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# International Intelligence

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## *Venezuelan Congress Escalates British War Plan for Region*

In a dangerous escalation of longstanding British imperial plans to plunge Ibero-America into fratricidal warfare, the Venezuelan National Assembly passed a resolution Jan. 17, granting “belligerent status” to the Colombian narco-terrorist groups FARC and ELN. Approved by 161 of the 168 members of the Congress, the resolution recognizes groups’ “belligerent status,” characterizing them as “insurgent movements,” and arguing that this sign of “good will” is the first step toward “generating confidence” for future negotiations for hostage releases. The resolution also denounces the “imperialist” United States, suggesting that the FARC and ELN are really “national liberation groups” that have been arbitrarily and unfairly included on the list of terrorist organizations drawn up by the U.S. government.

This act of lunacy comes just a week after Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez called on the world community to recognize the FARC and ELN—which are both guilty of heinous crimes in Colombia—as “belligerents.” It is guaranteed to further polarize a region where tensions are mounting daily, as a result of the conflict between the Venezuelan and Colombian governments on the issue of the FARC.

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## *Eurotreaty Moves Ahead In French Parliament*

On Jan. 16, with hardly any media coverage, the French National Assembly voted up the initial parliamentary text required to modify the French Constitution, a modification required before any ratification of the new “simplified” Eurotreaty, imposed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy at the EU summit in Lisbon on Dec. 13, 2007.

The text now has to also be approved by the Senate, which will vote on Jan. 29. Then, both Assembly and the Senate will meet at Versailles on Feb. 4 to vote on the needed

Constitutional modifications (two-thirds of the expressed votes needed). Only then, can the Eurotreaty be ratified by a vote of the French Parliament to take place on Feb. 7.

A mobilization against the treaty failed because all the major parties declared themselves in favor of this ugly remake of the free-trade zone “European Constitution,” which French citizens rejected in a popular referendum in May 2005.

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## *China Building High-Speed West-South Rail Corridor*

China will build a new high-speed railroad to link Guangdong Province, on the southeast coast, with Guizhou, one of its poorest regions, Xinhua reported Jan. 18. Lin Shusen, governor of Guizhou, announced in the provincial congress that the 818-km railroad will allow trains running 250-km per hour to link the Guizhou capital, Guiyang, with Guangzhou, on the coast. There is now no link between the two cities, and the trip can take as long as 20 hours.

The Guiyang-Guangzhou high-speed railroad will become part of the planned west-south high-speed trunk line in China, and will be connected to the planned high-speed railway between Lanzhou, capital of Gansu Province in northwest China, and Chongqing, the largest industrial city in central-west China.

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## *India and China in New Era of Rail Cooperation*

India and China, “the two giant railway systems of the world,” are now launching a “new chapter of cooperation,” the Indian Ministry of Railways announced Jan. 18. The two nations signed a Memorandum of Understanding during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to China Jan. 15-18. This will be a big boost for Indian Railways’ modernization, the Ministry announced. Chinese Railways will help India increase rail speed, which is essential to increase the efficiency of India’s system.

Chinese trains reach speeds of 275 kph, while the fastest Indian train goes just 150 kph.

These nations really are the railway “giants” in terms of rail length: China is third in the world, after the United States and Russia, and will soon be second; India is fifth in size. But when it comes to passenger use, these two nations far surpass any other. China’s rail use is the highest, with India not too far behind: twice the ridership of the entire European Union, and 30 times passenger use in the United States.

In freight transport, however, India lags behind, transporting only about 25% as much as the largest rail freight transporters, China and the United States.

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## *Messenger Spacecraft Shows Mercury Close-Up*

The latest news from the Solar System includes spectacular images taken by the Messenger spacecraft, as it skimmed about 120 miles above surface of the planet closest to the Sun, on Jan. 14. Nearly 33 years ago, when Mariner 10, the only spacecraft to visit Mercury, flew by it, it was able to “see” only one side of the Moon-sized planet. The Messenger (Mercury Surface, Space Environment, Geochemistry, and Ranging) has now shown scientists a good portion of Mercury that they had never before seen.

High-resolution photographs show details of impact craters (including one with a 120-mile-wide diameter, named for Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem), ridges, and new features. The planet has a highly elliptical orbit and is frozen on the night side, and baked where it faces the Sun. It is the only planet besides Earth with a global magnetic field, and radar data indicate there is water ice at its poles.

Messenger will fly by Mercury twice more to slow down, and then the spacecraft will brake into orbit around the planet in March 2011, to study it for one Earth year.

The images can be seen at: <http://messenger.jhuapl.edu/gallery/sciencePhotos/pics/>