



U.S.-Colombia Military Agreement Stirs Tension

More American troops will soon find themselves stationed in Colombia under the guise of battling drugs and terrorism, dramatically raising tensions in the region.

The conclusion of negotiations on a new agreement between the two countries, announced in a brief news release on August 14 by Colombia's foreign ministry, will allow U.S. forces to use seven military bases in the South American nation. The finalized plan must now be "technically revised" by both governments and approved by the Colombian Council of State. It is expected to be signed within two weeks. "This agreement reaffirms the commitment of both parties in the fight against drug trafficking and terrorism," Colombia's foreign ministry said in the statement.



One of the main reasons for the expansion of operations in Colombia is the refusal of Ecuador's leftist president Rafael Correa to renew a lease on the Manta base, which the United States has used as a counter-narcotics hub in the region for the past 10 years.

The plan has alarmed many South American governments, though they stopped short of issuing an official condemnation of the move at a regional conference last week. Among the malcontents are mostly leftist leaders like Hugo Chavez, who is using the opportunity to blast "U.S. imperialism" and even told fellow South American presidents that "this could provoke a war in South America."

After recently putting his armed forces on alert, Chavez told reporters that "we're talking about the Yankees, the most aggressive nation in human history." He also accused the U.S. government of ordering a recent Colombian military incursion into Venezuela. "The threat against us is growing. I call on the people and the armed forces, let's go, ready for combat!" Chavez said, claiming that the plan could be designed to provide cover for a later invasion of Venezuela by U.S. forces to obtain oil. He also threatened to nationalize Colombian companies and seal the border and announced that Venezuela will no longer provide subsidized fuel to Colombia.

Likewise, Ecuador is in the process of moving even more troops to the border with Colombia. And Bolivia, which recently expelled U.S. agents, is also expressing grave concerns about the agreement. "This isn't against drug-trafficking, it's against the region," said socialist Bolivian president Evo Morales, who called the agreement treasonous. "Our duty is to reject it."

Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva — a Marxist with close ties to both Castro and Chavez — called for increased transparency and assurances that U.S. troops will not be operating outside of Colombia, suggesting that president Barack Obama should meet with regional leaders to discuss the plan. He said he "regrets" the government's decision, while Brazil's foreign minister was quoted in a Brazilian newspaper saying he feared "a strong military presence whose aim and capability seems to go



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on August 17, 2009

well beyond what might be needed inside Colombia."

But while the fiercest rhetoric has come overwhelmingly from hard-core left-wing leaders who would criticize the United States no matter what, even governments that are seen as more moderate have expressed unease over the U.S.-Colombia agreement.

Chile's president, who currently heads the regional Union of South American Nations (Unasur) also echoed concerns about the plan. Argentina's president referred to the pact as "belligerent."

But even as South American nations continue to criticize the agreement, Colombian president Alvaro Uribe and American officials have been firm in its defense. "The first message is that Ecuador and Venezuela are our brothers and that we are in a battle against terrorism," Uribe said on the presidential website. "It would be good if the defense council of South America could quickly integrate with countries that want to help, like the U.S," he added, claiming the U.S. presence would act as an "insurance policy" for security in the region. He also proposed a dialogue with Venezuela and Ecuador aimed at resolving their differences in the future.

President Obama weighed in on the issue as well, criticizing "those in the region who have been trying to play this up as part of a traditional anti-Yankee rhetoric" and noting that Colombia will still maintain control of the bases.

U.S. military officials have also commented on the situation in an attempt to defuse some of the suspicion. "I think we need to do a better job of explaining to them what we're doing and making it as transparent as possible, because anybody's concerns are valid," vice chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff General James Cartwright said at a news conference. "The strategic intent is, in fact, to be able to provide to the Colombians what they need in order to continue to prosecute their efforts against the internal threats that they have."

The plan calls for an expansion on the number of U.S. troops in the country from the current 300 to around 800, though some reports, such as one in the *Financial Times*, have claimed the number will approach 1,500. The number of military contractors will increase to about 600.

The agreement is in direct defiance of the advice of America's Founding Fathers, who warned repeatedly of foreign entanglements. In addition, the U.S. Constitution does not authorize either a federal "War on Drugs" — which has thus far been an expensive and spectacular failure — or the stationing of American military forces abroad without a congressional declaration of war.

But aside from constitutional issues, at a time when America is already in such dire financial straits — borrowing hundreds of billions just to keep the government running — it doesn't make sense to be spending more money on foreign adventures. The U.S. government should obey the Constitution and bring home America's military personnel as quickly as possible.



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