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US's 'arc of instability' just gets bigger

By Pepe Escobar

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The New Great Game is not only focused on the face-off between the [United States](#) and strategic competitors Russia and [China](#) - with Pipelineistan as a defining element.

The full spectrum dominance doctrine requires the control of the Pentagon-coined "arc of instability" from the Horn of Africa to western China. The cover story is the former "global war on terror", now "overseas contingency operations" under the management of President Barack Obama's administration.

Most of all, the underlying logic remains divide and rule. As for the divide, Beijing would call it, without a trace of irony, "splittist". Split up Iraq - blocking China's access to Iraqi oil. Split up Pakistan - with an independent Balochistan preventing China from accessing the strategic port of Gwadar there. Split up Afghanistan - with an independent Pashtunistan allowing the building of the Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline bypassing [Russia](#). Split up Iran - by financing subversion in Khuzestan and Sistan-Balochistan. And why not split up Bolivia (as was attempted last year) to the benefit of US energy giants. Call it the (splitting) Kosovo model.

Kosovo, incidentally, is known as the Colombia of the Balkans. What [Washington](#) calls the "Western hemisphere" is a sub-section of the New Great Game. The linkage between the recent military coup in Honduras, the return of the living dead - that is, the resurrection of the US Navy's Fourth Fleet in July 2008 - and now the turbo-charging of seven US military bases in Colombia is not to be blamed merely on continuity from president George W Bush to Obama. Not really. This is all about the internal logic of Full Spectrum Dominance.

Touching bases

Twelve South American nations, under the Union of South American Nations umbrella, got together in Bariloche, [Argentina](#), last week and after a heated seven-hour discussion only managed to stress, somewhat meekly, that "foreign troops cannot be a threat to the region" - in reference to the US military presence in Colombia. At least President Lula da Silva of

Brazil will be asking Obama to get together with South American presidents and reveal what this new military pact with Colombia is really all about.

Spin, of course, prevailed. Influential Brazilian conservative newspaper O Globo, which for all practical purposes looks like it's been redacted in Washington, practically blamed Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez for everything.

It's instructive to examine how some of the sharpest South American minds view it. Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano (whose book, *Open Veins of Latin America* was offered to Obama by Chavez at the recent Organization of American States summit) in an interview to an Ecuadorian paper, stressed how the US had spent a century fabricating military dictatorships in Latin America, so when there's a military coup, such as in Honduras, Washington is at a loss for words.

As for the military bases in Colombia, Galeano said they "offend not only Latin America's collective dignity but one's intelligence".

The US has already set up three military bases in Colombia, plus a dozen radar stations. Now this will be upgraded by the Colombian government to seven bases, one of them - Palanquero - with air access to the whole hemisphere. Seven bases in Colombia is a natural Pentagon response to the US losing the Manta base in Ecuador, and losing its grip on now leftist Paraguay. Washington already [trains](#) the Colombian armed forces, special forces and the national police.

The infamous Fort Benning-based School of the Americas, the flagship US training ground for ultra-repressive military dictatorships, that is, the "School of Assassins", re-baptized in 2001 the Western Hemisphere Institute of Security Cooperation, trained not only over 10,000 Colombians, but the coup leaders in Honduras as well.

Argentine political scientist Atilio Boron goes for the jugular; for him, "To think that those troops and weapons systems are based in Latin America for some reason other than to insure the territorial and political control of a region that experts consider the richest one on the planet in terms of its natural resources - water, energy, biodiversity, minerals agriculture, etc - would be unforgivably stupid."

American political activist and author, Noam Chomsky, in an interview to Venezuelan-American lawyer Eva Golinger during his recent visit to Venezuela, explained how the "rose wave" of South American leftism is scaring Washington so much that it's forcing it to collaborate with every government that would have been summarily deposed a few decades ago. Chomsky refers to the Joao Goulart government in Brazil, which was toppled in 1964, giving way, under US supervision, to "the first national security state neo-Nazi-style". Lula's policies today are not that different from Goulart's.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization all over

Colombia has received over US\$5 billion from the Pentagon since Plan Colombia was launched by president Bill Clinton way back in ... the year 2000. Colombian President Alvaro Uribe rules over a captivating land infested with paramilitaries and extra-judicial killings - scores of peasants and trade unionists killed in cold blood. But he's praised in Washington as a human-rights hero.

Isn't that swell? In a 1991 unclassified Pentagon intelligence report, then-senator Alvaro Uribe Velez is described as "dedicated to collaboration with the Medellin cartel at high government levels". The report stresses Uribe "has worked for the Medellin cartel and is a close personal friend of Pablo Escobar Gaviria", the archetypal, now dead, Colombian drug lord. No wonder Uribe has always fiercely fought any possible form of extradition treaty.

Boron describes Uribe as "the empire's Trojan Horse". It's this Trojan Horse that allows what is in fact a counter-insurgency operation to be packaged as a "war on drugs". Needless to say, Colombia remains the number one supplier of cocaine to the US - Plan Colombia or not.

The counter-insurgency is also in large part directed against, who else, Venezuela's Chavez, who, in his innumerable casual moments, makes no secret that he "knows Uribe, and his psychology, very well". Golinger, author of a must-read book on Washington's overall strategy, *Bush vs Chavez: Washington's war on Venezuela*, told Russia Today that "Plan Colombia really does not have the objective of addressing directly the war on drugs"; it's more about the "control of natural resources and strategic resources".

Way beyond Venezuela, this is all about the militarization of the Andes and beyond. Colombia is, yes, the Trojan Horse in charge of policing virtually all of [South America](#), not to mention Central America, now that US political, economic and military hegemony is shrinking by the hour.

The beauty of Plan Colombia is its one-size-fits-all status - from AfPak to [Mexico](#). Few people know that in April 2007, the former US ambassador to Colombia, William Wood, was sent to Afghanistan to implement ... a Plan Colombia, that is, counter-insurgency disguised as a war on drugs. Colombia is a mirror of Afghanistan - and vice-versa. It goes without saying that counter-insurgency-heavy Afghanistan - now under the supreme boot of former death-squad operator to General Davis Petraeus in Iraq, General Stanley McChrystal - still produces over 90% of the world's opium.

And inevitably that's where NATO comes in. The only part of the world where NATO is still not active is ... South America. Few people also know that a few months ago, the head of the Pentagon's Southern Command, Admiral James Stavridis, became NATO supreme commander. Three of the past five NATO top military commanders - Stavridis, Bantz Craddock and Wesley Clark - moved to NATO glory from ... the Southern Command, certainly adding another meaning to the gloomy expression "School of the Americas".

No wonder Bolivian President Evo Morales said in Cuba, in mid-July, "I have first-hand information that the empire, through the US Southern Command, made the coup d'etat in Honduras." And all this while not only Mexico and Argentina - but also Brazil and Ecuador - are on their way to decriminalizing drugs.

War on drugs? So much for the cover story. More like the Pentagon stuck in the business, to quote Galeano, of insulting Latin America's intelligence for a long time to come.