

Colombia's Uribe Tours China, Japan

by Maximiliano Londoño Penilla

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During his recent tour to China and Japan, April 6-13, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe put into motion several economic and security alliances which are important from the standpoint of a commitment to turn Colombia into an industrial and agricultural power, free of the plague of narco-terrorism.

First, President Uribe discovered that Colombia must physically integrate with Asia, and in particular with China and Japan. Until now, trade with those two countries, and economic relations in general, have been tiny, practically non-existent. Currently, half of Colombia's exports go to the United States. But now, the possibility has opened up for Chinese and Japanese investment in the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons, joint development of various manufacturing activities, and construction of vital infrastructure projects, both national and regional, within the perspective of a growing Ibero-American integration.

This last point was given a major boost during the summit held March 29 in Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela, where Presidents Lula da Silva of Brazil, Chávez of Venezuela, Uribe of Colombia, and Prime Minister Rodríguez Zapatero of Spain, set a specific agenda for the construction of infrastructure works, such as the project to restore the navigability of the Meta River and its linkage with the Orinoco. This would give Brazil an outlet to the Colombian Pacific, via the Putumayo River, and a highway going from Brazil's Mocoa to Colombia's Pasto, and ending at the port of Tumaco.

Second, in the terrain of the fight against narco-terrorism, President Uribe raised the possibility of nations like China becoming Colombia's strategic partner, in addition to the United States, which now exclusively sponsors the anti-narco-terrorist Plan Colombia. Uribe explained that just as China seeks support for its policy of One China, One Nation, so too does Colombia seek support for its fight against the narco-terrorists. Uribe said: "Yes, we have an alliance with the United States, but we want to replicate that alliance with our neighbors! We want to replicate that alliance with many nations of the world. We want the Chinese to be our great allies in defeating terrorism, because this problem is not a remnant of the Cold War, but rather a problem of that kind of terrorism financed by the drug trade."

A Strategic Alliance With China

As U.S. statesman Lyndon H. LaRouche has explained, the weakness of the Bush government is what generates the momentum to carry out this kind of strategic change in various regions of the planet, such as the push for the physical integration of infrastructure by the South American Presidents, and Uribe's discovery of the importance of Colombia's economic integration with Asia.

Uribe proposed to the Chinese that they should jointly explore those areas in which they could contribute to improving the equipment and weaponry of the Colombian Military Forces and National Police. On this question, Uribe noted that China supported Colombia multilaterally in the fight against terrorism, and said: "We would like this principle of bilateral support that has already been offered us in uniforms for our soldiers, to be extended to other areas. We are working on extending it to other stages—to a stage of direct bilateral support, of daily condemnation of terrorism in the political arena, and of permanent support for our Army, in every way they can be supported, so that our Army can definitively defeat terrorism."

Uribe emphasized, "On the question of weapons, we are seeking many sources of weapons supply for the Colombian Army and Police, to defeat terrorism, and we are confident that we have a great source in China, as one step forward, to be able to consolidate the scenario I have proposed: that we may add other countries, like China, to our alliance with the United States in the fight against terrorism."

For example, if China were to finance the construction of an oil pipeline, which would bring Venezuelan oil to Colombia's Pacific coast, as Uribe has proposed, this would present an interesting situation, in case of the probability that the narco-terrorist groups would attack that pipeline. If this happened, an attack on such a pipeline by the FARC, ELN, or the paramilitaries, would constitute a direct attack not only on the interests of Colombia, but also against those of Venezuela and China.

At the Ciudad Guayana summit meeting, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez took a positive step toward resolving the tensions between his country and Colombia, telling a press conference, "We have told the Colombian guerrillas, and I ratify this here in Ciudad Guayana, that the moment that they set foot on Venezuelan territory, they will be considered enemies of Venezuela, and we demand that all those armed groups respect the sovereignty of our country."

Infrastructure and National Sovereignty

Instead of an ever-larger U.S. military presence in Colombia, as is occurring right now, it would be more appropriate for the preservation of Colombian national sovereignty, to have other strategic allies as well, in the area of economics and in matters of security. That way, Colombia would not be so vulnerable to the blackmail and enforced demands of the Bush-Cheney Administration.

As President Uribe explained it during an April 7 press conference in Beijing: “On the question of infrastructure, we have made significant strides in what has begun to be unanimous agreement for China to construct the pipeline between Venezuela and our Pacific coast, crossing the entire north of Colombia, which would make it possible: for China to buy Venezuelan oil at a Colombian Pacific port; for Venezuela to export through the Colombian Pacific; for Colombia to develop that port on the Pacific and have a new supply source of hydrocarbons.”

With regard to agricultural cooperation between the two countries, Uribe said: “We will continue to examine the great potential of Colombian agriculture, the possibility of rapidly incorporating six million hectares in the production of wood, of rubber, of various agricultural products like palm oil, not only for production of edible oil but also for biodiesel.”

At the first business roundtable between the Chinese and the Colombians in Beijing, organized by Proexport and opened by President Uribe, more than 500 businessmen attended, of whom 270 were Chinese. In addition to agriculture—especially Colombian flowers and coffee—the Chinese businessmen expressed interest in participating in energy and mining projects, construction of large infrastructure works, development of agroindustrial and manufacturing processes, and projects related to the chemical and pharmaceutical industries.

Economic relations thus far are still exploratory, and dur-

ing a planned second visit by Colombian business representatives, specific sectors will be discussed in depth, along with follow-up of those activities already begun. Colombia’s exports to China in 2004 were microscopic, barely \$133 million, in such areas as iron-nickel ore, metallurgy (waste from processing copper, iron, and aluminum), and petroleum derivatives. However, during Uribe’s visit, Chinese investors were presented with a portfolio of energy projects for a whopping \$3 billion. These programs include the hydroelectric plants of the Sogamoso River in Santander, the Amoya River in Tolima, and others.

In one of the meetings in China on the question of energy and oil, President Uribe invited the Chinese investors to visit Colombia, to work on exploration and to associate with the state oil company, Ecopetrol, to exploit and renew oil fields. He reiterated several times, “We proceed from the following premise: Colombia has a neighbor, Venezuela, which produces 3 million barrels of oil a day; another neighbor, Ecuador, which produces 600,000 bpd, and 87 percent of Colombian territory is still unexplored with regard to the search for petroleum.”

Unfortunately, Colombia has not been able to determine what its true oil reserves are, because the foreign companies linked primarily to Wall Street and City of London financial interests, have imposed all sorts of restrictions and blackmail. For example, the companies have carried out several exploration stoppages, demanding draconian contractual conditions from Colombia. Further, the companies have prevented Colombia from developing a significant oil refining capability, except for the refinery at Barrancabermeja. If that situation should continue, it has been said that in two or three years, Colombia will once again be importing gasoline, because it will no longer be self-sufficient in petroleum production. An alliance with China in the exploration and refining of petroleum would break the control that Washington and London currently exert over Colombian oil, among other essential raw materials.

Japan and the Línea Tunnel

Trade with Japan has also been slim, although a little better than with China, which is practically non-existent. Colombian exports to Japan were \$260 million, and imports were \$600 million. That is, Colombia has a negative trade balance of \$340 million with Japan. Until now, Colombia sold Japan coffee, emeralds, and iron-nickel, in particular. Although Japan is the second market for Colombian coffee in the world, after the United States, trade with Japan was seriously affected by the assassination by FARC terrorists of Japanese businessman Chikao Muramatsu, vice-president of the Yasaki Ciemet auto-parts company. Muramatsu was kidnapped in February 2001 in the capital city of Bogota, and according to security reports, was assassinated in November 2003, in a rural area of the province of Cundinamarca.

“For the kidnapping and assassination of the Japanese businessman, we ask pardon. That can never be allowed to

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