

Cuba's Role in the Bolivarian Radical Populist Movement's Dismantling of Democracy

How a once moribund revolution fueled by petro dollars remade Latin America and the strategic challenge posed to the United States

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ABSTRACT

While Venezuela is generally viewed as the architect of the Bolivarian movement, the Cuban role transformed the radical populist movement into a tier-one challenge to the United States

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Overview

When the Cold War ended, the Cuban revolution, the Western Hemisphere's only lasting Marxist dictatorship, seemed destined for the dustbin of history. The Soviet Union, provider of vital petroleum, food and political support, had collapsed. The Cuban-supported Sandinista government in Nicaragua was forced to relinquish power, and El Salvador's revolutionary movement negotiated an end to that insurgency. With no allies and flagging economic power, the Castro dictatorship seemed destined for the dustbin of history.

Yet, against all odds and prognostications, 26 years after imposing a "Special Period" of extreme rationing and enduring deep food and fuel shortages, the Castro regime today exercises more influence in Latin America than it did during the height of the Cold War. This paper offers an overview of this stunning turn of events, which are the product of the symbiotic relationship between Hugo Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution, the Castro brothers' enduring revolutionary ideology, and the fusion of both revolutions into a political/criminal enterprise that has reshaped Latin America.

The Cuban-Bolivarian rise comes as U.S. influence in Latin America, particularly in relation to military and security doctrine is waning quickly and dangerously. A particularly noxious new authoritarian doctrine of asymmetrical warfare and permanent confrontation with the United States is filling this vacuum, and has serious but little understood consequences for U.S. national security.

Given the press of global conflicts in which the United States is involved, it is not surprising that simmering and ill-defined threats, even those close to the Homeland, are not considered a priority. However, the growing number of convergence points in Latin America for TOC and terrorist groups to engage in mutually beneficial efforts to counter U.S. interests and possibly harm the United States should be a significant concern. The Cuban/Bolivarian alliance is the nucleus of this threat.

Cuba's lead role in this hemisphere-wide movement is often overlooked. Venezuela under the late Hugo Chávez, initially flush with billions of petro dollars, is widely and correctly viewed as the driving force of the Bolivarian Revolution and its self-proclaimed goal of establishing an international alliance to bring 21st Century Socialism to the hemisphere.

The Bolivarian bloc is now made up of Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Suriname, Ecuador (to a lesser degree) and some small Caribbean islands. The former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla movement in Colombia, now a legal political party, is also a fundamental component of the

Bolivarian structure. Other political parties like the Worker's Party (PT) of Brazil and the small Communist parties of the region also are part of the bloc.

Venezuela's role in bankrolling the movement is visible, but the less visible Cuban support directly facilitates the Bolivarian movement's ability to execute its radical authoritarian political model, state-centric economic vision, and explicitly anti-U.S. foreign policies across multiple countries.

Under the tutelage and direct participation of the Cuban regime's sophisticated General Intelligence Directorate (DGI),¹ Cuba provided vital support to the countries of the Bolivarian Alliance, including: intelligence collection, support and training; access to international solidary networks and alliances, particularly Russia, and radical revolutionary groups such as ETA Basque separatists and splinter groups of the IRA; skills in suppressing internal dissent; and ideological direction. In effect the Cuban government has viewed the Bolivarian movement and financial assets as a way to expand the Cuban model across the hemisphere, something that was not possible even with Soviet help in the Cold War.

While Chavez's Bolivarian project would not have survived without Cuban assistance, economic and energy partnerships with Venezuela were equally vital to Cuban survival. Without this symbiotic relationship, outlined below, neither movement would have reached the heights they did in the early 21st century.

A significant third factor also has played an important role in the success of this partnership, and it poses the most direct threat to U.S. interests and security. Senior leaders of all of the Bolivarian nations have been credibly accused, charged or convicted of not only engaging in cocaine trafficking but of using transnational organized crime as an instrument of state policy.² The primary ally of the Bolivarian bloc has been the FARC, identified as one of the largest cocaine cartels in the world during its existence as a guerrilla army.

Through these activities, the Bolivarian structure has access to enormous amounts of resources that do not pass through the state treasury and for which there is no accountability or transparency. Furthermore, the Venezuelan state oil company, *Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA)* and its majority-owned subsidiaries in El Salvador

¹ The DGI is responsible for foreign intelligence collection. The DGI has six divisions divided into two categories of roughly equal size: The Operational Divisions and the Support Divisions. The operational divisions include the Political/Economic Intelligence Division, the External Counterintelligence Division, and the Military Intelligence Division. The Political/Economic Intelligence Division consists of four sections: Eastern Europe, North America, Western Europe, and Africa-Asia-Latin America. The External Counterintelligence Division is responsible for penetrating foreign intelligence services and the surveillance of exiles. See "Directorate of General Intelligence." *Global Security*. Accessed at <https://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/cuba/dgi.htm>.

² In the case of Ecuador, the Correa government maintained direct ties to the FARC and drug trafficking structures but the current government of Lenin Moreno has moved to distance itself from those policies.

(Alba Petróleos) and Nicaragua (Albanisa) have been documented as access points within the Bolivarian states through which to launder multi-billion dollar illicit revenue streams.³

A revealing insight into this network came to light in March 2015, when the U.S. Treasury Department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) designated the Banca Privada D’Andorra (BPA) a bank of “primary money laundering concern.” The statement noted multiple billions of dollars’ worth of money laundering activity in the bank, benefitting a host of actors, including Russian and Chinese organized crime and PDVSA. The Treasury notice reported that BPA and PDVSA set up shell companies and “complex financial products to siphon funds off from PDVSA. BPA processed approximately \$2 billion in the money-laundering scheme.”⁴ The figure of \$2 billion siphoned off from PDVSA—which FinCEN documented in only a two-year period and is likely much higher—is stunning, particularly given that the country is in an economic free fall.

It is further apparent that these money-laundering activities provide a steady cash flow for a larger foreign policy strategy. The ALBA bloc embraces, as a policy of the state, alliances with TOC groups and terrorist groups such as the FARC,⁵ Hezbollah,⁶ the Spanish ETA separatists,⁷ and drug cartels that move cocaine. The same countries make up the core of several other Venezuelan-funded regional bodies designed to marginalize the United States in the region, including the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

³ For a comprehensive look at these ties, see: Douglas Farah, “Adapting U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts in Colombia,” Testimony before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, September 12, 2017, accessed at: https://www.ibiconsultants.net/_pdf/douglas-farah-testimony_senate-caucus-on-international-narcotics-control-pdf; also “Kingpins and Corruption: Targeting Transnational Organized Crime in Latin America,” AEI Working Group on Transnational Organized Crime in Latin America, American Enterprise Institute, June 2017, accessed at: <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Kingpins-and-Corruption.pdf>

⁴ “FinCEN Names Banca Privada d’Andorra a Foreign Financial Institution of Primary Money Laundering Concern.” *FinCEN*, March 10, 2015. Accessed at http://www.fincen.gov/news_room/nr/html/20150310.html.

⁵ The FARC, first designated a terrorist entity by the United States in 1997, is one of three groups in the world designated as both a major drug trafficking organization and terrorist group. The other two are the Taliban and *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) in Peru. See: State Department, “Foreign Terrorist Organizations.” *Bureau of Counterterrorism*. Accessed at <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>. The FARC has also been designated a terrorist entity by the European Union since 2001. This EU designation was lifted in 2017, as a result of the signing of a demobilization and peace accord between the FARC and the Colombian government.

⁶ The Lebanese-based Hezbollah was designated a terrorist organization by the United States in 1997 and by the European Union in 2013. Citation necessary here?

⁷ ETA was designated a terrorist organization by the United States in 1997. See: State Department, “Foreign Terrorist Organizations.” *Bureau of Counterterrorism*. Accessed at: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>.

These partnerships are presented internally as part of a broad struggle against the United States, imperialism, and neoliberalism, all of which require resources.⁸ Alliances with Iran and Hezbollah are portrayed as an extension of that struggle on a global scale, the Cuban construct honed during the Cold War. Indeed, structures like CELAC were specifically designed to exclude the United States and Canada from participating.

The embrace of Russia (both the state and state-affiliated TOC groups) and China as extra regional actors corresponds to a set of shared values, both in terms of geopolitical interest and governance models. The embrace is also based on the shared view of the Bolivarian/Cuban bloc and its allies that the United States is their primary enemy.

These blossoming relationships are evident from the multiple visits of the heads of the Bolivarian states to Russia and China, as well as the constant visits by Russian and Chinese leaders to the Bolivarian states to strengthen military, political and economic ties.⁹

Origins of the Alliance

While the ideological affinity between the Cuban and Bolivarian movements is important and clear, that alliance relies upon a powerful transactional relationship, built around the exchange of two commodities for mutual benefit: Cheap Venezuelan oil, desperately needed by the Cuban regime to revive its moribund economy and stave off political and economic reforms; and vast, world-class Cuban intelligence capabilities – developed with the Stasi of East Germany and the Soviet KGB – with decades of expertise in collecting intelligence in the hemisphere from Canada to Argentina, including numerous successful operations within the United States. These capacities and capabilities were desperately needed in Venezuela and the other Bolivarian states to improve the state’s ability to suppress internal dissent and stay in power indefinitely.¹⁰ The proof of the success of the model is the Castro brothers grip on power that has lasted 59 years.

⁸ Douglas Farah, *Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority*. Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, August 2012.

⁹ For the documentation of the significant Russian visits to the region and the increased rate for the visits see: R. Evan Ellis, “Russian Engagement in Latin American and the Caribbean: Return to the ‘Strategic Game’ In a Complex, Inter-Dependent Post-Cold War World?” *Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College*, April 24, 2015. Accessed at: <https://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/Russian-Engagement-in-Latin-America/2015/04/24> .

¹⁰ For an excellent summary of Cuba’s intelligence capabilities see: Michelle Van Cleave, “Cuba’s Global Network of terrorism, Intelligence and Warfare,” Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, May 17, 2012; William Rosenau and Ralph Espach, “Cuba’s Spies Still Punch Above Their Weight.” *The National Interest*, September 29, 2013. Accessed at: <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/cubas-spies-still-punch-above-their-weight-9147>

Precise figures on the volumes of this exchange are not possible because both governments go to great lengths to be as opaque as possible. However, at its peak in 2008, Cuba was estimated to have received 115,000 bpd, or more than 60 percent of its oil supply, from Venezuela at below-market rates, with most payment deferred for 20 years. In addition, until its economic collapse, Venezuela provided an estimated \$5 billion a year to Cuba in petro dollars for the services outlined below.¹¹

In return, Cuba greatly expanded its embassies in Bolivarian countries to carry out espionage and other activities, particularly in Bolivia, Nicaragua and El Salvador.¹² In addition, the Castro regime deployed tens of thousands of medical and other personnel in *misiones* around the hemisphere, both to provide basic health services and to embed Cuban experts in the intelligence, police and military structures of friendly nations. The purpose of these *misiones* was two-fold. First, the countries receiving the *misiones* paid for them and received the benefit of improved health services and literacy training while generating hard currency for the Castro government. Second, Cuba gained complete access and significant control over the strategic power centers across the hemisphere. In Ecuador, Bolivia, El Salvador and Venezuela, this included direct control of both voter registration lists and national electoral commissions, in addition to military and civilian intelligence structures, thereby greatly enhancing the ability to control the results of elections.

In recent years, Venezuela, long the linchpin of the petroleum/*misiones* exchange, has become increasingly unable to uphold its end of the bargain due to: rampant corruption; the collapse of world oil prices; plunging Venezuelan oil production; ongoing economic free fall, shortages and hyperinflation; and the increasing international isolation of the regime of Chávez' successor, Nicolás Maduro, as he increases repression.

¹¹ Ted Piccone & Harold Trinkunas, "The Cuba-Venezuela Alliance: The Beginning of the End?" Brookings Institution Policy Brief, June 2014; Marianna Parraga & Marc Frank, "Exclusive: Venezuela Oil Exports to Cuba Drop, Energy Shortages Worsen." *Reuters*, July 13, 2017. Accessed at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-cuba-oil-exclusive/exclusive-venezuela-oil-exports-to-cuba-drop-energy-shortages-worsen-idUSKBN19Y183>

¹² "Cuba tiene mayor embajada en Bolivia," Cubaencuentro, October 31, 2016. Accessed at: <https://www.cubaencuentro.com/internacional/noticias/cuba-con-la-mayor-embajada-en-bolivia-327436>



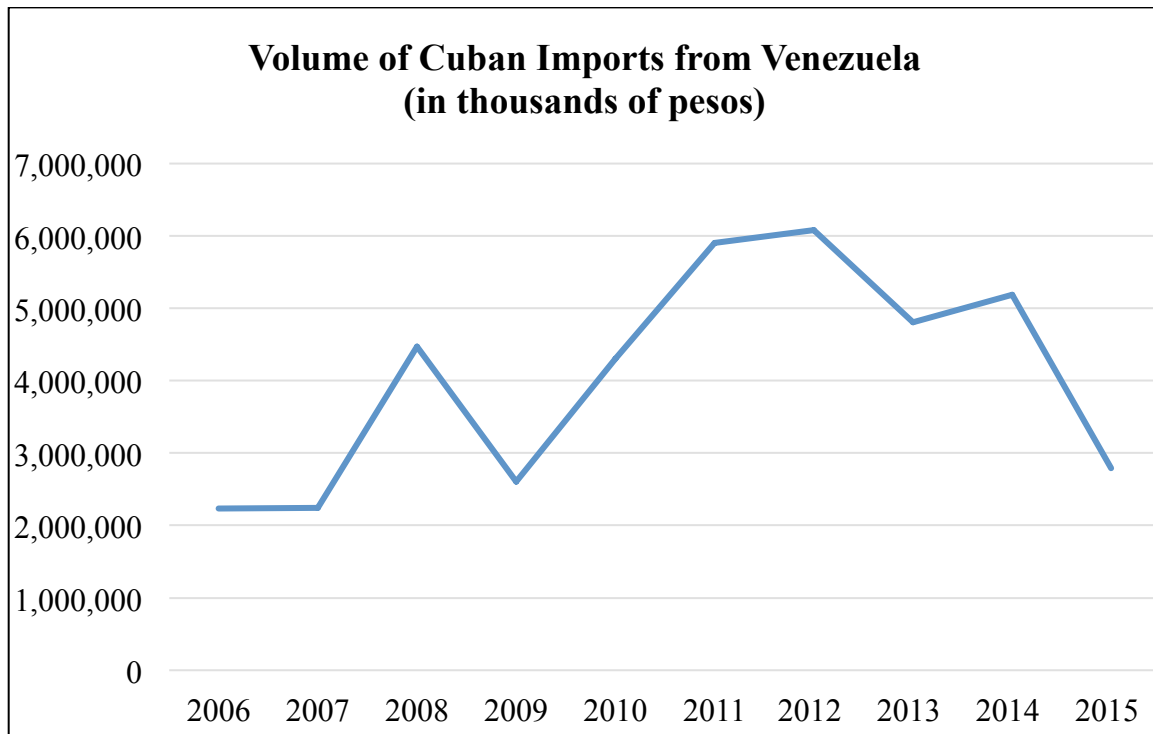
Figure 1: Evo Morales, Daniel Ortega, Raúl Castro and Nicolás Maduro at Bolivarian summit in Havana, January 2017 (Prensa Latina).

As a result, oil shipments from Venezuela to Cuba have slipped downward since at least 2010, and in the first half of 2017 were estimated to be 72,360 bpd,¹³ and the amount is likely to have fallen even further in the year since, as Venezuela's production has continued to fall. Cuba has been forced to significantly ration its electrical use in public buildings, curtail the sale of gasoline and diesel to the public, and recall thousands of its *misiones* members due to economic constraints.¹⁴

This contraction leaves the future of the alliance less certain, and has opened the door for Russia, China and Iran to use their economic resources to expand their influence in the Bolivarian axis, both to gain influence as well as access to vital natural resources, including undeveloped offshore oil blocs, lithium and rare earth minerals.

¹³ Parraga and Frank, op cit.

¹⁴ Piccone and Trinkunas, op cit.



Source: Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas e Información, Cuba

The Early Years and Ideological Framework

While the Castro-Chávez alliance began in the 1990s, the rise of the Cuba-Bolivarian movement came in the mid-2000s as the traditional, weak democratic governments in Latin America faced a loss of legitimacy due to widespread corruption, economic stagnation, and closed electoral systems.

This discontent coincided with the height of Chávez's oil wealth and personal popularity in the hemisphere, as oil prices soared over \$100 a barrel and seemingly unlimited PDVSA money could fund like-minded candidates and buy elections in neighboring countries. It was also before Chávez's credibility as a legitimate democratic alternative to traditional parties was in tatters. The Castro brothers, still wielding one of the most sophisticated intelligence apparatuses in the hemisphere (and indeed the world), saw the opportunity presented at this historic crossroads and, with Chávez, moved aggressively to seize the moment.

While Chávez had attempted an unsuccessful coup d'état in 1992, he relied on the Castro brothers to provide the ideological, political conspiratorial architecture that he and his allies would need to not just take power but to hold it, as the Castros had done since 1959. This architecture was adapted but remained essentially unchanged as Morales, Correa, Ortega, and Mauricio Funes and later Salvador Sánchez Ceren in El Salvador took power in in the mid-2000s.

From 2005-2007, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Mel Zelaya in Honduras were elected with significant Venezuelan funding and Cuban support. Against long odds, Daniel Ortega, the only one besides the Castro brothers to lead an armed revolution, returned to office in Nicaragua. In Peru, the Bolivarian candidate lost, but in Argentina, the Kirchner dynasty, while not officially part of the Bolivarian bloc, was a de facto partner, as was the Lula government in Brazil.



Figure 2: Presidents Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), Hugo Chávez (Venezuela), Raúl Castro (Cuba) and Evo Morales (Bolivia) give anti-imperialist salute Source: Getty Images

In 2009, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), the former guerrillas, won the elections in El Salvador, adding another ally, while Zelaya in Honduras was forcibly removed from office after a year. In 2010, Desi Bouterse, a convicted drug trafficker and warlord embraced and financed by Chávez, won election in Suriname. However, by 2016 the march of the “pink tide” was slowing; Brazil, Argentina and Honduras were no longer part of the alliance and Ecuador, under President Lenin Moreno, was slowly backing away from the Bolivarian authoritarianism and corruption that had defined Correa.¹⁵

It was now evident that the survival and expansion of the joint projects – the Cuban revolution and the Bolivarian axis – could only be insured if Venezuela used its oil wealth to provide Cuba with badly needed, discounted petroleum products and buy regional allies, while Cuba provided the roadmap, intelligence, and intellectual framework to shatter the traditional political and economic structures.

¹⁵ FT View, “The Ebbing of Latin America’s ‘Pink Tide.’” *Financial Times*, December 28, 2015. Accessed at <https://www.ft.com/content/72b63996-a282-11e5-bc70-7ff6d4fd203a>

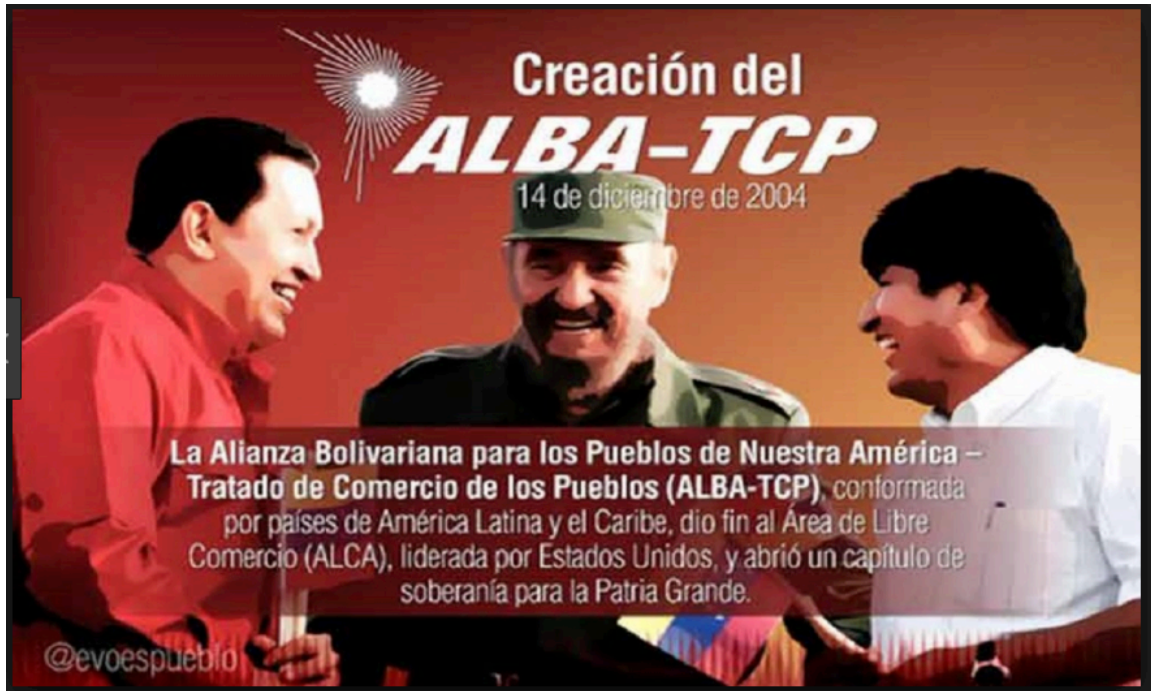


Figure 3: Poster announcing the creation of a trade pact among the Bolivarian alliance. Hugo Chávez (left), Fidel Castro (center) and Evo Morales (right).

In light of recent challenges, Bolivarian leaders make constant pilgrimages to Havana to consult with the Cuban regime, and Cuba played host to the FARC during its four years of negotiations with the Colombian government that led to a peace agreement signed in October 2016. In addition to personal visits by the presidents, key Bolivarian leaders like Juan Ramón Quintana of Bolivia, Medardo González and José Luis Merino of El Salvador¹⁶ all spend significant time in Havana. Quintana was recently named Bolivian ambassador to Cuba.¹⁷ Cuba is also the host to summits of the Bolivarian alliance, as well as other multilateral meetings.

When Fidel Castro died in 2016, the Bolivarian leaders publicly embraced the lessons he had taught them. Ecuador's Correa said Castro had been his spiritual and political father, while El Salvador's Salvador Sánchez Cerén said Fidel helped him "mature in our strategic vision of the revolutionary struggle." Ortega said that Castro would live on in all his followers and led a funeral crowd in Havana in chants of "I am Fidel, I am Fidel."¹⁸

¹⁶ "Cuban Vice President Receives the Secretary General of FMLN." *Prensa Latina*, December 11, 2017. Accessed at <http://www.plenglish.com/index.php?o=rn&id=22088&SEO=cuban-vice-president-receives-the-secretary-general-of-fmln>.

¹⁷ "Designan al Exministro Quinana Como Embajador en Cuba." *Los Tiempos*, April 28, 2017. Accessed at <http://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/nacional/20170428/designan-al-exministro-quintana-como-embajador-cuba>.

¹⁸ Nick Miroff, "From a Parade of Foreign Leaders, a Glowing Farewell to Fidel Castro." *The Washington Post*, November 26, 2016. Accessed at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/from-a-parade-of-foreign-leaders-a-glowing-farewell-to-fidel-castro/2016/11/29/6a9514c8-b5a8-11e6-939c-91749443c5e5_story.html?utm_term=.a203bd6d415e.

The successes of the Cuban-Bolivarian partnership, therefore, are the result of a carefully coordinated political and economic strategy, in order to allow the 'revolutions' to take and hold power. This strategy required a complex, sequenced series of steps that Cuba understood and had already successfully navigated, steps which leaders of the Bolivarian alliance, under their guidance, followed:

- Create a binary choice between being for the revolution, personified in the president and representing the collective will of the people, and being against it. Under this logic, being a counter-revolutionary is by definition a threat to the revolution and the people and therefore a criminal activity;
- Once in power, fundamentally restructure the intelligence services to focus on internal enemies, including opposition politicians, the independent media, the Catholic Church and civil society, while destroying the traditional social networks that historically had protected the elites;
- Recast the United States as the primary enemy of the hemisphere, using the "Yankee Go Home" rhetoric of the Cold War, and move aggressively to create conflicts that could be used to expel ambassadors, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), USAID and US-backed NGOs;
- Decapitate the military and police leadership, largely trained in the United States, and replace the top ranks with loyalists who are willing to violate institutional norms and politicize the institutions in the name of the revolution;
- Realign the Bolivarian governments with regimes hostile to the United States – including Russia, Iran, China, Syria, and, to a lesser degree North Korea – in the name of revolutionary solidarity and the need for an "independent" foreign policy.
- Use the deep and long-standing historical ties, developed by the Cuban regime over decades, to criminalized states¹⁹ and transnational criminal organizations in order to open new illicit pathways of increasing sophistication to the Bolivarian alliance and its allies (such as the FARC), and use the acquired funds to ensure the survivability of the movement.

¹⁹ The term "criminalized state" is used to define states that use transnational organized crime as an instrument of state policy. See: Farah, *Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority*, op. cit.



4 September 1986: Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and Cuban president Fidel Castro walk with Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega during the non-aligned countries summit in Harare, Zimbabwe

Picture: ALEXANDER JOE/AFP/Getty Images

Figure 4: The historic ties of Daniel Ortega and Fidel Castro to criminalized regimes like that of Muammar Gaddafi were of great value to Bolivarian movement 20 years later.

The Criminalization of the Bolivarian/Cuban Alliance

Driven by the ideological imperative to disrupt and defeat the United States, the Bolivarian/Cuban alliance has embraced transnational organized crime (TOC) as a valuable instrument of state policy, in a similar fashion as Russia, its main extra-regional ally. As mentioned previously, this is particularly true in Venezuela, Bolivia, El Salvador and Nicaragua. All of these governments directly support the FARC, Hezbollah, Iran, ETA, and major drug trafficking organizations as a manner of legitimate.

FARC documents captured by the Colombian military in 2008 show that the Chávez government, with the direct participation of the president, head of intelligence and other senior officials, loaned the FARC \$300 million for new weapons and other equipment, money the FARC agreed to repay in cocaine shipments. In addition, the documents show, the discussions of the loan and other vital strategic support, including weapons shipments and the creation of front groups, took place in Fuerte

Tiuna, the headquarters of both the military and intelligence structures in Caracas.²⁰ It would be difficult to have more direct evidence of Venezuela's direct support for a designated drug trafficking and terror organization than this.

Cuba, like the other Bolivarian allies, has not been a bystander in these activities. In addition to aiding North Korea in the illegal acquisition of weapons as discussed below, Cuba has been a consistent ally of the Assad regime in Syria. It has further served as a primary facilitator in the FARC's efforts to move billions of dollars to safe haven, in partnership with allies in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

These money-laundering activities, which allow the FARC to skirt the promises it made to forfeit assets, violate both the spirit and the letter of the Colombian peace pact. It also worth noting that the FARC money was derived from drug trafficking, kidnappings, extortion, human trafficking and illegal gold mining.²¹

The same FARC documents show that the FARC donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to the successful 2007 presidential campaign of Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and in exchange received safe harbor for its forces, as well as unfettered access to a dollarized economy and cocaine transport routes.²²

During the Cold War and since its end, Cuba had used Soviet money and money likely derived from the drug trade to support armed revolutions across Latin America and Africa. Testimony of associates of Pablo Escobar, as well as the direct testimony of Carlos Lehder (both Escobar and Lehder were founders of the Medellín cartel), pioneering Bolivian drug kingpin Roberto Suárez, and former Panamanian president Manuel Noriega all paint a credible and detailed picture of the direct involvement of the Cuban regime in allowing drugs to flow through Cuba for the financial benefit of the regime.

While the U.S.-backed Contra rebels in Nicaragua were engaged in widespread drug trafficking, the Sandinista government of Daniel Ortega was also reportedly involved in moving cocaine with Cuban help. According to published accounts, at a 1982 meeting of Fidel Castro with Sandinista leaders Edén Pastora and Tomás Borge, Castro encouraged them to move into drug trafficking to "whiten America with cocaine in order to destroy it."²³

²⁰ For an extensive look at the support of the FARC by Chávez, and a full explanation of captured FARC documents following the death of FARC commander Raúl Reyes see: James L. Smith, "The FARC Files: Venezuela, Ecuador and the Secret Archives of 'Raul Reyes.'" *International Institute for Strategic Studies, London*, 2011. See also: Douglas Farah, *Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority*, op cit.

²¹ Douglas Farah, "Adapting U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts in Colombia," op. cit.

²² Francisco Huerta Montalvo et al, "Informe Comisión de Transparencia y Verdad: Caso Angostura," Dec. 10, 2009.

²³ Ralph E. Fernandez, "Historical Assessment of Terrorist Activity and Narcotic (sic) Trafficking by the Republic of Cuba." *Cuba Confidential*, January 22, 2003. Accessed at: <https://cubaconfidential.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/historical-assessment-of-terrorist-activity-and-narco-trafficking-by-cuba.pdf>

This historical precedent, and the Bolivarian bloc's reliance on FARC cocaine for profit, made engaging in trafficking as a state enterprise an easy step for the Bolivarian leadership; it earns massive amounts of funds for their international project, and raises no alarms with the Cuban regime.

The list of the leadership of the Bolivarian axis reportedly involved in illicit activity is extensive and includes senior government officials of all of the Bolivarian countries. A small sample includes:

- Suriname's President Desi Bouterse and his son and confidant Dino, both convicted drug traffickers,²⁴ and the president presides over an illicit gold smuggling operation that aids the FARC and other criminal groups.²⁵
- Venezuela's vice president Tareck El Aissami, a member of the regime's inner circle, and a designated drug kingpin by the U.S. Treasury Department;²⁶
- El Salvador's FMLN leader José Luis Merino (AKA Ramiro Vásquez), currently deputy vice minister of foreign relations and architect of the Alba Petróleos money laundering operation;²⁷
- Bolivia's Juan Ramón Quintana, current ambassador to Cuba and former minister of the presidency (he has also held other senior posts);²⁸
- Bolivia's head of the anti-narcotics police René Sanabria Oropeza, convicted of trafficking hundreds of kilos of cocaine from Bolivia to the United States;²⁹
- Ecuador's former head of the central bank Pedro Delgado, who orchestrated a banking deal to help Iran evade U.S. and U.N. sanctions on its nuclear program.³⁰

²⁴Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith, "Political Acumen and Political Anxiety in Suriname." *Security and Defense Review*, National Defense University, Fall-Winter Issue 2011, Volume 12.

²⁵ Douglas Farah and Kathryn Babineau, "Suriname: The Paradigm of a Criminalized State," Center for Secure Free Society, March 2017, accessed at: <http://www.securefreesociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Global-Dispatch-Issue-3-FINAL.pdf>

²⁶ El Aissami is only one of more than a dozen senior Venezuelan officials sanctioned by U.S. and European authorities for drug trafficking and ties to transnational organized crime. See: "Treasury Sanctions Prominent Venezuelan Drug Trafficker Tareck El Aissami and his Primary Frontman Samark Lopez Bello." U.S. Department of Treasury press release, February 13, 2017. Accessed at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/as0005.aspx>

²⁷ Letter from the Hons. Jeff Duncan (chairman) and Albio Sires (ranking member), Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, to Hon. Steven Mnuchin, Secretary of Treasury, June 19, 2017.

²⁸ Reyes Theis, "El oscuro pasado del embajador de Bolivia en Cuba, Juan Ramón Quintana." *14ymedio Reportajes*, September 20, 2017.

²⁹ United States of America v. Rene Sanabria-Oropeza et al, United States District Court, Southern District of Florida, Indictment, February 14, 2011.

- Ecuador's former minister of national security Gustavo Larrea, who reportedly funneled FARC money to the successful presidential campaign of Rafael Correa in 2006.³¹

Given the revolutionary imperative to attack the United States, the use of drug trafficking as a means to that end is justifiable, within the context of the Bolivarian stated goal of "refounding" all of Latin America in image of Cuba and Venezuela.

The "Re-founding" of the Revolutionary States

The foundational step in this process, learned from Cuba's earliest revolutionary experience, was the "refounding" of the nation's basic conceptualization, enshrined in a new constitution that would provide the legal architecture for curbing the independent media, politicizing the judiciary, concentrating power in the executive, and perpetuating the revolution in power. Chávez implemented the strategy in 1999, a year after winning elections, at the instigation of Fidel Castro, who understood the days of armed insurrection in Latin America had largely run its course.

Evo Morales, the president of Bolivia, has publicly recounted that in an early 2003 meeting with Fidel Castro to discuss taking up arms against the government of Bolivia, the Cuban leader urged him not to opt for an armed insurrection to achieve power. "Don't do what I did, don't have an armed uprising," Morales said Castro told him. "Lead a democratic revolution, like Chavez's, with a constitutional assembly."³²

A small group of Spanish lawyers, working first with Chávez, then with Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador, wrote the new constitutions for all three nations, drawing from the Cuban playbook that created the Bolivarian governments as the true representatives of the revolution and any forces opposing them as the counter-revolutionary "enemies" seeking to harm "the people."³³

In a 2009 speech, Morales laid out the Bolivarian perspective, telling supporters:

³⁰ Alex Pérez, "Sanctions Busting Schemes in Ecuador." In Joseph Humire and Ilan Berman (eds.), *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, Lexington Books, 2014.

³¹ In addition to FARC documents, an independent panel appointed by Correa found that Larrea and other senior government officials took FARC money for the campaign in exchange for promises of giving the FARC free access across the Ecuador-Colombia border. It was not clear whether Correa knew of the donations. See: Francisco Huerta Montalvo et al, "Informe Comisión de Transparencia y Verdad: Caso Angostura," Dec. 10, 2009..

³² Carlos Valez, "Castro Urged Ballots, Not Guns, For Bolivia's Populist Revolution, Morales Says." *The Associated Press*, Dec. 30, 2006.

³³ For a more detailed look at the role of these Spanish intellectuals, led by Roberto Viciano Pastor of the University of Valencia, in writing the new constitutions of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, see: Joshua Partlow, "Latin America's Document-Driven Revolutions: Team of Spanish Scholars Helped Recast Constitutions in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador." *The Washington Post*, Feb. 17, 2009. p. A1.

I want to tell you, companions and union leaders, all of you, if you are not with the official party (the MAS) at this time, you are the opposition. If you are opposition, then you are right wing, of the racist-fascists, of the neo-liberals...it is time for definition-either you are with the MAS or you are a fascist (this rhymes in Spanish: *Sos MASista o sos facista*). There is no middle ground. Define yourselves.³⁴

With this premise established, political opposition becomes subversion, silencing non-government media is necessary to protect the revolution and the people, judicial attempts to rein in the executive are treasonous attempts by the enemy to thwart the revolution, congressional opposition is counter-revolutionary, and attempts at imposing accountability on state institutions or ending corruption are dying gasps of the traditional oligarchy defending their privileged positions.



Figure 5: Bolivian President Evo Morales greets a delegation of senior Cuban military officers visiting La Paz in 2016.

Restructuring the Intelligence Services

Each of the countries where the Bolivarian candidates prevailed shared a condition that long histories of political instability and social change had been unable to significantly disrupt: The social cohesiveness of the small, traditional economic and

³⁴ The statement was reported in all Bolivia's major written press. A video of the speech can be found here: <http://www.ahorabolivia.com/2009/04/08/debate-%C2%BFsos-masista-o-facista/>

political elites, in which social networks built through familial ties, shared educational experiences and access to power, play an enormous role.

This central power had traditionally ensured that members of the upper-middle and upper classes could protect each other from the extremes of the political turbulence that often led to violence in other social classes. While the elites went into exile and were occasionally jailed, the persistence of social networks through military dictatorships and unrest meant that there was a continual ability to appeal, on a personal basis, to the other side to mitigate the damage that would be done. Cuban intelligence operatives, having faced similar circumstances in their revolution and in helping to shape the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, which initially governed from 1989-1990, understood the importance of altering this structure.

The Cubans understood the necessity of destroying those elite social networks for the revolution to succeed, and did so by making examples of high-profile arrests of prominent dissidents in the early days of the Bolivarian ascent. In past eras political arrests of opposition figures were also carried out, but those arrested of the elite groups were usually freed within a matter of weeks to go into exile or comfortable house arrest. In the case of Cuba, dissidents remained in prison (or worse), a key factor in subduing and stifling internal dissent.

With the weakening and dismantlement of social networks, implementing other repressive measures - the criminalization of the opposition, harassing, bribing or blackmailing the independent media into silence, and carrying out voter fraud - could all be accomplished much more easily.

As the social networks were being dismantled, new Cuban structures were being put into place across the Bolivarian alliance. The structures were usually established within the presidency, in a special "situation room," designed to map, monitor and destroy all political opposition. During the Cold War, the Stasi of East Germany excelled at establishing internal networks to get neighbors to spy on neighbors, something the Cuban internal intelligence structure perfected through the "popular block" committees, where each person reported on his or her neighbors to a committee chairman.

"What Fidel told them (Bolivarian allies) is that, obviously they couldn't trust the security and intelligence structures from prior regimes because they were compromised and would be disloyal," a former Cuban intelligence officer explained. "That is why he (Fidel) would give them people they could trust, and these Cubans would have the lives of the presidents in their hands."

Fidel then proposed broadening the scope of work because to provide security, one needed information, and that was converted into Cuban control of intelligence structures." Ultimately, in the cases of Venezuela and Bolivia at least, the intelligence

gathered by the Cubans was sent directly to Havana, and Havana would decide what information to share with the host nations.³⁵

It is worth noting that while Ortega of Nicaragua maintains a cordial relationship with Castro and the Cuban regime, he runs his own formidable internal security apparatus with far greater independence; he and his loyalists received years of Cuban, Soviet and Stasi training during his first period in power, and have been perhaps the most successful in replicating the Cuban model.

The 2008 arrest of Leopólido Fernández, the influential opposition governor of the Pando department (state) in Bolivia, is a case study of similar actions in countries across the alliance, where Cuba directly influenced a break in the old paradigm.

Initially, Fernández, a traditional politician and businessman allied with former military dictator Húgo Banzer, was accused of perpetrating a “massacre” of 11 marchers supporting Morales, although the evidence was decidedly mixed on whether the marchers or counter-marchers opened fire. Morales ordered the governor’s arrest and then broadened the accusations against him, including conspiring to carry out a coup d’état, leading an armed separatist movement, and other charges. To replace Fernández, Morales named a loyal naval officer who would continue to aggressively attack the anti-Morales forces.³⁶

Fernández was not only imprisoned without a trial for years; all the pleadings for leniency or release by Fernández’s friends and family, even those allied with Morales and the MAS, were summarily rebuffed by the Cuban intelligence structure that by then controlled access to Morales and provided his security. Nine years later, Fernández was sentenced to 15 years in prison for ordering the 2008 murders. Charges of terrorism and conspiracy were dismissed, in large part because they were no longer needed to make the point that anyone, no matter how well connected, would be imprisoned if viewed as an enemy of the revolution.

“The Cubans didn’t care who you knew, who you went to school with, who married into your wife’s family,” said one Bolivian intelligence analyst. “Those were the levers always used in these cases and to the Cubans they meant nothing. They could tell everyone to go to hell without the need to consult their Bolivian counterparts. It was designed to show that the consequences of dissent were real and irreversible, with no room for emotional appeals.”

³⁵ Antonio Maria Delgado, “Opresión S.A., el nuevo modelo de espionaje y repression exportado por Cuba.” *El Nuevo Herald*, October 26, 2014. Accessed at: <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/venezuela-es/article3375172.html>

³⁶ “Evo Morales designa un military como prefecto de Pando.” *La Prensa*, September 20, 2008,. Accessed at: https://www.prensa.com/mundo/Evo-Morales-designa-prefecto-Pando_0_2388511444.html

The Decapitation of the Security Forces

Through decades of training, education and direct action, the United States had more influence in the militaries and police forces in much of Latin America than other state institutions. This made purging the security forces, both in terms of officers and doctrine, a high priority for the Bolivarian-Cuban alliance.

As soon as it was politically feasible, the Bolivarian states of Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Suriname banned the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) from operating in their national territories. In Ecuador, the Correa government also took over the DEA regional interdiction base in Manta – a move that has led to Manta becoming a major transshipment point for US-bound cocaine, manufactured by the FARC. In addition, the vetted units formed by the DEA, FBI and CIA were disbanded and the members, if they remained on active duty, were scattered to different units to dilute their contact and effectiveness.

The notable exceptions so far have been Nicaragua and, to a lesser degree El Salvador, where the DEA maintains a presence, although its partner relationships and access are curtailed and will likely soon be ended there as well.

The first priority was the wholesale reorganization the command structures of both the military and the police, in order to promote loyalists and marginalize U.S. allies. The purges were justified on the basis of alleged coup plans and, given the history of the militaries in these countries, the allegations proved effective when backed by the full weight of the state and its ever-growing official media.

In El Salvador, the FMLN promoted in a legally dubious manner a Communist Party member named David Munguía Payes, who had infiltrated the armed forces during the war. Munguía Payes first served as El Salvador's minister of public security and then minister of defense, where he remains today. Ortega in Nicaragua moved quickly to reinstall Sandinista loyalists from the revolution. Bolivia, Venezuela and Ecuador, which had no active revolutionary movements or pool of revolutionary talent to draw upon, had to dig deep into the ranks, with the aid of Cuban intelligence, to find acceptable replacements for the existing command structure.

As a Brookings Institution report noted regarding Venezuela, which also holds true for the other Bolivarian states:

Venezuela and Cuba also experience a close, if asymmetrical, security relationship. Various sources report the numbers of Cuban intelligence operatives and military advisors as ranging from hundreds to thousands. Around 400 military advisors provide direct support to the Presidential Guard. Intelligence and military advisors are reportedly deployed in military units, the Ministry of Interior and Justice, the Directorate of Military Intelligence, and the Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional. This

service is coordinated by Cuba's military attaché in Caracas. A coordination and liaison group of the Cuban armed forces in Venezuela was also established in 2009.

The Venezuelan armed forces have revised their doctrine, previously based on a U.S. model, to adapt a Cuban military doctrine. This is based on prolonged popular war, designed to incorporate the civilian population into resistance forces in the event of an invasion... Cuban advisors serve in the Venezuelan Interior Ministry, immigration service, and national telecommunications company. By contrast, the Venezuelan military and intelligence presence in Cuba is limited to a military attaché group, established in 2007, and officers receiving training at Cuban military schools.³⁷

Cuba's role is evident throughout the execution of these processes, first as it promoted the purges and then when it offered training and military doctrine to replace the U.S. model. The Cuban efforts to create new doctrine for the Bolivarian militaries are often accompanied by the Russian military aid and personnel.

The current hub of training is the "Juan José Torres Anti-Imperialist School," near Santa Cruz, Bolivia, inaugurated in August 2016 and largely staffed with Cuban, Ecuadoran and Venezuelan military instructors.³⁸

³⁷ Piccone and Trinkunas, op cit.

³⁸ "Instructores de Cuba y Venezuela serán docentes en la escuela militar antiimperialista de Bolivia." *Eju TV*, June 2, 2016. Accessed at: <http://eju.tv/2016/02/instructores-cuba-venezuela-seran-docentes-la-escuela-militar-antiimperialista-bolivia/> ; "Bolivia Opens 'Anti-Imperialist' Military School to Counter US Foreign Policies." *The Guardian*, August 17, 2016. Accessed at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/17/bolivia-anti-imperialist-military-school-evo-morales-us>



Figure 6: President Evo Morales inaugurates the Anti-Imperialist military academy for Bolivarian students.

Bolivian defense minister Reymi Ferreira said that graduating from the academy would be an “indispensable requirement” for any officer seeking promotion to a flag officer rank, saying the students would receive instruction in economics, social policy and other disciplines “with deep historical context.”³⁹

As with the Counter-narcotics training center in Nicaragua, the Anti-Imperialist School has been officially inaugurated several times through the years, perhaps indicating the lack of financial resources to finish the projects. The school in Bolivia was initially opened in 2011 as the ALBA Defense and Sovereignty School, with the surprise presence of then Iranian defense minister Ahmed Vahidi, who has an outstanding Interpol Red Notice requesting his arrest for the 1994 bombing in Buenos Aires, Argentina that left 86 people dead. Following the scandal that ensued over Vahidi’s visit the school, which had reportedly received more than \$1 million in Iranian financing, remained idle for almost five years, until its second inauguration in 2016.

³⁹ “Instructores de Cuba y Venezuela serán docentes en la escuela military antiimperialista de Bolivia,” op cit.



Figure 7: President Evo Morales (left) and Iranian defense minister Ahmed Vahidi (right) at the 2011 inauguration of the Anti-Imperialist Military Academy, Warnes, Bolivia. (Anti-Imperialist.org)

Morales, speaking at the 2011 inauguration, said the School would prepare the peoples of the region to defend against "imperialist threats, which seek to divide us." He said that the "Peoples of ALBA are being besieged, sanctioned and punished by the imperial arrogance just because we are exerting the right of being decent and sovereign." He added that, "We must not allow the history of colonization to be repeated or our resources to become the loot of the Empire."⁴⁰

Speaking before the assembled heads of state from the ALBA countries, Morales articulated the ALBA position, saying:

The Empire seeks to divide us, make us fight with our brother nations, in order to benefit from the conflicts. But we have decided to live in peace. The most profitable business of the empire is armed conflict among brother nations. War has one winner: Capitalism. And war has one loser: less developed nations.⁴¹

⁴⁰ "ALBA School of Defense and Sovereignty Opens." *Anti-Imperialist News Service*, June 14, 2011. Accessed at: http://www.anti-imperialist.org/alba-school-of-defense-opens_6-14-11.htm

⁴¹ ALBA School of Defense and Sovereignty Opens," op cit

Ideological Realignment

Morales' statement was the articulation, in language long used by Cuba, of a top priority of the Bolivarian nations: to portray the United States as the primary enemy of humanity and reorient their relations to Russia, Iran, China, North Korea, Syria and others who are viewed as strategic opponents to the United States.

The ties of the Bolivarian states to Russia, China and Iran have been amply documented⁴² and so will not be discussed here at any length. However, the underlying ideological framework of the realignment, shaped and led by Cuba, is less known but equally important; this influence is the focus here.

This ideology, fostered in Cuba, is articulated by a group of authors avidly promoted by the Bolivarian states through a web of interlocking websites. Together, these advocates press the idea that the United States has a host of secret bases in Latin America and is on the edge of an invasion that can only be staved off with the help of strategic allies.⁴³ This is the theory put forth by prominent author Telma Luzzani, who wrote an entire book on non-existent U.S. bases in the hemisphere in which she states

I was able to draw two maps: one of the presence of the Marines in Central America and one that shows, in more detail the Southern Command's bases in South America . . . The bases have always been a vital link in the existence of any empire, and they are more efficient if one can keep them, like spies, wrapped in secrecy. . . They may be smaller, have few personnel assigned to them, be more well hidden, but they provide the necessary logistics to deploy troops on a vast scale.⁴⁴

⁴² See for example: Farah, *Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority*, op cit; Joseph Humire, "Iran Propping up Venezuela's Repressive Militias." *The Washington Times*, March 17, 2014. Accessed at: <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/mar/17/humire-irans-basij-props-up-venezuelas-repressive/>; Linette Lopez, "A suspected terrorist and drug trafficker just became Venezuela's vice president." *Business Insider*, January 5, 2017. Accessed at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/new-venezuela-vice-president-has-ties-to-iran-hezbollah-2017-1>; Douglas Farah and Liana Eustacia Reyes, "Russia in Latin America: A Strategic Analysis." *PRISM*, Center for Complex Operations, National Defense University, Vol. 5 no. 4, 2015. Accessed at: http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_5-4/Russia%20in%20Latin%20America.pdf

⁴³ For a comprehensive overview of this network see: Douglas Farah, "The Advance of Radical Populist Doctrine in Latin America: How the Bolivarian Alliance is Remaking Militaries, Dismantling Democracy and Combatting the Empire," *Prism*, Center for Complex Operations, National Defense University, Vol. 5, no. 3, 2015. Accessed at: http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_5-3/The_Advance_Of_Radical_Populist_Doctrine_in_Latin_America.pdf

⁴⁴ Emiliano Guido, "Sin bases no hay imperio," *Mirador al Sur*, (no date) accessed at: <http://sur.infonews.com/notas/sin-bases-no-hay-imperio>



Figure 8: Best selling Bolivarian book Territories Under Surveillance: How the Network of U.S. Military Bases Operates in South America, outlining U.S. plans to invade Latin America militarily

Another favorite trope is what Stella Calloni, a journalist with close ties to the Castros and Chávez calls “soft coups” (*golpes de estado suaves*). In this construct, the Empire (United States) uses proxies such as police strikes and unrest in the military to try to topple the revolutionary governments. The strategy consists of illegal ways of creating a situation of chaos, organized by the Empire, and is operationalized whenever governments take popular measures and provoke the CIA to attack them.

Calloni supports her hypothesis with cases of civil unrest in Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Honduras and Paraguay, where, she says, one can lay the responsibility for seditious actions at the feet of U.S. agencies and foundations often use as fronts for U.S. agencies.⁴⁵

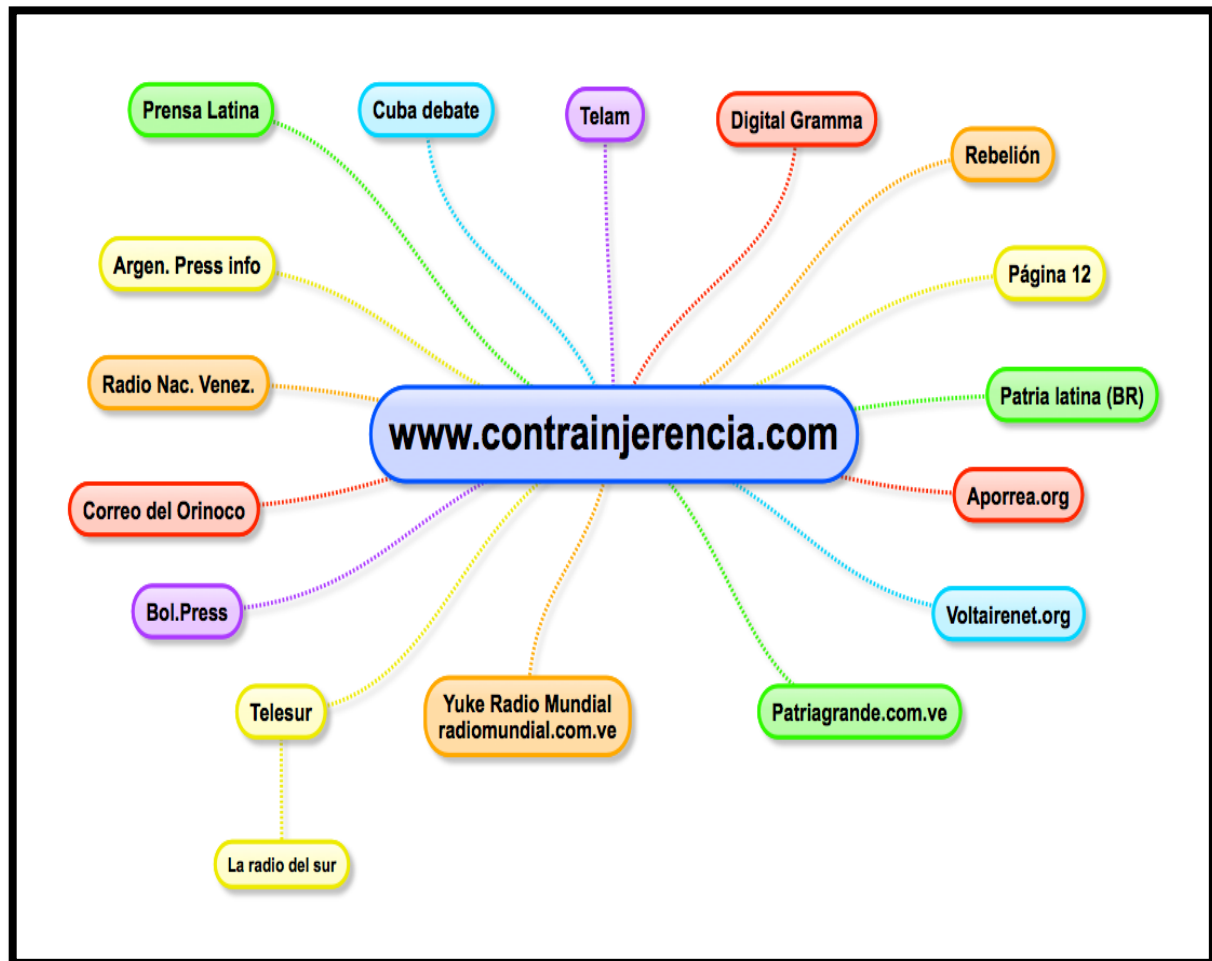
⁴⁵ Calloni expounds her theory of the “foundations” as fronts for U.S. actions in a piece titled “The Silent Invasion” (*La invasion silenciosa*). *Cuba Debate*, April 7, 2009. Accessed at: <http://www.cubadebate.cu/opinion/2009/04/07/la-invasion-silenciosa-iii/#.U20wDC8wInY>.



Figure 9: Stella Calloni with Fidel Castro Citation?

None of these writers or policymakers operates in a vacuum. They and their work are linked through an extensive web of cyber hubs that aggregate material, link to and promote each other, and are featured on the official websites of the governments of Cuba, Venezuela, Argentina and elsewhere.

One very active hub – among more than a dozen identified by IBI Consultants in a brief survey – is called ***Contrainjerencia*** (Against Interference), a title that refers to the imperialist interference in the hemisphere. In the figure shown below, the connection with multiple Cuban directed sites, as with the Bolivarians, and the Argentine government news agency Telam, is evident.



By understanding this intellectual project, the logic of the relationships of the Bolivarian states and Cuba to a wide range of rogue actors becomes evident. These alliances include: Cuba's attempted illegal exports of MiG fighter jets to North Korea; the embrace by Chávez of Carlos the Jackal and other international terrorist groups, including the FARC; and the warm embrace of Russia as a viable alternative to the United States for doctrine, military hardware and financial assistance.

Few cases better demonstrate Cuba's central role as a facilitator of rogue states than the bizarre case of the July 2013 seizure of a North Korean ship in Panama, the Chong Chon Gang, which was sailing from Cuba to its home country. Based on intelligence tips, U.S. and Panamanian officials stopped and boarded the vessel during its voyage as it entered the Panama Canal.

Panamanian authorities found the rusted ship was carrying weapons systems from Cuba, hidden beneath hundreds of thousands of sacks of sugar, loaded in such a way as to make the search particularly difficult. The Cuban foreign ministry thereafter

confirmed that they had indeed sent weapons on the ship: two anti-aircraft systems, nine missiles, and two dismantled MiG jets, along with 15 MiG engines. All of the materials were produced in the mid-20th century. The Cubans said that the weaponry, which was militarily obsolete, was being shipped to North Korea for repairs.⁴⁶

Given the fact that North Korea has little maintenance capacity for advanced weaponry, the explanation was clearly absurd, particularly given the history of the ship. As one report noted,

The Chong Chon Gang, it has emerged, is a known rogue ship, having been stopped and searched with suspicious shipments on several other occasions. In 2009, it was seen in the Russian naval base of Tartus, in Syria. A year later, it was found to be carrying drugs in the Ukraine. North Korea is known to operate a fleet of such ships; it is suspected of using them to procure hard currency for Pyongyang by ferrying black-market weapons here and there across the seas. There is also some evidence to suggest that North Korea is on the prowl for missile components, as part of its ongoing effort to build a missile system capable of carrying one of its nuclear warheads.⁴⁷

The Cuban government exercises ironclad control of ports and outbound cargo, and that the cargo in question came directly from the Cuban military. Therefore, it is clear that Cuban government was a direct participant in the attempted illegal shipment of weapons to North Korea. What remains unknown is why the Cuban regime would take such a risk.

In late 2017, as international pressure grew on North Korea and the United Nations was imposing more sanctions on the isolated nation, which nevertheless continued to test its missile technology, Cuba invited North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho for a visit. It is the only known trip abroad of a senior North Korean official except to its main sponsor, China.

While the exact nature of the visit is unknown, Yong-ho met with Castro and foreign minister Bruno Rodríguez and carried out other “unspecified activities,” while jointly denouncing U.S. “unilateral and arbitrary lists and designations” that led to “coercive measures contrary to international law.” According to Cuban state media, in their review of the meeting, “In a brotherly encounter, both sides commented on the historic friendship between the two nations and talked about international topics of mutual interest.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Rick Gladstone and David E. Sanger, “Panama Seizes Korean Ship, and Sugar-Coated Arms Parts.” *New York Times*, July 16, 2013. Accessed at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/17/world/americas/panama-seizes-north-korea-flagged-ship-for-weapons.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2&

⁴⁷ John Lee Anderson, “The Case of Cuba and the North Korean Ship.” *The New Yorker*, July 18, 2013.

⁴⁸ Sarah Marsh, “Castro Meets North Korea Minister Amid Hope Cuba Can Defuse Tensions.” *Reuters*, November 24, 2017. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-northkorea/castro-meets-north->

Conclusions

The Cuban regime's hemispheric influence has been significantly enhanced by the many roles it has played in supporting the Bolivarian revolution across Latin America. Cuba's primary asset is its sophisticated and competent intelligence services, now operating across the continent and controlling human and signals intelligence in host countries such as Bolivia and Venezuela.

Cuba's ideological and logistical support to a movement that was flush with billions of petro dollars also afforded the Castro government access to cheap oil and, with that oil, a shot at survival without significant internal reforms. The exchange of oil money for intelligence support is now threatened by Venezuela's economic collapse.

The result of the common Cuban/Bolivarian revolutionary project has been to create an alliance of highly criminalized states that view the United States as the primary enemy of humanity. In order to institute a new international order in line with their interests, this alliance has embraced cocaine trafficking and other illicit activities as legitimate instruments of state policy. The radical populist movement to create "Socialism for the 21st Century" set out to systematically destroy democratic institutions, muzzle the independent media, perpetuate itself in power by whatever means necessary, and ally itself with other governments around the globe that are overtly hostile to the United States and its interests.

While Venezuela under Hugo Chávez is widely (and correctly) recognized as the driver of the new revolutionary movements in Latin America, Chavez and others' success in taking power and retaining it would not have been possible without Cuba's active participation.

The Bolivarian/Cuban effort must be understood as a multinational, ideological/criminal enterprise that seeks an authoritarian alliance to directly challenge U.S. interests in the hemisphere. To do so, it is opening the door for hostile state and non-state actors to operate with impunity. This exercise in asymmetrical warfare has so far not been met with a coherent strategic response by the United States.