



Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia in war of words

Updated Mon. Mar. 3 2008 8:33 PM ET
CTV.ca News Staff

Ecuador broke off diplomatic ties with Colombia on Monday, after Colombian government commandos conducted a weekend strike against communist rebels inside Ecuador's borders.

Venezuela has also announced that it will be expelling Colombia's ambassador as a war of words erupted in South America over the raid that killed Raul Reyes, a prominent member of FARC -- the guerrilla army that is considered the world's richest insurgency.

FARC has been in a state of civil war with Colombia since the 1960s. Both Canada and the United States consider it to be a terrorist organization that is funded by the drug trade. On Monday, both Venezuela and Ecuador began reinforcing their border with Colombia with troops and tanks.

Venezuela's outspoken President Hugo Chavez has called Colombia President Alvaro Uribe a "mob boss" and a "liar."

Colombia says their commandos first bombed a camp on its side of the border, before coming under fire from across the Ecuadorian border. They overran that camp, Colombia says, and encountered Reyes' body.

But Ecuador's President Rafael Correa called that story an outright lie, saying "it was a massacre."

Correa also called Colombia "a foul and lying government that doesn't want peace." A Colombian official said that a computer seized at the camp where Reyes' was killed suggested that Ecuador was deepening their ties to FARC, which Ecuador is denying.

The seized computer also contained documents that suggest that Venezuela recently paid \$300 million to FARC and that the rebels had appeared interested in buying uranium, Colombia's police chief said Monday. Another document suggests that rebels have had financial ties with Chavez since 1992, when he was jailed for leading a coup attempt.

On CTV Newsnet, Vladimir Torres, a consultant for the Canadian Foundation for the Americas, explained Venezuela's involvement in a conflict that seems to be between Colombia and Ecuador.

"The reason . . . is that it is a matter of domestic politics for Chavez," Torres said.
"Chavez is in desperate need of some kind of external enemy that would allow him to exacerbate nationalism and galvanize his support.

"He wants some excuse to mobilize some kind of war situation, to call for some kind of state of emergency, so that he can accuse anyone who speaks of dissent as a 'traitor to the fatherland.'"

Torres says that it is unlikely that the situation will actually break into actual warfare between the three countries, citing the massive amount of trade that exists between the countries. He said Chavez has exacerbated the situation by publicly asking that FARC be de-listed as a terrorist group and that Colombia's evidence against Chavez is very strong.

Chavez has recently purchased \$3 billion in Russian arms, including helicopters and fighter jets.

With files from The Associated Press