

Chávez caught running Venezuela-Colombia border provocation

by Miguel Angel Piedra

The Feb. 26 massacre by Colombian terrorists of eight Venezuelan soldiers in an attack on a military outpost in Cararabo, Venezuela, created two very different results. One outcome desired by the terrorists, a state of conflict between Venezuela and Colombia, was achieved. The other, the dismantling of a planned major uprising inside Venezuela, however, was far from the terrorists' desires.

On March 15, Gen. Camilo Zuñiga, commander of Colombia's Armed Forces, charged: "We have information that [Lt. Col. Hugo Chávez] has been in contact with the National Liberation Army [ELN]. The movement which Chávez leads, the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200 [MBR], has made contact with the Colombian Guerrilla Coordinator, specifically with the ELN, with the idea of creating the Great Colombian Revolutionary Alliance." Zuñiga also named the leftist Venezuelan group Bandera Roja (Red Flag), as involved.

One day before, Venezuelan Interior Minister Ramón Escobar Salom had announced that Venezuela's DISIP (political police) had arrested 150 leaders of Red Flag and the MBR, including Hugo Chávez's brother, Adán, on the eve of an operation to provoke chaos nationally. DISIP director Gen. Rivas Ostos (ret.) reported that one of the detained, a 15-year-old boy, confessed that his assignment was to blow up DISIP headquarters, using four containers of a black powder which were found on him. Rivas added that among documents seized were plans for crimes against leading individuals, including parliamentarians. The operation was to have begun the night of March 15.

Colombia's *La Prensa* reported on March 18 that members of Venezuelan and Colombian guerrilla groups had recently held a summit in Caracas's Los Andes University and mapped out plans for a cross-border raid, aided by drug traffickers, designed to turn the two nations against each other and force a redeployment of Venezuelan troops to its border. Venezuelan military sources confirmed that the Cararabo attack was intended to draw troops out of the center of the country, leaving it unprotected during the planned March 15 uprising.

On March 21, Venezuelan media reported that Jesús López, linked to Chávez's MBR, had been among those detained for the Feb. 22 robbery of the Western Armored Cars company, in which two vehicles carrying more than 1 billion bolivars had been hijacked. The robbery, which did

not appear to be the act of common criminals, was one of the tip-offs to the government that broader subversive plans existed, the interior minister told the press.

In articles in *El Diario de Caracas* on March 8 and 15, Alejandro Peña Esclusa, secretary general of the Venezuelan Labor Party, warned of a British plan to foment border wars in Ibero-America, and of British support for "leftist" subversion. Peña had been the first to tie Chávez to the attack on the Cararabo outpost. On March 18, *El Nacional* reported that Chávez had admitted that he had received an invitation from the British government to visit that country. Chávez protested that the invitation had been cancelled after President Rafael Caldera had made calls to the British government.

Frustrated, MBR activists leafletted the Central University of Venezuela, attacking the government and Peña Esclusa, the latter labelled "a representative of the New North American Doctrine in Latin America," a reference to Peña's friendship with Lyndon LaRouche. LaRouche has become an obsession with Chávez, who announced in December that he had discussed his "LaRouche problem" with Fidel Castro when they met in Havana.

Chávez then flew to Bogotá, to meet with Colombia's President and defense minister to demand they retract reports that they had proof his movement is linked to the ELN. To no avail. "He didn't get beyond the waiting room," headlined Colombia's papers on March 22. No Colombian official received him, and the Colombian presidency informed the press that it had sent the Venezuelan government a classified report documenting evidence of the Chávez-ELN tie.

Border tensions are dangerous

The dismantling of the guerrilla apparatus inside Venezuela has not deactivated the danger of a border war, however. Some 5,000 Venezuelan soldiers are ready to cross into Colombian territory in "hot pursuit" of terrorists, in case of any new attack upon Venezuelan territory, the Bogotá paper *La Prensa* said. Colombian Vice President Humberto de la Calle Lombana stated that Colombia will not accept any unilateral military action by Venezuela which violates national sovereignty. "We will defend our sovereignty firmly," he said. Likewise, Colombian Armed Forces commander General Zuñiga announced on March 17 that Colombia has placed its troops on permanent alert.

That same day, in an interview in Colombia's *El Espectador*, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Burelli stated: "The frictions have been caused by irregular forces which seek to make the two governments fight. . . . This could be interpreted in different ways. First, as a very clear attempt to confront the two countries. Second, to give advantage to the drug trade, which is what finances all these operations." President Caldera, while in Guasdalito, Apure to activate a new Border Theater of Operations, declared: "Those who wish to make Venezuela into an enemy of Colombia, and Colombia into an enemy of Venezuela, are wasting their time."