



The Americas Report

From the Menges Hemispheric Security Project

Center for Security Policy

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Argentina



Bolivia



Brazil



Canada



Chile



Colombia



Costa Rica



Cuba



Dominican Republic



Ecuador



El Salvador



Guatemala



Haiti



Honduras



Mexico

The Americas Report is the continuation of the work of Dr. Constantine C. Menges' original Americas Report. For almost two years that report chronicled the efforts of the Castro-Chavez axis and their allies in their efforts to undermine the new spirit of democracy and freedom in Latin America, in favor of autocratic forms of regimes throughout the Western Hemisphere. The report also monitors events in the area as they effect regional and US security in this era characterized by the emergence of terrorist groups of global reach seeking international influence. The current Americas Report and the Menges Hemispheric Security Project of which it is a part will continue to support genuine democracy, free trade and the fostering of strong inter-American relationships as well as exposing growing tyrannies in the area.

Nancy Menges

Editor in Chief - "Americas Report"

Nicole M. Ferrand

Editor - "Americas Report"

For any questions, comments, or those interested in receiving this report or seeking to have their email removed from our list please contact **Nicole Ferrand** at: themengesproject@centerforsecuritypolicy.org or themengesproject@gmail.com.

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Highlighted Story- [Implications of the Colombian Hostage Rescue.](#)

By Luis Fleischman* and Nancy Menges*

The liberation of former Colombian presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt, along with three Americans and eleven Colombian hostages was not just an exemplary military operation carried out by the Colombian army but was an action that could have far wider implications. It was a major blow which could be the beginning of the end of a 40 year old guerilla movement known as **The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)**. The FARC are closely linked to the drug cartels, and continue to be responsible for the murder, blackmailing, and kidnapping of thousands of people including innocent civilians. The

FARC has also recruited and kidnapped minors for combat with about 30% of the group's combatants being under age children. This is an organization that began as the military arm of the communist party but long ago became an



Nicaragua



Panama



Paraguay



Peru



The United States



Uruguay



Venezuela

inhumane group that in the name of higher revolutionary goals left moral and human considerations behind.

Indeed, the rescue operation more than liberating the hostages will have tremendous political implications not only for Colombia and Latin America but hopefully for the United States. First, **the operation exposed the FARC as a weakened group**. In contrast **the rescue highlighted the patience, effectiveness and careful planning of the government**. It further **bolstered the hugely popular Colombian president** who out of the ashes of anarchy has succeeded in restoring order and stability while weakening the main sources of sedition; first the drug cartels and now the FARC. The Colombian government has been able to achieve this while sustaining the institutions of democracy.



Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Velez with the rescued hostages. Source: AP.

Secondly, **the success of the rescue operation was a major setback for Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez**. The FARC was also one of the main instruments in the hands of Chavez which he used in an effort to bring down the government of Colombian president, Alvaro Uribe. By the same token, Chavez sees the FARC's violent methods as an important resource in spreading the Bolivarian revolution. Lately the FARC has been calling itself not just Marxist-Leninist but also "Bolivarian" in reference to the pan-Latin revolution promoted by Chavez. Evidence from last March's Colombian raid in Ecuador exposed **strong "military" connections between the FARC and Hugo Chavez**. These connections were extended to Ecuadorian president and Chavez ally Rafael Correa who harbored FARC guerillas. Bolivian president Evo Morales has also been sympathetic towards the FARC.

Curiously enough, **Chavez, Correa and Morales are congratulating the Colombian President now when in fact they are crying over the FARC's defeat**. Chavez's declaration in support of the Colombian government is conspicuously forged. However, it shows how cowardly and defensive he has become because a blow to the FARC is a blow to the Bolivarian revolution. However, the weakening of the FARC should not be confused with a total defeat for either the FARC or the drug industry in Colombia. The group still holds some 700 hostages, and **retaliation attacks against the government and civilians can be expected**. It is not out of the question that the FARC could seek to capture other high-profile hostages. In fact a former senator and FARC-hostage, recently fled Colombia after he received several death threats. Yet, the success of the rescue will hopefully give Uribe the momentum and trust he needs to achieve total victory over these groups.

Since the attacks on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent actions taken by the Bush Administration, there has been a great deal of tough and merciless judgment against the Bush Doctrine. That doctrine- which calls for an aggressive stand against terrorist organizations and countries that harbor them as well as applying preventive measures to change the environment in which they operate- has been deconstructed by elements within the media, public opinion as well as politicians. The deconstruction of the Bush Doctrine began by reasonably criticizing its unilateralism in not reaching out to other partners in the international arena. However, such criticism was thereafter taken over by fear that a too aggressive action against terrorist organizations and rogue states could bring about revenge and proliferation of those groups. It is this fear that has led many in the US to believe that negotiations with an enemy that is ideological, uncompromising and murderous can somehow render positive results. To the contrary such negotiations only serve to make the US appear like a paper tiger and weak.

Under the auspices of the Soviet Union during the cold war, terrorist organizations around the world, without apparent common goal or close geographical location, cooperated and developed solidarity. In the aftermath of the cold war such cooperation and solidarity continues even more, as global jihad developed. The success of one terrorist organization has a psychological domino effect because it excites and encourages other terrorist organizations. A strike on a terrorist organization, on the other hand, has a demoralizing effect on global terrorism. Despite the distance between Colombia and the Middle East, it is very reasonable to assume that there was cooperation between the FARC and radical Islam via Hugo Chavez. Consequently, President Uribe by cracking down on the FARC also helped the global efforts to defeat Jihad.

Very few have understood the role of Colombia as a strategic asset to the US. The shameful debate over the free-trade agreement with Colombia led by Nancy Pelosi understands the relation with Colombia as a commercial one and in terms of its domestic effect. Pelosi and those who questioned the agreement chose to ignore the security factor in our relations with Colombia. This happened not only because of the populist mood of pre-electoral times but also because somewhere there is an element that believes that Chavez, Correa, Morales, the FARC and the Iranian presence in the region are not that big of a threat. In other words, fear of confrontation, lack of understanding of security issues and a blind rejection of the Bush doctrine has submerged many of our leaders in a sea of ignorance and negligence. This arrogant view is reflected in a recent editorial published by *The New York Times*. That editorial congratulates Uribe for the rescue operation but claims that this presents an opportunity to integrate the FARC into the political process. This is not mere ignorance of the totalitarian and wicked nature of the FARC. It is also an expression of contempt towards the Colombian people who suffered decades of anarchy and murder at the hands of the drug cartels and the FARC. Besides what gives members of the left-wing, Marxist-Leninist FARC who murder and extort any more right to participate in political life than the right-wing paramilitaries? Uribe enjoys 90% popularity because Colombians do not want to return to those years of chaos and anarchy. *The New York Times'* view of the situation reflects the ultimate sin of a very dangerous mood amongst some elites in our country. This attitude of denying

reality will eventually have negative consequences for the physical security of the United States and the West as a whole.

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Highlighted Story II –

[Thank you Mr. Uribe.](#)

By Nicole M. Ferrand.*

Those of us who have been following the news about the hostages' inferno at the hands of the narco-terrorist group known as the FARC are still amazed by the brilliant rescue of fifteen of them last week by the Colombian military, including eleven policemen and armed forces personnel and their most valuable captives: Ingrid Betancourt and the three American contractors. Although most world leaders are praising President Uribe and the Colombian armed forces for the stunning outcome, there are some who received the news as a blow. These include the Venezuelan, Bolivian, Ecuadorian, Nicaraguan and Argentinian Presidents, leftist Colombian Senator, Piedad Cordoba and others, including family members of one particular hostage who seem incapable or unwilling to thank or apologize to the people responsible for the release; I am talking about Mrs. Betancourt's mother, Yolanda Pulecio, sister, Astrid Betancourt, and husband Juan Carlos Lecompte.

Although she is now free, I cannot forget the attitude of her family during the last few years she was held captive. Led by Chavez and Piedad Cordoba they all said that Mr. Uribe didn't want to rescue Ingrid and that he was a warmonger who didn't care about her. They accused the Colombian President of being the devil saying he would only provoke Ingrid's death and that he should not attempt any military rescue. They actually said that Uribe would sabotage any attempt to free her because he feared she might run for President and ruin his chances. Then when Uribe ended Chavez's role as a mediator because he was illegally contacting the armed forces of Colombia, Chavez and the above mentioned leaders and her family were up in arms saying that he had just sealed Ingrid's fate and that she would be killed because the only one who could free her was Chavez.

Well, last Wednesday, Mr. Uribe, his minister of defense, Juan Manuel Santos and the brave military personnel achieved what the people mentioned above said was impossible: the successful rescue of these hostages. All the credit goes to Uribe for not caving into international pressure from people who wanted a negotiation to allow the FARC to become a political force in return for the liberation of the captives. Moreover, the best part is that not one shot was fired and nobody was injured or died.

Therefore, none of the human rights NGO's or groups can accuse operation "Checkmate" of abuses.

Immediately after being handed a microphone, **Ingrid began to praise the Colombian President, the Defense Minister and the Armed Forces of her country**, and you could see in her face and in the expression of the other hostages, complete gratitude and relief after years of living in nightmarish conditions in the dense Colombian jungle. **She was generous in saying that it was great for Colombia that current President Alvaro Uribe was elected and then re-elected and that his second term was a great blow for the FARC.** She described the operation as 'impeccable and perfect,' while her mother didn't know where to look and seemed incredibly uncomfortable. **But the rescue was also daring. If things would have gone wrong, just imagine the reactions against Uribe.** However, the Colombian President not only acted with dignity but demonstrated that he is a great statesman and leader, while at the same time showing humility about his role in the rescue. He did just as he had done when he decided to get FARC leader, Reyes who was hiding in Ecuador under governmental protection: Uribe made a bold decision, planned the operation very well, and achieved a successful outcome.

Ingrid's mother, Yolanda Pulecio, and her sister and husband became very close to the enemies of democracy and peace who in reality were using her suffering politically to achieve for the FARC the status of "belligerent forces" selling them the idea that this would mean the immediate release of her daughter. A lie, of course, but they decided to go along. Astutely, the Colombian government bitterly protested saying that the people who were lobbying for this outcome might take the further step of recognizing the FARC as a "state in formation," a status that France and Mexico granted the Sandinista rebels during the Nicaraguan civil war in the late 1970s. "Such a move would mean giving the FARC diplomatic immunity, asylum rights, Venezuelan passports, and freedom from extradition, said former Colombian Defense Minister Rafael Pardo, now a consultant based in Bogota. "They would be giving the FARC legitimacy, and that's very grave."

So what did Mrs. Pulecio who believed her new found "friends" say about Uribe before her daughter's liberation? The following words of hate: "I've only hated one person in my life: Presidente Alvaro Uribe Vélez." "Uribe has only wanted to humiliate me, taking advantage of my pain as a mother." **"If my daughter is still not free, it's Uribe's fault."** "I've opposed Ingrid's children living in Colombia, for fear that Uribe, his army, or his paramilitaries would harm them." "I've never spoken badly of the FARC, because I understand their struggle."

On April 12, in Caracas, Mrs. Pulecio said, verbatim, in the presence of President Chávez, and a gathering of almost a hundred people who attended the Meeting of Intellectuals and Artists in Defense of Humanity: "Señor Presidente, for me it's a great honor that you should hear me here. I want to take advantage of this opportunity to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all that you've done for those who've been kidnapped and what you've done for my daughter. So I already don't know what else to do. **I feel confident in everything that you've done, and I feel much safer here than in Colombia.** As you know, I've had to suffer all the lies, all the deception during these six years in which we've been permanently deceived, naturally I've had to suffer the fact that there is no true press. This morning when I heard that we need to recover truth in the

media, that the media should tell the truth, and that all of us must be vigilant, this hit me in my soul. Because in Colombia all I read are lies, I read the papers and say: 'This is false, this is false, this is false.' Even the polls deceive the people. But, okay, I don't want to get into political things but I do want, Presidente, to give you infinite thanks for what you've done and may do for my daughter and for all those who are kidnapped. To all of you I ask for your solidarity, this I wouldn't wish on anyone, I've endured an ordeal, but my daughter has endured a worse ordeal, going on seven years now. **I give great thanks for the help that you may give us, Mr. Chavez, for your support right now,** for something that for me, is really, Presidente, as you know, very hard. **Thank you very much.**"

This February, at a massive world rally against the FARC where millions went to the streets wearing white shirts saying "No more FARC" and "No more kidnappings," demonstrators flooded the streets of 125 capitals around the world. "I feel the pain of the families of the hostages rotting in the jungle ... and I want all the nations of the world to realize that the FARC is not Colombia," one demonstrator said. Outrageously, Astrid Betancourt, Ingrid's sister said: "We condemn this, it is propaganda, which while pretending to be against the FARC is completely organized by the government." She also commented "all attempts at bringing the government and Farc together were always frustrated by Uribe," adding "We must end this policy of confrontation with Farc and negotiate a humanitarian pact with them. Bush's re-election has, unfortunately, had effects in Colombia since it has encouraged Uribe in his war mentality rejecting any dialogue with Farc who to him are 'terrorists.' This policy is not compatible with respect for human rights. But the president is standing firm on his position of confrontation with Farc. He could, however, show that his government is in a strong position, by showing that it is amenable to signing a humanitarian agreement with the guerrilla fighters. I am convinced that it is with such a pact and not through military confrontation, that the hostages' lives can be saved. It is not just Ingrid's life but that of the 3,000 hostages, that are at stake."

Incredibly, adopting the vocabulary of a FARC defender Astrid continued "The issue of a hard line is placed in the international context of 'combating terrorism.' But FARC's fight should not be compared with the terrorist attacks of New York or Madrid. There has been guerrilla warfare in Colombia for more than 40 years. I cannot say that my mother or I feel hatred towards Farc: Who are they? The leadership comprises a secretariat of about 15 people. But there are thousands of ordinary soldiers who got involved because they have no other chance of earning their living. We know families where a son is in Farc and another serves in the Colombian army. The brothers are trying to survive. The country can only be united again by dialogue, not by military confrontation."

Months before "Checkmate," Betancourt's husband, Mr. Lecompte had accused the Colombian president of ordering the capture in Venezuela of a prominent member of the FARC after having learned that he was taking steps with Switzerland to have Ingrid liberated. Lecompte was referring to the case of Rodrigo Granda, arrested on 13 December in Caracas in an incident that caused a diplomatic crisis between Colombia and Venezuela that the two governments are currently trying to put behind them. He did not reveal the source of his information. Then in December after the FARC's and Chavez's blunder with the hostage liberation, Mr. Lecompte said: "We are going to insist that the government

abstain from doing any military operations to rescue Ingrid,” as if Uribe had any fault in this. When Lecompte was told about the recent rescue, he quickly said “I am so emotional and so happy...I don’t have words” He forgot to thank the President, the minister of Defense and the brave commandos for the release for his wife.

The only words that Ingrid Betancourt had for the enemies of Colombia and friends of terror were: “Don’t meddle in Colombian democracy; respect our government” or in other words “Don’t continue helping the FARC.” Now the world will listen: Ingrid has conveyed to the whole world the horror of her captivity and how her captors required her to perform forced labor in order to get medicine.

Mrs. Pulecio, Astrid Betancourt, J.C. Lecompte and others who have accused, insulted and blamed everything on Uribe should understand that the Colombian President did not kidnap Ingrid; the FARC did. Uribe didn’t advise her to enter into FARC territory against the wishes of Colombian military personnel. In fact, while she was campaigning she met with the FARC leadership including Reyes and thought they respected her. She made a grave mistake and paid a very high price for trusting them. Uribe rescued not only her, but three Americans and eleven members of the police and the armed forces. He is the one to thank, not blame. For the sake of all those rescued, apologize and say a public and loud ‘Thank you’ to the ones responsible for the hostages’ new found freedom.

One more thing, let’s hope that Ingrid has learned her lesson and doesn’t forget who her real rescuers and friends are. She should stand by her government and the armed forces of her country: Colombia. She is now in Paris, praising Sarkozy, talking to Chavez over the phone, and is being treated like a queen. Perhaps this new found ‘celebrity status’ may be going to her head. She has said she may run for President and perhaps is now calculating her chances. **Just yesterday, surprisingly, for the first time since her release she said: Colombian President Alvaro Uribe should soften his tone when dealing with the Marxist FARC, and urged him to break with the language of “hatred.”** “President Uribe, and not just President Uribe but Colombia as a whole, should change some things,” Betancourt told RFI radio, making her first public criticism of her one-time political rival. “I think the time has come to change the language of radicalism, extremism and hatred, the very strong words that cause deep hurt to a human being,” she said, adding that tolerance and respect were needed. Let’s keep an eye on her.

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New Feature – From the Menges Hemispheric Security Project, we look forward to hearing from you at our blog: <http://themengesproject.blogspot.com/>
Regards,
The Staff of “The Americas Report.”

News Stories –The following are a summary of several news stories found in different media outlets. To access the information, we have provided the hyperlink below each news story.

Chávez-Uribe meeting soon – *El Universal*.

During a meeting to be held next Friday, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and his Colombian counterpart Álvaro Uribe will deal with varied cooperation issues based on a “respectful, constructive” dialogue, said Venezuelan Minister of Foreign Affairs Nicolás Maduro. “It is a political meeting to talk candidly, to be reunited from the political viewpoint and to order a schedule of vital matters.” Maduro said that a “peace dialogue” should take precedence in the talks of the two heads of state. He added that the presidents would talk about multiple issues, particularly the ongoing cooperation programs in the areas of energy, trade and infrastructure. As for the Petrocaribe meeting that will be held in Maracaibo next week, Maduro reported on the confirmed attendance of the 17 member states, and announced also the incorporation of Honduras and Guatemala. “The Petrocaribe organization has widened up; it is stronger. We have talked also to Costa Rica; they will send an official delegation to act as observers.”

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/07/09/en_pol_art_fm-maduro:-chavez-ur_09A1781799.shtml

Colombian Military Uses Betancourt’s Voice to Urge FARC to Disarm – *El Universal*.

The voice of French-Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt is blaring over the jungles of Colombia, urging the rebels that held her captive for six years to demobilize. **Colombian military helicopters equipped with loudspeakers are blasting Betancourt’s voice in Spanish saying “hey, guerillas” and telling the rebels they can recover their liberty if they surrender.** The operation is part of a psychological campaign that the Colombian government hopes will persuade members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to disarm. Betancourt’s former captors are believed to be holding more than 700 hostages in Colombian jungle camps for ransom or political leverage. The Colombian government has said it is looking into opening direct contact with the FARC in an effort to win the hostages release.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-07-09-voa41.cfm>

Captivity was hell, Betancourt tells CNN Larry King – *Infobae*.

“It was hell,” Ingrid Betancourt told CNN’s Larry King in an interview about her six years as a hostage of a leftist rebel group in Colombia. “It was hell. It was hell for the body, it was hell for the soul, it was hell for the mind,” she said during the interview from Paris, France. “For me, I thought perhaps it could last for three months at the most. I couldn’t imagine what was going to come,” she told King. Betancourt and 14 others, including three US contractors, were rescued July 2 in an elaborately planned operation by the Colombian Army that fooled the FARC. During her campaign for Colombia’s presidency Betancourt had met with FARC leaders, imploring them, “No more kidnapping.” “I thought that perhaps we had that common ground. I was mistaken. I didn’t understand that they think completely different. If you don’t work with them, if you’re not one of the members of that club, you are an enemy,” she added. I didn’t know I was their enemy, but I was.” Betancourt wouldn’t answer questions regarding Emmanuel, the child born in captivity to her running mate, Clara Rojas - who was captured along with her - or whether she was sexually abused. She did speak of a “horrible” punishment after an escape attempt but declined to elaborate. “I don’t want to fill myself with those memories,” she said.

<http://www.infobae.com/contenidos/391013-100891-0-Ingrid-Betancourt-respondió-la-pregunta-más-difícil>

Chávez talks with Ingrid Betancourt – *El Universal*.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez held on Wednesday a telephone conversation with French-Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt, who was rescued last week after more

than six years as hostage of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), reported the head of state during a speech. Chávez said that he spoke with Betancourt for half an hour and expressed hope in managing “in coordination with her” to get the release of all the people kidnapped by the FARC and promoting peace talks with the Colombian guerrillas, AFP quoted. http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/07/09/en_int_art_president-chavez-tal_09A1783199.shtml

Former FARC hostage Luis Eladio Pérez leaves Colombia after death threats – CR.

Luis Eladio Pérez, former senator and FARC-hostage, fled Colombia after he received several death threats. Pérez or his family won't reveal where he is hiding for security reasons. Pérez doesn't know where the threats came from and takes them very serious. “Some of the threats are very, very valid, but I can get into them. I am not going to endanger my safety or that of my family,” he told journalists. The former senator was abducted in January 2001 by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and released last February after mediation by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and Colombian opposition senator Piedad Córdoba. During his captivity Pérez was guarded by Gerardo Antonio ‘César’ Aguilar and Alexander ‘Gafas’ Farfán, the same guards who were arrested during the rescue of Ingrid Betancourt and 14 other hostages. The former congressman Monday testified against ‘César’ and ‘Gafas’ before the prosecution and accused them of torture. The former hostage recalled that ‘Gafas’ always was the cruelest of the guards. According to Pérez, the guard made them walk barefoot through the jungle and was the one who gave orders to chain the hostages. Pérez was more positive about ‘César’. He said the guerrilla visited the camp on two occasions and stated that, despite the cruelty of the situation, he was a kind man. Luis Eladio Pérez will try to return soon to continue working towards the release of the country's many hostages.



Former Senator and FARC hostage, Luis Eladio Pérez. Source: Colombia Reports.

<http://colombiareports.com/2008/07/09/perez-leaves-colombia-after-death-threats/>

Uribe should soften his tone with FARC: Betancourt – Reuters.

Colombian President Alvaro Uribe should soften his tone when dealing with the Marxist FARC guerrillas, freed hostage Ingrid Betancourt said on Monday, urging him to break with the language of “hatred.” “President Uribe, and not just President Uribe but Colombia as a whole, should change some things,” Betancourt told RFI radio, making her first public criticism of her one-time political rival since her liberation. “I think the time has come to change the language of radicalism, extremism and hatred, the very strong words that cause deep hurt to a human being,” she said, adding that tolerance and respect were needed. Betancourt was full of praise for Uribe following her release, but her re-emergence from the jungle has prompted speculation that she might return to politics and stand for president again at the next election.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSL0721722220080707>

Santos: “We know the whereabouts of guerrilla leaders” – El Universal.

Although Colombian Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos is not willing to predict the date of the end of the war against the rebel Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), he is aware that the guerrilla movement is beleaguered by serious problems after the military operation

that ended with the release of 15 hostages last Wednesday. In an interview with daily newspaper El Universal, Santos fervently defends the Operation Check Mate performed by the Colombian army to rescue a group of captives. **“The operation was made in Colombia. We did not have any foreign help.”** Santos does not believe that the FARC is likely to retaliate against the hostages, because **“it would be a stupid action, a serious mistake.”** When Santos assesses the current situation, the Defense Minister says: **“The operation was a serious blow to FARC and, more specifically, to the main leader of FARC, Alfonso Cano. The best option for them is to negotiate.”** This is the most serious blow to the FARC in 44 years, but there will be more. They are going through their worst moment in history. However, we will continue putting military pressure on them until they realize that violence is not the correct way to solve things. It was a serious defeat for Alfonso Cano and for “Mono” Jojoy, who is Cano’s foe within the FARC. We do know where the FARC leaders are and their sphere of operation, except for those who are abroad. But we are monitoring all of them. New blows are to come little by little. We know there are some leaders abroad indeed.



Colombian Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos

Colombian Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos. Source: Colombia Reports.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/07/04/en_int_art_santos:-we-know-the_04A1760719.shtml

[Betancourt asks Uribe to accept help from anybody, even Chávez – El Universal.](#)

Ingrid Betancourt urged Colombian authorities to reconsider and accept help to attain the freedom of the hostages held by the rebel Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). “The point is that hostages in Colombia need efforts by a lot of people. I think just one person cannot make it,” said the former hostage referring to Colombian President Álvaro Uribe, in an interview with Efe in Paris. Betancourt, who has said that she is willing to mediate between Uribe and the Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in order to “restore friendship and confidence” between both rulers and try to solve the hostage situation, “dreams” about Chávez and Uribe “hugging each other again.” “Beyond ideological differences, they are two presidents who represent two people who love each other. It is the same with Ecuador. These differences must be overcome, and we must be generous and understand that we alone are not going to solve this problem, a friendly hand that helps us is always needed,” she stated. Chávez, “for whatever reason, can speak to FARC and be heard by them.” Betancourt added that for FARC, “he is a god.” Additionally, Betancourt said that the FARC guerrillas felt “practically betrayed” when Chávez stated that to obtain power through the use of weapons was “out of order in Latin America” and that they should look for a “political scenario.”

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/07/08/en_pol_art_betancourt-asks-urib_08A1778561.shtml

[US prosecutor ratifies Venezuelan gov’n links to the suitcase scandal – El Universal.](#)

Franklin Durán, a Venezuelan businessman and former partner of Guido Antonini Wilson, who is a US government key witness in the case of the USD 800,000-filled suitcase, is still waging a legal battle with the US prosecutors who charged Durán with the crime of spying. Durán’s stance is different from that of the

other three defendants in the scandal of the cash-filled suitcase that was confiscated from Antonini Wilson in Argentinean airport of Aeroparque last August 4, as he tried to smuggle the money in Argentina. Far from calming things down, Durán is disclosing more information on who's who in the scandal where Venezuelan and Argentinean officials are apparently involved, Argentinean newspaper La Nación reported. On July 7, federal prosecutor John Shipley mentioned the role "Venezuelan authorities" played in the suitcase scandal when replying to Edward Shohat, the lawyer representing Durán in the case. **According to the US prosecutor, it was Durán who told Antonini Wilson during a meeting in Miami before his detention that "Venezuelan authorities did not trust Antonini and were suspecting that Antonini was negotiating with US authorities."**

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/07/09/en_pol_art_us-prosecutor-ratifi_09A1780961.shtml

Inflation climbs 15.1 percent in first half – El Universal.

Food price increases strongly impact some key variables that measure quality of life. During the first six months this year, there was a 19.3 percent hike in food prices, 16.6 percent in health services, and 17.5 percent in transportation. **According to the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV), the monthly inflation surged 2.4 percent, which represents an accumulated inflation rate of 15.1 percent in the first six months.** These results have virtually ruined the official annual inflation goal at 19.5 percent. Officials with the BCV and the Ministry of Finance are convinced that the steady price increase is the result of higher demand and low supply of products. Therefore, they decided to slow down monetary expansion abruptly, and liquidity barely climbed 0.8 percent during the first five months of the year. However, the inflation rate continued to grow. José Manuel Puente, a professor at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Administration (IESA), considers that "the problem is that public spending was adjusted and while the government adopted some monetary policies, Venezuela has been affected by production problems. There is a gap between demand and supply and the way to solve it is through price increases." Puente says that economy prospects are not good.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/07/09/en_eco_art_inflation-climbs-15_09A1780599.shtml

Chávez to establish joint venture with Correa in Ecuador – El Universal.

Chávez will visit Ecuador next July 15 to sign an agreement with his Ecuadorian counterpart Rafael Correa in order to organize a joint venture between both countries. The new company is to build a new refinery called Refinería del Pacífico, official sources said. The ceremony where the rulers are to initial the deal will take place in the Ecuadorian coastal city of **Manta**, where the refinery will be located and the seat of a US military base until 2009. The US military base contract in Manta will not be renewed next year, DPA said.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/07/09/en_eco_art_chavez-to-establish_09A1781721.shtml

El Salvador: Chavism threat reported – El Universal.

The so-called Salvadorian movement Fuerza Solidaria (Solidary Force) launched a campaign to warn against the "threat" posed by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez against Salvadorian internal affairs. Last July 7, Fuerza Solidaria aired a documentary in most Salvadorian TV networks with the motto "a threat that is knocking at the door of our own house (...); we cannot let it in," AFP reported. "The goals of freedom, equal opportunities for all and solidarity are endangered in El Salvador," said on Tuesday Jaime Hándal, one of the leaders of Fuerza Solidaria. For Hándal, the threat is impersonated by leftwing party Farabundo Martí Liberation Front, and its presidential candidate Mauricio Funes, who is leading the polls ahead of March 2009 elections over the rightwing ruling party and the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) candidate, Rodrigo Ávila.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/07/09/en_pol_art_chavezism-threat-rep_09A1781279.shtml

[Ecuador's Correa seizes TV stations – Infobae.](#)

Ecuador's government seized three television stations and nearly 200 other businesses on Tuesday for debts stemming from a bank failure in the 1990s. The economy minister resigned hours before the takeover. In raids backed by dozens of police, a state agency that protects depositors in failed banks took over TC Television, TC Noticias and Gamavision stations, along with dozens of insurance, construction and real estate businesses owned by the Isaias Group. The companies were allegedly linked to bankers facing embezzlement charges after the 1998 collapse of Filanbanco bank. The government of leftist President Rafael Correa said the 195 seized companies owe the country millions and the move gives hope that thousands of depositors could recover the money they lost when the bank collapsed. Representatives of the stations called the seizures an attack on freedom of the press. Immediately before the takeover, Economy Minister Fausto Ortiz resigned and was replaced by Wilma Salgado. Ortiz could not be reached for comment. But Jose Toledo, TC Television's new vice president for news, said Ortiz resigned because he opposed the takeovers.

<http://www.infobae.com/contenidos/390934-100891-0-Critican-los-ataques-la-prensa-Ecuador>

[Pdvsa drill begins searching for gas in Bolivia – El Universal.](#)

A Venezuelan state oil company (Pdvsa) oil drill is set to begin searching for gas and condensates in Bolivia by the end of the month, said the company in a communiqué. The drill is on board a ship sailing towards the port of Arica, Chile, from where the oil equipment will be transported by land to the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz. **The electric drill, identified as “PDV08,” was made in China.** It will be operated by Venezuelan technicians at depths ranging between 16,400 feet and 26,200 feet “in the Bolivian traditional and non-traditional exploration areas,” Pdvsa said. Francisco Arias Cárdenas, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs for Latin America and the Caribbean, oversaw the shipment of the drill at the Venezuelan eastern port of Guanta. Pdvsa's communiqué said that the drill shall be used to find condensates and gas in the Cañada, Itaguazerenda and Ovai areas. The Vice-Minister also recalled that the shipment of the drill is part of the agreement signed on January 23, 2006, between the governments of Venezuela and Bolivia.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/07/09/en_eco_art_pdvsa-drill-begins-s_09A1782319.shtml

[Issuance of ID cards funded by Venezuela investigated in Bolivia – El Universal.](#)

Bolivia's National Electoral Court (CNE) requested the Attorney General Office to investigate alleged irregularities in the issuance of free ID cards, a program supported by the Venezuelan government. The court reported in a communiqué that submitted to the prosecutor “the claims and backup documents” provided by opposition deputy Ninoska Lazarte, the principal petitioner. Lazarte told AP that since the program started in 2006, “to get the card has been fairly easy.” The program is intended to provide indigenous peoples and poor peasants with ID cards. “There are people holding several ID cards; there are cloned numbers and other irregularities that have contaminated the electoral roll,” said Lazarte. The Venezuelan government donated an information technology system and cash to finance the program.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/07/09/en_pol_art_issuance-of-id-cards_09A1782359.shtml

[Argentine Court Upholds Legality of Grain Tax – Infobae.](#)

Tuesday an Argentine federal administrative court ruled in favor of the Argentine government in a challenge to the president's sliding-scale export tax on

grains, according to media reports. On March 11 Argentina President Cristina Fernandez implemented an increase on export tax rates as export values rise, pushing taxes on soybeans up to about 45 percent, compared with a previous 35 percent levy. For months farmers have been on strike over the tax and halted soybean exports. As a result, U.S. soybean exports have been up considerably during the strike. Lower courts had previously ruled that only the Argentine Congress had the power to impose taxes, whereas the latest ruling argued it is within the president's power to impose the tax. As a result of the protests caused by the strikes launched by farmers, the president submitted the tax proposal to the Congress for ratification. Over the weekend the House endorsed the tax and the bill is currently being debated in the Senate. Farmers lifted their latest strike last month hoping to successfully lobby Congress to vote down the tax with hopes the legal courts would overturn the tax. **They are bound to take the streets again.**

<http://www.infobae.com/contenidos/390932-100798-0-En-medio-del-debate-el-campo-sube-la-presión-y-regresa-las-rutas>

Nicaragua's Ortega threatens opposition for 'conspiring' with US help – AFP.

Daniel Ortega said that the opposition was “openly conspiring” with US help to overthrow his government, and threatened to unleash “weapons of war” if they did not stop. Thousands of Nicaraguans marched against Ortega last month after the Electoral Tribunal disqualified two political parties from the November municipal and the 2011 general elections. “We want peace, but we’re also prepared to raise the steel weapons of war if they try to overthrow the people’s government, the power of ordinary citizens,” Ortega said on the 29th anniversary of the rebel uprising that overthrew the Somoza dictatorship. “Those who are openly conspiring and are financed by the yanks, by the imperialists, they’d better respect the rule of law here, they’d better not provoke the people, the poor, the farmers, because this is the people’s proud Sandinista power.”

http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5iu06A_KZE2vS6u4SoSckYrJczjnQ

Peru: Some Farmers Strike over Trade – NYT.

Some farmers angry at President Alan Garcia's free-trade policies began a two-day strike, snarling traffic and closing rail service to the Inca ruins at Machu Picchu. The strike was the latest protest urging the government to spread the wealth from an economic boom. It occurred on the eve of a nationwide strike called by Peru's largest labor union. Farmers are concerned about the rising cost of living.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/09/world/americas/09briefs-FARMERSSTRIK_BRF.html?ref=world

Six Charred Bodies Found in Tijuana as Drug Violence Escalates in Mexico – VOA.

Mexican police say they have discovered six charred bodies on a street in the northern city of Tijuana. A police spokesperson said the victims had been shot, and then burned, in violence blamed on drug gangs. Police say the discovery of the bodies Monday brings the death toll to 14 for Tijuana since Saturday. Police say drug violence is on the rise in Tijuana after two months of relative quiet in the city across the U.S. border from San Diego, California. Almost 300 people have died in drug gang wars in Tijuana this year. Also, police say gunmen killed the head of the state police in Culiacan, Sinaloa. Elsewhere, authorities say a severed human head with a note from the killers in a plastic bag was discovered in Culiacan Monday. Similarly, police officials say a human head with a threatening note for Mexican law enforcement was discovered Saturday in Oaxaca.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-07-08-voa30.cfm>

Chile: Insulza makes agreement with PS to leave the OAS only if he is candidate –

Despite insisting that he would not comment on matters involving the presidential election during his visit to Chile, the secretary general of the OAS, José Miguel Insulza, referred to somewhat political topics this morning and made an agreement with his party to postpone his exit from the international organization amid the possibility that he could become the group's 2009 presidential candidate. The information was confirmed by the president of the Socialist Party (PS), Camilo Escalona, who assured that the party would not place any type of condition on Insulza and said that he would only leave the OAS if, during the socialist convention on the 29th of November, he is chosen to be the candidate.



Jose Miguel Insulza. Source: Esmas.

<http://www.emol.com/noticias/ingles/detalle/detallenoticias.asp?idnoticia=312360>

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