombia, U.S. Army South held talks with the Colombian armed forces in Bogota from March 19-23.

Three years ago CBS News quoted an unnamed Pentagon official stating, "The more Afghanistan can look like Colombia, the better." The equation is now being reversed.

Other top U.S. defense and military officials have for years spoken of "coming back home" to the Western Hemisphere as the war in Afghanistan winds down.

Panetta's and Dempsey's visits to Colombia and their statements regarding the purpose of them leave no doubt as to where America's new, at any rate expanded, counterinsurgency war is occurring.

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