

Venezuela's Chavez confirms military deployment along border with Colombia

By [Global Research](#)

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Global Research, August 01, 2010

Xinhua News Agency 1 August 2010

CARACAS: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said Friday troops had been deployed to defend its border against Colombia, which has claimed rebels are using Venezuela as a hideout.

He told a national TV station the deployment of infantry and air force units was for defensive purposes, claiming a Colombian aircraft had violated Venezuela airspace for five minutes this week.

Chavez did not give details about the deployments, but said he had been reviewing "war plans," because Colombian President Alvaro Uribe "is capable of doing anything" before handing over the power on Aug. 7.

"They aren't going to lead us into a war through blackmail," said Chavez, who had also threatened to cut off oil supplies to the United States if it backed a military attack by Colombia.

Venezuela cut ties with Colombia after Bogota accused Caracas of harboring its rebel militants. Since then, Chavez has accused Colombia of preparing a military attack, but the Colombian government denied the charge, saying it simply wanted cooperation from Venezuela in combating rebels.

Chavez said he had sent Venezuelan troops to check the alleged Colombian rebel bases and found nothing but an abandoned house.

Chavez also said he wanted peace and would contact the incoming Colombian government in an effort to heal relations between the two neighbors.

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