7-29-2010

Costa Rica: Arrival of U.S. Warships Causes Outrage in Country With No Army

George Rodriguez

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen

Recommended Citation
https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/9810

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Costa Rica: Arrival of U.S. Warships Causes Outrage in Country With No Army

by George Rodriguez

Category/Department: Costa Rica

Published: Thursday, July 29, 2010

The Costa Rican government as well as a majority of its legislators insist the recent authorization for dozens of US warships to come to Costa Rican ports during this year's second semester to help fight drug trafficking is only routine. It is standard procedure within the framework of the joint-patrol agreement both countries signed in 1999 and have kept up since, they point out.

Civil-society organizations and political analysts, as well as legislators opposed to their colleagues' decision, denounce the permit as a violation of national sovereignty, and some have labeled it a US military invasion of Costa Rica.

On July 1, 31 of the 57 members of the Asamblea Legislativa (AL)—this Central American nation’s unicameral parliament—voted to allow 46 US warships and some 7,000 troops to arrive in Costa Rica from that date until December 31.

The local media reports that the vessels are capable of carrying a total of 200 helicopters and warplanes, besides the Marines.

One day after the vote, the conservative morning daily La Nación reported that Marines "will be allowed to move nationwide in uniform" and "will be able to enter and leave the country at will, which does not mean the entire war force is to be concentrated here at one given moment."

"US personnel in Costa Rica will enjoy freedom of movement and the right to carry out the activities they consider necessary to fulfill their mission," according to the paper. "Most of the war vessels are 135-meter frigates, capable of transporting two armed SH-60 or HH-60B helicopters...plus 200 Marines and 15 officers each."

"Other vessels...are capable of carrying 102 officers, 1,499 Marines...42 CH-46 helicopters, five AV-8B Harrier planes, and six Blackhawk helicopters," reported the paper, which also said that "catamaran-type vessels will also be allowed into national waters, a hospital ship, and reconnaissance vehicles able to sail as well as move on land."

Government insists sovereignty not violated

Government officials as well as deputies who voted for the permit have said that the procedure was routine, that every six months such authorization is given, and that, of the total ships included in a detailed list each time, only 20% actually dock at Costa Rican ports.

Four days after the vote, Security Minister José María Tijerino assured the public that US troops would not be deployed in Costa Rica or carry out tasks that are the duty of the Fuerza Pública, the Costa Rican police. "A 7,000-strong army deployed along the country’s highways and towns is not going to happen," Tijerino told local television. "They will step down to watch over the vessels, fill them with fuel, and will step down unarmed for relaxation."
Several hours later, at a press conference at the Casa Presidencial, Costa Rica’s President Laura Chinchilla suggested that those opposed to the US anti-drug military presence in the country should protest as strongly against the presence of drug traffickers.

"What I’d love would be to see all those raising their voice against an alleged violation of our sovereignty...to raise their voice just as loudly against those drug traffickers and those criminal gangs," she said.

"They should do it also that way" against the illegal organizations that "aren’t requesting permission to come into our country," added Chinchilla, who also refuted the point made by critics regarding the violation of the country’s sovereignty by assuring them that "it is not the case, because constitutional procedures are respected."

Chinchilla thus referred to statements from civil-society sectors and local political analysts who came up strongly against the permit.

**Opposition groups voice strong objections**

The day after the vote, the Sindicato de Trabajadoras y Trabajadores de la Educación Costarricense (SEC) warned, "The intense military mobilization in Central American waters takes place as geopolitical tension grows in the area."

It happens "a year after the [June 28, 2009] coup d’etat in Honduras and as tension grows between nations such as Venezuela and Colombia," said the SEC, adding that "the latter approved in previous months an authorization for US troops to be stationed at seven bases in its territory (see NotiSur, 2009-06-12). A similar request is being made to Panama."

Also on July 2, the Comisión Nacional de Enlace (CNE) stated in a press release that it "categorically repudiates the presence of US naval forces and military personnel in Costa Rica," and added, "The permit...severely jeopardizes Costa Rica on several levels, especially because it ties our country to the US government’s war plans and agenda and in so doing turns our territory into a military objective."

Thus, the government and the political leadership of the parties whose legislators voted the permit "openly support Plan Colombia and the aggression and war agenda against...Venezuela and other South American countries openly threatened by the US," the CNE said. "We hold [those who passed the measure] directly responsible for any situation occurring within the framework of this occupation of our territory by that US naval force."

But Mauricio Boraschi, head of the Comisión Nacional Antidrogas (CAN), told NotiCen that Costa Rica, with eleven times more territorial waters than land surface, is in dire need of the resources the US provides under the anti-drug cooperation agreement (Acuerdo entre el Gobierno de la República de Costa Rica y el Gobierno de los Estados Unidos de América para la Cooperación para Suprimir el Tráfico Ilícito).

"It could be interpreted that, if we don’t do this, we’re opening national territory to drug trafficking," Boraschi warned, referring to the agreement, which is better known as the Acuerdo de Patrullaje Conjunto. "Of all the ships out there, the only ones they tell us have a real possibility to come are five," but on each list, "you put all of them because you don’t know, in the end, depending on their interests, on how the world moves or how they move it, which ones they’re going to send, or where."
Boraschi said the increasing presence of both Colombian and Mexican drug cartels in Central America, including Costa Rica, led this country’s government earlier this month to send an official mission—made up of Boraschi, Tijerino, and Jorge Rojas, head of the Organismo de Investigación Judicial (OIJ)—to US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) headquarters. There, they met with top SOUTHCOM officials, regarding, among other issues, "a change in the way we operate our joint-patrol treaty," he said.

"What the Southern Command provides is, so to speak, a logistics strategic platform of action in the area of the Americas," Boraschi said. "They have an institution" that is "a joint command created by the US for the anti-drug struggle in the US and in the Central American region."

The drug czar thus referred to the Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF), based in Key West, Florida, made up of more than 30 US security agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the US Coast Guard and Navy, and several police forces.

The JIATF "coordinates operations within...the US and toward the Americas region...from Argentina upward," and "the countries send officers...who facilitate communications and information exchanges, and the operations—joint operations—are planned there," said the Costa Rican official.

It "has representation at each US Embassy, because not all of us have the capability to send people over there...so, the relation functions through informatics systems, constant communication, exchanges of information," Boraschi said. "Joint-patrol treaties are made operational from there."

"They move, let’s say, all the administrative operational part, but based on the resources they already have in different Coast Guard or Navy bases, so what they do is like the coordination, the green light for you to go out on your frigate to patrol a certain place....They tell each ship where it has to go and on what mission," he added.

-- End --