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US Escalates War Plans In Latin America

US Military: After Iraq, Latin America

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On June 29 US President Barack Obama hosted his Colombian counterpart Alvaro Uribe at the White House and weeks later it was announced that the Pentagon plans to deploy troops to five air and naval bases in Colombia, the largest recipient of American military assistance in Latin America and the third largest in the world, having received over $5 billion from the Pentagon since the launching of Plan Colombia nine years ago.

Six months before the Obama-Uribe meeting outgoing US President George W. Bush bestowed the US's highest civilian honor, the Medal of Freedom, on Uribe as well as on former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

A press account of the time expressed both shock and indignation at the White House's honoring of Uribe in writing that "Despite extra-judicial killings, paramilitaries and murdered unionists, Colombia's President Uribe has won the US's highest honor for human rights." [1]

The same source substantiated its concern by adding:

"Colombia is the most dangerous country on earth for trade unionists. In 2006, half of all union member killings around the world took place there. Since Uribe came into power in 2002, nearly 500 have been murdered. In reply to concern about the assassinations, Uribe dismissed the victims as 'a bunch of criminals dressed up as unionists.'

"More than 1,000 cases of illegal killings by the military are being investigated. There are dozens of cases of soldiers taking innocent men, murdering them and dressing them up as enemy combatants. Hundreds of
members of the security forces are thought to have taken part in such activities." [2]

Colombia: Forty Year War

For over forty years Colombia, the last of Washington's remaining "death squad democracy" clients in the Western Hemisphere, has waged a relentless counterinsurgency war against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC} and an equally ruthless campaign with its US-trained and -equipped military and allied paramilitary formations against trade union, peasant, indigenous and other organizations. An estimated 40,000 have been killed and 2 million displaced as a result of the fighting.

In 1985 the FARC laid down its arms and entered into a peace process with the government of Belisario Betancur.

It helped found the Patriotic Union to participate in electoral and other peaceful activities

but within several years as many as 5,000 Patriotic Union elected officials, candidates, trade unionists, community organizers and other activists were murdered by Colombian security forces and government-linked right-wing death squads, especially the notorious United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) and its late leader Carlos Castano. Eight congressmen, 70 councilmen, dozens of deputies and mayors and hundreds of trade unionists and peasant leaders were slain and in 1989-1990 two of its presidential candidates were murdered within seven months.

Faced with complete extermination, the FARC rearmed and sought refuge in the southeast of the country.

In 1998 then Colombian President President Andres Pastrana permitted FARC a 16,000 square mile safe haven in the Caqueta Department.

The US then set its sights on an intensive counterinsurgency campaign to destroy the FARC infrastructure in the region and to uproot and destroy the organization altogether.

In January of 2000 STRATFOR, not a source known for opposing war, warned:

"The U.S. State Department recently announced a two-year, $1.3 billion emergency U.S. aid package for counter-narcotics operations in Colombia. The plan also is geared toward helping President Andres Pastrana negotiate peace with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). But the plan will have the opposite effect. It will end the peace negotiations between the rebels and the government and re-ignite the war. Ultimately, the plan does little more than pave the way for greater U.S. involvement. [3]

It went on to say that "The bulk of the money pledged for counter-narcotics efforts will go directly to the military to fight the rebels….This will tip the balance of power away from the government in Bogota and toward the military, which has always opposed the peace negotiations. Ultimately, the door will open wider for greater U.S. involvement." [4]

Plan Colombia: Clinton's Parthian Shot

Colombia was already the largest recipient of US military aid in the Western Hemisphere by 2000, but the Clinton administration increased the Pentagon's role in the nation with what became Plan Colombia.

After entering office in January of 1993 bombing Iraq and later killing hundreds if not thousands of Somalis the same year, Clinton and his foreign policy team never abandoned the use of military aggression.

In 1995 it provided military planners and advisers for Croatia's brutal and ethnocidal Operation Storm and led NATO's bombing of Bosnian Serb targets, including retreating troops and refugee columns following them, leaving what is now the Bosnian Serb Republic strewn with depleted uranium and an epidemic of cancer cases.

Three years later it launched cruise missile attacks on Afghanistan and Sudan and on December 16, 1998 began Operation Desert Fox, a deadly four-day assault on Iraq with 250 airstrikes and over 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles – the evening before scheduled impeachment proceedings against Clinton in the US Congress.

The following year the administration's use of military aggression reached its apex with the

78-day US-led NATO assault against Yugoslavia, the first military attack against a European nation since Hitler's and Mussolini's from 1939 onward.

The administration's Parthian shot was Plan Colombia in 2000.

Colombia's President Pastrana conceived of a project the preceding year, 1999, that the White House redesigned for its own purposes.

As former US ambassador to El Salvador Robert White, sacked by the Reagan administration in 1981 in preparation for unleashing its death squad and Contra wars in Central America, wrote after the US Congress passed Plan Colombia in June of 2000:

"If you read the original Plan Colombia, not the one that was written in Washington but the original Plan Colombia, there's no mention of military drives against the FARC rebels. Quite the contrary. (President Pastrana) says the FARC is part of the history of Colombia and a historical phenomenon, he says, and they must be treated as Colombians." [5]

An alternative American presswire reported that, "In early 1999, the Pastrana administration began peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the largest rebel group.

"The president also made his first trip to Washington in search of aid against the drug trade. But when he got there, 'they changed the script on him,' according to Marco Romero of the Peace Colombia Initiative, a coalition created in September by 60 local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seeking an alternative to the Plan Colombia.

"Pastrana's talks with U.S. congressional leaders and the head of the White House office on National Drug Control Policy, Barry McCaffrey, gave rise to the Plan Colombia, said Romero." [6]

McCaffrey is a retired Army General who earned his stripes in the Dominican Republic in 1965, Vietnam from 1966-69 and in Operation Desert Storm in 1991. He was also head of the Pentagon's Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) from 1994-96 and Deputy US Representative to NATO.

"In support of their request for aid to Colombia, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and drug czar McCaffrey told the U.S. Congress that the funds were to be used for 'restoring order in southeastern Colombia.'" [7]

With the passing of Plan Colombia the US increased military aid to the nation by over twenty times in just two years, 1998-2000, from $50 million in 1998 to over $1 billion in 2000, placing Colombia only behind Israel and Egypt in that category. In the ten years since 1998 US military aid was increased a hundredfold.

Earlier in the year a mainstream American news source said that "The Clinton administration's proposed $1.6 billion in emergency aid to Colombia is at least as much a counterinsurgency package as it is an anti-drug measure" and mentioned that "a member of Congress objected to White House efforts to sidestep the normal appropriations process." [8]

Weeks before the House vote one of the worse recent massacres of Colombian civilians occurred in El Salado, perpetrated by paramilitaries with army complicity.

Plan Colombia was drenched in blood even before it was formalized. In January of 2000 US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Colombia to promote the initiative and in honor of her arrival the Colombian military killed 50 of its citizens in an attack outside of the capital of Bogota.

The US Congress and Senate added over a billion dollars, sixty attacks helicopters and more special forces counterinsurgency advisers to the war in June. Approximately 70% of the 2000 Plan Colombia funds were allotted for the financing, training and supplying of army anti-narcotics battalions operating in southeastern Colombia, the former FARC safe haven.

Nominal progressives, the late Paul Wellstone in the Senate and Illinois Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky in the House, attached a human rights proviso that no serious person expected to be honored and only two months after the Congress's authorization of Plan Colombia Clinton used his presidential waiver to override the human rights conditions on the grounds of "national security."

Nine Years Later: Drug War Charade Gives Way To Naked Counterinsurgency

The escalation of counterinsurgency operations was packaged under the label of a war against drugs, of course. Nine years later Colombia remains the largest supplier of cocaine and heroin to the United States.

How seriously one should have taken this charade was indicated in April of 2000 when the former commander of the U.S. Army's anti-drug operation in Colombia, Col. James C. Hiett, pleaded guilty to not having turned over evidence on his wife, Laurie, for smuggling cocaine and heroin into the United States. His spouse pleaded guilty in January of planning to smuggle $700,000 worth of heroin into the US through the mail.

Colonel Hiett doubtlessly performed his duties in propagating the tale that the FARC was responsible for the lion's share of coca and opium cultivation and trafficking in the nation and that the US military was the best response to its alleged activities.

If one still had any doubts regarding the sincerity of American claims to be combating narco-trafficking and terrorism, within weeks of the passage of Plan Colombia Secretary of State Albright escorted the head of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army, Hashim Thaci, whose colleagues and allied drug cartels control most of the marijuana, hashish and narcotics traffic in Europe, to her old haunts in the United Nations Headquarters and her then current ones in the State Department, preparing him to become a future head of state. (Since last year he is in fact the president of what former Serbian president Vojislav Kostunica has aptly called the world's first NATO state. It is also the world's newest narco-state.)

After the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States the White House elevated the FARC towards the top of its targets list in the so-called Global War on Terror, though what role the group could have had in the attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. is beyond any sane person's ability to discern or fathom.

By 2002 the Bush administration had discarded most of the drug war rationale and "Congress approved a law to allow American military aid to Colombia to be used in a 'unified campaign' against drugs and terrorism" and by 2008 "six years and $5-billion later, the Colombian military is Latin America's most skilled fighting force." [9]

American “Special Operations training provided many of the skills that showed ‘the way to open the door to these remote jungle locations that were in the past inaccessible to the Colombian government.’

“Military units including Special Forces and an elite Commando Brigade were created. Eight regional intelligence units were set up with reconnaissance airplanes, and state-of-the-art air-to-ground communications. An Intelligence School was created, as well as a Counter Intelligence Center.” [10]

Days before leaving office George W. Bush awarded Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, who rumors have linked to the former Medellin drug cartel and whose brother Santiago is accused of narco-trafficking and death squad connections, the Medal of Freedom.

Perhaps anticipating the honor and paying back the person most responsible for Plan Colombia and the increased military operations both within Colombia’s borders and outside the country, Alvaro Uribe announced that he was conferring the “Colombia is Passion” award on Bill Clinton “at a gala event…in New York City” for “for believing in our country and encouraging others to do the same.”

“Prominent Democrats on the guest list include former Clinton strategists Dick Morris and Vernon Jordan, former Clinton Cabinet members Lawrence Summers and Madeleine Albright, and several Democratic congressmen,” most of whom presumably had the political survival skills not to attend. [11]

Earlier the same year “On the eve of a visit by U.S. President George W. Bush” and with no further pretense of a drug war “U.S. and Colombian soldiers arrived in the southern town of Cartagena del Chaira, a FARC stronghold, by helicopter….” [12]

As the narcotics issue has been downplayed, so the human rights component of Plan Colombia has been relegated to the realm of short-lived public relations manipulation.

In February of 2007 Colombian Foreign Minister Maria Consuelo Araujo’s brother, Senator Alvaro Araujo, was arrested for connections to the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).

Uribe was untroubled by the above and said, “When they ask, why do I keep the foreign minister, I answer: She is not involved in the criminal activities that are under investigation.” [13]

Plan Colombia has entered its tenth calendar year. In the intervening years covert and overt government and paramilitary massacres, many too grisly to relate, have continued unabated and drug cultivation and exports have been, if marginally dented, not substantially affected by what is still referred to when convenient as a drug eradication program.

Drug war claims notwithstanding, Plan Colombia’s activities both within and outside the nation were actuated by other designs.

Colombia: Pentagon’s Base In Andean Region

From its very advent it was intended to be more than an intensification of the decades-old

counterinsurgency war in Colombia and to be the opening salvo of a US campaign to escalate the militarization of the Andes region. White House and Pentagon plans to employ Colombia as a regional military force and operating base to police South America have gained new urgency for Washington with political transformations in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina and Paraguay heralding the end of US political, economic and military domination of the continent.

In its first full year of existence, 2001, a Peruvian Air Force jet shot down a civilian plane spotted by a US aircraft flown by CIA contractors with American missionary Veronica Bowers and her infant daughter on board, killing both as well as the pilot.

By 2006 the US had doubled the amount of military trainers and advisers stationed in Colombia and in the same year the nation's planes started violating the air space of neighboring Ecuador. The planes, and it would not have been unusual for US personnel to have been aboard them, were ostensibly conducting fumigation missions.

The Ecuadoran government denounced the actions as "unfriendly and hostile" and "Defense Minister Marcelo Delgado said…that army airplanes will fly over its border to prevent Colombian airplanes from entering Ecuadorian airspace…." [14]

In December of 2006 not only Colombian planes crossed the border into the country. Later in the month "Some 40 Colombians…fled across the border into Ecuador after they were attacked by Colombian soldiers," the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Ecuador reported. [15]

Twelve months before fifteen Colombians were killed and 1,500 displaced in the Narilo province in the country's southeast, bordering Ecuador. "Authorities remained silent as to whether this was a military operation against guerrilla fighters or a dispute between paramilitary groups." [16]

In early 2007 Marine Gen. Peter Pace, then chairman of the Joint
Chiefs of Staff, traveled to Colombia and spent two days meeting with the country's military and political leadership. Shortly afterwards Colombian Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos, about whom more will be said later, returned the favor and visited the Pentagon where he met with US Defense Secretary Robert Gates. A Defense Department report of the visit quoted Pentagon officials as saying that "U.S. military support for Colombia, previously focused on combating drugs, has expanded to helping the Colombian military confront the country's rebel insurgency" and that "U.S. Special Forces troops in Colombia provide Colombian forces military training…."[17]

Five months later Colombia built a third military base on its 2,219 kilometer border with Venezuela, initially stationing 1,000 troops in it.

Colombia has become a military outpost for Washington in confronting and threatening both Ecuador on its southwestern and Venezuela on its northeastern frontiers.

It is also part of a strategy that is more than regional and even continental in nature and scope.

South America: NATO's Sixth Continent

Since the implementation of Plan Colombia in 2000 the US has enlisted several NATO allies

for the counterinsurgency war in the nation and for broader purposes in the region. British SAS (Special Air Service) personnel have been assigned to the Colombian military for training purposes and Spain also sent military personnel.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has members in Europe and North America and partnerships in Asia (Afghanistan, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Singapore, South Korea, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) and with Australia.

The only inhabited continent it hasn't penetrated yet is South America,

In January of 2007 Colombian defense chief Santos traveled to Washington, London and Brussels, in the last-named city "for talks with the European Union," and then to Munich, Germany "for a meeting of NATO defense ministers." [18] Santos of course made the tour to garner more military aid from the US and its NATO allies. The European Union was reported to have provided $154 million annually as of that year.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez warned in September of 2005 that "We discovered through intelligence work a military exercise that NATO has of an invasion against Venezuela, and we are preparing ourselves for that
invasion."

He detailed the plan as consisting of a "military exercise…known as Plan Balboa [that] includes rehearsing simultaneous assaults by air, sea and land at a military base in Spain, involving troops from the US and NATO countries." [19] US troops deployed to the Dutch possession of Curacao off Venezuela's northwest coast were also part of the planned operation.

In spring of the following year it was reported that "Military maneuvers in the Caribbean are being carried out by the US, members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and countries from the hemisphere – excluding Cuba and Venezuela, which are the potential objectives of this demonstration of force" and that immediately afterwards "Future exercises will involve roughly 4,000 soldiers from the US, Holland, Belgium, Canada and France, who are scheduled to participate in a maneuver being dubbed the Joint Caribbean Lion, to take place between May 23 and June 15 in Curacao and Guadeloupe." [20]

Colombian Counterinsurgency War: Model For South Asia And Central America

For the past several years the US has also recruited and deployed Colombian military and security forces for the war in Afghanistan, supposedly to replicate the Plan Colombia drug war component in South Asia.

In April of 2007 Washington transferred its ambassador to Colombia, William Wood, to Afghanistan to oversee the application of the Colombian model of counterinsurgency under the guise of combating drug cultivation. Two years later Afghanistan is estimated to account for over 90% of the illegal opium production in the world.

A Bangladeshi analyst observed that "Based on 2003 figures, drug trafficking constitutes the third biggest global commodity in cash terms after oil and the arms trade.

"Afghanistan and Colombia are the largest drug producing economies in the world, which feed a flourishing criminal economy. These countries are

heavily militarized and the drug trade is protected.

“Amply documented, the CIA has played a central role in the development of both the Latin American and Asian drug triangles.

“NATO, as an entity, has become an accessory to major narcotics proliferation and criminal activity. Opium is not truly being reduced: in fact all the figures show that it is on the rise. This is happening under the eyes of NATO as confirmed by several media reports.” [21]

The intermediate way stations between Afghanistan and Colombia are Kosovo, not without reason dubbed the Colombia of the Balkans, and increasingly Iraq.

The pattern is impossible to ignore.

Ironically given the above contention, BBC News reported two years ago that “The US hopes that some of the lessons learned in Colombia can be applied to Afghanistan….” [22]

Last January the current chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullin, visited Colombia and was quoted as saying “Our military-to-military relationship is exceptionally strong. We need to stay with them. They have achieved things that are remarkable.” [23]

This March Mullin traveled to Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Mexico. Upon returning his comments were summarized as affirming that “The U.S. military is ready to help Mexico in its deadly war against drug cartels with some of the same counter-insurgency tactics used against militant networks in Iraq and Afghanistan” [24] and that “the Plan Colombia aid package could be an ‘overarching’ model for Pakistan and Afghanistan….” [25]

A feature on US Central Command chief David Petraeus’ plans for the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan reported that “Military officials are also looking at U.S. relations with Colombia as a possible model for Afghanistan and Pakistan, saying something like Washington’s Plan Colombia strategy could help the two countries against militants.” [26]

The report from which the last quote is excerpted, “US sees lessons for Afghan war in Colombia,” also includes this:

“Afghan police have already trained with their Colombian counterparts and Bogota is studying sending troops to Afghanistan to help out in eradication and de-mining.” [27]

What is being exported to Afghanistan was made sickeningly evident last autumn when it was announced that Colombia had dismissed three generals and 22 soldiers of different ranks for the slaughter, at random apparently, of young slum dwellers in Bogota.

“The youths were lured from a Bogota slum with the promise of work; later their bodies were found in mass graves near the Venezuelan border.

“Human rights groups say that soldiers sometimes kill homeless people so that they can inflate their claims of success on the battlefield and receive promotion. [28]

Among the three generals asked to resign was General Mario Montoya Uribe, “the author of the policy to use body counts to measure success against guerrillas” [29] who “allegedly encouraged promoting officers whose units kill the most leftist rebels.” [30]

A later report provided gruesome details:

"More than 1,000 cases of illegal killings by the military are being investigated. There are dozens of cases of soldiers taking innocent men, murdering them and dressing them up as enemy combatants. Hundreds of
members of the security forces are thought to have taken part in such activities." [31]

Recall in reference to the above that the report immediately preceding it states that the murdered were buried in mass graves near the Venezuelan border.

With this year's onslaught by the Sri Lankan military against LTTE strongholds appearing to have ended the nation's 33-year war, the Colombian government and its American military suppliers are waging the only decades-long counterinsurgency war in the world, one now in its fifth decade.

It has been and remains a war against the poor, the landless, the disenfranchised, anyone would opposes the privileges and abuses of the large landholders, the business elite, the US-trained military establishment and the upper echelons of the narco-mafias.

Nine years ago Plan Colombia was designed to be the terminal phase of that war.

The Colombia model is now the prototype Washington has openly identified for application in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Mexico among other locations.

Plan Colombia: Reining In Resurgent South America

Plan Colombia, additionally, is now being increasingly revealed as a military strategy for suppressing a rising tide of discontent with the aftereffects of post-Cold War neoliberalism throughout South America, Central America and the Caribbean.

The US and the West as a whole have used the Colombian regime and its formidable military machine to intimidate its neighbors Ecuador and Venezuela and the Andean region as a whole. Bordering on Panama, Colombia is also a potential launching pad for attacks on Central American nations like Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador.

A brief chronology of the past year and a half will demonstrate the heightened role that is intended for Colombia by its sponsors in Washington.

In January of 2008 Venezuelan President Chavez said that the US and its Colombian client "don't want peace in Colombia because it's the perfect excuse to have thousands of soldiers there, the CIA, military bases, spy planes and who knows what other…operations against Venezuela."

He added, "I accuse the government of Colombia of devising a conspiracy, acting as a pawn of the U.S. empire, of devising a military provocation against Venezuela." [32]

On March 1st of 2008 Colombia launched a raid inside Ecuador and killed 24 suspected FARC members, including the group's second in command Raul Reyes.

An article titled "Colombian official says US intelligence helped raid on
rebels" reported that "the Ecuadoran air force found that Colombia used ten 500-pound bombs, similar to those used by US forces in Iraq, which 'cannot be transported by

Colombian airplanes.'

"Ecuadoran authorities also noted that a few hours before the Colombian bombing raid, an HC-130 military aircraft had taken off from the US air base at Manta, in southeastern Ecuador." [33]

Fearing that the armed incursion inside Ecuador was part of a broader plan of aggression, Venezuela deployed some 9,000 troops to its border with Colombia. On the day of the attack Venezuelan President Chavez warned his Colombian counterpart, "Don't think about doing that over here because it would very serious, it would be cause for war." [34]

Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa broke off diplomatic relations with Colombia after the attack and when it was later discovered that the bombing had killed an Ecuadoran national, warned of further consequences.

On March 6 Venezuela decreed a state of general alert and sent ten battalions, tanks and planes to the Colombian border.

US President Bush told reporters that "America would continue to stand with Colombia." [35]

Three weeks later Ecuador announced that it would "install electronic surveillance equipment and boost its military presence along its border with Colombia" and President Correa warned that his country would ""never again" allow a foreign attack on its soil. [36]

US Military: After Iraq, Latin America

Also in April of 2008 the US Air Forces Southern director of operations, Col. Jim Russell, advocated that troops being withdrawn from Iraq be redeployed to the Pentagon's Southern Command which takes in South and Central America and the Caribbean. He stated at the time: "We think, as we move ahead, we will see more of a shift of attention towards the region.

"We're seeing problems right at the mouth of Central America. That's the gateway to our southern border." [37]

On July 12, 2008 the US Navy reestablished its 4th Fleet, encompassing South and Central America and the Caribbean as does the Pentagon's Southern Command, after it was disestablished in 1950 following World War II.

Earlier this year the chief of the Southern Command, Admiral James Stavridis, became NATO Supreme Allied Commander and head of the Pentagon's European Command. Three of the last five NATO top military commanders – Stavridis, his predecessor Bantz John Craddock and Wesley Clark – moved to that post from being head of Southern Command.

In May of 2008, clearly anticipating what has occurred this week, Venezuela warned Colombia not to allow a new US military base in La Guajira near the border with northwestern Venezuela. The latter's president said, "We will not allow the Colombian government to give La Guajira to the empire. Colombia is launching a threat of war at us." [38]

Less than a week later a US warplane penetrated Venezuelan airspace on a flight from the

Netherlands Antilles. The Venezuelan government accused the US of spying on a military base on Orchila Island and "said the U.S. was testing Venezuela's ability to detect intruders and that the Venezuelan air force was prepared to intercept the plane had it not turned back toward the Caribbean island of Curacao." [39]

Defense Minister Gustavo Rangel said that "This is just the latest step in a series of provocations in which they want to involve our country." [40]

In September a bloody separatist ambush killed eight people in the Bolivian province of Pando. The government expelled US ambassador Philip Goldberg, an old hand at supporting violent secessionist uprisings in Bosnia and Kosovo earlier. The head of the nation's armed forces, General Luis Trigo, warned that "The Bolivian Armed Forces warned on Friday that they will not tolerate any more actions of radical groups or foreign interference in the country's internal affairs." [41]

Toward the end of 2008 Bolivia expelled US Drug Enforcement Administration officers and later announced plans to purchase Russian helicopters for anti-narcotics operations.

Today Bolivian President Evo Morales stated, "I have first-hand information that the empire, through the U.S. Southern Command, made the coup d'etat in Honduras." [42]

In October of 2008 Ecuador charged the CIA with infiltrating its military and knowing of the Colombian attack on its territory the preceding March. Defence Minister Javier Ponce told newspapers: "The CIA had full knowledge of what was happening in Angostura." [43]

At the same time Colombian Defense Minister Santos broadened his nation's bellicosity by aiming it toward Russia. Completely the creature of Washington and its military that he is, Santos said:

"Russia, with its 16,000 nuclear bombs, has a great desire to be a key player in the world. But its presence in the region will promote a return to the Cold War." [44]

Santos was alluding in particular to recent Russian-Venezuelan naval exercises in the Caribbean and to the fact that Russia has provided Caracas with advanced arms, warplanes and submarines, reflecting a general trend among Latin American nations – including Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina and Nicaragua – toward increased military ties with Russia as a counterbalance to traditional American domination of their armed forces and to be able to defend themselves against US and proxy attacks. What Santos and his American sponsors fear is the effective demise of the almost 200-year-old Monroe Doctrine.

This March Venezuelan President Chavez labeled Colombian Defense Minister Santos "a threat to regional stability" and a "a threat to the stability and sovereignty of the countries in the region" who "again shows his contempt for international law" in reference to Santos' defense of the attack inside Ecuador last year. [45]

Santos reiterated his intention to continue striking alleged rebel sites in neighboring countries, evoking this response from Chavez a few days later: "In case of a provocation on the part of Colombia's armed forces or infringements on Venezuela's sovereignty, I will give an order to strike with Sukhoi aircraft and tanks. I will not let anyone disrespect Venezuela and its sovereignty." [46]

During the past few months the Pentagon has been training the armed forces of Guyana,

Venezuela's eastern neighbor, both at home and in the United States. The use of French and Dutch island possessions in the Caribbean for military purposes has already been examined. With the election of Ricardo Martinelli as president of Panama this May putting that country back into the US column, the noose is tightening around Venezuela.

Ecuador refused to renew an agreement with the US for the use of its Manta military base and so Washington lost its basing rights there this month. With the corresponding announcement last week by Colombian President Uribe that he was turning five more military bases over to the Pentagon – three airfields and two navy bases – President Chavez was correct in seeing the move as "a threat against us," and warning that "They are surrounding Venezuela with military bases." [47]

Since the overthrow of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya on June 28, led by military commanders trained at the School of the Americas, alarms have been sounded in Latin America and throughout the world that the coup, far from being an aberration or anachronism, may mark a precedent for more in the near future.

And just as in the final months of the Bush presidency and the first seven months of the current one military operations in Afghanistan, for five years given secondary importance in relation to Iraq, have escalated into the world's major war front, so plans for direct US military aggression in Latin America, dormant since the invasion of Panama in 1989, may be slated for revival.

Notes

1) Russia Today, January 18, 2009
2) Ibid
3) STRATFOR, January 14, 2000
4) Ibid
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7) Ibid
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9) Tampa Bay Times, July 12, 2008
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11) Associated Press, May 24, 2007
12) Associated Press, March 10, 2007
13) Xinhua News Agency, February 18, 2007
14) Xinhua News Agency, December 16, 2006
15) Xinhua News Agency, December 27, 2006
16) Xinhua News Agency, January 20, 2006
17) U.S. Department of Defense, February 1, 2007
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22) BBC News, July 8, 2007
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30) Trend News Agency, November 4, 2008
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32) Reuters, January 25, 2008
33) Focus News Agency, March 24, 2008
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35) Reuters, March 4, 2008
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