

FARC alliance with Venezuela's Chávez ignites Andean region

by Valerie Rush and Dennis Small

In less than two months in office, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez has:

1. decreed an illegal referendum to ram through a proposal for a Constituent Assembly, designed to throw out the country's existing national constitution, shut down the Congress and other national institutions, and lay the basis for Jacobin mob rule in Venezuela;

2. threatened to personally lead street demonstrations against the Venezuelan Supreme Court, should they rule against his referendum proposal;

3. announced that the Venezuelan Army must be "politicized," effectively transforming it from guardian of the state into his own political party (Chávez is a former Army lieutenant colonel, forced to resign after attempting a coup d'état in 1992);

4. encouraged Brazil-style land seizures, by announcing that people have the right to steal if they are hungry, and that the military and national guard will *not* be used, as they have been historically, to stop such actions (an epidemic of land and building seizures, both rural and urban, has followed his statement);

5. pledged full allegiance to International Monetary Fund dictates, including making full debt repayment and budget austerity a priority.

But most dangerous of all has been Chávez's public encouragement and support for the FARC and ELN narco-terrorists in neighboring Colombia, establishing a de facto alliance with them which threatens to ignite Africa-style warfare throughout the entire Andes region, and the South American continent beyond. In light of the current economic and social volatility of the area, reflected most immediately in Ecuador, Chávez's de facto alliance with Colombia's narco-terrorist armies could turn the area into a global hot spot overnight, as in the Middle East or the Balkans.

Pro-terrorist 'neutrality'

On Feb. 22, Chávez declared at a Caracas press conference that he would grant asylum in Venezuela to any Colombian soldier or guerrilla, "equally, because they are combatants in an internal conflict in which we are neutral." When

challenged by reporters as to whether the Venezuelan head of state had not, in effect, just granted "belligerent" (co-equal) status to the narco-terrorists, Foreign Minister José Vicente Rangel rushed to deny it, insisting that President Chávez was speaking "colloquially, not juridically."

Chávez, however, never retracted his comment. In fact, he poured oil on the fire, by declaring on March 10 that "belligerent" status had *already* been granted by the Colombia government of President Andrés Pastrana itself, when it agreed to demilitarize 50,000 square kilometers in southern Colombia as an incentive for peace talks with the FARC. Chávez added that, in the demilitarized zone, "the guerrilla now governs, sets rules, and has its own taxes."

The FARC and ELN responded to this de facto diplomatic recognition with delight. In an extensive document put out on the Internet, FARC scribbler Héctor Mondragón wrote that, with Chávez's electoral victory in Venezuela, "the political perspective in this region of Latin America has become extremely interesting." Mondragón said that the FARC extends its congratulations to Chávez on his election victory, and described the new Venezuelan head of state as "one of the best sons of the fatherland of the Liberator Simón Bolívar."

The ELN also publicly expressed its gratitude to Chávez for what they called his public recognition of their status.

Colombians across the political spectrum were outraged at Chávez's provocative intervention into their country's internal affairs, and Colombian President Pastrana abruptly cancelled a border summit that the two heads of state were scheduled to hold that same day.

Former Colombian President Alfonso López Michelsen explained what was at stake, when he described Chávez's granting of belligerency status to the FARC as "recognition that there are two governments in Colombia: one is Pastrana's, and one is [FARC leader] Tirofijo's. Then the arms trade becomes legitimate with both, because as President Chávez says, he would be observing neutrality. Chávez could send his ambassador to Tirofijo and treat him as a representative of another government."

Despite the furor his statements triggered, Chávez not

only did not back down, but he escalated his offensive, announcing that he might have to reconsider his “collaboration” with the Colombian peace process, while Foreign Minister Rangel warned the Colombian government against trying Chávez’s patience.

London’s scenario

This has all brought Colombia and Venezuela to their worst bilateral relations in a decade, and has created tensions throughout the region. As *EIR* has been emphasizing all along, Hugo Chávez is functioning as a pawn of the London financial elites, who are determined to ignite the region, sowing revolution, insurgency, and assassination, the better to splinter and control the disintegrating continent.

As in Africa, the sovereign nation-state and its legitimate defense forces are being replaced by private, irregular armies. Colombia is the worst case, where the battered and under-funded Armed Forces are under perpetual assault, both at home and abroad, from London-controlled non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, while the FARC-ELN narco-terrorist armies use their profits from the drug trade to import high-tech weaponry and secure their half of the country.

London is creating irregular armies on the right as well as the left. According to an interview with the Bogotá daily *El Tiempo* on March 15, paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño announced his readiness to deploy heavily armed “self-defense forces” into Venezuela, in hot pursuit of any guerrillas that take Chávez up on his offer of refuge. “And if the [narco-terrorist] chieftains take refuge in Caracas, the self-defense forces will arrive in Caracas. . . . The [Colombian] Army cannot enter there, but we have a natural, moral obligation to pursue those bandits there. We don’t want a border problem, but President Chávez needs to take a more sensible attitude. . . . He cannot convert his country into a refuge for guerrillas.”

Foggy Bottom, foggy mind

One would think that in the face of this narco-terrorist threat so close to the United States, the U.S. State Department would do everything in its power to strengthen the Colombian military, isolate the FARC, and box Chávez’s ears—hard—to bring this scenario to a halt, while encouraging an economic policy that would develop and stabilize the area.

Not at all. The U.S. State Department has instead fully committed itself to Colombian President Pastrana’s lunatic “negotiation” strategy with the narco-terrorists, to the extent of holding two separate face-to-face meetings last December with FARC representatives, in Costa Rica.

Then, two weeks after Chávez’s statement of “neutrality” toward Colombia’s narco-terrorists, a FARC commando squad along the Colombian-Venezuelan border kidnapped, tortured, and murdered three Americans who were working with an isolated Indian tribe in Colombia. The bullet-riddled

bodies of the two women and one man were dumped on the Venezuelan side of the border.

Although FARC spokesman Raúl Reyes at first denied his organization’s responsibility for the crime, Colombian military intelligence turned up irrefutable evidence from a radio phone intercept of a FARC chieftain’s conversation, in which he gives the orders for the kidnapping and assassinations. The FARC finally admitted responsibility, but blamed it on a low-level local leader, “Commander Gildardo,” who had allegedly acted “without consulting higher leadership bodies,” and had violated FARC policy. “It is not FARC policy to disappear Colombians or people of other nationalities,” stated a ludicrous FARC communiqué. Adding insult to injury, the FARC leadership then refused to turn “Gildardo” over to the Colombian authorities, promising to discipline him themselves.

The FARC’s only problem is that “Gildardo” was probably invented! A March 7 intercept of a FARC transmission by military intelligence caught the voice of FARC military commander “Mono Jojoy,” demanding that his brother, “Commander Grannobles,” come up with a scapegoat for the assassinations. Says the intercept: “This is the biggest f—king political disaster. . . . Give me any name. . . . This is urgent, because I need to put out a communiqué.”

Did this outrage cut through the foggy minds at Foggy Bottom? Hardly. At a March 8 press conference to decry assassinations, State Department spokesman James Rubin insisted that U.S. support for the Colombian “peace process” would continue.

Not everyone in the area is so deluded about the pursuit of an illusory “peace” with these bloody assassins and drug traffickers. Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori made waves back in early February, when he told a Washington conference of the Inter-American Defense College that negotiations with the FARC will turn Pastrana into a “half-President.” He said that he had never agreed to dialogue with Peru’s narco-terrorists who were committed to destroying the Peruvian state, because “had I done so, I would have been a half a President, negotiating with the country’s other half-President,” the terrorists’ leader. Fujimori received a standing ovation from the military representatives present from around the continent.

Since then, Fujimori has mobilized thousands of Peruvian troops along the border with Colombia, determined to prevent an infiltration of Peruvian territory by the increasingly powerful and newly emboldened FARC. Such statements and actions are also a clear message that direct, or “multinational” U.S. troop intervention into the region is not acceptable to Peru. There are some in Washington promoting precisely such a U.S. intervention into Colombia, usually in the form of a “multinational” or “Organization of American States” deployment, but this would only make an already disastrous situation even worse, very possibly creating the “Vietnam-like quagmire” that the FARC has threatened.