



THE FALSE CLAIMS OF THE URIBE ADMINISTRATION AGAINST VENEZUELA

On July 15, 2010, the Colombian government claimed it had photographs, videos, and intelligence proving that leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), Colombian insurgent groups active over 40 years, were operating in Venezuela with the support of the Venezuelan government. The accusations come only weeks before Juan Manuel Santos is to be sworn in as Colombia's new president and shortly after the president-elect and Venezuelan officials began discussing ways to improve the relations between the two countries – strained since an illegal March 2008 attack on Ecuadorean territory by Colombian forces and the October 2009 signing of a military agreement between Colombia and the U.S. virtually granting U.S. military forces control over seven Colombian military bases.

Much like many of the accusations before them, the latest claims are patently false and politically motivated. While Venezuela has long suffered the effects of Colombia's devastating internal conflict, the Venezuelan government does not shield or provide resources to members of the FARC or other insurgent, terrorist, or criminal organizations.

VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA

Venezuela and Colombia share a 1,200-mile-long border that crosses largely unpopulated and desolate territory. Throughout the history of Colombia's 60-year internal conflict, violence, crime, and refugees have flowed across the border into Venezuela, even as Venezuelan authorities have secured the border, participated in peace negotiations in Colombia, and tended to the needs of those escaping the violence in Colombia.

Since President Hugo Chávez took office in 1998 – he was re-elected in 2000 and 2006 – he has loudly advocated for peace in Colombia, arguing that a military solution to the country's internal conflict is not possible and would only generate more difficulties for the region, and, particularly, Venezuela and its long

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*- U.S. Gen. Doug Fraser
March, 2010.*

border with Colombia. In contrast, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe has dramatically emphasized a military approach against the insurgent groups, further distancing the possibility of a long-term solution to the 60 years Colombian civil war.

OTHER FALSE CLAIMS

Colombian accusations of Venezuela's alleged links to the FARC are numerous, though they have all been debunked or suffer from a lack of verifiable and trustworthy evidence.

In July 2009, the Colombian government accused Venezuela of providing the FARC with three anti-tank rocket launchers that had been purchased by the Venezuelan government from Sweden over two decades ago. The three rocket launchers had been found in a FARC encampment in October 2008, though strangely the Colombian government waited almost a year to level its accusations at Venezuela. In August 2009, President Chávez responded to the accusations, providing a 1995 document from the Venezuelan National Guard detailing the theft of five rocket launchers from a military installation during a FARC raid on Venezuelan territory – the three rockets referred to by Colombia were among these 5—, a theft that had been accordingly communicated to the Colombian government at the time.

In March 2008, the Colombian military illegally bombed a FARC encampment on the Ecuadorean side of the border shared between the two countries – an action that was rejected by 11 out of 12 countries members of the South American Union, UNASUR – from which they allegedly recovered a laptop belonging to a FARC leader. The laptop – which surprisingly survived a bombing that killed 26 people and destroyed much of the camp – was said to contain information linking senior Venezuelan officials to the FARC. In fact, although Interpol later said that reading and verifying all the documents on the laptop would take over 1,000 years, within hours of the raid Colombian authorities were launching accusations against Venezuela and Ecuador. They went as far as to



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claim that Venezuela had paid the FARC \$300 million and was working with the group on obtaining uranium. The information from the “magic” laptop, as it was called – and the unquestioning reporting by the mainstream media on it – seemed to finally provide verifiable evidence that Venezuela was supporting the FARC.

None of what the Colombian government said they found on the laptop has been verified, and much has withered under scrutiny. Investigative journalist Greg Palast found that the allegation that Venezuela had provided the FARC with \$300 million was “fake.”¹ U.S. intelligence officials expressed “extreme skepticism” with claims that the FARC was trying to obtain uranium for a dirty bomb.² Latin America researcher Adam Isacson at the Center for International Policy reviewed the documents from the laptop that were made publicly available and said, “They cannot be taken at face value.”³ A letter from 21 academics noted that the most notable communications between Venezuela and the FARC took place when Venezuela – with Colombia’s approval – agreed to mediate a humanitarian exchange of hostages in later 2007 and early 2008.⁴ An Interpol analysis of the laptop concluded that because of the handling of the evidence by the Colombian government for days before it was turned over, the documents on it could not be used in any judicial proceeding.⁵ **This Interpol’s analysis even found that over 48,000 files had been manipulated after Colombian forces “recovered” the laptop.**⁶

Other allegations of Venezuelan support for the FARC date back to 2001, when a Venezuelan newspaper reported that the Venezuelan government had flown a high member of the FARC to Cuba, known as Grannobles, so he could escape. In fact, Venezuela had airlifted a young member of the group to Cuba at the request of the Committee of the International Red Cross and in coordination with the Colombian government, as even President Andrés Pastrana and other Colombian officials ratified publicly.⁷ Similarly, in 2003, a man named Moises Boyer turned himself in to Colombian intelligence agencies and told the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* that he was a former member of Venezuela’s armed forces and pilot for President Chavez. Boyer also said that a FARC leader, Raúl Reyes, had been flown to Venezuela for medical treatment on instructions from Venezuela’s vice-president. Despite a media frenzy over the story, an investigation found that Boyer was neither a pilot nor a member of Venezuela’s armed

forces, and that his story had been completely fabricated. In fact, *El Espectador* even published a letter to its readers to apologize for disseminating false information.⁸

Finally, high ranking officials of regional multilateral organizations and even from the U.S. Defense Department have also dismissed these kinds of accusations. In April 2008, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza, testified before the House Subcommittee on Western Hemispheric Affairs that there was no evidence of Venezuelan support for the FARC.⁹ More recently, in March 2010, General Douglas Fraser, the U.S. General in charge of the U.S. Southern Command, testified before the Senate Armed Service Committee, “We have not seen any connections, specifically, that I can verify that there has been a direct government-terrorist connection.”¹⁰

VENEZUELA’S ATTEMPTS AT PEACE

Contrary to what some of these accusations have stated, Venezuela has extended its hand in hopes of reaching a politically negotiated peace in Colombia. **One of its most recent attempts was in late 2007 and early 2008, when President Chávez worked with Colombian Senator Piedad Córdoba – with the approval of President Uribe – on a humanitarian exchange of hostages.**¹¹ The negotiations directly led to the release of six hostages and eventually helped facilitate the release of former Colombian presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three American defense contractors.

THE TIMING OF THE ACCUSATIONS

The timing of Colombia’s most recent accusations is of interest. With a new president who has pledged to repair relations between the two countries set to be sworn in on August 7, **such a public airing of these alleged claims by the outgoing government of President Alvaro Uribe would poison any future rapprochement between Colombia and Venezuela.** Moreover, there is also another factor that may also explain the recent round of accusations – the free trade agreement with the U.S.

On July 7, President Barack Obama announced his intention to submit a pending free trade



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agreement (FTA) between the U.S. and Colombia to Congress for consideration. The FTA, which was signed in 2006, has been stalled over concerns in Congress related to Colombia's human rights record. In attempting to have the FTA endorsed by Congress, the Bush administration – and now, it seems, the Obama administration – tried to distract from Democratic concerns with the agreement by selling it as a means to counter the “threat” posed by Venezuela.

This tactic dates back to 2005, when then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld argued in an op-ed on the pending Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), “The coming vote on CAFTA is a national-security vote.” As late as 2008, President Bush made the same plea in relation to the Colombian FTA, saying that it would stop “terrorists and demagogues” from emerging victorious in Latin America.

ECHOES OF IRAQ

The Colombian government has pledged to present “evidence” for their most recent accusations at the OAS on July 22. **Their appearance before the regional body provokes memories of Secretary of State Colin Powell's dramatic presentation to the UN Security Council on evidence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction – all of which was subsequently found to have been doctored for the pre-determined end of leading the U.S. to war against Iraq.**

Venezuela seeks only peace for Colombia. As President Chavez has repeatedly stated, and as the history of Latin American internal conflicts show, there is no military solution to the Colombian conflict. Venezuela has shown that it is willing to take any steps to ensure that relations between the two countries are improved – based on the fundamental principle of mutual respect – and that the internal conflict that has gone on for over 60 years in that sister nation can be resolved

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¹ “\$300 Million from Chavez to FARC a Fake,” Greg Palast, May 16, 2008.

<http://www.gregpalast.com/300-million-from-chavez-to-farc-a-fake/>

² “U.S. Skeptical of Colombian ‘Dirty Bomb’ Claims,” ABC News, March 5, 2008. <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/story?id=4395397&page=1>

³ “A Fairy Tale from a Guerilla Laptop,” Center for International Policy, March 10, 2008. <http://www.cipcol.org/?p=555>

⁴ “An Open Letter to the Media: Interpol Analysis of FARC Laptop Authenticity Will Not “Prove” Links Between Venezuela, Rebels,” April 26, 2008.

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⁵ “Interpol Notes Improper Initial Handling of FARC Laptops”, IPS, March 15, 2008. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=42391>

⁶ INTERPOL, *Interpol's Forensic Report on FARC Computers and Hardware seized by Colombia*, (May 2008), 33. (English Version)

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⁷ “Colombia aclara caso de guerrillero colombiano herido trasladado a Cuba desde Venezuela”, *Venevisión*, April 2, 2001.

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⁸ “El Espectador's Editorial Board Letter (Original in Spanish). *El Espectador*, August 12, 2003. <http://www.elespectador.com/nacional/nota1.htm>

⁹ “Los medios perdieron el piloto”, *Observatorio de Medios*,

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⁹ “OAS chief to US Congress: no Venezuela-terrorist link,” AFP, April 10, 2008.

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5ipNXwHOq34tlujMqpPj9OZVXwzwnw>

¹⁰ “US general sees no Venezuela-guerrilla link,” AFP, March 11, 2010.

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iLRc4xRTwzEnD6Uz55LRaUOiT4Lg>

¹¹ “Chávez Asks Uribe for Patience in Hostage Talks”, *IPS*, November 20, 2007.

<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=40141>