

ever greater state control of the economy, while assisting U.S. enemies wherever he can. He's already won converts in Bolivia and Ecuador, and he came far too close for American comfort in Mexico's election last year.

Meanwhile, Colombian President Álvaro Uribe is embracing greater economic and political freedom. He has bravely assisted the U.S. fight against narco-traffickers, and he now wants to link his country more closely to America with a free-trade accord. As a strategic matter, to reject Colombia's offer now would tell everyone in Latin America that it is far more dangerous to trust America than it is to trash it.

Yet Democrats on Capitol Hill are doing their best to help Mr. Chávez prevail against Mr. Uribe. Even as Mr. Chávez was doing his war dance, Senate Finance Chairman Max Baucus was warning the White House not to send the Colombia deal to the Hill for a vote without the permission of Democratic leaders. He was seconded by Ways and Means Chairman Charlie Rangel, who told Congress Daily that "they don't have the votes for it, it's not going to come on the floor," adding that "what they [the White House] don't understand it's not the facts on the ground, it's the politics that's in the air."

Mr. Rangel is right about the politics. No matter what U.S. strategic interests may be in Colombia, this is an election year in America. And Democrats don't want to upset their union and anti-trade allies. The problem is that the time available to pass anything this year is growing short. The closer the election gets, the more leverage protectionists have to run out the clock on the Bush Presidency. The deal has the support of a bipartisan majority in the Senate, and probably also in the House. Sooner or later the White House will have to force the issue.

Our guess is that Messrs. Baucus and Rangel understand the stakes and privately favor the accord. The bottleneck is Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is refusing to allow a vote under pressure from her left-wing Members. These Democrats deride any link between Hugo Chávez and trade as a "scare tactic," as if greater economic prosperity had no political consequences. "President Bush's recent fear-mongering on trade shows just how desperate he is to deliver one final victory for multinational corporations," declared Illinois Democrat Phil Hare, who is one of Ms. Pelosi's main trade policy deputies.

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THE FARC'S GUARDIAN ANGEL

(By Jackson Diehl)

Latin American nations and the Bush administration spent the past week loudly arguing over what censure, if any, Colombia should face for a bombing raid that killed one of the top leaders of the FARC terrorist group at a jungle camp in Ecuador. More quietly, they are just beginning to consider a far more serious and potentially explosive question: What to do about the revelation that Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez forged a strategic alliance with the FARC aimed at Colombia's democratic government.

First reports of the documents recovered from laptops at the FARC camp spoke of promises by Chávez to deliver up to \$300 million to a group renowned for kidnapping, drug trafficking and massacres of civilians; they also showed that Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa was prepared to remove from his own army officers who objected to the FARC's Ecuadoran bases.

But in their totality, the hundreds of pages of documents so far made public by Colombia paint an even more chilling picture. The raid appears to have preempted a breathtakingly

ambitious "strategic plan" agreed on by Chávez and the FARC with the initial goal of gaining international recognition for a movement designated a terrorist organization by both the United States and Europe. Chávez then intended to force Colombian President Álvaro Uribe to negotiate a political settlement with the FARC, and to promote a candidate allied with Chávez and the FARC to take power from Uribe.

All this is laid out in a series of three e-mails sent in February to the FARC's top leaders by Iván Márquez and Rodrigo Granda, envoys who held a series of secret meetings with Chávez. Judging from the memos, Chávez did most of the talking: He outlines a five-stage plan for undermining Uribe's government, beginning with the release of several of the scores of hostages the FARC is holding.

The first e-mail, dated Feb. 8, discusses the money: It says that Chávez, whom they call "angel," "has the first 50 [million] available and has a plan to get us the remaining 200 in the course of the year." Chávez proposed sending the first "packet" of money "through the black market in order to avoid problems." He said more could be arranged by giving the FARC a quota of petroleum to sell abroad or gasoline to retail in Colombia or Venezuela.

Chávez then got to the plans that most interested him. He wanted the FARC to propose collecting all of its hostages in the open, possibly in Venezuela, for a proposed exchange for 500 FARC prisoners in Colombian jails. Chávez said he would travel to the area for a meeting with the FARC's top leader, Manuel Marulanda, and said the presidents of Ecuador, Nicaragua and Bolivia would accompany him. Meanwhile, Chávez said he would set up a new diplomatic group, composed of those countries and the FARC, plus Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, for the purpose of recognizing the FARC as a legitimate "belligerent" in Colombia and forcing Uribe into releasing its prisoners.

In "the early morning hours," the FARC envoys recounted in a Feb. 9 e-mail, Chávez reached the subject of whether the release of Ingrid Betancourt, a former Colombian presidential candidate who is the FARC's best-known hostage, would complicate his plan to back a pro-FARC alternative to Uribe. "He invites the FARC to participate in a few sessions of analysis he has laid out for following the Colombian political situation," the e-mail concluded.

Assuming these documents are authentic—and it's hard to believe that the cerebral and calculating Uribe would knowingly hand over forgeries to the world media and the Organization of American States—both the Bush administration and Latin American governments will have fateful decisions to make about Chávez. His reported actions are, first of all, a violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1373, passed in September 2001, which prohibits all states from providing financing or havens to terrorist organizations. More directly, the Colombian evidence would be more than enough to justify a State Department decision to cite Venezuela as a state sponsor of terrorism. Once cited, Venezuela would be subject to a number of automatic sanctions, some of which could complicate its continuing export of oil to the United States. A cutoff would temporarily inconvenience Americans—and cripple Venezuela, which could have trouble selling its heavy oil in other markets.

For now, the Bush administration appears anxious to avoid this kind of confrontation. U.S. intelligence agencies are analyzing the Colombian evidence; officials say they will share any conclusions with key Latin American governments. Yet those governments have mostly shrunk from confronting Chávez

in the past, and some have quietly urged Bush to take him on. If the president decides to ignore clear evidence that Venezuela has funded and conspired with an officially designated terrorist organization, he will flout what has been his first principle since Sept. 11, 2001.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET FOR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2009

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the concurrent budget resolution, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 70) setting forth the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2009 and including the appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2008 and 2010 through 2013.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I would like to be informed when I have used 45 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Chair will so inform the Senator.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, we come to the floor with a budget resolution that came out of the committee last week. I think it is important to set the stage in recognition of the fiscal condition of the country as we present this budget.

We have seen a dramatic deterioration in the budget situation under this President. As we all know, he inherited a budget that was in surplus; in fact, a budget that was estimated to have a future of surpluses so large that the head of the Federal Reserve said we were in danger of paying off the Federal debt. That is a danger I would like to have.

The President then took us on a fiscal course that has produced four of the five largest deficits in our history. In fact, it may turn out to be five of the largest deficits in our history, depending on how events unfold this year.

We can see in the previous years we were having budget surpluses, and then the President took us into deficit and deepened those deficits until we reached a record deficit in 2004 of \$413