

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 28, 2009

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street, Northwest  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Madame Secretary:

We are writing about press articles regarding the State Department's negotiations with the Government of Colombia to establish a semi-permanent military presence with base access in that country.

Despite the obvious foreign policy and budgetary implications of such an agreement, neither the Foreign Relations Committee nor the State, Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee was even informed of the negotiations, much less consulted on them. Even after press reports divulged their existence, the negotiations were acknowledged only in response to staff inquiries.

Given this lack of consultation, we respectfully request a written summary of the negotiations and their results. Specifically, we would like to know:

- What sort of U.S. military presence in Colombia and the region do these negotiations envision? What would be the operational and policy purposes of such a presence? How would the basing agreement affect limitations on the U.S. role in Colombian counternarcotics/counterinsurgency operations?
- How many U.S. troops, what rotation schedule, what hardware, and what support infrastructure would be intended, where and at what cost? What benefits of any kind would accrue to the Colombian Government, and specifically to the Colombian military, under such an arrangement? And what programs, if any, would be reduced in order to pay for this semi-permanent military presence?
- Where would semi-permanent base access fit into the U.S. interagency commitment – as previously briefed to the Committees on Appropriations and Foreign Relations – to gradually reduce U.S. military assistance to Colombia and “nationalize” major elements of Plan Colombia? Under what conditions would you anticipate closing the base(s) short of the reported 10-year period?
- What are the implications of further deepening our relationship with the Colombian military at a time of growing revelations about the widespread *falsos positivos* (“false positives”) scandal, in which the Colombian military recruited many hundreds (some estimates are as high as 1,600) of boys and young men for

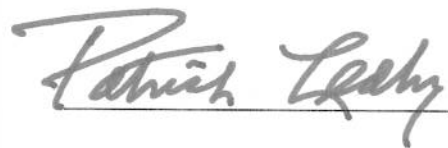
jobs in the countryside that did not exist and then summarily executed them to earn bonuses and vacation days? In your judgment, what signal does a deepening of our partnership with the Colombian military send before investigations gain momentum and accountability for these atrocities is established? How, given these circumstances, would deeper institutionalized cooperation with the Colombian military fit in with our strategic interest in and commitment to human rights and the rule of law?

- What implications does a basing agreement hold for other U.S. interests in South America, and how were those implications weighed in the negotiation? What consultation or notification with Colombia's neighbors was made before press reports about the basing proposals appeared, and how did they react? What impact would the Department expect such a basing agreement to have in the region and on our relations with other South American countries?
- How long have the negotiations been going on, and why was there no consultation with the above-mentioned congressional committees or with NGO experts on Colombia? Was the lack of consultation as pervasive on the Colombian side as well, and, if so, did the Department judge, or concur in the Colombian Government's judgment, that there should be no consultation on the Colombian side either?

We look forward to discussing this important issue with you. The decision to make semi-permanent a U.S. military presence in Colombia warrants serious debate about both the practical aspects as well as the implications for other U.S. objectives in that country and the region.

Sincerely,

  
Chris Dodd

  
Patrick Leahy