

US escalates threat against Venezuela

War planes and drones violate airspace • Obama green-lights troop build-up in Colombia

Just after noon on January 8, a US military plane violated Venezuelan airspace, the latest in a series of provocations by the Obama administration.

During a live broadcast that evening, President Hugo Chávez revealed that the P3 bomber took off from an air base in the neighbouring island of Curaçao and entered Venezuelan airspace for around 15 minutes.

It was intercepted by two Venezuelan F-16 planes prepared to escort it outside Venezuelan territory.

"When the F-16 planes attempted communication with the US aircraft, it immediately took off towards the north, but later returned," said Chávez.

He added that at 1:37pm the plane came back and flew for about 19 minutes inside Venezuelan territory, but "was escorted out and pressured by our F-16s."

Days earlier, Vice-President Ramón Carrizalez publicly denounced another violation by a US military plane also originating from the air base in Curaçao in 2009.

Since 2008, Washington has been increasing its military and intelligence presence on Curaçao, where it has maintained a Forward Operating Location since 1999. A 2006 State Department document classified the Dutch islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao as the "the third frontier of the United States," describing the Caribbean colonies part of the US "geopolitical border."

Just before Christmas, Chávez revealed that missile-capable unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, had illegally entered Venezuela's airspace, reaching "as far as Fort Mara," a Venezuelan military fort in the state of



A US P3 plane flew from a Curaçao airbase into Venezuelan territory

Zulia bordering Colombia.

In October, Colombia and the US signed a military co-operation agreement authorising US occupation of seven military bases in Colombian territory and all other installations as required. The agreement is the largest US military expansion in Latin American history.

Although the two governments publicly justified the agreement as an increased effort to fight drug trafficking and terrorism, official US Air Force documents revealed that the US would conduct "full-

spectrum military operations" throughout south America from the Colombian bases.

The Air Force documents also justified the disproportional military expansion as necessary to combat "the constant threat ... from anti-US governments in the region."

And the documents reveal that the US presence in Colombia will increase the success of "intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance" operations and will improve the Pentagon's capacity to conduct "expeditionary warfare" in Latin America.

However, after an outcry from governments in the region, the US Air Force submitted an "addendum" to Congress in November.

The modified document eliminated all mention of war and military operations in the region, as well as offensive language directed at Colombia's neighbors Venezuela and Ecuador.

Since 2006, Washington has classified Venezuela as a nation "not fully collaborating with the war against terror" and in 2005 Venezuela was labelled by the State Department as a nation "not co-operating with counter-narcotics operations."

Despite no substantive evidence to prove such dangerous accusations, the US has used these classifications to justify an increase in aggression towards the Venezuelan government.

In 2008, the Bush administration attempted to place Venezuela on the list of state sponsors of terrorism. The initiative was unsuccessful primarily because Venezuela is still a principal supplier of oil to the US. Should Washington consider Venezuela a terrorist state, all relations would be cut off, including oil supply.

Many people assumed that, when Barack Obama became president of the US, he would keep to his word and start to build bridges with countries that Bush had threatened.

But the recent violations of Venezuelan airspace, the build-up of troops in Colombia and Obama's willingness to support the overthrow of progressive presidents in Latin America, such as during the coup against Manuel Zelaya in Honduras, it's clear the Bolivarian revolution and its international supporters need to remain as vigilant as ever.

From reports by Eva Golinger
- www.chavezcode.com

A decade of propaganda? BBC reporting of Venezuela

Researchers at the University of the West of England have exposed ongoing and systematic bias in the BBC's news reporting on Venezuela.

Dr Lee Salter and Dr Dave Weltman analysed 10 years of BBC reports on Venezuela since the first election of Hugo Chávez to the presidency in an ongoing research project and their findings so far show that the BBC's reporting falls short of its legal commitment to impartiality, truth and accuracy.

The researchers looked at 304 BBC reports published between 1998 and 2008 and found that only 3 of those articles mentioned any of the positive policies introduced by Chavez.

The BBC has failed to report adequately on any of the democratic initiatives, human rights legislation, food programmes, healthcare initiatives, or poverty reduction programmes. Mission Robinson, the greatest literacy programme in human history, received only a passing mention.

According to the research, the BBC seems never to have accepted the legitimacy of the president, insinuating throughout the sample that Chavez lacks electoral support and at one point comparing him to Hitler ("Venezuela's Dictatorship" 31/08/99).

This undermining of Chavez must be understood in the context of his electoral record — his legitimacy is questioned despite the fact that he has been elected several times with between 56 per cent and 60 per cent of the vote.

Of particular note is the BBC's response to the military coup in 2002. BBC News published nine articles on the coup on April 12 2002, all of which were based on the coup leaders' version of events, who were, alongside the "opposition," championed as saviours of the nation. Although BBC News did report the coup, the only time it mentioned the word "coup" was as an allegation of government officials and of Chavez's daughter.

The official BBC explanation was that Chavez "fell," "quit," or "resigned" (at best at the behest of the military) after his "mishandling" of "strikes" (management lockouts) and demos in which his supporters had fired on and killed protestors.

In "Venezuelan media: 'It's over!'" the BBC allowed the editor of El Universal to declare: "We have returned once again to democracy!" Perhaps more significantly, in "Venezuela's political disarray" the BBC Americas regional editor chose to title a sub-heading "Restoring democracy." "Oil prices fall as Chavez quits" explains that Chavez quit as a result of a "popular uprising."

Crucially, all of the vox pops used in the nine articles were from opposition supporters and the only voices in support of Chavez were from government officials, Chavez's daughter or Cuba.

It is therefore reasonable to infer from BBC reports that ordinary Venezuelans did not support Chavez — while the coup was inaccurately reported as "popular," the counter-coup was not.

Venezuelans are painted as mindless sheep led by a Pied Piper figure, responding only to his call for them to agitate. In the BBC's world, social and political "divisions" exist because of Chavez.

For the BBC, the only legitimate representatives of Venezuelan appear to be the unelected oligarchs behind the "opposition." It is the "opposition" that is Venezuela. "Opposition leaders in Venezuela," according to the BBC, appeal "to the international community to intervene to protect democratic rule."

When democracy was "restored" by a military coup and the imposition of a dictator, the BBC reported that "Venezuela has looked not to an existing politician, but to the head of the business leaders' association." When a majority of Venezuelans elect Chavez it is not an act of Venezuela, yet when a CIA-backed military coup imposes a corrupt oligarchy, it reflects the will of the whole of Venezuela — not the will of an elite class, but of Venezuela itself.

There is an argument that the inaccuracy and bias of the BBC's reporting results from the experience of BBC journalists, themselves being from a particular class background living in well-to-do parts of Caracas. From this point of view, they simply don't see the reality of the situation.

If so, it would confirm the claim that we tend to be given "the perspective of an international correspondent who works in a downtown office building of an opposition newspaper and lives in an apartment in a wealthy neighborhood."

The big question, however, is whether the BBC can be trusted to report adequately on Latin America. Certainly from their latest reports on Evo Morales's recent victory in Bolivia it seems unlikely. In the meantime, their audience remains woefully ill-informed.

For further information contact Lee Salter at lee.salter@uwe.ac.uk

News in brief, with *Venezuelanalysis.com*

Chávez announces currency devaluation

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez announced a devaluation of the official exchange rate of the bolivar currency and the creation of a second rate denominated the "oil bolivar" for non-essential imports, in a nationally televised address on January 8.

The bolivar would be devalued from 2.15 per dollar to 2.6 per dollar, while the "oil bolivar" will be pegged at 4.3 per dollar. The measure represents a 17 per cent and 50 per cent devaluation respectively.

The Venezuelan government moved to regulate foreign currency exchange in 2003 after a two month long bosses lockout in the oil industry aimed at ousting the democratically elected Chavez from power caused an estimated \$20 billion damage to the economy. The latest devaluation is the first since an 11 per cent devaluation in March 2005.

The devaluation is aimed at revitalising the economy and strengthening national development after the country experienced a 2.9 per cent contraction in 2009 due predominantly to lower oil prices resulting from the global economic crisis, he explained.

Ministry's measures to curb energy use

Following months of regular blackouts in some regions, the government has implemented energy-saving measures, requiring companies to submit plans to save 20 per cent of their electricity usage, regulating the usage of lighting for advertising and creating schedules of electricity usage for shopping centres, casinos and bingo halls.

The Ministry for Electricity's measures went into effect on December 21 and the state-owned corporation is charged with implementing them.

"We're going to appoint some inspectors and generate a whole process of inspection and accountability so that all the various sectors comply with this saving plan," said minister Angel Rodriguez.

He said the measures were needed because drought had affected dam levels and hydroelectric power is the main source of energy for the country. He added there was a need to use electricity more efficiently as consumption was 14 per cent higher than the regional average.

Electrical contract 'a victory for workers'

The signing of a single collective contract for the electricity sector marks "the way forward for workers," said Angel Navas, president of the Federation of Electrical Workers (Fetraelec), last month.

With its legalisation after one year and six months of struggle by workers and their federation, the new single collective contract not only represents the equalisation of benefits and conditions of workers, but an important step for the participation of workers and organised people in the management of the company and a blow to the entrenched bureaucracy in state-owned electricity company Corpoelec.

"It's a total victory for the workers. That's why yesterday, when we held workers' assemblies at a national level, there was an air of triumph, joy, victory," Navas said.

One historic achievement of the contract is Clause 1, "which allows for the liberation of the worker," Navas explained. Clause 1, which refers to the direct participation of workers and people in the management of the company, "sets the axis, the strategic lines, from the standpoint of the working class, of how a socialist enterprise should be, what the model of production relations should be, so that workers participate in the management and decision making."

New mission to lower infant mortality

Just before Christmas, the government launched its latest social programme. Called Mission Baby Jesus, it aims to provide better attention to women giving birth by improving hospital infrastructure, increasing the availability of medicine, providing health education for pregnant women and by building prenatal care houses.

It also aims to promote healthy nutrition for women, especially pregnant women, and reduce maternal and infant mortality and

encourage and increase breast feeding. It will also focus on the health of children under 5 years old including preventative health care and detecting any mental or physical health disabilities.

President Chavez said that, before he was elected in 1998, the average infant mortality rate as a percentage of total deaths of children under five was 26.72 per cent. By 2007, it had dropped to 16.7 per cent, but he said the aim was to bring it below 10 per cent.

Chávez in Copenhagen: Capitalism is killing us

'Global imperial dictatorship' sabotaging environmental agreements, says Venezuelan president

During his speech to the 15th United Nations Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez slammed the “lack of political will” of the most powerful nations to take serious action to avert climate chaos and called for systemic change to save the planet.

Chávez, who received a standing ovation for his speech, said the process in Copenhagen was “not democratic — it is not inclusive.”

In particular, he criticised an attempt by rich countries to overturn the Kyoto Protocol. Doing so would eliminate differentiation between the obligations of rich and poor countries, treating countries from the global North and South as equally responsible for climate change.

“There is a group of countries that believe they are superior to those of us from the South, to those of us from the Third World. This does not surprise us — we are again faced with powerful evidence of global imperial dictatorship,” Chávez said.

The Venezuelan president also applauded the protesters outside



Chávez speaking at the Copenhagen UN Climate Change Summit

the summit who were calling for serious measures to stop catastrophic climate change.

“There are many people outside. I’ve read in the news that there were some arrests, some intense protests there in the streets of Copenhagen, and I salute all those people out there,” he said.

“I have been reading some of the slogans painted in the streets. One said: ‘Don’t Change the Climate, Change the System!’ And I bring that on board for us.

Let’s not change the climate. Let’s change the system! And as a consequence, we will begin to save the planet. Capitalism is a destructive development model that is putting an end to life, that threatens to put a definitive end to the human species.”

Another notable slogan was: “If the climate were a bank, they would have bailed it out already,” Chávez said.

“It’s true, the rich governments have saved the capitalist banks,” he said, but they lack

the “political will” to make the necessary reductions to greenhouse emissions.

History requires all people to struggle against capitalism and, if we don’t, life on the planet “will disappear,” he argued.

Human activity was exceeding the limits of sustainability and endangering life on the planet, but the impacts of climate change were also being felt disproportionately by the world’s poor, Chávez explained.

He also pointed to the relationship between economic inequality and levels of emissions. He said the richest 500 million people, or 7 per cent of the world’s population, were responsible for 50 per cent of global greenhouse emissions, while the poorest 50 per cent of the world’s population were responsible for only 7 per cent of total emissions.

Using this analysis, he argued that it was not feasible to call countries such as the US and China to sit at the summit on an equal footing, insisting that the same obligations can not be imposed on both nations.

The US, with a population of 300 million, consumes more than 20 million barrels of oil a day, while China, whose population is almost five times greater, consumes around 5-6 million barrels a day, he pointed out.

The behind-the-scenes negotiations at the summit had been marked by sharp disputes between the US and China, and between rich and poor nations. Poor countries criticised rich countries for attempting to set inadequate emissions targets for industrialised countries and for pledging insufficient funding for poor countries to alleviate the impacts of climate change.

According to various reports, poor nations argue that rich countries should reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020. The European Union has pledged a 20 per cent reduction. The US however, has only offered only a 3-4 per cent cut.

Outside in the streets of Copenhagen mass demonstrations calling for “climate justice” were repressed by police using pepper spray and batons. More than 1,000 people were arrested.

by Kiraz Janicke, Venezuelanalysis.com

Visit www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/5013 for the full text of Chávez’s speech

‘We need a world revolution’

At a public meeting organized by trade unions, political organizations and solidarity campaigns including Hands Off Venezuela, more than 3,000 people in Copenhagen heard President Hugo Chávez point out that a socialist revolution is the only solution to the problems of humanity.

Chávez stressed the need for a worldwide revolution and repeated his proposal for a Fifth International to be an instrument for this purpose.

At the meeting, President Evo Morales of Bolivia spoke condemning capitalism. Other speakers included Cuban Vice-President Estaban Lazo and the Nicaragua’s Foreign Minister Samuel Santos.

Chávez began his speech by condemning the repression in the streets of Copenhagen during the UN climate summit. Mentioning the climate summit, he said: “Some do not want to discuss the causes of climate changes. I will tell you the cause — capitalism. Capitalism is the worst enemy for life and for the climate.”

A delegation from Hands Off Venezuela met Chávez shortly before his speech and handed the president two letters from the workers at the Gotcha and Vivex factories in Venezuela. We expressed our solidarity with the president and the idea of a Fifth International.

In his speech, Chávez underlined the point that the Venezuelan revolution was only the beginning of the world revolution and that the



Venezuelan revolution was not complete yet — the task of building socialism in Venezuela was still ahead. He said that he was certain that the revolutionary events in Venezuela and other Latin American countries will repeat themselves in the countries in the North — in Europe and in the USA.

The audience interrupted the speech several times with loud applause and chants such as: “El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido.” The biggest applauses came when Chávez spoke of Fidel Castro and the fight against US imperialism and of socialism being the only way to end global misery and ensure a future for humanity.

In his speech, Chávez thanked Hands off Venezuela and other groups for arranging this meeting, stressing that all change comes from below — from the organisation and political education of the masses. by Hands Off Venezuela, Denmark

The Venezuelan Hip Hop community gets organised

At the end of December the first conference of activists in the Venezuelan Hip Hop movement was held.

Convened and organised by the Hip Hop Revolution collective with participation from eight states in the west of the country, the congress discussed the creation of urban art schools — a joint project of the collective and the Ministry of Communes.

For three days at the National Institute of Socialist Education and Training in La Azulita, Merida, workshops were held on political education, music production, documentaries provided by the National Film Archive, and the creation of the definitive curriculum of the urban art schools, whose classes began over this period.

During the meeting a joint statement was drafted which is reproduced below:

“Hip Hop is one expression of the creative power of the people. It is a culture that originally emerged from conditions of poverty, in the most neglected, marginalised and oppressed sectors of society. We view ourselves as a resistance movement that confronts capitalism and its system of domination. We view ourselves as the successors of the historical class struggle that led



The Hip Hop movement congress held in Merida, Venezuela

our people to their first nationwide rebellion in 1814, the first act of genuine rebellion of an insurgent people who spilled into the streets to destroy the society that screws us.

“As a tiny part of the people, we do not view our movement as a form of isolated struggle. We recognise our origins and we join with the collective construction of our neighbourhoods and communities for a fully just society.

“We realise that the struggle of our movement begins within ourselves. We must try to destroy our individuality and understand that, alone, no prog-

ress is possible. Our culture is collective from its roots, for this reason we look beyond the four elements of our movement. We view our cultural creation as an act of freedom that can neither be bought nor sold, traded nor negotiated — it is simply for living and building.

“Part of the commitment of our movement is to achieve horizontal organisation. We rule out competition between partners and brothers — the proposal is to be inclusive, to convey the message to the people, our people.

“We base our knowledge on experience and invention, pro-

ducing and generating spaces of thought and discussion, pointing inward toward the internal, inviting our people to investigate, discuss, activate and collectivise — making art, inclusive art, that is born of the people, that is not seen in museums, that they still do not want to show, the art of collectively creating with words, painting, the body, sounds and the spirit.

“We believe in collective discussion and construction, because “knowledge” and the so-called “intellectuals” and “middle-class thinking” have screwed over the world. We choose and identify with the “uneducated” people, with their unwritten words, with their unstudied knowledge, with their unanswered questions, with their hunger without food, their homes without a home.

“We are committed to the transfer of knowledge and action to the older and younger generations. Our shared project of the popular urban art school is an option we propose as a grain of sand towards new thinking and the construction of a new society, where neither race nor gender nor religion, nor training are separated, but are amalgamated into one piece, in one territory and in permanent construction.

Translated by Kiraz Janicke

Join Hands Off Venezuela!

The international broad-based Hands Off Venezuela campaign was established in 2002 to generate awareness about Venezuela, especially within the trade union and progressive movements. Our main task is to promote the social gains of the Bolivarian Revolution and mobilise public opinion against imperialist aggression towards Venezuela.

The basic aims of the campaign are to:

- Give full support to the Venezuelan revolution, which has repeatedly proved its democratic credentials, in its struggle to liberate the oppressed of Venezuela.
- Defend the revolution against the attacks of imperialism and its local agents the Venezuelan oligarchy.
- Support the new trade union confederation, the UNT, as the legitimate voice of the workers' movement.
- To counteract the media distortions and lies about Venezuela and mobilise the maximum support for the above aims.

Hands Off Venezuela organises public events, film shows, speaking tours and delegations to Venezuela, provides news and information about the latest events and promotes solidarity and links both in Britain and internationally.

To get your trade union or other organisation affiliated, here are the recommended annual affiliation fees: National trade unions: £500, regional bodies: £250, branches/trades councils: £50, others: £25. Membership fees for individuals are waged: £7.50 and unwaged: £5 (suggested)

Contact us at britain@handsoffvenezuela.org

Diary date: Hands Off Venezuela AGM 2010
Saturday April 10 in a central London venue

Speakers include Jeremy Dear (NUJ), Derek Wall (Green Party) plus Venezuelan guests

To join, please complete this form and return to the address below

Name:

Address:

Post code:

Telephone:

Email:

Trade union/organisation:

Please make cheques payable to:
Hands Off Venezuela

**Post to: Hands Off Venezuela,
PO Box 47274, London, W7 9AB**