US PARAMILITARIES IN COLOMBIA: NOW TWICE AS ILLEGAL

Remember that Jeremy Scahill report that listed Colombia among the 75 places where JSOC has deployed?

> *The Nation* has learned from well-placed special operations sources that among the countries where elite special forces teams working for the Joint Special Operations Command have been deployed under the Obama administration are: Iran, Georgia, Ukraine, Bolivia, Paraguay, Ecuador, Peru, Yemen, Pakistan (including in Balochistan) and the Philippines. These teams have also at times deployed in Turkey, Belgium, France and Spain. JSOC has also supported US Drug Enforcement Agency operations in Colombia and Mexico. The frontline for these forces at the moment, sources say, are Yemen and Somalia. "In both those places, there are ongoing unilateral actions," said a special operations source. "JSOC does a lot in Pakistan too."

In my post on it, I noted that we're engaging in belligerent activities without apparent legal approval to do so. But that was because this program seemed to use the legal approval to fight al Qaeda to fight other entities, like Latin American leftist terrorist or drug cartels.

Wednesday, the Colombian aspect of our paramilitary activities became even more illegal, because a Colombian court struck down that country's cooperation agreement with the US because it lacked Congressional approval. (h/t Max Fisher who has a bunch of interesting links on this development)

> A high court in Colombia has voided an accord with the United States that would allow an increased U.S. presence on seven Colombian military bases. The ruling on Tuesday by the Constitutional Court declared the agreement signed by outgoing President Alvaro Uribe unconstitutional because it bypassed approval of the Congress.
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> The agreement was signed in October and faced intense criticism from Colombia's more left-leaning neighbors, including Venezuela and Bolivia. President Juan Manuel Santos (pictured above right), who was inaugurated on Aug. 7, enjoys a wide political majority in Colombia's Congress and told reporters Wednesday that the ruling would have no effect on cooperation between the U.S. and its closest ally in Latin America.

It may well be that Uribe's successor, Santos, simply gets Congressional approval for this. But until that happens, this decision serves to heighten questions about US involvement in Latin American, not least with regards to incursions into populist Venezuela and Ecuador.

As Adam Isacson explains, this won't prevent US paramilitaries from doing what they have already been doing.

> U.S. military and contractor personnel were still acting under the authorities laid out in a series of old accords (1952, 1962, 1974, 2004, 2007), whose validity the Colombian court did not challenge.Under these old accords, U.S. personnel *have already been frequently present at the seven bases* listed in the DCA, as well as several others. The difference is that today, there is no "free entry": each U.S. deployment is subject to a series of Colombian government approvals that would be unnecessary under the DCA. It also means

> that construction of new facilities at the Palanquero airbase in Puerto Salgar, Cundinamarca – for which Congress appropriated $46 million in 2010 – cannot yet begin.

But it may result in more scrutiny—in Latin America, at least—at what our troops and contractors are doing. (It also may increase pressure on the Administration to pass the free trade accord with Colombia.)