



## Venezuela Prepares for War, Again

After sending 15,000 more troops to the border, leftist Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is warning his military and the population to “prepare for war” against neighboring Colombia and the “Yankee empire,” further inflaming tensions in the region.

Diplomatic relations between the two neighbors have been on the rocks for years, but recent developments, including Colombia’s finalization of a [military agreement](#) with the United States, have added fuel to the fire. Chavez is once again accusing the U.S. military of gaining a foothold in the region to eventually invade Venezuela and steal the nation’s vast oil reserves. “Do not make a mistake Mr. President Obama, and go order open aggression against Venezuela using Colombia,” he [said](#), warning that such a move could spark a 100-year war that would engulf the entire continent. “We are prepared to do anything, but Venezuela will never be, never, ever again will it be a Yankee colony.”

Urging his officers in a televised broadcast to “defend this sacred nation called Venezuela,” Chavez explained that the best way to avoid war is to always be prepared for it. “It’s an ancient proverb,” he said. “If you want peace, prepare for war.” He also announced plans to train “revolutionary students,” more military groups, and even women for the battle.

Other recent events have also heightened tensions on the troubled border between the countries. Late last month, Venezuela [announced](#) the arrest of several alleged Colombian spies plotting to destabilize the government. Predictably, Chavez decried the alleged involvement of the CIA and the U.S. government, which he also blamed for the 2002 failed coup against him.

More recently, a string of high-profile kidnappings and murders on the border with Colombia have also [caused](#) the situation to deteriorate. Colombia is demanding the results of the investigation, while Venezuela claims the dead may have been involved with right-wing paramilitary groups known to operate in the area. Also, two Venezuelan troops were killed while patrolling the border earlier this month.

And in March of last year, accusations and threats also flew when Venezuela and Ecuador sent troops to the border with Colombia in response to a cross-border raid by Colombian forces into Ecuador. Back then, Bush pledged to stand with Colombia.



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on November 11, 2009

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But the United States has denied participating in anti-Chavez operations and claims that the military pact with Colombia is only aimed at fighting drug traffickers and leftist guerilla terrorists within the nation's own borders. And despite the controversial move, which has been widely condemned around Latin America, the Venezuelan people still do not agree with their socialist leader's warmongering. A poll by Caracas-based Datanalisis released Wednesday revealed that almost 80 percent of the population opposes the war stance.

Some [analysts](#) have speculated that Venezuela may actually be attempting to deflect growing anger about the situation at home. After taking over utility companies, the Chavez government is now rationing energy and water, according to the Associated Press. The economy has been in steep decline even as the price of oil dropped and inflation surged, with what is left of the middle class continuing to shrink.

Colombia has appealed to the United Nations and the Organization of American States over the Venezuelan regime's hostile rhetoric and military preparations, but Colombian President Alvaro Uribe has expressed hope for talks to resolve the matter. Colombian leaders have also accused the Venezuelan government of providing support and a safe haven for left-wing terrorists involved in Colombia's decades-old civil war, but the officials maintain that they do not want war.

The U.S. State Department has also urged the nations to maintain peace. "We are very much aware of recent tensions along the Venezuelan-Colombia border," said a spokesman, who noted that he did not think the spat was about America. "But we certainly would encourage dialogue between Venezuela and Colombia and a peaceful resolution of the situation along their border."

Brazilian Defense Minister Nelson Jobim also downplayed the conflict and pushed for talks. "We believe that everything can be resolved with dialogue," he said. "I don't think the tension is going to increase; it's part of the rhetoric of the continent." The Organization of American States is also pushing for talks to resolve the dispute.

Chavez has been described by critics as a "buffoon," and his socialist policies are certainly responsible for the deteriorating situation in Venezuela. But assuming he is not just trying to whip up support and distract from conditions at home, his fear may not be totally irrational. Given the history of U.S. government intervention in Latin America and around the world, any foreign leader could be excused for some degree of paranoia.

But Americans should be outraged too. The United States has no business sending troops or occupying military bases in Colombia or anywhere else. It is a colossal waste of money and it is unconstitutional. Plus, without external enemies to rally the population, Chavez might actually have to focus on improving the lives of his people through freedom.

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