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Chavez: "Colombian Police Lied to its President"

By: Sarah Wagner; *Venezuelanalysis.com*
Caracas, January 10, 2005

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez accused Colombian police forces of lying yesterday about the capture of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) 'foreign minister,' Ricardo Granda, saying that he had proof that Granda was illegally abducted in Caracas.

During an interview with Eleazar Díaz Rangel, the director of Venezuelan newspaper, Últimas Noticias, in his weekly television show, Alo Presidente, Chávez confirmed that "There is no doubt, the Colombian police are lying. When they say Granda was captured in Cúcuta, the Colombian police are lying."

According to allegations made by the FARC, Granda was kidnapped in Caracas on December 13th and driven across the border shared between the two countries, where he was officially captured. Both the Colombian police forces and the Colombian government have maintained otherwise, insisting that Granda was indeed apprehended two days later on Colombian soil.

Recent developments in the investigation have contradicted the Colombian version of the matter. Venezuelan Minister of the Interior and Justice, Jesse Chacón obtained a statement from a Colombian journalist, whose identity is not being released, who allegedly met Granda in Caracas on December 13th. According to the journalist, Granda stepped outside to take a cell phone call and never returned.

Phone records confirm this account, proving that Granda received a call to his cell phone in Venezuela just moments before he was kidnapped. The phone was turned off and ten hours later it was turned back on again in Santa Ana, in Tachira state, near the Colombian border.

"There are sufficient indications to believe that this man, who was in Venezuela without the knowledge . . . Of the Venezuelan

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U.S. Pressure and Threats Against Syria

On January 11, UPI reported that Bush administration "hard-liners" are considering launching selected military strikes at "insurgent training camps" in Syria and "border-crossing points used by Islamist guerrillas to enter Iraq."

An administration official said Syria has "camps in which Syrians are training Iraqis for the insurgency and others where Iraqis are training Syrians for the same purpose" which could be hit by U.S. air strikes. A former senior CIA official also stated recently "We should send a cruise missile into south-side Damascus and blow the Mukharbat headquarters off the map. We should first make clear to them that they are the target."

These latest threats are part of the U.S. program of escalating pressure against Syria.

On a visit to Syria in early January, Richard L. Armitage, the deputy secretary of state, also delivered a "stern warning" to the Damascus government. He emphasized "that there's still a problem with former regime elements using Syria to help the insurgency and that it was very important to have that stopped."

In late December, President Bush stated in a news conference "We have sent messages to the Syrians in the past and we will continue to do so. We have tools at our disposal -- a variety of tools, ranging from diplomatic tools to economic pressure."

Another White House official stated that Bush is reviewing a wide range of options, including freezing the assets of high-ranking Syrian government officials, and military options have not been ruled out. "That's not the focus. But that is within the full panoply of tools available to effectuate change," the official said.

Syria has long been subject to limited economic sanctions by the United States because of its designation by the State Department as a sponsor of terrorism. Last May, Bush issued an executive order banning U.S. exports to the country and barring all air flights between Syria and the U.S.

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Winning "Hearts and Minds" Not a Goal of U.S. Occupiers

An article in "The Economist" magazine on December 29th reports that U. S. military actions in Iraq have completely isolated them from large segments of the Iraqi population.

The article, by an "embedded" correspondent, exposes the fascist and brutal nature of the U.S. occupation.

U. S. soldiers in Ramadi, the article points out, drive their humvees recklessly through the streets, disrupting traffic wherever they go. "Back this bitch up, motherfucker," one soldier screamed in English at an elderly taxi driver. On the rear bumper of each humvee is posted a sign in English "Keep back 50m or deadly force will be applied." Sometimes, soldiers fire on vehicles encroaching within 30 meters, other times they fire at 20 meters: "If anyone gets too close to us we fucking waste them," says one U.S. lieutenant. "It's kind of a shame, because it means we've killed a lot of innocent people."

Marines sometimes hide near the body of dead insurgents and kill whoever comes to collect it. According to the marine lieutenant: "It gets to a point where you can't wait to see guys with guns, so you start shooting everybody...It gets to a point where you don't mind the bad stuff you do."

Marines in Ramadi say they have killed 400-500 people, according to the article. A more precise estimate is impossible,

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government, was kidnapped December 13th between 3:50 and 4:10pm," noted Chacón.

With regard to Granda's Venezuelan citizenship, which it was discovered he had acquired in 2004, Chavez explained that the police investigation showed that Granda acquired it under false pretenses, in which case his citizenship would be "null and void." According to Chavez, some of the documents Granda used to prove that he had resided in Venezuela for over five years were false....

Chávez went on to state in his interview, "I ratify that if a terrorist or a leader of a guerrilla group from Colombia or any country in the world is here in Venezuela, and if that person is wanted for any type of crime, that the government of that country should work with the Venezuelan institutions. They should never come here to search for him, let alone kidnap him; this is a violation of international law and of the human rights of the person implicated in the case."

The dispute has proven controversial for Chávez who has recently made a concerted effort to improve economic and security ties between the two nations. "This is a serious situationIf the Colombian police really did violate Venezuelan sovereignty it will of course have an impact on our bilateral relations," noted Chávez. However, he insisted that "rogue elements in both countries should not be allowed to undermine the recent improvement in relations between the two countries."

In spite of rapidly accumulating evidence, Colombian authorities continue to stand by their initial position, that Granda was captured December 15th, in the Colombian border town of Cucuta. "Police acted fully with their rights by capturing a Colombian citizen in a Colombian territory," stated Colombian Defense Minister Jorge Alberto Uribe.

because the marines rarely see their attackers. When fired upon, they retaliate by blitzing whichever buildings they think the fire is coming from: charred shells now line Ramadi's main streets.

"Sometimes it works in the insurgents' favor," said Rick Sims, a chief warrant officer. "Because by the time we've shot up the neighborhood, then the guys have torn up a few houses, they're four blocks away, and we just end up pissing off the locals."

In Fallujah, 40 miles east of Ramadi, the marines who survived the fierce assault on the town in November have a sardonic acronym for the skills it taught them: FISH, or Fighting In Someone's House. FISH involves throwing a hand grenade into each room before checking it for unfriendlies, or "Muj", short for mujahideen, as the marines call them.

American marines and Gis frequently display contempt for Iraqis, civilian or official, says the embedded correspondent. An 18-year-old Texan soldier in Mosul who, confronted by jeering schoolchildren, shot canisters of buckshot at them from his grenade-launcher. "It's not good, dude, it could be fatal, but you gotta do it," he explained. Marines in Ramadi who, on a search for insurgents, kicked in the doors of houses at random, in order to scream, in English, at trembling middle-aged women within: "Where's your black mask?" And "Bitch, where's the guns?" In one of these houses was a small plastic Christmas tree, decorated with silver tinsel. "That tells us the people here are OK," said a U.S. Corporal.

According to army literature, American soldiers should deliver the following message before searching a house: "We are sorry for the inconvenience, but we must search your house to make sure you are safe from anti-Iraqi forces [AIF]."

In the town of Baji, U.S. soldiers went house-to-house, breaking down doors searching for "terrorists." They ended up detaining 70 men from districts identified by their informant as "bad". In near-freezing conditions, those arrested sat hooded and bound in their pyjamas. They shivered uncontrollably. One wetted himself in fear. Most had been detained at random. The evidence against one man was some anti-American literature, a meat cleaver and a tin whistle. American intelligence officers moved through the ranks of detainees, raising their hoods to take mugshots: "One, two, three, jihaaad!"

Syria (from page 1)

The main additional tool being weighed by the administration for possible further sanctions, officials have said, is authority wielded by the Treasury Department, which in May labeled the Commercial Bank of Syria a financial institution of "primary money laundering concern." Further steps by the Treasury are possible, the most severe of which would be to prohibit any American bank, broker or mutual fund from dealing with the Syrian bank, the country's single government-owned financial institution.