

Venezuela aims for biggest military reserve in Americas

Greg Morsbach in Caracas

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[The Guardian](#)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/venezuela/story/0,,1723274,00.html>

Around 500,000 Venezuelans will start a four-month military training programme today to turn them into members of the country's territorial guard. They are the first group of a total of 2m Venezuelan civilians who have so far signed up to become armed reservists.

By the summer of 2007, Venezuela is likely to have the largest military reserve in the Americas, which is expected to be almost double the size of that in the United States.

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The huge recruitment drive is part of President Hugo Chávez's plan to create a people's army that would answer directly to him in the event of civil unrest or an armed conflict.

General Alberto Muller Rojas, one of the members of the army high command who helped to devise the new thinking in military strategy being adopted by Venezuela's leftwing government, said: "If for example the United States were to invade Venezuela one day, and that's what many people are expecting, the only way we could repel such an attack would be a full scale guerrilla war against the foreign aggressors.

"Our professional army only numbers 80,000 soldiers, so we would need to use civilians like in Iraq to fight the Yankee forces."

Top military officials are confident that a reserve force of 2m, or one in five adults, would be sufficient to dissuade any country from invading Venezuela, the world's fifth biggest oil exporter and fifth biggest supplier of crude oil to the US.

Many of Venezuela's state-owned companies, such as the oil giant PDVSA, have started their own territorial guard units. However, they are being asked to join the formal training programme offered by the armed forces.

Richard Arrais, 40, a marketing executive who works at PDVSA's headquarters in Caracas, has his own office and works in a nine-to-five job Mondays to Fridays. But once a week he and his friends meet up as reservists.

He said: "Since January we've been holding informal meetings to discuss military tactics and to receive courses such as first aid.

"But the training starting this Saturday will be tougher. There will be drill, weapons training and assault courses, as well as a military exercise in the countryside."

Mr Arrais and others like him say they are happy to give up every Saturday in defence of their fatherland and the values of President Chávez's socialist revolution. They believe internal opposition forces and the United States could strike at any moment.

So far service in the territorial guard is voluntary. But the Venezuelan parliament is studying proposals to make it obligatory for all Venezuelan adults to join the territorial guard.

Mr Chávez has sought to position himself at the vanguard of a bloc of Latin American leftist leaders acting as a counterpoint to US hegemony in the region.

Tensions between Caracas and Washington have simmered in recent weeks with an espionage row that has resulted in a US naval attache being expelled and disputes on a range of issues from the war on drugs to aviation safety restrictions.

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U.S. says Venezuela spending too much for military items

By: GEORGE GEDDA - Associated Press

http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2006/01/21/military/22_04_291_20_06.txt

WASHINGTON -- Venezuela is planning a "buying spree" for military equipment that goes beyond the country's legitimate needs, the State Department said Friday.

In recent days, the United States has sought to block proposed sales of military planes and other equipment to Venezuela by Spain and Brazil.

The transactions are part of what "we would consider an outsized military buildup in Venezuela," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said.

He also noted that the government of President Hugo Chavez has decided to activate its reserves and to create a million-person militia.

On Thursday in Brasilia, Chavez called the U.S. objections to the Brazil deal absurd and said Brazil will try to persuade the United States to allow it. At stake are 20 planes costing \$200 million. The deal was worked out with Empresa Brasileira de Aeronautica SA, or Embraer.

The United States has the authority to block the sale because some of the planes' technology is American-made. Embraer President Mauricio Botelho said Friday the company is working on changes that could make the sale acceptable to Washington.

Botelho said the plane would be used to combat drugs and arms trafficking and not "for acts of war."

Last week, Chavez blasted a U.S. attempt to block Spain from selling Venezuela 12 military planes with American parts, calling it proof of Washington's "imperialism."

In response, McCormack said at the time the United States is concerned that the proposed sale "could contribute to destabilization in Latin America."

The United States has made that view clear to the Spanish, Venezuelan and other governments in Latin America," McCormack said.

The proposed Spanish transaction involves armed maritime patrol seacraft and some airplanes.