

Outflank the Push for Colombia-Venezuela War

by Maximiliano Londoño Penilla

This statement was issued by the president of the Lyndon LaRouche Association in Colombia.

The recent conflict between Colombia and Venezuela, is a typical example of a border conflict manipulated from abroad, which could set off an absurd and fratricidal war. This conflict was triggered by the capture of Rodrigo Granda, a high-level member of the anti-government and pro-drug-production guerrilla group, Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), who reportedly was handed over to Colombian authorities by Venezuelans who pocketed a bounty that had been offered by the Colombian government. The Venezuelans, on the other hand, charged that he was kidnapped by Colombians operating inside Venezuela, with the collaboration of bribed Venezuelan national guardsmen.

After 15 days, during which diplomatic and commercial relations between the two nations were paralyzed, a communiqué was released on Jan. 28 by the Colombian presidential palace, the Casa de Nariño, announcing that the conflict had been resolved, and that on Feb. 3 Colombian President Uribe would go to visit Venezuelan President Chávez, to hear what he had to say, and offer his own observations.

The communiqué indicated that the Colombian government was fully prepared “to review the facts that are of public knowledge, and that if, in the view of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, they are deemed inappropriate, they will not be repeated. All this in harmony with a combined political goal, that will allow Colombia and Venezuela to advance a binational strategy against terrorism, drug trafficking, contraband, kidnapping and other crimes. This strategy will be developed through the application of current mechanisms or with others defined by the governments, always with the strictest regard for legality and in particular for the sovereignty of both nations.”

Uribe’s communiqué, which had been drafted in consultation with the Venezuelan government, has, at least for the moment, satisfied Hugo Chávez, who had demanded at least some gesture from Colombia toward recognizing that it had violated Venezuelan sovereignty. Nonetheless, Chávez indicated that the matter would only be resolved once he meets with Uribe, and the respective explanations are given.

The governments of Brazil, Cuba, and Peru, in particular, had acted to help find a diplomatic solution acceptable to both sides, one which would reduce the possibility of U.S.

involvement that could have aggravated the conflict. However, the most effective diplomacy turned out to be based on the close physical-economic links between the two nations. Residents of the border zones and the business communities of both nations mobilized to demand a fraternal solution appropriate to the neighboring nations.

Regional War Scenarios Planned Years Ago

More than two decades ago, the Rand Corporation, among similar such institutions, had prepared scenarios for an eventual war between the United States and Venezuela, assuming the eventuality that a hostile Venezuelan government would threaten to suspend oil shipments to the United States. According to these scenarios, it would be a proxy war—that is, Colombia would be used as the spearhead against Venezuela. Given the announcements of George Bush that he will continue his so-called crusade to free the world of tyrants, and the recent statements of Condoleeza Rice, warning that Hugo Chávez is a “negative force in the region,” it comes as no surprise that the Jan. 21 edition of the *Wall Street Journal* demanded that Bush help President Uribe against the Venezuelan tyrant, since Bush has made it clear that any government that gives refuge to terrorists is an enemy of the United States.

In his second inaugural address, Bush promised that he would give the Iraq treatment to other countries. Will Venezuela be the next Iraq? In fact, Chávez and the FARC, with their provocations, are doing everything possible to give the United States a pretext for militarily invading the region, in the guise of fighting terrorism.

The FARC, Chávez, Evo Morales’s coca-farmers in Bolivia, and similar political forces hope to turn Central and South America into a scene of confrontation with the United States, reviving Che Guevara’s old idea of creating “one, two, many Vietnams.” At the same time, Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld, under the pretext of fighting renegade regimes and conquering ungovernable areas, also want to create chaos, thus creating preconditions for razing nations and eliminating national sovereignty. The Wall Street and City of London bankers are desperate, as they see their IMF-based world monetary and financial system collapsing in a systemic and global crisis, because debt service is growing more rapidly than the capacity of nations to pay. Just as in the 1930s, when the Anglo-American bankers put Hitler in power, today these same financial interests hope to impose a world fascist dictatorship by establishing a new version of the Roman Empire, this time the empire of Wall Street’s and London’s usury.

As U.S. statesman Lyndon H. LaRouche has explained to those who are trying to find some rational explanation for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the truth is that the goal of the Bush Administration has been effectively achieved—namely, to cause destruction, genocide, hunger, chaos, religious warfare, territorial fragmentation, and so on, and to extend this process to other areas of the world. Why? Because this provides a justification for imposing a world dictatorship, shattering all

lawful order, to try to salvage and recycle the dying financial cartel which controls the nations of the world today.

There Is an Alternative: Regional Economic Development

To be able to comprehend such events as the Granda case, it is necessary first to comprehend the strategic framework in which they occur. There are two mistaken axiomatic assumptions involved if one takes sides in the Colombia-Venezuela conflicts: 1) to believe that this is a local, Colombian-Venezuelan problem, and that for patriotic reasons, we [Colombians] must unconditionally support and institutionally align ourselves with the national government; and 2) to consider that all options have been exhausted, and that there is no other way than to capture Granda, or any other terrorist, however and wherever we can, because Chávez will never cooperate.

As is clear, the apparent validity of these axioms has been crushed by reality. In the first place, the IMF-based world economic system is in flames, and a band of fascists controls the White House. IMF adjustment programs have destabilized every nation on the planet. Argentina has experienced repeated changes in government, and President Kirchner is facing the fury of the creditors, who insist on collecting their pound of flesh. President Mesa of Bolivia is on the verge of falling before the combined forces of Evo Morales’s *cocaleros* and the Santa Cruz oligarchy, which is now promoting separatism.

In Peru, President Alejandro Toledo is not even loved by his own daughter, despite having been placed in the Presidency thanks to the good offices of the United States, which mobilized to oust his predecessor, Alberto Fujimori, who was America’s firmest ally in the fight against narco-terrorism. Now, you have the so-called “ethnocacerist” Humala movement (based on ethnicity), the Shining Path insurgency, and all other kinds of indigenist uprisings occurring in a Peru victimized by the IMF. Ecuador is a pressure cooker on the verge of exploding once again. And in Colombia, we are in total war against the narco-terrorists of all stripes, both left and right. To aggravate the Colombo-Venezuelan conflict could serve as the new detonator in a region that is already an economic, political, and social volcano in full eruption.

In the second place, it is obvious that there are options, other than paying members of the security service of a neighboring nation, to capture Granda. Brazil President Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva’s efforts to seek a negotiated solution to this conflict are important. What Uribe had achieved last year in his relations with Chávez is the path to follow: Implement important economic agreements to bring about joint regional infrastructure projects. The construction of the binational gas pipeline that would connect Colombia’s Guajira region with Venezuela’s Maracaibo must not be suspended. While it is true that Venezuela is eighth in the world in terms of natural gas reserves, those reserves are not located in the border areas with Colombia; thus the Venezuelan border states of Zulia

and Táchira could be supplied with Colombian natural gas. The future expansion of this project would then allow Venezuelan gas, in turn, to be delivered to Central America and to the Colombian Pacific coast.

In fact, there already is some electricity integration between Colombia and Venezuela, which is the first step toward the kind of broader energy integration that could be achieved. Despite the stupid comment of Colombian Vice President Francisco Santos, to the effect that Colombian-Venezuelan trade—which reached \$2.5 billion last year—is not important, the truth is that Colombia and Venezuela are indissolubly integrated, both physically and historically. For example, the Colombian plains are more interconnected with Venezuela in terms of supply routes, than to the rest of our own country, for lack of adequate transportation infrastructure inside Colombia. In general, 1,200 kilometers of common border have made for fluid, but still very limited, economic interchange, due to restrictions imposed by the IMF, which under the pretext of fighting the fiscal deficit, will not allow any investment in public works.

At the present time, Colombia exports approximately \$1.3 billion worth of merchandise to Venezuela annually, which is a big improvement from the crisis period of 2003, when annual exports fell to only \$693 million. The year before, they had been \$1.742 billion. Colombian exports to Venezuela currently represent approximately 10% of total sales abroad. At one point, some 30% of Colombian exports went to Venezuela. In the textile sector alone, Colombia exports \$154 million a year to Venezuela. Under current conditions, our textile manufacturers cannot compete with those of Asia, and in particular with Turkey. So Venezuela is our natural market. Chemical products constitute 20% of Colombia's exports to Venezuela, while food and drink account for 16%.

With the recent retaliatory measures taken by Chávez, all economic and infrastructure projects were suspended, and binational trade and highway transport were reduced to the minimum. For example, 1,800 tons of crude and coking coal from Colombia, being transported through Venezuela and destined for export to the United States and Central America, were frozen at the ports of Ceiba and Maracaibo. Last year, coal worth \$45 million, from Colombia's Norte del Santander province, was exported. Now, all supplies of cheap Venezuelan gasoline to Colombia's border cities has also been suspended. Eighty percent of everything consumed in Colombia's Arauca province, along the Venezuelan border, is transported by Venezuelan highways, because ours would take ten hours longer to get there.

Brazil's mediation in this conflict is important because it will lead to closer ties between Colombia and Brazil. In the meeting held on Jan. 19 between Lula and Uribe, not only was the Colombian-Venezuelan conflict addressed, but a bilateral agenda, heretofore minimal, began to be expanded upon. For now, binational projects between Colombia and Brazil are at the embryonic stage, but this could rapidly grow, if there is a

break with IMF policy that has vetoed this great potential. At that meeting, agreements were signed for the mutual provision of health services between Leticia (on the Colombian side) and Tabatinga (on the Brazilian side), and possibilities for expanding trade were explored as well.

Brazil, which is eagerly seeking outlets to the Pacific, is interested in building a highway between the cities of Pasto and Mocoa, but financing for the project must first be arranged. Construction of the Meta-Orinoco waterway must begin immediately, as well as the intermodal Tumaco-Puerto Asís-Belem do Pará corridor, projects with which both Brazil and Colombia are in accord.

In sum, as LaRouche has insisted, the only way to sow peace between nations is through the joint development of great economic and infrastructure projects. The issue is the physical economy between Colombia and Venezuela, in the context of developing great development and infrastructure corridors that can connect our region with the rest of the planet. The agenda of Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld is to sow chaos and destruction in the region, through every kind of ethnic and resource war imaginable. Colombia must insist instead on an agenda of great economic projects, and must abandon the illusion that by trying to imitate the hunter-killer squads that Cheney and Rumsfeld have created to capture enemies, that the problem of narco-terrorism can be solved. What is needed is cooperation among nations, with respect for the sovereignty of each, to eliminate any logistical, economic, or political advantage for the narco-terrorists.

Chávez should be taken at his word, when he insists that he does not support the FARC narco-terrorists. Concrete mechanisms must be established to supervise this process, and guarantee that this policy is carried out. The military forces of both countries can play a key role, in a coordinated process of mutual support (each in its own national territory, without foreign intervention nor hot pursuit), to eliminate the presence of narco-terrorists who exploit the long border to create trafficking corridors. Many of the mechanisms that currently exist for resolving border conflicts between the two nations must be activated, along with the deployment of the respective foreign ministries, and of mediating friendly nations. President Uribe and all public officials should abstain from trying to compete with Chávez in his war of the microphone. But no merely political or diplomatic solution will ultimately hold, unless the physical-economic links between the two sister countries are strengthened.

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