

tion in hand from the New York branch of London's favorite bank, J.P. Morgan. It was not until the final phase of the 1998 Presidential campaign that Britain's loyal U.S. networks, led by Vice President Al Gore's minions, joined the "Chávez Project" prominently, and he was assured that the United States would welcome him, should he be elected.

The British sponsorship of Chávez is of a piece with London's defiant promotion, during the same time period, of the drug cartel's Colombian President, Ernesto Samper Pizano, stymying efforts from within the Clinton administration to isolate Samper by decertifying his government as non-cooperative in the war on drugs. As the House of Lords set up a "Samper Pizano defense committee" (led by the son of the notoriously imperial racist Field Marshal Gen. Montgomery), Britain orchestrated a virulent campaign demanding that the United States never again initiate any "unilateral" action whatsoever against the drug trade in the Americas. Samper Pizano survived, and Colombia now faces disintegration.

Elected in December 1998, Chávez's first measures were to extend Venezuela's support to Colombia's narco-terrorists.

In mid-June 1999, Chávez travelled to Wall Street to seal that side of the deal, offering Venezuela up for looting to hundreds of gathered financiers. Revealing how desperate Venezuela is for cash to avoid bankruptcy, Chávez announced significant new measures, which include:

- Issuance of dollar-denominated government domestic bonds, much like the infamous Mexican Tesobonos, which led to that country's debt explosion in late 1994.
- Dollar accounts will now be permitted inside Venezuela, and banks will be permitted to extend dollar loans.
- The privatization of the state's aluminum, electrical, gas, and petrochemical industries will proceed, and private foreign capital is sought for the state oil industry.

After Chávez's performance, Venezuelan financier Gustavo Cisneros publicly praised Chávez for having made "commitments" to the gatherings of "very important businessmen." He will now have to fulfill these promises, Cisneros smirked: to honor the debt, to welcome foreign investment, and to provide the legal framework to protect private investment.

A few weeks earlier, on May 21, Chávez had given the closing address to the London *Economist's* ninth annual Roundtable, held in Venezuela for the fifth year in a row. Chávez could not find sufficient words to express how "truly honored" he was, to address a gathering sponsored by the financial powers of the City of London. Urging conference participants to consider Venezuela as "their house," he assured them that his national project "is not one of obsolete, archaic nationalism," but is "outward-looking." He held up the nickel and gold mines already exploited by British and Canadian companies as examples of the investment possibilities opening up.

Interspersed among dissociated quotes from Zarathustra, Galileo, Albert Camus, Vivian Forrester, and Descartes, Chávez waxed eloquent about "the unforgettable days that we

spent in London"; of how, in the "hot, hot" phase which Venezuela will soon be entering with the new Constituent Assembly, his government looks to "countries which have experience. Just look: England, the United Kingdom. Talk about experience!" He concluded with a fervent call to the vultures assembled by the *Economist*: "You are welcome here. Do not leave. Stay. . . . A country is being reborn here, and this country is opening up, and it is at your orders."

Chávez abets 'Third Cartel' in Colombia

by Juan Avila

During its four months in power, the Venezuelan government of Hugo Chávez has consolidated a de facto alliance with Colombia's narco-guerrillas, an alliance which began long before Chávez became President of Venezuela, but which now poses a highly dangerous threat since it has become enshrined as state policy. Although the rhetoric is full of fine-sounding phrases about peace, dialogue, and social change, the reality of the alliance is alarming: The "Third Cartel" of drug trafficking in Colombia—that is, the FARC/ELN narco-terrorists—politically, diplomatically, and even logistically supports the Venezuelan government, in its drive to secure the status of a "belligerent force" in the Colombian conflict, the better to fragment that Colombia and establish an independent narco-republic in the south of that country.

Most recently, Chávez made a public statement, expressing his hope to travel to the FARC-controlled demilitarized zone (DMZ) in Colombia, to meet with FARC chieftain Manuel Marulanda ("Tirofijo," or "Sureshot"), and "preferably to meet together with President Pastrana" of Colombia. Apparently, the trip was supposed to take place immediately following the heads-of-state summit in Cartagena in late May; but opposition from important sectors in Colombia, and the crisis triggered when Defense Minister and the high military command resigned in protest, prevented the Venezuelan President's rendezvous with the FARC—at least for now.

Some Venezuelan officials who did go to meet with the FARC one week after the summit included Sen. Pablo Medina, from the Venezuelan PPT (Patria Para Todos) party which is part of the ruling Polo Patriótico movement, and Congressman Rafael Uzcategui, also from the PPT. Medina is one of the most important leaders of the pro-terrorist São Paulo Forum. Although President Chávez denied that Medina went as his official mouthpiece, his visit clearly represented an advance in coordination between the FARC and Chávez: Medina met for five days with the narco-guerrilla leaders, had a lengthy interview with Marulanda himself, and returned



Chávez brokered a three-way meeting in Caracas with Colombian President Andrés Pastrana (left) and Fidel Castro in February 1999, after Pastrana had handed over huge chunks of his country to the narco-terrorists. Like Chávez's MBR-200, Colombia's FARC/ELN are members of Fidel's continental São Paulo Forum.

with several messages from FARC military commander Raúl Reyes. Among these was a videotaped greeting to the Venezuelan government and people, which was broadcast on Venezuelan television. Medina and Uzcatogui returned from what has already come to be known as "Marulandia," through the border with the Venezuelan state of Zulia. That same route has been taken by hundreds of Colombian refugees fleeing narco-terrorist rampages in the zone of La Gabarra.

Developments in La Gabarra are another recent indication of the collaboration between the Chávez government and the Third Cartel. In mid-May, there was an avalanche of Colombian refugees, after the FARC and ELN warned that so-called paramilitary forces were moving in to seize their towns. The unfortunates fled from La Gabarra into Venezuelan territory. Under the coordination of Chávez follower, Zulia's Gov. Francisco Arias Cárdenas (whose office has hosted peace talks with the ELN), and with the convenient presence of United Nations and International Red Cross delegates, who thus managed to "internationalize" the incident, the Venezuelan government gave the order to receive all the refugees and facilitate their return to other Colombian territories where they are not threatened.

The reality, however, was revealed by international wire services, which noted that La Gabarra is a coca cultivation area, whose control is under dispute by the narco-guerrillas and the paramilitaries, and that the so-called "refugees" are primarily coca-farmers linked to the Third Cartel.

Conferring 'belligerent' status

Since 1995, there has been much speculation about meetings between Chávez and the FARC/ELN, even before he became a Presidential candidate. It began during Chávez's visit to the Zapatista terrorists in Mexico's southern state of Chiapas, and his first meeting with Fidel Castro in Havana, when a speech by the latter anointed Chávez as the new commander of the Ibero-American Revolution, a dream that Chávez has nurtured since adolescence, when he apparently was active in the youth cells of the Venezuelan Communist Party.

During his Presidential campaign, Chávez denied that he had had contact with the FARC/ELN, claiming that this rumor came from an intelligence report released by then Colombian narco-President Ernesto Samper Pizano, for domestic political reasons. What he could not deny, however, was that he attended meetings of the São Paulo Forum, in Montevideo, Uruguay and in San Salvador, El Salvador, in 1995 and 1996, respectively. There, his Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement became affiliated with the Forum, and participated in discussions, cheek-by-jowl, with representatives of the Colombian FARC and ELN.

Once he assumed the Presidency, Chávez began to openly manifest his support for the Colombian narco-guerrillas, setting aside Venezuela's military doctrine, history, and security and defense postulates. On Feb. 22, 1999, just two weeks before taking office, he announced that Venezuela would

henceforth be “neutral” in the Colombian conflict, and that the FARC and ELN terrorists would be accorded the same treatment as Colombia’s Armed Forces. Immediately, spokesmen for the FARC and ELN thanked Chávez for his “equanimity,” and proclaimed that he had, in effect, recognized them as “belligerent forces.”

Chávez’s Foreign Minister José Vicente Rangel then travelled to Bogotá, to calm the waters by declaring that his use of the word “neutral” was merely “colloquial, not juridical.” As is known in international law, the “neutrality” of one state toward the internal conflict of another state is the first step toward granting belligerent status to the insurgent force, which accords it international recognition as a government, with its own territory, diplomatic relations, and international trade—including arms trade.

On March 10, President Chávez went even further, arguing that the state of “belligerency” for the guerrillas was not being granted by him, but had already been granted by Colombia’s President Andrés Pastrana; the remark generated a serious “impasse” in relations between the two countries. In April, with the re-launching of “peace dialogues” in Colombia and meetings between Presidents Pastrana and Chávez at the CARICOM meeting in the Dominican Republic, and later along the Colombian-Venezuelan border, the involvement of the Chávez government in negotiations with the narco-guerrillas took another step forward. The FARC proposed that Venezuela, together with three other countries, serve as “guarantors” in peace negotiations with the Pastrana government, and formally invited the Venezuelan President to visit the DMZ.

The new official relationship with the ELN, responsible for the majority of kidnappings and assassinations along the Venezuelan border, is very important. The Venezuelan government has also offered to mediate in talks with the ELN, and has facilitated more than 60 meetings with Colombian civilian spokesmen, at the office of the Zulia government, in Maracaibo. Heading these meetings was the ELN’s second-in-command Antonio García, who had been responsible for the 1995 massacre of Venezuelan naval cadets at Carabobo. In a letter to the Venezuelan Foreign and Government ministries, García thanked the Venezuelan government and people “for offering us your territory and collaboration,” and made reference to “the discretion and the respect with which we have been treated.”

Supranational intervention

Moreover, Zulia Governor Arias Cárdenas—an ally of Chávez since the 1994 coup attempt—has assumed an important role in this de facto alliance with the narco-guerrillas, as can be seen in the meetings he hosted between Colombian leaders and the ELN, already mentioned. Fully aware that his border state is one of the areas most affected by the narco-guerrilla rampages next door, Arias has undertaken lunatic

initiatives of his own, such as having his own foreign policy, under which he named former Nicaraguan President, the Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega, as his international adviser, and proposed that the ELN be given control over a broad demilitarized zone along the border of Zulia, just a few kilometers from Venezuela’s main oil centers. Arias Cárdenas has also urged the presence of UN “blue helmets” in the Colombia-Venezuelan border zone.

These initiatives, while quickly rejected by Venezuelan’s Defense and Foreign ministries, nonetheless coincide with the guidelines for a U.S. or supranational military intervention into Zulia oil fields under terrorist threat, which had been elaborated by Henry Kissinger’s State Department in the 1970s.

Large Venezuelan sectors (agricultural producers, military, businessmen, and church layers) are particularly worried about this policy of the Chávez government, which appears to be more concerned with its relations with Colombia’s narco-guerrillas than in protecting its own citizens. The kidnapping of Venezuelans has continued, not only on the border, but even in the capital of Caracas and in interior cities such as Valencia, where, last April, an entire ELN “kidnap industry” infrastructure was discovered. In the recent kidnapping of a young student, Mely Alejandra Carrero, in the border region of Táchira, the Chávez government gave its support to the narco-guerrillas, which infuriated Venezuelans.

Also continuing is the growth in collection of bribes, extortion, and cattle rustling. In April, three businessmen in Apure state were murdered by the ELN for not paying their bribes. Weapons-trafficking to the guerrillas is also increasing. In early May, it was reported that the U.S. government suspended weapons sales to Venezuela, because there was an unheard-of rise in purchases during the previous year (eight times more than in 1996), presumably by the Colombian narco-guerrillas.

But perhaps the most worrisome is the silence of the Chávez government on the evident links of the FARC/ELN to drug production and trafficking, the processing laboratories, the trade in drug inputs, the illegal airstrips, etc., and the growing use of Venezuelan territory for these activities.

The only official voice to come out against all this has been that of the recently named president of the Venezuelan Anti-Drug Commission, Mildred Camero, who declared on April 5: “Drug trafficking is an international business, and from every viewpoint, it is extremely serious that the narco-guerrillas are gaining ground in Venezuela. . . . Although we don’t have the latest statistics, there has been an increase in the exchange of drugs for weapons and for persons. The guerrillas buy and sell both inputs and finished products. There are theaters of operation, but relations between guerrillas and Venezuelan military and civilians have to be carefully reviewed.”